

THE PERFORMANCE OF BREATHLESSNESS ON THE PAGE

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This thesis formulates a practice-based approach to performances of breathlessness on the page. It investigates breathlessness as a subject of creative practice through performance writing, creating different works that function as material object, site as well as score for future performance permutations. These works each examine different aspects of breathlessness, with a focus on the corporeal, affect and between-ness. The relationship of these performance works to the body, affect, time and duration establish the performative possibilities of writing and how this specific form of artistic practice contributes to discourse surrounding live work. My research does not distinguish between the contributions of practice and critical analysis.

The outcome of the research is three works, one of which is embedded within this document, and a critical analysis that explores the different ways breathlessness performs on the page. Key to my research is a negotiation of understandings of *lessness*. Breathless performance writing posits a concept of *lessness* as other than absence. The ability of the practice-based work to initiate experiences that engage with the body, time and duration also demonstrate forms through which writing can generate as well as directly participate in performance.

This research contributes to the field of contemporary performance and theatre practice by defining *the live* in relation to writing as well as developing a concept of *lessness*. The distinction between writing and performance leads to unnecessary schisms between the two disciplines. This body of research demonstrates the ways in which performance writing bridges these disciplines to initiate live work. This research disrupts conventional and binary definitions of breathlessness, performance and writing. Performance writing initiates live experiences for audiences of one or many, unbound to any one point in time, capable of generating multiple but unique live encounters with performance.

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Author's Declaration

I declare this work to be my own. I received valuable feedback in dialogue with Fiona Templeton and Professor Johannes Birringer. Additionally, some of the early concepts were shaped in conversation with Dr. Broderick Cho as well with my master's dissertation supervisors Dr. Jerome Fletcher and Dr. Mark Leahy.

Introduction

How can a corporeal experience perform on the page? How can performances of breathlessness be written? My thesis explores performances of breathlessness on the page through a performance writing practice. This written document accompanies practice-based research in the form of page-based performance work and functions as an extension of practice. To this end, the writing here employs multiple modes of address that shift through critical analysis, performative/poetic writing and direct address of the reader. This is to highlight the relationship between performative practice and the practice of writing, question the boundaries between academic text and creative practice, and to create a constant move towards a sense of the live in writing. Fluctuating between these different registers of writing as well as blurring the boundaries between these forms, situates practice as the primary mode of research. (For example, the use of italics in this text is for both foreign words as well as poetic writing. In addition, bold italics are a direct address to the reader, making them aware of the experience of reading and complicit in a performance of writing.) To better articulate these decisions in the text I use footnotes.¹ The objective of introducing these diverse textures is to allow the thesis to perform the ideas explored through the writing. These interventions permeate the text, from the poetic subheadings to the breaks in form. It is for this reason that the thesis also employs gaps in argumentation (as a performance of *lessness*) and emphasizes the tensions between practice and conventional modes of research within the initial chapters. The friction experienced in chapters two and three is performative and highlights the need for the resolution of the final chapter where critical discourse and practice merge. Creating performance work and writing that works against definition, disciplinary boundaries and binary

¹ The standard Harvard-style citation used by the Arts and Humanities Department at Brunel University requires in-text citation. This body of work utilises parentheses to different ends; to avoid confusion with in-text citation I have chosen to reference sources in footnotes. This is an aesthetic choice and in keeping with the treatment of this thesis as a body of work that is subject to aesthetic as well as academic concerns. Footnotes are ragged to set them apart from the main text but remain 12pt for legibility and are single-spaced. Blockquotes are also single-spaced.

thinking is an active tactic here and is reflected into the non-linear and performative mode of argumentation. In trying to cultivate an understanding of what breathlessness means to performance on the page as well as notions of lack that surround *lessness*, this thesis performs its argumentation. In this sense, the reader is also conceived of as an audience member. Key to this process is highlighting the role of the body in performance writing practice. An understanding of the corporeal connects the individual works that comprise this thesis.

Practice intermeshing with critical analysis performs the definition of performance writing: occurring at the meeting point between disciplines. The first chapter of this thesis explores the contradictory definitions of performance and writing. It considers how writing is commonly positioned in opposition to performance, and both disciplines are reframed within the context of this body of research. Borrowing from experimental writing, poetics and performance theory, as well as initial definitions of performance writing, a working definition of performance writing relies on the performative qualities of writing. Interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary, performance writing additionally relies on time, duration and affect to convey its performance. Occupying multiple temporalities, the liveness of writing is not fixed to a specific physical location. Because text can be fixed to a page, this allows it to produce endless quantities of unique performances that do not rely on a given space. The individual reading of a text performs to its audience of one. Reading to and for an audience invites a different performative relationship to writing. There are multiple modes of enacting performance in writing and this thesis engages with these myriad forms without prioritising one over the other. My body of work relies on embodied forms of writing to enhance a sense of encounter with the work. The affect this particular mode of performance writing produces at a singular point in time allows writing to exceed its expository function and move into the realm of performance.

To address the relationship of practice-based research to written critical analysis, this thesis foregrounds the critical work with practice and provides a close reading of the works generated as research. The blurred boundaries of performance writing demand a similar intermeshing of practice-based work with critical writing in order to extend the reach of practice to the body of the thesis. Included in the appendix are several works developed in extension to the practice-based research. Some are

complete and have found their way into other forms, while others serve to demonstrate different textures evoked by the research process. These modes of research crystallise in the page-based forms included at the outset of chapters two and three (*Echo/plasm* [2013] and *These Lungs* [2015] respectively). Placed before each close reading, these works invite you to form a relationship with the text. In the final chapter, practice and research document merges as performative writing interlaces with and disrupts academic discourse. A performance of breathlessness is thus embedded within the thesis body, producing disruptions in form and linearity that call attention to the performative action of breathlessness. Each chapter expands on different manifestations of breathlessness on the page as well as the various themes that they evoke.

At the outset of my research I looked at breathless performances of body-based performance art practices. I concentrate on works made after 1970, such as Chris Burden's *Velvet Water* (1974), Karl Boegel and Heiner Holtappels' (Boegel & Holtappels) *Atmung 1-4* (1976) and *Reminiszenz II* (1977), Frank Uwe Laysiepen [Ulay] and Marina Abramović's *Breathing In/Breathing Out* (1977) and *Talking About Similarity* (1976), and L. A. Raeven's *Love Knows Many Faces* (2005). Concentrating on body-based performances to explore embodied experiences of breathlessness allows me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the affect that these performances evoke. L. A. Raeven's performance to camera *Love Knows Many Faces* (2005) depicts the twin sisters and artistic duo treading water in a lake near Nederhorst den Berg, the Netherlands. The sisters compete to hold their heads above water, constantly wary and each occasionally attempting to force the other under water. This work primarily explores the power dynamic between the twin siblings but also touches on anxieties surrounding breathlessness. Another example is Ulay and Abramović's *Talking About Similarity* (1976) which explores different aspects of breathlessness. When Ulay sews his mouth shut and Abramović answers questions posed by the audience about their relationship, the performance questions notions of voice and voicelessness. Abramović speaks for Ulay until she slips, speaking for herself, and consequently falls silent, identifying the tensions and concerns surrounding control, voicelessness and the ability to speak for one's self. Concerns around voicelessness and agency touch on issues that surround early Victorian medical forays into mental health, where the performances of

hysteric women act in lieu of agency or control over their own narrative.² My research developed the initial themes explored in *Echo/plasm* (2013) such as voicelessness, control, authorship, anxiety and *informe*.

Echo/plasm invokes the mythical figure of Echo to explore ectoplasm as a physical manifestation of breathlessness. It is a publication that resembles educational pamphlets from the early 20th century. The first half of the book mimics the scientific methods and writing of that period to explore representations and performances of spirit mediums. The second half delves into the distinctly performative emergence of the breathless ectoplasm through a progressive whitening of the text. This work evokes breathlessness on the page and does so in a highly physical and literal fashion. The manifestation of the ectoplasm calls to mind mucosal excretions and the performativity of slime, as described by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*.³ Slime, like the secretions associated with the uncontained female body, resists efforts to establish authorship, control or even a sense of fixity. In slipping from easy definitions, ectoplasmic manifestations make the interior exterior and elicit anxieties that accompany slips in binary modes. This understanding of slime pairs with Georges Bataille's work on *informe*, which he employs to mean un-form or between form. The resistance of mucous to definition binds it to the anxieties that it produces as a form of affect.

The malleability of the ectoplasm to the narratives of the day, as well as the way in which those narratives were controlled and subverted through the medium-performers, draws into question understandings of authorship. Photographic documentation plays an important role in the lasting narratives that surround the ectoplasm; it is photography that "fixes" a bodily production that resists adherence to any given form. The ephemerality of the ectoplasm and its resistance to becoming fixed invites manipulations in the development of its narrative. In turn, the ectoplasm

² Further research into this subject was published in my journal article: "Articulating Breath: Writing Charcot's Hysteric with Performance Writing," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 13, no. 3 (2014): 318-325.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 771.

impedes the voice of the spirit medium. The subsequent chapter explores how ectoplasm functions as a way of subverting the voicelessness that dominant narratives produce in women. This exploration of the fixity of form translates into a performance of breathless in the second half of the publication. The status of writing comes under threat as a gradual whitening of the page produces breathlessness.

Creating and perpetuating clear definitions and boundaries is an act of control, one that permeates our culture, for example, in the form of expected gender performativity but also in the determination of performance and liveness. Breathlessness can be induced through control but also occupies a space (such as the one between performance and writing) that resists definition and, by extension, control. Performance writing similarly places itself between disciplines, occurring at the juncture of disciplines. The physiological implications of breathlessness such as blocked breath or impeded speech compromise articulation. In overturning notions of authorship and control, *Echo/plasm*'s performance of breathlessness begins to open up lines of inquiry into the limits and boundaries that define the difference between breath and breathlessness.

Excess and its relationship to the limit acts in parallel to the duality of breathlessness. The experience of breathlessness relates not only through lack of breath but also the excess of it: think here of panting and gasping as uncontained modes of breathlessness. Limit creates the boundaries that excess by its definition must exceed. However, in the work of Georges Bataille and Audre Lorde excess enacts a constant revision of the limit and what this might mean for notions of finitude. The aim of exploring the limit is to redefine the remit of finitude and to question its association with writing. In this sense, breathlessness parallels performance writing in its performative modes. Breathlessness conveys an understanding of the limits of the body through a literal limit of breath. The cyclical nature of breathing undermines a fixed notion of breathlessness, and by concentrating on excess and the limit it is possible to examine the performative modes of breathlessness beyond the literal.

To limit the scope of breathlessness to the literal would result in different exercises in form rather than using performance writing practice to develop a deeper understanding of breathlessness and what its relationship to *lessness* might be. My early postgraduate research was in the use of breathlessness as a trope for female pleasure in

literature. Writing desire occupies a difficult zone where the tendency towards titillation overshadows affective modes that elicit desire and emphasise pleasure. Producing affect through writing is a key component of my research and heightening relationships between the body and writing emphasises this. In comparison to *Echo/plasm* and the chapter that accompanies it, *These Lungs* and chapter three explore metaphorical extensions of breathlessness. Many metaphorical uses of breathless refer to awe or stupor and relate to states of mind. Unfortunately, this particular metaphor does not challenge existing definitions or create room to explore the space between breath and breathlessness. Looking at the libidinal, excess and the limit as extensions of breathlessness, it becomes difficult to adhere to a fixed notion of finitude. In this sense, questioning finitude questions the definitions attached to *lessness*. The role of excess in *These Lungs* is to explore the ways in which plenitude both produces performances of breathlessness and how it undermines concrete understandings of what that breathlessness might be.

These Lungs erodes distinct limits between bodies, genders, the living and the dead. The publication uses a structure of two columns to produce a mirroring within the page that blurs the boundaries between the two spaces. The dual running narratives meet in tension at the space between them, a space that shifts and collapses as the eye skips from the one column to its companion. The boundaries between left and right falter, allowing two distinct voices to weave disruptions into a thickening fabric. Performance writing relies on an understanding of between-ness: the space *between* performance and writing is where the necessary slippages in disciplinary boundaries occur. Concrete binaries limit understanding performance writing as well as breathlessness. The tendency to read breathlessness as lack or absence relies on a specific acceptance of what *lessness* means. Rather than cling to a framework that does not serve my chosen discipline, this thesis explores the relationship of performance writing to breathlessness and questions the notion of *lessness* as absence.

As mentioned earlier, the final chapter of this thesis merges practice and critical discourse. To parallel the disruptive qualities of breathlessness as well as question the parameters defining states of *lessness*, creative practice occurs within the structures of a critical analysis. This allows the performative qualities of writing to act within an existing form and structure while simultaneously undermining boundaries between

performance and critical writing. The modes of writing produce affective arguments for a nuanced understanding of between-ness where a *lessness* is not an absence. This particular strategy allows critical writing to exist alongside practice and allows practice to question hierarchies favouring traditional academic output over practice-based research. Because the practice is not physically distinct from the writing, the boundary between thesis and practice loses potency. Distinctions between practice and research or performance and writing ultimately fade as this research proposes a territory where they are capable of coexisting.

Drawing on performative interventions in the text, the final chapter of this thesis employs the conflation of grammatical units with the body to disintegrate boundaries, structures and forms in order to examine *lessness* outside of a binary framework. Using grammatical units as a starting point, the chapter explores the affective properties of parenthetical marks and ellipses within writing and how this creates multiple temporal layers. The outset of the chapter addresses the experience of the stutter, grounding the writing in the body, but graduates to tease out relationships between this physical state and the language that it disrupts. The stutter impacts the same linguistic structures that seek to contain it, creating points of disruption neither absent nor present that do not adhere to temporal conventions within writing. The physiological realities of breathlessness are never far, grounding the subject matter as well as the structure of the text in different forms of *lessness*. As with breathlessness, the stutter occupies the disputed terrain of both present and absent. Conventional modes of writing composition become active participants in its decomposition; this process of breakdown highlights the relationship of presence to absence and gestures towards their meeting point.

Lessness inscribes the presence of absent breath in writing: its performance is reliant on some form of presence. In this sense, performances of breathlessness do not convey absence but rather something between absence and presence, something *less*. In exploring what this *lessness* entails both literal blank spaces in writing and metaphorical blanks, such as syncope or fainting, formulate interpretations of what this could be. Literal absences and gaps in writing combine with metaphorical negotiations of these themes, exploring gesture, duration and affect, to define a space between absent and present. These interventions in writing invite new understandings

of the durational and affective properties of *lessness* on the page while furthering an argument of what a performance of breathlessness on the page entails.

This thesis seeks to explore performances of breathlessness on the page through creative practice. A performance writing practice serves as the research methodology. Each individual chapter highlights different modes of practice, from establishing the parameters of performance writing to utilising this same practice to articulate performances of breathlessness on the page. Direct address mitigates the formal relationship a thesis invites, bringing critical writing closer to practice, the body and performance. A relationship between breath and breathlessness manifests between writing and reading, page and performance. In this space, there is an encounter between you and me.

CHAPTER 1. Methodology

Introduction

I am reading Amelia Jones' "Working the Flesh: A Meditation in Nine Movements".⁴ I open the page to section VI. Flesh/Wound. In between this page and the facing one I hold open with my thumb are the torn remnants of pages 139-140. The torn edge of the paper stands up, casting ragged shadows onto page 138, onto Flesh/Wound, and tearing the page in half again. Some of the text is cast in shadow and some remains lit, altering the way in which I read it. I read the "white" against the "black" in two ways, separating the light from dark. This reading occurs only as I hold the pages open and only under the fluorescent lights of the library I am sitting in.

I am thinking about your experience, now, in this moment that I am writing and in this moment that you are reading. These two moments, present tense and this future present, are non-simultaneous points of the same performance, that is, the performance of writing. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson state in the introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* that the "notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a process rather than an act with a final goal."⁵ Jones and Stephenson aim to indicate through their exploration of body-based performance practices the ways in which "the act of interpretation itself" becomes a kind of performance.⁶ The text thus becomes the site through which the performative is enacted, broadening the potential sites of performance and the ways in which writing can perform. *Let me give you something to hold on to here: by sites I mean the page – the one in front of you.*

⁴ Amelia Jones, "Working the Flesh: A Meditation in Nine Movements," in *LIVE: Art and Performance*, ed. Adrian Heathfield (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 138-140.

⁵ Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁶ Jones and Stephenson, introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, 1.

Flesh/Wound, written in bold, cuts into the surface and writes the body onto the page. It creates a black gap in the text. It mires itself deeply...it can be called a wound, a lack or even a less-ness. If writing can wound the page and marr its surface, then surely it is possible that writing can perform other kinds of *lessness* as well. In this text, the pages act as multi-textured layers of time, experience and affect, completely overturning the notion of it (the page) as a two-dimensional surface. To this end, the textual modes of address shift between critical analysis, direct address (written in bold) and performance writing (italicised). These varying modes of address unravel the performance of writing as a process that becomes active through an interaction with the audience, material and form. Performance writing forms the methodology of my practice-based research. As a mode of work making, it resides at a juncture between disciplines. Implemented as a methodology, performance writing encourages associative logic and networking of ideas, articulating the points of intersection between the body and this body of writing while simultaneously fluctuating between modes of address to activate a performance of writing.

The aim of this thesis is to discover the modes by which a performance of breathlessness takes place on the page through a performance writing practice. This research incorporates works that operate independent to this text as well as negotiations of critical analysis that emphasise a relationship between performance, the body and writing. Maggie O’Sullivan once stated in an interview with Charles Bernstein that breath is involved in the activity of writing, that “writing is a body-intensive activity – totally.”⁷ Breathlessness describes a physical state, a perceived absence of breath within the body. This body of research explores performances of breathlessness within the context of a page-based performance writing practice as well as questioning the ways in which we can use writing to relate to our understanding of the limits of the body and *lessness*. However, before we can approach performances of breathlessness on the page we have to establish an understanding of what constitutes performance writing and the ways in which it performs.

⁷ Maggie O’Sullivan, “Writing is a Body-Intensive Activity: Interview with Charles Bernstein,” transcribed by Michael Nardone, *Jacket 2* (December 4, 2013), accessed September 1, 2014, <http://jacket2.org/interviews/writing-body-intensive-activity>.

In the work of Alain Badiou, Badiou defines theatre as an assemblage of different parts (including text) that, through representation, initiates a singular performance event.⁸ He states that, what he terms the “theatre idea,” arises through performance, defining the “theatre idea” as an act of theatrical representation.⁹ Badiou’s commitment to his concept of the “theatre idea” does not necessarily preclude writing from performance but rather identifies that representation can initiate a singular performance event. Key to the performance of writing is its relationship to time and, like Badiou’s “theatre idea,” performance writing comes into being through a temporary encounter with the reader. The performance writing text functions both as a representation capable of generating singular performances as well as the trace of performance. Performance writing is in that sense both the location of temporary manifestation of the performance event as well as its trace. Writing possesses the ability to inscribe liveness as well as to create fixed performance residues, but it can simultaneously perform within the duration of a performance writing event. Event, in this context, refers to an experience achieved through the reading, performing or viewing of writing. An emphasis on the practical function and uses of writing overshadows consideration of writing as event or action and the singular experience that this performance imparts to an audience.

Movement between registers of address is an active tactic in this text and highlights the different actions of writing, whether that be to communicate meaning or to perform. By utilising shifting registers, the duration of writing extends as well as gestures towards the ways in which writing becomes a “doing”. Della Pollack describes performative writing as “making not sense or meaning per se but making writing perform.”¹⁰ She writes that “writing as doing displaces writing as meaning” and therefore displaces writing from its strictly semantic function.¹¹ Pollack is concerned with performative writing as a discursive practice. She asserts that she

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 72.

⁹ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 72.

¹⁰ Della Pollack, “Performing Writing,” in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan et al (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 75.

¹¹ Pollack, “Performing Writing,” 75.

means to “make writing speak as writing” and she seeks to “discern possible intersections of speech and writing.”¹² Performative writing creates different textures within the same piece of writing. The expository function of writing gives way to the performative to create instances where writing “does” instead of “explains”.

The distance between writing and performance is held in place by a limitation of writing to its practical functions in addition to holding to rigid definitions of time in relation to performance such as ephemerality and liveness. This is in part due to a perception of writing as representative of speech and therefore as the reproduction of an ephemeral event or action. The ability of writing to record and replicate language leads to an overall impression of writing as decidedly fixed, permanent and reproductive. These qualities belie the fleeting quality of any encounter with the page and deflect from its performance. Performance writing’s relationship to time is complex. Writing documents the past but also operates within the live moment of the present. Concentrating solely on writing’s ability to document or record obscures the potential of the page as a site of performance. Changing the way that we understand time and its manifestation through liveness and ephemerality makes it possible to recognise the performance of a medium that is defined by its reproducibility. I discuss later on in this chapter the writing of Peggy Phelan on performance, its iterations and reproduction and how performance writing reframes these relationships.

“It is I you hold and who holds you, I spring from the pages into your arms” Walt Whitman writes; he addresses his reader and writes the action into being.¹³ He describes the performance of his writing as it/he performs to his audience. I, you, they, are held in the moment described by the writing, a moment that is simultaneously enacted by the writing. This moment, this experience is bound to time, within time. The bodily encounter between you and me, the writer and the reader, is written into being through the page. Writing is an activity through which I reach out and touch and am touched. This understanding of touching relates to a

¹² Pollack, “Performing Writing,” 76.

¹³ Walt Whitman, “So Long,” in *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1860/poems/162>.

haptic experience of writing, what Laura Marks calls haptic visuality.¹⁴ Haptic visuality refers to a kind of looking that caresses and collapses the boundaries between looking and touching.¹⁵ The haptic introduces touch to perception as well as making meaning. By applying Marks' concept of haptic visuality to writing and engaging with the characteristics of reading, relationships to the textures and sites of writing expand. Part of this changing relationship to writing is the introduction of spaciality that diverse surfaces imply. Performances of writing occur at points *between* disciplines, collapsing the boundaries between writing and embodied experiences while simultaneously introducing a spaciality to writing that conveys its performance.

Although writing may negotiate the constraints of time and space differently to speech, its delay does not preclude it from being/becoming performance. Understanding the liveness of writing as not fixed to one particular moment but capable of initiating multiple unique encounters is key to a performance of writing. Redell Olsen refers to "degrees of liveness," not to create a hierarchy of "liveness" but to articulate that "the temporal moment of the live cannot necessarily be fixed as occurring entirely within the present moment."¹⁶ This understanding of liveness opens writing up to a multiplicity of presents. Performance writing is experienced through an encounter with writing – a moment most certainly bound to and constrained by time. The reproductive characteristics of writing allow for it to be encountered at multiple times and places, however, each of these encounters are informed by their own contexts and temporal specificities. The performance of writing is contained within its own present but where and how that present occurs does not rely on the fixtures of traditional notions of performance. It is a temporal

¹⁴ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 162-163.

¹⁵ Haptic visuality is discussed briefly in this section as well as in greater detail in chapter three.

¹⁶ Redell Olsen, "Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman," *HOW(2)* 1, no. 6 (2001): unpaginated, accessed September 11, 2013, http://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_6_2001/current/in-conference/olsen.html.

experience that incorporates the haptics of the page and occurs within the multiple presents of writing.

In my practice, performance writing expands expository uses of writing to performance through affect: this is the means by which it transcends purely semantic function. This particular definition of performance writing relies on the use of affect and achieves this through continual conflation of intellectual concepts and themes with physiological processes and experiences. These tactics generate an affective response, allowing a form of representation like writing to initiate its performance at multiple temporalities producing singular experiences within the live. Key to this idea is the relationship of writing to the body, as explored by writers like H  l  ne Cixous and Catherine Cl  ment, whom I discuss later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters. Writing transcends the constraints of representation when it is capable of reaching beyond the page and touching the body of the reader; this is what I mean when I say performance writing.

On Writing

Writing represents and reproduces – but is it doing? Performance writing is a mode of making that relies on a system of signs to instigate a performance event. Because these signs are predicated on speech a conclusion is drawn that writing is therefore a representation speech. In *Phaedrus* Plato decries writing’s inability to record speech because it is removed from the moment of utterance.¹⁷ However, this stems from Plato’s fear of writing’s ability to falsely represent speech in the sense that writing is not bound by truth – not just because it lacks the specific immediacy of speech but also because of the supposed difference of writing to speech. If writing has the ability to “falsely” represent speech, then it effectively presents something other than speech: it presents itself and the experience that only writing imparts. When Plato inscribes his discourse in the form of speech, that is, when he chooses to write his ideas in dramatic form as “written speech,” he establishes a rift between writing and the present.¹⁸ He chooses the form that most

¹⁷ Plato, *The Complete Works of Plato*, ed. John M. Cooper et al (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 552.

¹⁸ *Phaedrus* is written in dialogue form.

closely resembles speech within writing: its literal transcription. This hierarchical positioning of writing to speech creates an unnecessary distance between writing and performance by defining writing as always and entirely representative of speech. Writing, in Plato's understanding, cannot be live and is the means by which speech becomes fixed and placed outside of time.

But what is writing? Writing in its crudest sense is marks – scratches or scribbles. Some say that writing is a kind of drawing.¹⁹ Walter Ong describes writing as technology that employs markings (signs) to represent and replicate speech.²⁰ Roland Barthes' early work doesn't initially challenge this stance – in fact, he reiterates it in *Writing Degree Zero* – but his later engagement with the activity of writing and properties of the text create space in critical theory to begin to articulate a concept of the performance of writing. Barthes is concerned with establishing an understanding of writing (on the page) and, through his work, expanding definitions of the text. Barthes demonstrates how the activity of writing influences its production by referring to the act of writing in his text. When Barthes introduces the concept of the “writerly text” he defines it as productive (versus representative or reproductive) text: one that is entirely present.²¹ In addition, Barthes writes that “the modern scribe is born simultaneously with his text, is in no way supplied with a being which preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation, and every text is eternally written *here and now*.”²² He describes an authorial disappearing act through writing, a passage from absent to present and back again which requires a limited duration. Although Barthes' overarching aim is to establish the authorless text – a kind of writing that is defined by each individual reading and not necessarily by the original aim, intent and context of the author – he introduces

¹⁹ Serge Tisseron, “All Writing is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript,” *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): 29, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/293-0178>.

²⁰ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982), 82-83.

²¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 4-5.

²² Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 145.

a relationship between writing and time. Writing produces many different experiences; it does not reproduce one writing, one reading or one experience.

Writing houses the capacity to extend its duration beyond the ephemeral present of performance, but within performance writing, there are multiple and singular presents. According to Barthes, writing can be made entirely continually present and, in this sense, can obtain a limited duration. This occurs through the act of writing. The writer disappears as the writing comes into being through audience reception. Although the text may have a continuous material presence, this continuity is the material trace of performance writing. This form of writing (as a doing or making of performance) activates writing in a performance-making process for a limited duration. The writer disappears as the activity takes place, with writing supplanting the author's body, which allows a performance of writing to occur in the space left between the body of writing and the audience. The perpetual death of the author in any process of writing creates space for a live encounter between the audience and writing.

The audience's relationship to writing as experiential, active and fleeting is key to developing a sense of what performance writing consists. Performance writing occurs at the meeting points of different disciplines and it is within this temporary juncture that a performance occurs. Barthes calls for the collapse of the "distance" between reading and writing, which in turn opens up the different activities to play against their limits.²³ This distance holds the reader removed from the text and prevents its "play", confining the reader to a passive and visually observant role.²⁴ By suggesting an encounter between the writer and the reader Barthes collapses that distance, opening up a path towards understanding writing as an activity. Barthes splinters the attributed functions of writing through describing (and advocating) a kind of writing that is active and changing, what he terms "the text" and positions as a foil to "the work". Barthes distinguishes the *work* from the *text*. The work is authorial, mnemonic and reproductive, whereas the text is "play, activity, production, practice."²⁵ The work occupies a "fragment of space" and closes off

²³ Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 159.

²⁴ Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 158.

²⁵ Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 162.

where the text opens up, continually, in constant dilation.²⁶ This distinction is worth noting because it creates a definition of the text that makes it contingent on the activity of writing. He concludes that “the theory of the text can only coincide with a practice of writing.”²⁷ This playful and explosive theory of text that he describes can only occur within a practice of writing, suggesting that the doing or making of writing is different to writing in a representational or archival mode.²⁸ Practice has a double meaning here. It refers to an activity, to act, but one that also enacts performance again and again, not as one performance but many that are both singular and in constant evolution.

The division between performance and writing relies on the hierarchical division between speech and writing, that is, writing as a representation of speech. Plato and his successors, Aristotle, Hegel, Husserl, Saussure and so on, exclude writing from language and depict it as “a phenomenon of exterior representation,” dismissing writing from participation in language, placing it always outside, as an appendage to speech.²⁹ Derrida contests this idea in the same way that he contests the entire notion of origin: he writes that speech is inextricably bound up in writing. The trace of writing is present in speech in the sense that neither can “be present in and of itself, referring only to itself.”³⁰ When Derrida introduces the concept of *différance*, which he describes as the “systematic play of differences...of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other,” he unfixes writing and imbues it with shifting and slippery properties.³¹ The misspelling of *différance* is deliberate: the *a* performs the play, the movement in the space between writing and speech. He is careful to assert that spacing is meant in this context as both active and passive. He writes, “It is the becoming-space of the spoken chain...a becoming space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing,

²⁶ Barthes, *Image– Music – Text*, 157-158

²⁷ Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 164.

²⁸ W.B. Worthen expands on these ideas at length in “Disciplines of the Text/ Sites of Performance,” *TDR* 39, no.1 (Spring, 1995): 13-28.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Seminology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva,” in *Positions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24.

³⁰ Derrida, “Seminology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva,” 26.

³¹ Derrida, “Seminology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva,” 27.

every passage from one to the other.”³² Derrida’s *différance* challenges the perceived hierarchy speech to writing by focussing on their relationships to each other and play between these two forms of performance.

Différance also refers to the play between absent and present in writing. Writing prolongs the present, evoking through constant slippage into trace the tensions between absent and present in writing. Derrida believes that writing is not exhausted in “the moment of its inscription” and that it can “give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence” of its producer.³³ Although writing is largely unquestionably attributed with these qualities, speech is not. However, Derrida challenges this and suggests that speech is similarly limited to recognisable patterns (marks) that allow meaning to be communicated beyond the immediate presence of the speaker. The properties traditionally attributed to writing are equally applicable to speech. He writes that speech is constituted “by virtue of its iterability, by the possibility of its being repeated” and that this occurs in the absence of its “referent” in addition to the absence of the gesture towards signification.³⁴ This is, according to Derrida, the unifying aim all of kinds of communication, regardless of their “form”. Although Derrida ultimately argues that writing is “capable of functioning in the radical absence” he goes on to assert that this absence is not a “modification of presence” but is instead a “rupture in presence.”³⁵ He directly associates the absence of a writer or their audience with death, with a break in presence. A breach of this kind indicates that writing is indeed capable of exhaustion as it moves from the moment of iteration and ruptures the present.

Walter Ong, contesting Derrida, asserts that the written word, although necessary to the process of signification, still represents speech.³⁶ He writes that “it is impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious

³² Derrida, “Seminology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva,” 27.

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 9.

³⁴ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 10.

³⁵ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 8.

³⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 73.

human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly.”³⁷ However, Ong goes on to assert that because writing moves speech from the auditory to the visual, speech and thought are irrevocably altered by this process.³⁸ He also traces the development of a society from oral to literate and describes ways inscription is incorporated into mnemonic practices in oral societies through “fixed” phrasing.³⁹ Ong describes an oral society, stating:

Without writing, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual. They are sounds. You might ‘call’ them back – “recall” them. But there is nowhere to “look” for them. They have no focus and no trace (a visual metaphor, showing dependency on writing), not even a trajectory. They are occurrences, events.⁴⁰

Ong explains there is no recall or linear thought without the written word and that the speech of oral societies must find a way of replicating the fixity of writing. Speech reproduces the continuities of thought that we understand from writing through the use of “redundant” and “conservative” speech.⁴¹ By using redundant and conservative phrasing the speaker repeats what has already been said to form a continuity of thought in a manner that is otherwise not possible in orality. What Ong is describing here is a form of “traceless” writing, a precursor to literacy, that has the ability to be rewritten with each subsequent performance. Fixed phrasing enables the speaker to not only recall a pre-existing line of thought but also to present it before a new audience, conveying performance of language that is fixed but live, traceless but not untraceable. This blurs the previously established definitions of speech and writing, complicating our understanding of them by entailing areas where they overlap. Moreover, Ong writes that writing “can implement production of still more exquisite structures and references, far surpassing the potentials of oral utterance.”⁴² Writing produces new forms that develop beyond the constraints of speech. Rather than be

³⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 73.

³⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 83.

³⁹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34, 83.

⁴⁰ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31.

⁴¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 39-42.

⁴² Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 83.

confined to representation, writing possesses the capacity to expand on speech and, by extension, the forms in which performance presents itself.

The Life and Death of Writing

In identifying the performativity and affirming the liveness of writing it is necessary to challenge existing notions of writing as lifeless or dead. This is due to the relationship of writing and speech to language and how writing is placed in a subordinate hierarchical relationship to speech. Derrida argues, “writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death [...it] exhausts life,” referring to the commonly held opposition of writing to speech and to life.⁴³ Ong also mentions the established conflation of writing with death, tracing it through history.⁴⁴ Rather than concentrate on writing as not-living (and therefore not-live), it is interesting to look at the way in which it exhausts life, and to transfer the emphasis from a state of (non)being to an activity that carries death and resurrects itself. Ong attributes the resurrection of writing to its “rigid visuality”, and I wonder, does he mean rigid like a corpse or rigid like a phallus?⁴⁵ Conflating the reproductive with death is a means by which the finality of death can be examined and overturned. Bernard Noël begins his essay “To Change Death?” with the fragment, “To live, to write.”⁴⁶ Living and writing are joined by a conjugal comma, separated by a slight pause and expended in the same breath. Georges Bataille asserts that through erotic encounters we become aware of the limits of ourselves and between each other but importantly, “through dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, [it] reveals their fundamental continuity.”⁴⁷ Noël ponders on the position of these two activities as he has written them, as both

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press: 1997, 1967), 17.

⁴⁴ Walter Ong writes about this at length in *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 230-71.

⁴⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 80.

⁴⁶ Bernard Noël, “To Change Death,” in *A Range of Curtains*, trans. Paul Buck et al, ed. Paul Buck (Yorkshire: Curtains, 1973), unpaginated.

⁴⁷ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 22.

same and different. Conjugal here refers not to the derivative changes through inflection of the same verbal root but to the joining of divergent activities and how these divergent activities relate to each other.

Noël describes writing as consisting of “moments of intense reserve and moments of total expenditure,” totally divergent states as far as he is concerned that lead to an “ambiguity of an act that sometimes I make and which, sometimes, makes me.”⁴⁸ Approaching the limit, according to Bataille, leads to a violent wrenching of the subject from itself to a confrontation with the now estranged self, possible through total expenditure.⁴⁹ Noël turns to the page in front of him, to the hand that is writing the text (that I am reading and now writing about), and reflects on the displacement of his body in the moment of writing and, yet, how it only occurs through his body.

The body, according to Noël, is the site of two functions: the reproduction of the species and of language. Language displaces the self and, in that sense, he believes that even as he is writing about his self, he is in actuality writing about an other. However, he concludes that although “[w]ords are that death agony which endures,” he must challenge that constant loss through writing.⁵⁰ As Noël comes to terms with what he views to be the primary dissonance between the activities of writing and living, what is striking is how he describes writing as an activity even as he asserts that language, through repetition, has the power to “quash the passage of time.”⁵¹ In this sense, he differentiates between the activity of writing, where he seems very aware of the duration of time, and language. The reproductive capabilities of writing suggest that writing operates outside of time (and is therefore not live), whereas Noël asserts that language itself can be composed of the same reproductive qualities. As writing approaches the limit (through expenditure), the subject alters through a loss of self, an approach occurring through writing.

⁴⁸ Noël, “To Change Death,” 104.

⁴⁹ “...it is necessary for me to die (in my own eyes), to give birth to myself.” Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 73.

⁵⁰ Noël, “To Change Death,” 106.

⁵¹ Noël, “To Change Death,” 106.

Michel Foucault refines this view by shifting away entirely from an emphasis on loss. In a 1980 interview with Duccio Trombadori, Foucault discusses how the experience of writing transforms him. “Each book transforms what I think,” he says, describing an activity that he ascribes transformative properties to.⁵² Writing, for Foucault, is directly linked to the transformation of self and the experience that writing imparts both to the writer and their audience. This is what Foucault means when he uses the term “experience-book”.⁵³ An “experience-book” is not just a body of writing that can be read, it is a writing that provides a transformative experience that leaves both the writer and audience changed. The experience-book is not limited to the documentation of this change but is an active catalyst of that change.⁵⁴ This emphasis on the transformative properties of writing allow for an understanding to develop of writing not only as an independent activity capable of generating experience but also as a catalyst in the development of experiences that cannot be reproduced. Use of the term *experience* inevitably forces Foucault to distance himself from phenomenology and to articulate that he, like Bataille, is concerned with the ways in which experience disrupts and changes the self.⁵⁵ Experience, according to Foucault, does not “affirm the subject” but instead is a means to transforming the self, or subject, into something other and therefore new. In this sense, the self comes into being through the act of writing.

In the essay, “Self Writing”, Foucault describes Greco-Roman ethopoietic writing (*hupomnemata*), stating that its intent “is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the nonsaid, but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of the self.”⁵⁶ He distinguishes between the later

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. James Cascaito et al (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 27.

⁵³ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, 41.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, 41-42.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, 31.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 273. See Michel Foucault, “Self Writing,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: The New Press, 1997).

narrative and diaristic functions of personal writing and the *hupomnemata*; where later personal writings have a preservative function and record events in order to recall them; hupomnematic writings are an activity, a making or a doing. Writing as an activity, in this context, is not subservient to its function or purpose but instead dynamically influences and participates in what it is creating. Because it is not separate to the self (in this context) writing cannot be limited to representing an already-happened past. Rather than writing acting as a reflective document or even as a representation of the self, the self and writing become each other; “they must form part of ourselves: in short, the soul must make them not merely its own but itself.”⁵⁷ This is a significant shift: writing becomes an essential component of forming the self and must do so in a way that fully integrates the one into the other.

The principles of correspondence that Foucault describes activate writing, creating a kind of writing that does. He writes:

When one writes one reads what one writes, just as in saying something one hears oneself saying it. The letter one writes acts, through the very action of writing, upon the one who addresses it, just as it acts through reading and rereading on the one who receives it.⁵⁸

Correspondence is a form of communication that limits itself to a specific audience, usually an audience of one, and is often limited to collating and regurgitating knowledge. Foucault is less interested in the actual content of the letters and instead shifts his attention to the act of writing and what that means to both the writer and the reader. The content is less important than the action of writing because, through the act of writing, one writes and that in turn acts upon the reader. That there is an underlying performance, a doing – an acting, to writing that is apparent in its product and activated through an encounter with it. Rather than writing representing life, writing facilitates the experience through which we can “reach that point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or extreme.”⁵⁹ Consequently, writing does more than represent life; it performs in such

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, “Self Writing,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 210.

⁵⁸ Foucault, “Self Writing,” 214.

⁵⁹ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, 31.

a way that it facilitates live experiences and reaches beyond the page or the original limits imposed by concepts that surround its activity.

Ideas of Performance

But all living art will be irrational, primitive, complex: it will speak a secret language and leave behind documents not of edification but of paradox.⁶⁰

The parallel-running histories of writing and performance intersect at different points over the course of time, but within the context of this writing I am most concerned with performance and writing post-dating the beginning of the 20th century. By the early 1970s myriad artistic practices had been subsumed under the mantle of “performance art”, which obscure the foundations and ideologies that these performance works developed out of.⁶¹ An intersection between writing and performance was already evident in the work of the modernist avant-garde, the Dadaists and Surrealists, particularly as a result of interdisciplinary artistic practices such as theatre, writing and image-based art. Guillaume Apollinaire’s early example of concrete poetry, *Calligrammes; Poems of War and Peace 1913-1916* (1918), a play between text and image on the page comes to mind, as does the work of Antonin Artaud, including his plays, critical writings and notebooks. Pre-dating these works are the writing experiments of Stéphane Mallarmé, followed by James Joyce, e. e. cummings and Ezra Pound; all explore the ways in which text and form convey meaning. This is best exemplified in the concrete poetry manifesto of the *Noigandres*. Haraldo and Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari and Ronaldo Azeredo coin the term “concrete poetry” and describe writing as something that “sees the word in itself – a magnetic field of possibilities – like a dynamic object, a live cell, a complete organism, with psycho-physico-chemical proprieties, touch antennae circulation heart: live.”⁶² The

⁶⁰ Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés (London, Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd, 1996), 49.

⁶¹ Kristine Stiles, “Performance Art” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles et al (London: University of California Press, 1996), 679-680.

⁶² Augusto de Campos, Haraldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, “Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto,” trans. John Tolman, *AD - Arquitetura e Decoração* 20 (Nov/Dec, 1956): unpaginated, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/concretipoet.htm>.

Noigandres describe production of the word as a dynamic, pulsating and live process. The word, as they use the term, contains an understanding of writing as means of production as well as a way of coming into being. “The word” refers back to the biblical word – to Genesis 1:3 – and even though it was an utterance, it is through the written word that we witness this performance and establish an understanding of “the word” coming into being.

Performance indicates an action, a doing or a making, by some body. The Merriam-Webster dictionary entry describes performance as: “a presentation of an artistic work (as a piece of music) from a particular point of view, and the doing of an action.”⁶³ Richard Schechner describes performance as a sidewinder snake crossing the desert: “wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there.”⁶⁴ The elusive definition of performance complicates critical discourse and allows for its practice to remain manifold and evolving: if we cannot predict its next move, then we cannot halt its progress. The only way to understand performance is through performance, Michael Huxley and Noel Witts argue in *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*.⁶⁵ This is to say that the doing of performance forms the remit and definition of performance. This places activity at the core of defining performance work, in addition to perceptions of time, duration and affect.

Performance art describes works made in the period following World War II where artists begin to use their bodies as a medium, bringing their work “closer to life” and displacing the object with the human subject.⁶⁶ Roselee Goldberg mentions this move in *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*:

⁶³ Merriam-Webster, “Performance,” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/performance>.

⁶⁴ Richard Schechner, “What is Performance Studies Anyway?,” in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Jill Lane et al (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 357.

⁶⁵ “...we take the manifestation of performance as being central to the study of performance. It matters not from where the performance derives; the point of interest is the performance itself.” Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, introduction to *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*, ed. Michael Huxley et al (London: Routledge, 1996, 2002), 3.

⁶⁶ Stiles, introduction to “Performance Art”, 679. Further to this is a definition of body art: “Body art is viewed here as a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjective engagements, instantiate the dislocation or discentering of the

Performance in the last two years of the sixties and of the early seventies reflected conceptual art's rejection of traditional materials of canvas, brush or chisel, with performance turning to their own bodies as art material...conceptual art implied the *experience* of time, space and material rather than their representation in the form of objects, and the body became the most direct medium of expression.⁶⁷

The shift away from purely representational work (in the form of traditional art mediums such as painting and sculpture producing art objects) to presentational work involving the artist's body actively engaging with an audience in real time is a means to expanding the boundaries of existing mediums and modes of communication between the artist and their audience. Carolee Schneeman discusses her move from painting to performance, stating that extension of her existing practices into real time allowed for a new kind of vitality to her work. She writes that the body is vital to this process, "because [...] representation won't carry."⁶⁸ Representation doesn't impart experience in the way that Schneeman desires her work to. The move towards performance in Schneeman's work, where she incorporates typically representational mediums such as painting and writing into live pieces, indicates a rejection of the passive modes that representational mediums are bound up in – not the mediums themselves nor their performative potential.

Representation runs contradictory to a sense of liveness, a defining characteristic of performance. The doing or making of performance with disciplines traditionally associated with representation does not mean that the performances themselves are representational. Alain Badiou's previously mentioned "theatre idea" identifies ephemeral manifestations of performance through an assemblage of representational parts. Goldberg asserts in "Performance: A Hidden History" that the constitution of performance is subject to the various disciplines that performance

Cartesian subject of modernism." Jones and Stephenson, introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, 1.

⁶⁷ Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, 2011), 152-153.

⁶⁸ Carolee Schneeman, interview by Andrea Juno, in *Angry Women*, ed. Andrea Juno et al (San Francisco, CA: RE/Search Publications, 1991), 72.

evolved alongside and that it is “live art.”⁶⁹ Performance exists in the moment where the work is presented to an audience. This results in the notion that the afterlife of performance is in trace or residual forms. Peggy Phelan, in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, distinguishes writing from performance while articulating that the life of performance is in the present.⁷⁰ Phelan asserts that writing is infinitely replicable because of its reliance on “the reproduction of the Same” to create meaning and this is often interpreted in such a way that it shuts down any discussion of performance writing.⁷¹ However, Phelan does offer potential instances in which writing can become performative – instances where what is written is directly linked to an activity or a doing, such as the case of J. L. Austin’s performative utterances.⁷² J. L. Austin’s work is often cited in reference to the performance of writing but ultimately Austin proposes another situation wherein writing is conditionally reliant on speech in order to perform. Writing, photographs and video comprise performance residue and consequently these forms become associated with the afterlife rather than the present of performance – even though they may also comprise the articulated parts that make up a performance.

While it is true that writing relies on reproductions of the same to communicate meaning, it does not mean that writing as an activity cannot create what Phelan describes as a “maniacally charged present” that “disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control.”⁷³ Writing, and in particular printed matter, relies on a largely fixed set of signs and reproduces the same forms in order to communicate. However, this could just as easily be applied to speech, which equally relies on recognisably replicated

⁶⁹ Roselee Goldberg, “Performance: a Hidden History,” in *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Lucia della Paolera (Ubu Web Editions, 2010), 22, accessed February 13, 2013, http://www.ubu.com/historical/battcock/Battcock_The-Art-of-Performance_1984.pdf.

⁷⁰ “...performance’s only life is in its present.” Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.

⁷¹ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 149.

⁷² J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 6.

⁷³ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 148-9.

utterances to communicate. In that sense, Phelan's strict ontological definition of performance excludes the many forms of representation it utilises and refers solely to the shared moment(s) of production and reception. If this is the case, then there is most certainly space for writing to perform – although it may not be located where we expect to find it. In her later writing, Phelan concurs with this view in *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* describing performative writing as enacting the affective force of a performance.⁷⁴ Although she is careful to distinguish the difference in the writing of performance, versus the experience of them, ultimately Phelan identifies the ability of writing to enact an affective response within its audience. Affect bridges the semantic function of writing, allowing the audience to experience writing's performance.

The use of writing to create a simulacrum of performance creates a false impression of writing's inability to perform. Phelan argues for the resistance of performance to re-presentation, replication and reproduction because performance is purely consumptive – not reproductive.⁷⁵ Performance only spends, according to Phelan. However, this does not rule out writing as performance, it simply dictates the ways in which it can perform. Remember, Bernard Noël describes writing as consisting of moments of total expenditure. While Phelan may be correct in defining writing about performance as a way of reproducing performance through documentation, it does not mean that writing cannot comprise a performance practice. However, it does indicate that the understanding of writing as performance can only be approached through writing in order to better understand the ways in which it “spends”. When Phelan attributes “the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” to performance, this does not mean that writing's ability to produce trace denies its performance; it simply means that the moment of the performance cannot be replicated through trace.⁷⁶ If the creation of a trace were to deny the possibility of performance,

⁷⁴ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 12.

⁷⁵ Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*, 12.

⁷⁶ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 149.

then how could any performance incorporate any kind of materiality that would ultimately leave some sort of trace?

An experience of affect is temporal: it takes place in a temporary, in-between space. Peggy Phelan writes: “Performance boldly and precariously declares that Being is performed (and made temporarily visible) in that suspended in-between.”⁷⁷ She refers to Richard Schechner, who defines “between-ness” as a fundamental characteristic of performance.⁷⁸ Her reference to between-ness is to emphasise the impossibility of “seizing the Real”. Performance temporarily enacts an experience and is defined its ephemerality, but that does not necessarily preclude activities that result in fixed traces. If writing can similarly reveal being through defining the self then does it really matter that it is traditionally employed in a process of reproduction? Phelan writes:

In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of “presence.” But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else – dance, movement, sound, character, [art].⁷⁹

Writing is the activity through which we are able to come to know the self. As the writer “disappears” into representation, writing briefly occupies the between-ness of performance. This sense of between-ness can be evoked through reproducible works, as is indicated by Adrian Heathfield in the introduction to *LIVE: Art and Performance*. He describes an encounter with Damien Hirst’s sculpture *The Pursuit of Oblivion* (2000): “Facing this artwork, time slides and I’m gripped by an uncanny feeling. The sculpture is performing: the object is alive.”⁸⁰ While I understand that Heathfield describes an experience of a work that is categorically “not live”, his decision to ascribe live characteristics to his encounter with the work presents a willingness to engage with differing forms of “live”. I am not suggesting that “the work” is capable of some sort of autonomous performance but if between-ness is a defining characteristic of performance – if performance is indeed a snake shifting

⁷⁷ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 167.

⁷⁸ Schechner, “What is Performance Studies Anyway?,” 357.

⁷⁹ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 150.

⁸⁰ Adrian Heathfield, “Alive,” in *LIVE: Art and Performance*, ed. Adrian Heathfield (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 7.

over the sands – then surely that means that performance will always elide fixed definitions of its attributes.

The recognition of live qualities in reproducible works creates a range of ways in which the performative qualities can be evaluated. Heathfield describes this movement as a “shift to the live” within contemporary arts; “from the optic to the haptic, from the distant to the close, from static relation to fluid exchange.”⁸¹ He describes a tendency of contemporary work to fluctuate between disciplines and incorporate temporal qualities. The live has begun to increasingly manifest in reproducible media and in ways that challenge what Redell Olsen terms the “monolithic live.”⁸² She terms this manifestation “degrees of liveness” meaning: “the temporal moment of the live cannot necessarily be fixed as occurring entirely within the present moment.”⁸³ An encounter with a performance work is simultaneous to its presentation. This implies performance must occur in a space inhabited both by the performer and audience. Olsen explores the “degrees of liveness” specifically within the context of the multi-media work that interrogates “the live subject in relation to the time of event and to the time of writing itself.”⁸⁴ Olsen is concerned with the delay between the moment of making and presentation inherent to video and related media and how liveness persists between dyssynchronicities of work presentation and reception. Olsen establishes that a live exchange between performer and audience circumnavigates the delay between inception and reception within particular medium.

A relevant point in Olsen’s review is her description of Francisco Goya’s eighty-two etchings, *The Disasters of War* (1810-20). Goya’s etchings depict things he witnessed during the particularly intense period of conflict between Spain and the

⁸¹ Heathfield, “Alive,” 7.

⁸² Redell Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman,” *HOW2* 1, no. 6 (2001), accessed February 2, 2013, https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_6_2001/current/in-conference/olsen.html.

⁸³ Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman.”

⁸⁴ Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman.”

Napoleonic French Empire. They are, in fact, his lived experiences. This is most evident, as Olsen points out, in the captions with which Goya accompanies his etchings and in particular when he states, “I saw this.” The shift from “This is what you see” to “This is what I see” transforms representations of an already happened past into an immediate and present lived experience as it is mediated through the artist. Olsen is quick to point out that she is not confusing degrees of liveness “with a discussion of the witnessing an event ‘at first hand,’” and articulates that, “gradations of liveness emerge at precisely the moment that the possibility of representation comes into play which might be before, after or during the event itself.”⁸⁵ Goya invokes the live by drawing attention to his presence during the event; each caption transports the viewer to the moment of experience through the present tense. The invocation of the “I” in the caption, in addition to the tense of the writing, transmit the live through the artist/medium. As Olsen concludes: “the live subject’s ‘I saw this’ is a tissue of varying degrees of liveness that have occurred over a period of time.”⁸⁶ “Live subject” is synonymous with the “self” that Foucault writes into being. What Olsen proposes is a concept of the live that is not limited to a single present tense or isolated moments in time but instead layers of liveness that invoke the present at non-simultaneous points in time. Olsen recognises the problems that the degrees of liveness create for the duration of any given work. If the duration of a work can be revived, such as they are in text-based works, then the “time” of a work becomes complicated and layered.⁸⁷

Part of Heathfield’s proposed *shift to the live* is a tendency towards haptic interaction with a piece. Haptics describes nonverbal communication that involves touch. The movement from the optic to the haptic within contemporary arts refers to a collapse in the distance between the artist and the audience, the work and the viewer, and also between the disciplines and their calcified definitions. When Laura Marks first introduces the concept of haptic visuality, she applies it specifically to

⁸⁵ Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman.”

⁸⁶ Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman.”

⁸⁷ Olsen, “Degrees of Liveness, Live and Electronic Subjects: Leslie Scalapino, Fiona Templeton and Carla Harryman.”

film analysis and uses it to describe a mode of looking that is “more inclined to move than to focus, to graze than to gaze.”⁸⁸ This turn of phrase indicates the tendency of haptics to collapse distances to the body. She writes that, “while optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image.”⁸⁹ What Marks proposes is a radical shift in the way that we are able to perceive and consequently interact with what is traditionally deemed representational. Haptic visuality allows us to experience the page as surface, material and texture. Further into this chapter I discuss the relationship between site, space and performance writing and how this develops a concept of haptic writing. Privileging the material presence of the page collapses the distance between the body and writing. What was properly conceived as distance transforms into a closeness as the space between writing and the body becomes a meeting point.

It is important to retain the integrity of between-ness in performance and to employ it as the central criteria in articulating performance. The *shift to the live* described by Adrian Heathfield and *degrees of liveness* proposed by Olsen all hinge on a primary understanding of the between-ness of performance. Creating expanded understandings of what the live can encompass can only come through a work’s ability to engage with and evoke an experience of between-ness in the audience – whether that is an audience of many or, as in the case of some text-based works, of one. The best tactic to argue the performance of writing is to perform it, as articulated by Foucault and others. To invoke the performance of writing one must occupy a space in flux, bridging the disappearing gap between speech and writing, utterance and text, representation and presentation.

Performances of Breathlessness

In the following paragraphs I will discuss a number of works from the latter half of the 20th century to the present that depict and/or utilise a state of impaired breath (breathlessness) in their work. My interest is primarily in works that incorporate the corporeal. I take this to include video art and installations as well as newer

⁸⁸ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 162.

⁸⁹ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 163.

disciplines such as performance writing (of which the bulk of my artistic practice comprises). The works will be handled according to date in a linear progression to allow for a systematic handling of each work (and not to imply or impose relationships between the individual works). It is my intent that through discursively approaching the different works that I will establish a history of non-terminal manifestations of breathlessness in contemporary performance work. Because this review is undertaken in part to gain a better understanding of the material I am actively handling in my own work, I concentrate on the relationship between the corporeal and language, as well as how these works might contribute to an understanding of the between-ness of breathlessness.

The works I discuss here are: Chris Burden's *Velvet Water* (1974), Boegel and Holtappels' *Atmung 1-4* (1976) and *Reminiszenz II* (1977), Ulay and Abramović's *Breathing In/Breathing Out* (1977) and *Talking About Similarity* (1976), and L.A. Raeven's *Love Knows Many Faces* (2005).⁹⁰ There are many works that depict breath and I have deliberately chosen not to incorporate these into my review (such as Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Breath* (1970)) because I do not feel that they address impaired breathing or loss of breath in a way that is relevant to my practice and research.

⁹⁰ Chris Burden, *Velvet Water*, May 7, 1974, performance, Chicago, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, "Atmung 1," video, 0:30 (18:45), 1976, *LIMA*, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/boegel-holtappels/atmung-1/1393>. Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, "Atmung 2," video, 0:30 (4:16), 1976, *LIMA*, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/boegel-holtappels/atmung-2/1394>. Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, "Atmung 3," video, 0:30 (3:46), 1976, *LIMA*, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/boegel-holtappels/atmung-3/1395>. Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, "Atmung 4," video, 0:30 (3:42), 1976, *LIMA*, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/boegel-holtappels/atmung-4/1396>. Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, "Reminiszenz II," video, 0:30 (5:42), 1977, *LIMA*, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/boegel-holtappels/reminiszenz-ii/17400>. Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Breathing In/Breathing Out*, performance, April 1977, Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade. Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Talking about Similarity*, performance, November 30, 1976, Single 64, Amsterdam. L.A. Raeven, *Love Knows Many Faces*, video, 6:00, 2005, Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam.

Chris Burden is a performance artist whose practice began in the 1970s and who is known for producing some of the first examples of body art in western contemporary art. His early works enjoy a specific infamy due to the physically dangerous and risky actions that his performances required. Many of his works (at least superficially) court death and explore the limits of the body. A constant awareness of the proximity of death, and the fragility of our own bodies accompanies consciousness of our own inhalations. Burden engages with breathing in an entirely different way in his performance piece *Velvet Water* (1974). At the outset, Burden asserts that breathing water is the opposite of drowning and that water is “a richer, thicker oxygen capable of sustaining life.”⁹¹ He then submerges his head under water, his fists gripping the edges of the basin and attempts to “breathe”. He slings back his head, his hair slicked back by water and gasps for air. He repeats this futile action, choking and coughing up water, until physical exhaustion (not lack of will) forces him to stop. His audience viewing his performance through a live video feed could hear the noises he made through the thin wall separating the audience from the performer. They watched him immerse his head, then throw it back and choke up water, the violence of the act communicated through the sounds penetrating the barrier between him and his audience. This auditory penetration is what holds his audience. This both implicates and confronts them with their role as witnesses.

What is relevant here is how Burden challenges definitions of drowning and the qualities that we attribute to breathlessness. Dorothy Seiberling, in her 1976 article, “The Art-Martyr,” sketches parallels between Burden’s body of work and Christian depictions of martyrdom and faith-based suffering.⁹² If we are to follow this vein, there is a parallel between baptism and *Velvet Water*. However, as in Seiberling’s article, this is a crude gesture. Burden wants us to imagine a velvet caress, soft slippery water, enfolding richness, but only in contrast to the desperate and struggling reality of the performance. What is largely unexplored is the destructive properties of this “velvet water” on the powers of speech. Burden’s introductory statement is undone, broken down and choked out with every immersion. His articulation, that he will “breathe water” is nullified by the breathlessness he encounters in the basin. Burden’s

⁹¹ Dorothy Seiberling, “The Art-Martyr,” *New York Magazine*, May 24, 1976, 58.

⁹² Seiberling, “The Art-Martyr,” 48-66.

performance illustrates the contrast between drowning and water's ability to sustain life. He does so by identifying breathing as the fundament of living, of sustaining life, and depicts the circumstances in which it is and isn't possible. *Velvet Water* utilises the corporeal limits of the body to explore how this impacts speech articulations. Breathlessness becomes complicit in the un-making of language.

Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels worked together for approximately a decade, spanning the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Their performance pieces, particularly the ones occurring early on in their collaboration, were physical, endurance-oriented and often exhausting the limitations of the human body. Their works were not unique during the period they took place in; at Performance Arts Festival of Brussels, Belgium, in 1978 they performed alongside other performance artists whose work focus on the body, its limitations and physical endurance. In *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970's*, author Kathy O'Dell suggests that "body art" from this period was a way of engaging with and mediating ongoing political and social upheaval.⁹³

Boegel and Holtappels' *Atmung 1-4* were a series of actions that took place in 1976, at the beginning of their ten-year collaboration. The length of each piece in this series is determined by the video documentation by cutting to black; the documentation shows a portion of the original performance. Video documentation is the primary source of access for these pieces, although Boegel and Holtappels also produced a small catalogue of their early performance works in 1980 entitled *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978*. I have chosen in this instance to refer to the performances of Boegel and Holtappels as actions because they indicate a preference for this term in their documentation.⁹⁴ Boegel's body functions as the raw material for the actions in this specific series, although in other works Holtappels' body is also used. The purpose of the *Atmung* series is to explore a specific method of research: "...the use of outside stimuli to influence the psyche and consciousness and

⁹³ Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970's* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 75.

⁹⁴ Boegel & Holtappels refer to their collaborative works as "actions", as specified in the title of the book, *Untersuchungen: Aktionen*. Karl Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978* (Den Hague: De Dageraad, 1980).

to make ‘psychic’ processes visible through the body.”⁹⁵ The actions that make up the *Atmung* series were chosen in the greater context of exploring the physical as a way of expressing mental illnesses; their design is to mimic an altered mental state and create a greater understanding and experience of states that fall outside of the everyday.⁹⁶ In particular, they were interested in finding a way to access (through extreme physical situations) a better understanding of the subjective reality of schizophrenic catatonics.⁹⁷

The introductory seconds of *Atmung 1* (1976)⁹⁸ are interrupted with static and a black shattering from one frame to another. This noise eventually moves to the edges of the image; a man (Klaus Boegel) clothed only in a dark pair of underwear is standing in an inflated, clear nylon bag. He calmly (and heavily) breathes in through his nose and out through his mouth. His stance is relaxed, his arms hang at his sides and his hands are unclenched. The camera zooms in after a minute to focus on Boegel’s face. When he breaks rhythm to exhale through his mouth it sounds like short pants. He breathes in deeply through his nose, a long suck and exhales briefly as though despite his best efforts, not much air gets in. He swallows. Continues. Due to the quality of the recording, a frame will go black and reappear again or flicker in and out and around the edges.⁹⁹ The surface of the nylon bag is lightly fogged and the details of his face are slightly obscured. Like *Atmung 1*, the first shot of *Atmung 2* (1976)¹⁰⁰ reveals the space and context in which the performance takes place. We see Boegel sitting on the floor, leaning up against a wall with his knees drawn up tightly against his body and encased (confined) in plastic. His head is enclosed, along with the rest of his body. His position is cramped and uncomfortable looking. Unlike *Atmung 1*, *Atmung 2* restrains the performer’s movement and, after a few seconds, the camera zooms in to focus on

⁹⁵ Boegel and Holtappels, *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978*, 6.

⁹⁶ Boegel and Holtappels, *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978*, 6.

⁹⁷ Boegel and Holtappels, *Aktionen 1975-1978*, 8.

⁹⁸ Boegel and Holtappels, *Atmung 1*.

⁹⁹ The obscured face and diminishing oxygen mirror the flaws of the recording medium. The video threatens to collapse into black simultaneous to Boegel’s body. Shared metaphorical parallels of film and breathlessness are further explored in chapter four.

¹⁰⁰ Boegel and Holtappels, *Atmung 2*.

the bag beginning to cling to Boegel's face as he breathes. Every time he moves, the plastic crackles, loudly punctuating the shallow rhythm of his breathing. Unlike in *Atmung 1*, Boegel's expression is tense, displaying discomfort, and his anxiety is palpable. In the last few seconds of the video documentation Boegel's body begins to fall out of frame; he shifts and slowly slides off to the left as he fails to stay upright and loses consciousness.

Atmung 3 (1976)¹⁰¹ is described in *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978* as a single performance made up of two parts; the first, in which Boegel strangles himself with a length of cloth, and the second, in which he attempts to breathe through a wad of cloth inserted into his mouth with his nostrils closed. However, the video documentation clearly titles the actions as separate works and numbers them in the order I discuss them here. *Atmung 3* begins with a close-up of Boegel's face and shoulders placed in the middle of the screen and directly facing the camera. His nostrils are stuffed with cotton wadding. He takes a length of cloth that appears to be a large handkerchief; it is white with a darker fabric or thread along the edges. He slowly, carefully, feeds it into his mouth while looking into the camera. He folds the cloth upon itself and tucks the edge further into his mouth to keep it in place. His front teeth are visible; the wad is placed behind them. The wad of cloth holds his mouth open and the pressure of his open mouth simultaneously holds the cloth in place. He breathes in and out through the miniscule gaps in the wadded cloth. He inhales and exhales with difficulty. Different to the other *Atmung* works, the duration of this piece is brief. Boegel's eyes bulge from lack of oxygen, all his blood goes to his head, making it swell up.¹⁰² Occasionally, he uses both hands to gently assess the position of the wad and to softly press it back into his mouth. He maintains the position of the wad throughout the brief performance; the screen cuts to black after three and a half minutes.

Although this is performance does not contain the same sort of tension and anxiety of the other actions in this series, his active participation (versus passive) in

¹⁰¹ Boegel and Holtappels, *Atmung 3*.

¹⁰² LIMA, "Atmung 3," accessed May 2, 2015, <http://catalogue.nimk.nl/site/?page=%2Fsite%2Fart.php%3Fid%3D1393>.

denying his body oxygen is in many ways much more troubling and subversive. This leads us to *Atmung 4* (1976), the last and most violent actions in this series. The video sequence opens and it is difficult to determine the extent of the force that Boegel applies to the cloth wrapped around his neck. He wraps the ends of the cloth around each fist and holds them, suspended, above his shoulders. He inhales and exhales. He adjusts the pressure and you can see the cloth cinch in around his neck. Unlike in the other performances, Boegel's action does not impede his airway, nor does it incorporate a container with a diminishing supply of oxygen. His face is slightly contorted by the effort necessary to enact his own strangulation. The screen flickers like a heartbeat. By compressing his neck, he is actually reducing the flow of oxygenated blood to his brain. The sensation is wholly different to the woozy increase of carbon dioxide: pressure builds in his head and, although he can inhale, it does little to impact his ever-increasing thirst for air. In this three-minute performance, he simply constrains his neck to rapidly induce breathlessness in a body that is still breathing. In all of the performances in this series, the performer confronts you with their gaze. This invites empathy and an affective response to the apparent self-violence in a situation where the audience has no recourse to intervention.

These pieces visualise breathing through variations of auto-asphyxiation. Their depictions also use props that are most commonly associated with terminal outcomes. Granted, an accompanying statement such as, "I strangle myself [for] three minutes with a towel" belies the drama and danger of the art, but the manner in which breathing is depicted is clearly designed to emphasise the danger and risk involved in the actions. This relationship is more explicit in the work of Danny Devos who deliberately mimics death-scene or post-mortem photography in his works.¹⁰³ His piece *I'm Suffocating* (1980) in which Devos slowly suffocates over a 15-minute period with a plastic bag placed over his head, sealed around his neck, while listening to the music of the Simpletones bears a striking resemblance to *Atmung 2*.¹⁰⁴ The grainy photograph

¹⁰³ Devos' interest in crime-scene photography and true crime imagery is most explicit in his later works, which include a photographic series of staged death scenes.

¹⁰⁴ Danny Devos, *I'm Suffocating*, September 12, 1980, performance, Amsterdam, AMVK-exhibition, Art Something.

documenting this piece shows a man, shirtless, wearing a pair of jeans and shoes, crouching on a tiled floor. His upper body is crumpled up, bent forward and hunched. The flash of the camera makes his skin look pale in contrast to the denim, the dark floor tiles and the black background. The bag around his head is crumpled by the air he lacks, just as Boegel's bag slowly crumpled around his face.

Although Boegel and Holtappels depict breathing within extreme restrictions, their actions are not outside of our realm of experience. It is our ability to empathise with the artist's body that generates tension and discomfort for the audience.¹⁰⁵ Different to other body works that visibly display harm, tension builds through the viewer's shared understanding of what it is to be without breath. This consequently reawakens a primal fear of the fragility of our bodies, which is an experience that we can each empathise with to varying degrees. It is this knowledge, combined with a definitive visual narratology of breathlessness as a terminal practice/state, that encourages us (in this instance) to regard performed breathlessness as a potentially harmful act. It is impossible to watch Boegel wrap a strap around his neck or breathe with a bag over his head without associating these actions with pre-existing documents of mortality. The anxiety these actions provoke relates directly to imagery depicting suicide, fatal sexual practices and murder. We thereby understand breathlessness to be the causal agent and consequently categorise breathless states as harmful. This thesis, along with Boegel and Holtappels' work, seeks to sidestep the terminal associations of breathlessness. The purpose of the *Atmung* series is to physically manifest the symptomology of mental illness and to bring about greater (individual) understanding about these liminal states of being. The implied harm of the actions involved in the *Atmung* series produces a performance of the liminality of the "mentally ill" mind and the affect an altered state of mind produces.¹⁰⁶ In this sense Boegel and Holtappels use breathlessness as a way of establishing an understanding of between-ness. By subjecting Boegel's body to the same rigorous

¹⁰⁵ Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970's*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ The terminology and discourse that Boegel and Holtappels use regarding mental illness is extremely dated. Although they demonstrate a sympathetic engagement with mental illness, they do so by casting the neuro-atypical as other. It is not a position I support but I feel that their work should be viewed within the context of the time it was made.

clinical gaze, and allowing him to participate in pathological activities within a controlled environment, the duo occupy the same liminality as the subjects by whom they were inspired.

This series led to further studies in which Boegel and Holtappels began to immerse themselves further and further into the physical reality of schizophrenia. Believing that the physical expressions of schizophrenics were directly related to their inner emotional experience and functioned as a kind of non-verbal articulation of their lived experience, Boegel and Holtappels produced further work that explored states beyond language. *Reminiszenz II* (1977) depicts Boegel attempting speech but his ability to do so is impaired by a large ball of dough inserted in his mouth. (I explore this work further in chapter two.) The shift of emphasis from breathing to speech production implies an underlying relationship between the two. There is a causal relationship where the breathless are speechless because breathing is necessary for the production of speech. The blocked glottis functions as a metaphor for those who cannot speak for themselves. Inarticulacy parallels altered perceptions of reality and an inability to coalesce a coherent narrative beyond or outside of the shared realms of experience.

In *Breathing in/Breathing Out* (1977) Ulay and Abramović (Uwe Laysiepen and Marina Abramović) block their nasal passages with cigarette filters in their nostrils, lock their mouths together and pass air back and forth, drawing in used breath from one set of lungs into the other as the oxygen gradually dissipates. Ulay and Abramović rebreathe air until both performers lose consciousness. The artists describe their performance as a deliberate attempt to birth a conjoined consciousness for which the mutual exchange of breath would lead to a destruction of self and “to create something like a hermaphroditic state of being that we called the death self.”¹⁰⁷ Mary Richards writes in *Marina Abramović* (2010) that Ulay and Abramović’s work from this period is primarily concerned with a “psychic shattering.”¹⁰⁸ The duo enacts physically

¹⁰⁷ Janet Kaplan, “Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramovic,” *Art Journal* 58, no. 2 (1999): 17, accessed December 30, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777944>.

¹⁰⁸ Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 17.

difficult and challenging scenarios in which their egos will be “deliberately crushed.”¹⁰⁹ Their work concentrates on subsuming the ego/self through repetitive and painful actions in order to experience through their bodies’ pain-induced ego dissolution. Richards draws parallels between the arts practice of Ulay and Abramović and practices of the Siva Pasupata sect. In *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* Thomas McEvelley describes how sect practitioners “carry out inappropriate and potentially destructive behaviours that damage their self-image to such an extent that the ego is all but effaced,” surmising that this results in the freedom of the individual.¹¹⁰ Ulay and Abramović exchange something more intimate than fluids and more essential than words. By bringing their bodies close to death and depriving each other of air, they attempt to lose their subjectivity by embracing thanatos.

There is a certain awareness of the conjugal in this work, of two made one through physical embrace. *Breathing In/Breathing Out* exhibits a non-gender specific mutual penetration that actively breaks down the gender binary and allows Ulay and Abramović to “negate the general idea of man and woman” and move towards becoming “one complete person.”¹¹¹ In *Talking About Similarity* (1976) Ulay sews his lips shut and Abramović speaks for him, using their “psychic” connection to answer questions put to Ulay until she feels that the connection is broken. She differentiates the voice she lends to Ulay from her own, ending the performance when she feels ‘the truth of her responses diminish’.¹¹² This work reverses traditional gender roles by silencing the male voice but in this complicated role play Abramović loses her voice in order to serve as Ulay’s mouthpiece. Thus, the piece resembles a strange ventriloquism. Nonetheless, Ulay and Abramović use forms of breathlessness to

¹⁰⁹ Mary Richards, *Marina Abramović* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis: New York, 2010), 14-15.

¹¹⁰ Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 226.

¹¹¹ Helena Kontova, “Marina Abramovic and Ulay,” *Flash Art* 80/81 (1978), accessed December 30, 2012, http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=197-&det=ok&ti-tle=MARINA-ABRAMOVIC-AND-ULAY.

¹¹² Richards, *Marina Abramović*, 19.

transgress their individual bodies and pass into the other's. Breath becomes a medium for sharing a oneness.

A shared physical existence is a prevalent theme in the work of L. A. Raeven, twin sisters Liesbeth and Angelique who make work under a conjoined identity. Contrary to Ulay and Abramović, the work of L. A. Raeven focusses on the corporeality of a shared physicality over the metaphysical. *Love Knows Many Faces* (2005) is a video work (first shown in 2005 at Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam) depicting the sisters swimming in a river. They take turns pushing the other under water as they attempt to drown one another. Apparent from the outset of the video is the physical frailty of both performers, which is later verified by Liesbeth Raeven:

We filmed this...soon after Angelique came out of the hospital. It was actually very dangerous: she was still so fragile. She only weighed some thirty-two kilos. The water was ice-cold, after five minutes you were frozen, and we couldn't stand because you would get stuck in the sand.¹¹³

The biggest controversy surrounding their artistic practice has been their emaciated bodies which they initially ascribed to limiting their individual weight to equal the "healthy" body weight of a single individual.¹¹⁴ Their work deals predominately with the concepts of aesthetics and consumption, relying on their corporeal experiences to convey the complicated ethics that surround these concepts.¹¹⁵

The liminal space of breathlessness acts a metaphor for the extremes of their relationship. They tread water, grimly regard the other, breathe haggardly and

¹¹³ "24 Uur Met L. A. Raeven," *24 Uur Met*, VPRO (Amsterdam, 25 May, 2012). Translation my own.

¹¹⁴ Sean O'Hagen, "Hungry for fame," *The Observer*, February 17, 2002, accessed August 4, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2002/feb/17/features.review137>.

¹¹⁵ "24 Uur Met L. A. Raeven," *24 Uur Met*. L. A. Raeven emphatically refused to engage in an explicit dialogue about anorexia (and eating disorders) early on in their career. They felt that to accept the label anorexic would allow others to dismiss their work rather than engage with it critically. It was only in *24 uur met...* ("24 hours with..."), a Dutch TV programme on which the host, Wilfried de Jong, inhabits a space for 24 hours with his guest(s) wherein a series of informal interviews take place) that the sisters spoke candidly about their complicated relationship to each other and eating.

desperately, violently pushing the other under. Closer than lovers, they engage each other in a constant battle of wills on the battleground of their bodies. The camera focuses on one face and then the other to convey how they regard each other. Liesbeth swims towards Angelique, and pulls her under the water and holds her head under. Liesbeth embraces Angelique and uses the weight of her body to hold her under. Angelique desperately fights this and we see her splashing, choking up the brown water of the canal, her limbs flailing in the murky soup. Other shots include them holding on to the remnants of a dock, panting, and then returning to tread water, each alone. Breathlessness in this piece is yet another means to portray the wilfully destructive interaction of two bodies trying to separate themselves from a conjoined identity that they simultaneously also seek out and nurture.

Contrary to Burden's work, which also incorporates drowning, this work does not lend itself to the metaphorical wealth that this particular act offers. They drag one another under with no apparent success or conclusion. Breathlessness does not result in an exchange; one does not speak for the other. Instead, breathlessness becomes the process by which they mark their individuation; one endures what the other does not. Liesbeth doesn't breathe for Angelique; instead, it is through the dissolution of the other that they break down their interchangeability.

The physical imperative of breath is a catalyst for the production of work that explores both literal and metaphorical between-ness. The role of impaired breathing in the works I have discussed here demonstrates the multiplicity of meanings and uses that can be attached to performances of breathlessness. However, what they share is the use of breathing (and impaired breath) as a means to discuss the transgression of perceived limitations, boundaries and norms. Is it impaired breath or is it breath averted and rechannelled? These different pieces divert breath to guide us to insights about corporeality, states of mind, frames of reference and ways of being.

Where is Performance Writing?

Where is performance writing? It is typed on a keyboard, appears on a screen and turns into a page that you can read. It is here and now. Performance writing exists between performance and writing, emerging from the tension bridging these two

field.”¹²⁰ Bergvall purposefully avoids referring to performance writing as a discipline, instead referring to it in terms of space, first calling it a “field” and later “an area,” and one “of joint practical and critical investigation of the many uses writing and language are being put to and push themselves into.”¹²¹ Performance writing creates locations in between the known and unknown as active sites of exchange.

The spaces of performance writing rely on movement between the known and unknown sites of writing. Their recognised boundaries collapse and recuperate in relation to this movement that is performance writing - those between spaces where language and writing “push themselves into.”¹²² Hall reiterates this understanding of space in “Thirteen Ways of Talking about Performance Writing”:

she saw that she had made something
that in controlling she couldn't control;
in putting her words out into a space
which others moved in and out of
there was a performance space in which these others had to perform,
caught in a narrative of swinging things and meanings.¹²³

Hall depicts the effort to control the site of writing as futile in order to emphasise the slipperiness of these locations due to their multiple points of access and engagement. Connections between page, present, site and body develop as textures that permit the shift and flow of writing from reader to reader and body to body irrespective of time. The haptics of writing extend the materiality of the page to other, less fixed, sites of writing. Rachel Lois Clapham, in *(W)reading Performance*

¹²⁰ Ric Allsopp, “Performance Writing,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21, no.1 (1999): 79, accessed October 12, 2010, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/performing_arts_journal/v021/21.1allsopp.html.

¹²¹ Bergvall, “What Do We Mean By Performance Writing?”

¹²² Bergvall, “What Do We Mean By Performance Writing?”

¹²³ John Hall, “Thirteen Ways of Talking about Performance Writing,” in *Essays on Performance Writing, Poetics and Poetry, Vol. 1: On Performance Writing, With Pedagogical Sketches*, (Bristol: Shearsman Books, October 2013), 29. Originally published in *Thirteen Ways of Talking about Performance Writing* (Plymouth: PCAD, 2008).

Writing, omits the term *performance writing* entirely from the collection of essays.¹²⁴ Performance writing instead occupies the blank space contained with brackets, such as: [], performing the ephemerality of the space it occupies, between disciplines and permeating beyond the page. In contrast to Hall, Clapham creates a space within the text that simultaneously generates a performance of writing while highlighting the layers of writing that exist both on and off the page. The bracketed space highlights the different definitions of performance writing that abound while also allowing the space to facilitate a movement between them through their collective absence.

Yve Lomax's work parallels performance writing practices but she chooses to align her work with "art writing". Lomax, along with her colleagues from Goldsmiths' MFA Art Writing program, formulated *11 Statements Around Art Writing*, stating that art writing "is in the situation of a fulcrum."¹²⁵ This can be read to mean that art writing is a medium through which artistic practice is exercised. However, a fulcrum can equally hinge disconnected practices together. It is [a practice] that re-invents itself each time.¹²⁶ Although the concern of art writing is both writing as an art practice as well as a means to write critically about art, the discipline as defined in "11 Statements Around Art Writing" does not speak explicitly to the performance of writing. Art writing may not be performance writing but they do occupy similar territories. Lomax wants "to find out what writing can do, what it can develop and envelop."¹²⁷ She, like Bergvall, refers to writing as an art practice that is active and enacting.

Performance writing is the site of convergence for varied disciplines but where that convergence takes place is not limited to specific times or spaces. When Ric

¹²⁴ Rachel Lois Clapham, ed., (*W*)*reading Performance Writing* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2008), accessed January 1, 2012, http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/rachel_lois_clapham_guide.html.

¹²⁵ Maria Fusco, Yve Lomax, Michael Newman and Adrian Rifkin, "11 Statements Around Art Writing," *Frieze Blog*, October 10, 2011, accessed October 18, 2013, <http://blog.frieze.com/11-statements-around-art-writing/%20/>.

¹²⁶ Fusco, Lomax, Newman and Rifkin, "11 Statements Around Art Writing."

¹²⁷ Yve Lomax, preface to *Writing the Image* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), xii.

Allsopp describes performance writing as marking “the terminal points in between,” we could read this as meaning the sites of rest as well as nodes of contact.¹²⁸ Allsopp describes performance writing in contradictory terms, defining it as “increasingly fixed” as well as “unstable and exploratory.”¹²⁹ He writes that it is “the continuing and transforming relationship between the two terms of its discourse.”¹³⁰ He indicates a constant friction within the definition of the practice as well as between the two disciplines that comprise it. Friction cannot occur in stasis; by describing performance writing in these ways we are able to retain an understanding and practice of its unfixed qualities, allowing for a constantly emerging discipline that “crackles and sparks into life.”¹³¹ With that in mind let us return to *terminal points in between* and remember that a terminal in electric circuitry is the point at which connections are both established and broken.

Lyn Hejinian writes in *The Language of Inquiry* that “language itself is never in a state of rest” and that “the experience of using it, which includes the experience of understanding it, either as speech or as writing, is inevitably active – both intellectually and emotionally.”¹³² Hejinian reflects Foucault’s sentiments here: the practice of engaging with language through writing is active and, by extension, transformative. Because language is never at rest, the process of engaging with it is by nature unfixed. Writing is continuously undergoing transformation, provoking change simultaneously within its audience.

cris cheek also addresses the role of the audience and its relationship to a work. He calls for a consideration of the “increasing number of writers for whom text is not so securely on the page and by whom reading witnesses are being increasingly led into exegetic microtopias of ‘live writing’.”¹³³ cheek asserts that in these circumstances “a

¹²⁸ Allsopp, “Performance Writing,” 76.

¹²⁹ Allsopp, “Performance Writing,” 77.

¹³⁰ Allsopp, “Performance Writing,” 77.

¹³¹ Allsopp, “Performance Writing,” 79.

¹³² Lynn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 50.

¹³³ cris cheek, “Implicit,” in *Additional Apparitions: Poetry, Performance and Site Specificity*, ed. David Kenney et al (Sheffield: The Cherry on the Top Press, 2002), 106.

performance is not a product, rather performance is an occurrence of conversations between process and product ongoing.”¹³⁴ Although cheek writes about poetry readings, I feel that the description of text that is “not so securely on the page” extends to page-based works in the sense that the ongoing dialogue between process and product also occurs on the page. When he describes the poetry reading as:

a site of textual uncertainties, partly since perhaps nobody knows for sure quite how much is written and how much unwritten in that particular place and at that particular time. The particularities of moment are worth registering here.¹³⁵

cheek illustrates the unfixed quality of writing. No one knows how much is written and unwritten in a given moment, not if we think beyond the immediate function of writing as inscription. As Bergvall asserts:

Any treatment, any font, any blank, any punctuation, any intonation, any choice of materials, any blob, however seemingly peripheral to the work, is part of the work, carries it, opens it up, closes it in, determines it. This is its performance. Its points of impact.¹³⁶

Sumner, in “Wade Into Words,” describes how in Bergvall’s work *The Hungry Form* the page activates through the performance of words upon its surface.¹³⁷ This description designates the page as a site of performance; the page becomes a stage, a space and a medium for performance. *But the performance is in the points of impact.* Bergvall describes her work as the performance on and through the page – one that contains within itself the potential for secondary performances but does not require them.¹³⁸ cheek and Bergvall recognise that the sites of performance writing are not secured to any singular location but rather exist in dialogue with and between each

¹³⁴ cris cheek, “Implicit,” 106.

¹³⁵ cheek, “Implicit,” 108.

¹³⁶ Bergvall, “What Do We Mean By Performance Writing?”

¹³⁷ Alaric Sumner, “Wade Into Words,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21, no. 1 (1999):82, accessed October 20, 2013, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/performing_arts_journal/v021/21.1sumner01.html.

¹³⁸ Caroline Bergvall, “The Hungry Form (G.eek Mix),” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21, no. 1 (1999):112, accessed October 18, 2013, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/performing_arts_journal/v021/21.1bergvall.html.

other. In this context, the relationships that emerge between process and product rely on dialogic exchange between sites of writing and reading. Although spaciality is emphasized in writing about performance writing, this generates questions regarding how contact between diverse material and immaterial locations occurs and what facilitates these slippages between them.

Performance writing moves in, closes up, carries, slips, impacts: all of these descriptions refer to contact between different modes of writing. Some writing, such as this writing, takes place on a page. Yet some writing occurs in blank or unwritten spaces. Sites of writing that exist individually as textures and surfaces beg closer scrutiny however, their performance occurs through slippages from one in relation to another. Allsopp describes the page as “a material space and also an ideological and increasingly fluid space, and as such determines, frames and contains the types of performance that it enacts.”¹³⁹ What might be initially conceived of as disconnected spaces, locations and surfaces are different registers of writing: areas thickened with spaciality, duration and materiality. The haptic articulates the role of touch in perception, encouraging movement across the different registers in relation to each other and identifying spaciality in writing. Movement between registers relies on haptics to collapse the distance between the different textures, sites and surfaces of performance writing. Hapticity both champions texture and acknowledges the materiality of writing while highlighting the relationships that arise through contact. The haptic also asks you to consider your body in relation to writing: how you encounter it sensuously without the distance of representation. Marks writes of how “a haptic composition appeals to the tactile connections of the surface plane of the image,” thereby emphasising the relationality of these surfaces to each other within the parametres of the haptic gaze.¹⁴⁰ By applying Marks’ concept of haptic visuality to writing, we identify the workings of spaciality in performance writing. In the same way that optic visuality adheres to a single focal point, conventional writing does not engage with the materialities of performance writing nor with the bodies that produce and experience it. By contrast, haptic writing encourages a non-hierarchical

¹³⁹ Ric Allsopp, “Itinerant Pages: The page as performance space,” *Performance Research* 9, no. 2 (2004): 4.

¹⁴⁰ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 163.

exploration of the diverse surfaces and sites of performance writing. It articulates how registers can be explored in relation to each other and the connection this bears to performance writing practice.

The different registers employed in this thesis (as modes of address) invite a closer proximity to the writing. This occurs through the constant displacement of any one set register, provoking new relationships to the writing as well as the material and immaterial sites of activity. In this sense, performance writing utilises the enhanced proximity that arises through haptic writing to lubricate slippages between various sites, spaces and durations of writing. Closeness to writing and between writings elicits sensitivities to the shifts in register that I employ in this thesis. This includes the different registers that performance writing generates as writing moves in and out of the spaces I put my words into. These fluctuating intimacies highlight the materiality of the page, the immateriality of your experience and the spaces performance writing inhabits.

This leads me to highlight my work: present in what you are reading, now. Redirection of attention to the body through writing is a constant tactic in my research and alerts the reader to the relationship that their body bears to writing. The collapses in boundaries that hapticity introduces to performance writing also encourage bodily enmeshment in critical writing. Foucault writes that “The role of writing is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a ‘body.’”¹⁴¹ And this body should be understood not as a body of doctrine but rather – following an often evoked metaphor of digestion – as the very body of the one who, by transcribing his readings, has appropriated them and made their truth their own. Writing transforms the thing seen or heard “into tissue and blood.”¹⁴² Foucault conflates the body with writing to convey an embodiment of writing. He describes the ability of writing to impart knowledge as well as experience to the bodies of others. Imagine Jane Gallop’s *Thinking Through the Body*: she shares an anecdote of her near-strangulation at the hands of a care-giver as a baby.¹⁴³ In this collection of

¹⁴¹ Foucault, “Self Writing,” 213.

¹⁴² Foucault, “Self Writing,” 213.

¹⁴³ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 4.

essays she advocates the ways in which the body can impart knowledge and the ways in which it can contribute to critical discourse and methods of analysis. Gallop's visceral retelling – a reproduction – generates an embodied response to the writing. This kind of experience is otherwise not present in the academic text and rapidly shifts to my focus to her infant body. The writing moves from expository to affecting. In the moment that writing exceeds its semantic mandate and creates a bridge to the body it is possible to experience writing beyond representation. It becomes the thing itself: the performance. And we are its audience.

The body is the point of origin for conveying and performing breathlessness on the page. My approach to practice-based research and critical analysis is informed by *écriture féminine* and more specifically by the work and writing of Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément and Luce Irigaray. Affective and embodied writing is not limited to *écriture féminine* and, as such, this body of work also refers to Audre Lorde and Clarice Lispector at different points. Johanna Drucker argues that the poem has a performative life exterior to real-time readings or enactments. Because her definition relies on a purely visual performativity of writing, the materiality of the body is not taken into consideration.¹⁴⁴ Drucker's argument establishes the performativity of writing but unfortunately limits this to the visual form, stating that it “includes all of the elements that make the work an instantiation of a text, make it specific, unique, and dramatic because of the visual character through which the work comes into being.”¹⁴⁵ Her contribution to the argument is vital to understanding performance writing but excludes the body as well as its capacity for generating affective response. This is where Laura Marks' reconstitution of haptics plays an important role. Taking into consideration the sensuality of the gaze and the touching qualities of various textures, surfaces and materialities, haptic writing creates a bridge between the page and the body.

In contrast to Drucker, Hélène Cixous places the body central in her seminal essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, by proclaiming: “Writing is for you, you are for

¹⁴⁴ Johanna Drucker, “Visual Performance of the Poetic Text,” in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 131.

¹⁴⁵ Drucker, “Visual Performance of the Poetic Text,” 131.

you; your body is yours, take it.”¹⁴⁶ Radical at the time of its inception, Cixous’ work develops a theory of embodied writing relying on existing masculine/feminine binaries as a starting point for establishing relationships between embodied experience and writing. Cixous makes an argument for bisexuality as a way of mitigating said polarities, an argument which she develops further in her later work.¹⁴⁷ Cixous links writing to the body but also explores how it contributes to constructing the self. When Cixous writes, “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time,” she underlines the necessity of invoking the body in writing while also articulating how writing is intrinsically linked to self-expression.¹⁴⁸ Articulating the relationship of the body to writing considers performance writing independent of arguments of form and consequently makes space for affective modes. Collapsing body in writing transforms explaining to experiencing, highlighting the points at which affect can be initiated on the page. Merging the body with writing also generates the mode through which this text forms its arguments: conflation and collapse of boundaries become a means for accessing the between space of both performance writing as well as breathlessness.

Conclusion

The performance is in the points of impact: the performance is in the page. The performance of writing emerges through a better understanding of the activity of writing, time and duration, an expanded notion of the live and the haptics of the page. Impact describes an impression made by a force, a movement through time and space, that we could exclaim, “That was an experience!” And we would always exclaim that after the fact, after it was gone and any remnant we would have of that lost moment would not make it any less real. The capacity for trace mires performance writing in arguments questioning its liveness but ultimately it produces ephemeral performances that register on a spectrum of time and location. The strategy of this body of research

¹⁴⁶ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen et al, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 876, accessed August 16, 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239>.

¹⁴⁷ See Hélène Cixous, *The Book of Promethea* (1991) and chapter three for further discussion on the Cixous’ discourse on bisexuality and genderless states of being.

¹⁴⁸ Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 880.

is to present to the reader opportunities for experiencing various performances of breathlessness on the page, to be experienced independently and then subsequently in relation to the close readings that accompany them. The distinction of performance writing work to critical analysis gradually wears through alternating modes of address and the embedding of performance writing within the final section of this work. As I have stated before, we can only come to an understanding of the performance of writing through its making.

CHAPTER 2. *Echo/plasm*

Introduction

Open the cover. (When you opened the cover, did you notice the black endnotes?)

When the cover opens, it reveals the stage. The performance begins: part one, the researcher, and part two, the artist. The black page “parts” and gives a cue to begin. Within the spread marked by black paper “curtains” is a performance of breathlessness.

I hold my book, Echo/plasm, open in front of me. I test its spine, splaying it open. You should hold a copy in your hands, too.¹⁴⁹ I ask you to interact with it, to

¹⁴⁹ The physical copy in this thesis is from the 2nd edition. A digital copy of the 1st edition is included, in Appendix 5. There are minor corrections to the 2nd edition, omitting errors and factual discrepancies. Although it was interesting to mimic errors

read it as you are reading this text now, here. And even as you are here, now, soon you will be in the here and now of the performance on its pages.

This chapter provides an expanded reading of *Echo/plasm*.¹⁵⁰ It is not intended to supplant the experience of the writing or to undermine its performance. Instead this section expands the initial experience of breathlessness on the page and extends its manifestations. A copy of *Echo/plasm* is placed before the chapter to indicate the order in which it should be handled.

Leading from a paper on the subverted narratives of Victorian psychiatric patients, my research began with impeded speech and how it functions as a metaphor for breathlessness.¹⁵¹ Speech and voice, as the terms are used in this section, do not necessarily refer to live speech. Instead they refer to an ability to participate in a system of language, whether that be through writing (implied voice) or speech (literal voice), and to articulate the self. I develop the underlying relationship between breathlessness and writing through the apparent breathlessness of an inarticulate body. Here I refer to the impeded speech of a spirit medium, as explored in *Echo/plasm*.

The performance of breathlessness on the page is not limited to one form or one kind of breathlessness, as will be made clear in subsequent sections. Breathlessness is examined in this section within the context of the page-based performance in the bookwork *Echo/plasm* and as a literal embodied state. The title of the work plays on the linguistic slippage of *ecto* to *echo*, a malapropism performing the reverb of an echo and a slowly diminishing articulation. *Ecto*, meaning outside or external, turns into a cough when it exits the body. Rather than being carefully enunciated, the tongue is replaced with a slightly choked *echo*, initiating the promised “hampered articulations.” This section contends with a literal embodied condition of breathlessness through varying manifestations of compromised lungs and the

common to the source material, such as poor citation and misspellings, it became clear to me that rather than commenting on these errors my work began to perpetuate them. Refer to <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182756.v1> for the electronic version of this thesis to view *Echo/plasm*.

¹⁵⁰ *Echo/plasm* (2013), the 1st edition and 2nd edition in 2016.

¹⁵¹₁₄₇ See Jessica Worden, “Articulating breath: Writing Charcot’s Hysteric with Performance Writing,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 13, no. 3 (July 2014): 318-325.

implications of these states as performed on the page. Breathlessness, as it relates to this section, refers not just to a lack of breath but to a breath that is replaced by a cough, wheeze or tremendous quantities of phlegm – instances where the voice becomes blocked.¹⁵² In order to understand the ways in which breathlessness performs on the page, I will examine the questions blocked breath evokes in terms of immateriality, authorship and control.

Asthmatic Crisis

BREATHLESSNESS spreads out over the cover. The title promises “ectoplasmic manifestations, disappearing bodies, hampered articulations.” The cover explains that its contents are divided in two, as is the title. The book is about ectoplasms. The pages host a long text on the discourse surrounding ectoplasmic manifestations in the first part and a performance of breathlessness on the page.

François-Bernard Michel similarly implements capitalisation in his treatise on asthmatic writing, *Le Souffle Coupé: Respirer et écrire*, with the following excerpt from his introduction:

The CRISIS. Vespéral or nocturnal, is its essential manifestation. It is breathlessness through the closure of the bronchi in paroxysm. This crisis mimes, in a dramatic and repetitive way, DEATH BY SUFFOCATION.

But it is only a mime.¹⁵³

Michel capitalises CRISIS in his text, connecting it to DEATH BY SUFFOCATION and underlining a relationship between breathlessness and altered mental and emotional states. In medical terms, crisis refers to the critical point in the

¹⁵² I use a specific definition of the term voice within the context of my research. Voice does not necessarily mean a literal voice in speech but voice in the broader sense – authorship, self and communication – and it extends to mean the “voice” of writing.

¹⁵³ François-Bernard Michel, *Le Souffle Coupé: Respirer et Écrire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 7. “La Crise. Vespérale ou nocturne, est sa manifestation essentielle. C’est un accès d’essoufflement que la fermeture des bronches porta au paroxysme. Cette crise mime, de façon dramatique et répétitive, LA MORT PAR étouffement. Mais ce n’est qu’un mime.”

course of any disease but, by identifying this crisis as one that mimes, the term becomes entwined with performance. We are made aware of our time on the page with Michel's crisis and the space where his glaring capitals fill the throat as we struggle to move past them, the eye constantly drawn back. The DANGER is only mimed.

Spyros Maketos and Constantine Ballas identify the first written appearance of *asthma* in Homer's *Illiad*. Homer uses the word twice and to describe what has been translated as: "gasping with painful breath."¹⁵⁴ Asthma refers to laborious breath. The etymology of asthma stems from the verb form of the Greek *azein*: to exhale with open mouth.¹⁵⁵ This pertains strictly to the act of exhalation despite how asthma, as illustrated by Homer, commonly refers to the crisis it evokes: an inability to inhale.

Asthma, as described by Hippocrates, is related to mental dysfunction, to the emotions – "the depravement of the brain arises from phlegm and bile" – and "those who are made from phlegm are quiet, and do not cry out or make a noise."¹⁵⁶ Breath "cannot be stationary" and when impeded the body "becomes powerless."¹⁵⁷ As breath is most often blocked in the throat, the body becomes consequently speechless. Allen Weiss concludes that:

Asthma entails the blockage of breath, whence the impossibility of speaking; it is the symptom of an inadmissible pain that literally cannot be stated, thus signifying something that is to remain ineffable.¹⁵⁸

Weiss goes on to write that "asthma exhibits through a choking silence that metaphorises the most horrifying and crushing solitude of death...asthma is

¹⁵⁴ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Arnold Murray (London: William Heinemann, 1924), 15.10, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:15.1-15.33>.

¹⁵⁵ Constatine Ballas and Spyros Marketos, "Bronchial Asthma in Medical Literature of Greek Antiquity," *Journal of Asthma*, 19, no. 4 (1982): 35.

¹⁵⁶ Hippocrates, "De Morbo Sacro," in *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates* (New York: Charles Darwin Adams), 366, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0248%3Atext%3DMorb.+Sacr.>

¹⁵⁷ Hippocrates, "De Morbo Sacro," 360.

¹⁵⁸ Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless; Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 37.

mortification; it is thus the...refusal of communication.”¹⁵⁹ The powerlessness Hippocrates attributes to the stoppage of breath, “taking place in consequence of fear...while crying, when one cannot quickly recover one’s breath,” leads to speechlessness and, consequently, to inarticulacy. Weiss seems to be influenced by Elaine Scarry’s writing when he describes asthma as “the symptom of an inadmissible pain that literally cannot be stated.”¹⁶⁰ Scarry surmises in *The Body in Pain* that “Intense pain is language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self-disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject.”¹⁶¹ The anxiety that breathlessness evokes is due to the boundaries it initiates. Asthma is intimately experienced but ultimately denies access to language and exemplifies the precariousness of breathlessness.

The concern expressed here is ultimately with speech – with a loss of voice.¹⁶² Scarry describes torture, and its implicit pain, as being mimetic of death. As with asthma the body remains “emphatically present while that more elusive part represented by the voice is so alarmingly absent.”¹⁶³ However, the function of torture in Scarry’s text is to elicit information or to gain a confession.¹⁶⁴ Scarry writes that “confession is a halfway point in the disintegration of language” – that the language of the torturer is doubled in the confession of the prisoner who can now only echo.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Weiss, *Breathless; Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Weiss, *Breathless; Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1985), 35.

¹⁶² Scarry doesn’t believe that the loss of voice applies to all forms of intense bodily experience. She states in an interview in 2006 with Elizabeth Irene Smith that she believes “that pleasure, unlike pain, is really language-building.” Elaine Scarry, “The Body in Pain: An Interview with Elaine Scarry,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 224, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw/issues/Who%20Speaks%20for%20the%20Human%20Today/10.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 49.

¹⁶⁴ To elicit information and to confess are not synonymous. Scarry discusses both in her text.

¹⁶⁵ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 36.

Consider the reverb of the written confession and its ability to perpetuate the disintegration of language that Scarry describes. The confession, as a writing, resurrects again and again to perform in the absence of voice. Its performance is not limited to a specific point in time but has the devastating potential to occur over and over, expanding its possible duration.

As Weiss notes, asthma performs its function within language – by impeding its utterance – as the bronchioles swell shut, blocking the passage of air. It cannot be uttered. Can this refusal to communicate extend to all forms of language, and, in particular, can asthma perform within writing? Weiss writes, “speech is but a specific case of breath” and, in the case of breathlessness, speech is absent.¹⁶⁶ I return to Michel’s SUFFOCATION, to his injunction and how it crowds the space of the page, half-tempted to open my mouth to mime the “O”. (In the spirit of this text, I keep mine firmly shut.) This is also a performance.

Reading *Echo/plasm*

The soul escapes through the mouth in words. But words are still the body’s effluvia, emanations, weightless folds in the air escaping the lungs and warmed by the body.¹⁶⁷

The first half of *Echo/plasm*, in the *Ecto* section, traces a history of ectoplasms. Echoing this in the here, now, of this page I repeat that an ectoplasm is, according to the dictionary, a “viscous substance that is supposed to exude from the body of a medium during a spiritualistic trance and form the material for the manifestation of spirits.”¹⁶⁸ Ectoplasm is a term coined by Charles Richet to describe physical manifestations of psychic phenomena.¹⁶⁹ Contrary to traditional representations of

¹⁶⁶ Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless; Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, 134.

¹⁶⁷ Jean-luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 151.

¹⁶⁸ Stuart Webb, *Ghosts* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2013), 76.

¹⁶⁹ Charles Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychological Research*, trans. Stanley Debrath (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 34. In the 1st edition of *Echo/plasm I* deliberately mis-cite Geley as the coiner of the phrase to emphasise the dissonance between the subject matter and the scientific methods applied to it. Ectoplasm can be

spirits as non-corporeal or immaterial, ectoplasms presented a significant shift in thinking regarding psychic phenomena. Like the voice, the ectoplasm exits the body, travelling via the lungs, through the trachea, passing the larynx onto the tongue, but it remains suspended in the open mouth.

Psychical researchers – predominately male and educated, coming from backgrounds in science and medicine – of this phenomenon (ranging from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries) describe various forms, textures and consistencies that this substance may take on during a process of materialisation. Many accounts from researchers, as well as lay persons of sittings where manifestations occurred, concentrate on the phenomenological aspects of the experience. The researchers use scientific language and method to catalogue the different types of ectoplasm, filling pages with sensory perceptions of the substance. They supplement their first-hand accounts with photographic documentation, at the time a comparatively new and increasingly accessible technology. The property of the camera to “arrest” the viscous emanations in a fixed form created opportunities to study and verify phenomena that were, by their very lack of definition, ephemeral and constantly receding from grasp.

There is no definitive description of ectoplasm. It ranges from “a solid, liquid or vaporous substance produced by ghosts or spirits” to a “viscous white substance which is said to be released from the orifice of a medium and used by spirits to take on a physical form” to simply a “filmy, quasi-solid substance which supposedly issues from the bodies of mediums.”¹⁷⁰ Charles Richet refers to magnetic and visual manifestations as “human effluvia.”¹⁷¹ Use of the term effluvia

traced to Charles Richet, *Traité de Métapsychique* (Paris: Libraire Félix Alcan, 1922); it is there that he appears to first use the term in print, despite writing extensively on material phenomena (as cited in subsequent footnotes). This is omitted in the 2nd edition.

¹⁷⁰ Sources listed in order of citation. “Paranormal Terminology,” My Paranormal Podcast, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://myparanormal.tumblr.com/terminology>. “Ectoplasm,” Paranormal Encyclopedia, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.paranormal-encyclopedia.com/e/>. “Definitions,” Carroll Area Paranormal Team, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.carrollareaparanormalteam.com/id16.html>.

¹⁷¹ Charles Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychic Research*, 106. Effluvia meaning a gas, vapour or discharge. It derives from Latin, meaning to flow, 269. He first refers to the

galvanises the increasingly physical manifestations of ectoplasmic phenomena, from it “forming in a cloud,” as Judge Peterson observes in 1877, to what C. E. M. Joad describes in 1933 as “a shapeless, fluid substance of the colour and consistency of congealed porridge.”¹⁷² This transition from gas to solid begins towards the end of the 19th century where the emphasis changes from apparitions and ghostly spirits to material excretions. By the 1930s the majority of the photographic and textual documentation, as well as physical evidence of material phenomena, were thoroughly debunked – the sittings were ultimately elaborate performances designed to provide audiences with the illusion of an existence beyond our immediate one.

Albert von Schrenck-Notzing produced a study entitled *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics* in 1914, translated by Edmund Fournier d’Albe into English and expanded with additional material for the 1920 and 1923 editions printed by Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & Company. These editions contain 225 illustrations, most of which are reproductions of photographs. They accompany detailed descriptions of sittings with medium Eva Carrière and describe the various forms, textures and consistencies ectoplasm assumes during a materialisation. Spanning a four-year period, many accounts of the sittings concentrate on the visual aspects of the experience. However, whenever possible, von Schrenck-Notzing also describes sounds, smells and textures. These emanations originate from a body that gradually recedes – from view and from text – becoming increasingly visually (and verbally) inarticulate. Photographs of the sittings diminish role of the medium’s body: the body is entirely concealed, enshrouded in specially tailored costumes to prevent trickery, hidden behind a curtain or bound to furniture.¹⁷³

fluids as effluvia in Richet, “Concerning the Phenomena Called Materialisation,” *Extracts from the Annals of Psychical Science* 2 (November 1905): 280.

¹⁷² Andrew T. T. Peterson, *Essays from the Unseen, Delivered Through the Mouth of W. L., a Sensitive, and Recorded by A. T. T. P.* (London: J. Burns, 1885), 46. Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism vol. 2* (London: Cassel and Company, 1926), 89. Cyril E. M. Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2005, 1933), 174.

¹⁷³ See Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics*, trans. E.E. Fournier d’Albe (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923) for detailed photographs of

Representations of ectoplasm convey the body as a passive point of origin for the substance emanating from and returning to it. This gives the false impression that Von Schrenck-Notzing's photographic documentation scores the performance of the ectoplasm as it moves in and out of materiality and obscures the performative agency of the medium.

Through the introduction of photography, psychic phenomena are given a fixed material presence. Unlike the shift between material and immaterial over the duration of a sitting, the photographic document allows for a finite material manifestation. However, this particular form is also a slippage – the “truth” of the document is undermined by the underlying performance of the medium that leads to the creation of this image. In turn, the image is not a representation of the material presence of the ectoplasm but a presentation of a slippage into immateriality because the ectoplasm was, in truth, never really there.

A Glottal Block

Emanations from the mouth prevent articulate speech and, as a result, many mediums were reliant on nonverbal communication during the course of a sitting or on the observant eye of a companion or assistant to determine the length of any given performance. Ectoplasm replaces the natural inhalation and exhalation of the body and, by extension, speech. In the absence of speech, and in the absence of any self-determined narrative, it becomes necessary to examine what the ectoplasm means and the ways in which it replaces the absent voice of the medium. What is happening here, in this unsaid?

Ich clebe an der sprache.

I cling to speech.

Klaus Boegel repeats this phrase over and over again in the video documentation of *Reminiszenz II* (1977). This performance is from a series of works

costumes. In the 1st edition of *Echo/plasm* I altered the spelling of Albert von Schrenck-Notzing to Albert von Shrenck-Notzing. As mentioned previously, my intention was to undermine the authority of the psychical researchers and question their methods. I change my tactic in the 2nd edition and use the correct spelling.

by the duo Boegel and Holtappels, who immersed themselves further and further into the physical reality of schizophrenia through performance. Boegel and Holtappels felt that the physical expressions of schizophrenics were directly related to their inner emotional experience. They used breathlessness to create an altered state of mind and articulate this inner experience. Their work locates the displaced voice of the mad within the body and explores ways in which a kind of language can be devised to facilitate a mad “voice”.

Reminiszenz II depicts Boegel attempting to speak but his ability to do so is impaired by a large ball of dough inserted in his mouth. He tries to repeat, speaking through the glottal blockage, “*Ich klebe aan der sprache,*” and, although he clings to speech, the speech clings to him and will not exit. His ability to articulate speech is blocked (literally) and despite the nonsensical translation of his utterances, he repeats the statement over and over. His expression sticks within his gullet, effectively choking his speech as his jaw works endlessly to shift his gag. The blocked glottis is the impeded articulation of the mad: those who cannot find a place in language. Inarticulacy parallels altered perceptions of reality and an inability to coalesce a coherent narrative within the shared realms of experience. By acting out the literal impediment of speech, Boegel enacts the dichotomous schism experienced by schizophrenics as their physical reality is so often at odds with their interior world. The voice is displaced because it has no space in reality – Boegel and Holtappels use their performance to create a place for the blocked voice.

In the video document, the flesh of the moving image is worn through use; it is marred by bands indicating the deteriorating quality of the material. The white stripes disrupt the sound and cut into the image. The white ball in Boegel’s mouth extends its reach beyond the immediate performance and a new permutation of the performance occurs through the deteriorating matter of the film. In the artist’s book that documents this project we are shown two stills: the ball of dough looks amorphous and emergent like an exhalation of cigarette smoke.¹⁷⁴ The figurative “blockage of

¹⁷⁴ Klaus Boegel and Heiner Holtappels, *Untersuchungen: Aktionen 1975-1978* (Den Haag: Boegel & Holtappels, 1980), 65. I remembered this effect when writing *Echo/plasm*. In the second section all the writing deteriorates, demonstrating how the authorial voices succumb to the pressures of time through repetition and duration.

speech” is first literal but in the recall of this performance the ghostly remains of the dough haunt the frame; his glottal prop is transfigured into the immaterial and mysterious.

Like ectoplasm, Boegel’s mouth is filled by a white substance that emerges from within the body. The loss of voice in *Reminiszenz II* stems from the obstruction in his mouth. Through the glottal block, the voice that emerges is distorted (unlike normal speech) and without apparent origin. This is a separation of subject and object that, according to Janet Beizer, makes the “ventriloquising agent external to the body from which speech appears to emanate.”¹⁷⁵ However, Beizer also notes that the archaic understanding of ventriloquism was of a voice coming from within the body – a definition that formerly lent itself readily to describe manifestations of aberrant speech. The contemporary use of ventriloquism refers to performance (one that Boegel certainly produces) where the authorship is unquestioned. Ventriloquism, held to either definition, always indicates a form of speech that is breathless. It originates not in the lungs but in the belly, animated by something other than breath. It is a performance that gives the impression that a voice is coming from elsewhere and, in that sense, it becomes a performance of breathlessness.¹⁷⁶ By dislocating the origin of language, Boegel creates a sticky speech that obstructs his voice and access to breath. This voice from “beyond the dough” slips into breathlessness as it escapes, performing the position of the mad speaker.

The Body Disappears from View

What is this thing that hinders speech? Hélène Cixous writes that “she makes what she thinks materialise carnally, she conveys meaning with her body.”¹⁷⁷ Cixous

The text disappears through degradation of the medium. In this instance, the ink submerges under a growing whiteness.

¹⁷⁵ Janet L. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-century France* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 47.

¹⁷⁶ Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-century France*, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Hélène Cixous, “Sorties,” in *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. Hélène Cixous et al, trans. Betsy King (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 68.

deliberately includes forms associated with inarticulacy – it is after all, according to her, the flesh that “speaks true.”¹⁷⁸ *Écriture féminine*, as Cixous employs the term, occurs beyond or even extraneous to the page because it is written with the body.

Within von Schrenck-Notzing’s photography, the body of the medium is often contained, swaddled by dark fabric. Her body, after initial examinations of all of her orifices, is sewn into constraining garments and physically restrained to items of furniture. There is a palpable emphasis on her body in the literature. Each sitting begins with observations about her body in relation to its productions. These descriptions have an indexical quality, describing her body and its manifestations in terms of breath, skin, fur, limbs and heads. They mimic the reproductive function of the female body to generate lifelike corporeal forms. They exude from the thresholds of her body as mucous, issuing from her mouth, nose and vagina.

Luce Irigaray describes the female sex as an ever-open threshold, marking boundary between worlds and the gateway to mucous.¹⁷⁹ Mucous marks the boundary of the excretive body. Irigaray describes a “phenomenon that remains in the interior, does not appear in the light of day, speaks of itself only in gestures, remains always on the edge of speech, gathering the edges without sealing them.”¹⁸⁰ Mucous occupies the threshold, remaining interior. “Already constructed theoretical language does not speak of the mucous,” she writes. “The mucous remains a remainder, producer of delirium, of dereliction, of wounds, sometimes of exhaustion.”¹⁸¹ Mucous becomes the grotesque communiqué from an otherwise speechless body – whether it is a mad body or a possessed one.

I have to think of Andrzej Żuławski’s film *Possession* (1981) and the scene in which the female lead played by Isabelle Adjani aborts a hysterical pregnancy, careening through an underground walkway, dashing her groceries against a wall and collapsing

¹⁷⁸ Cixous, “Sorties,” 68.

¹⁷⁹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. The Athlone Press (London: Continuum, 2004), 18.

¹⁸⁰ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 135.

¹⁸¹ Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, trans. Gail Schwab (London: Continuum, 2002), 244.

as voluminous quantities of mucosal fluid flow from her body.¹⁸² The scene opens as she exits the subway. As she comes up the escalator stairs she begins to laugh. She laughs harder and harder and as the noises exit her body they become progressively shriller, transforming into shrieks as she throws her body against the tiled walls of the tunnel towards the surface. As she is in the process of emerging from the subway system (referred to as “the tube” without irony in London) her breath becomes more forced and each utterance (somewhere between a shriek and a groan) is forced out. She careens through the space, spasming and throwing her hands out and her hips upward. Her shrieks begin to culminate and the camera cuts to her kneeling on the concrete soaked in milk and eggs. She begins to exude fluid from her mouth, her eyes, from behind her ears, joining a rapidly growing pool that expands out from underneath her skirt. The profusion of fluid issuing from her body blurs its boundaries – the skin becomes coated with mucous, marked with the interior. Julia Kristeva describes this fluid as “the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body.”¹⁸³ The definition of Adjani’s body exceeds its limits as her interiority flows into the world.

Mary Douglas describes all margins as dangerous – everything is vulnerable at its edges. She writes that the horror and fear attached to bodily fluids is related to how it flows past the margins of the body.¹⁸⁴ Slime, mucous and “the Blob” are common enough tropes in horror films; all are designed to depict the abjection and innate horror of becoming one with the mucosal. *The Blob* (1958) depicts a slimy alien mass that consumes all in its path, making the body one with slime. When I was younger I saw a trailer for *The Blob*. It was on a VHS tape that we had borrowed from the local library. My father laughed at it and teased us in the weeks following about “the Blob”. My dreams overflowed with a slimy mass in the form of a dark pool that expanded. It was a large gelatinous mass that attacked my sister: a stickiness that weighed me down and suffocated me.

¹⁸² *Possession*, directed by Andrzej Żuławski (1981; Neuilly-sur-Seine: Gaumont).

¹⁸³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 54.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966, 2002), 150.

Consider, briefly, the figure of the jellyfish and the quiet horror it evokes. Lisa-ann Gershwin describes in *Stung!: On Jellyfish Blooms and the Future of the Ocean* the jellies caught in netting surrounding a salmon farm:

the jellyfish struggled against the current and the netting, their mucus, which is profuse and packed with stinging cells, was sucked into the cages...the salmon inhaled the mucus, it blocked the oxygen-exchange surfaces of their gills, causing them to suffocate.¹⁸⁵

A medusa reproduces itself, infinitely, compacts in mass when necessary and floats along, trailing its tentacles and spreading its mucus. These slimy fingers are venomous, as is the whole of its mass. The stinging cells that comprise its body disperse when it decomposes, forming a dense and suffocating mass at the bottom of oceans and seas, and choking everything that encounters it.

“The Blob”, as depicted in the aforementioned film, is the same consistency and colour as thick blackstrap molasses; this is in stark contrast to the 1988 version of *The Blob*.¹⁸⁶ In this version, “the Blob” is similar to vaginal fluids, clear yet opaque, pink yet white, and closely resembles the fluids pooling in between Isabelle Adjani’s thighs. This returns “the Blob” to the monstrous and the female, performing the suffocating embrace of the interior as it flows outwards, consuming bodies. Everything succumbs to “the Blob”, becoming “the Blob”. This is not a question of pollution, as Douglas is concerned with, but, according to Irigaray, of mastery: “These mucous membranes evade my mastery.”¹⁸⁷ Mucosal writing similarly evades mastery in as much as mastery denotes control and conveys the threat of female agency. Within ectoplasmic performances, the narratives constructed by von Schrenck-

¹⁸⁵ Lisa-ann Gershwin, *Stung!: On Jellyfish Blooms and the Future of the Ocean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17.

¹⁸⁶ See *The Blob*, directed by Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr and Russell S. Doughten Jr (1958; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures). *The Blob*, directed by Chuck Russell (1988; Culver City: TriStar Pictures). “The Blob” is also common parlance for menstruation. Horror surrounding the productive capabilities of the female body permeates contemporary culture and this manifests through a conflation of horror media with natural bodily processes.

¹⁸⁷ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 142. See also Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 141-159.

Notzing are constantly subverted and rewritten by the mucosal productions of the medium performers.

Echo

Echo begins with a polyvocal text that includes three voices. The first voice is a narrator, who describes the medium's body and ectoplasmic manifestations. The register shifts from objective observations to a suggestive dialogue between two individuals about a third: Echo. These voices mimic the phrasing of *Phenomena of Materialisation*. Echo's voice permeates the narrative through a gradual disappearance of the text. The narrative repeats twice. The duration of the writing extends as the repeating text is replaced by a mucosal whiteness. Writing through repetition invokes the performative and allows the reader to experience the time and space of the page.¹⁸⁸ Echoing the text multiple times emphasises the changes that occur through duration. Not only is it clear that this writing articulates the time of the page (through its disappearance) but the space that emerges through its disappearance also marks its passing. Writing becomes immaterial through the emerging whiteness that obscures it, congruous to the passage of the ectoplasm between material and immaterial states.

Paragraphs reduce to sentences, then isolated words and ultimately the individual letters. The text is obscured that only fragmented, guttural utterances remain. The narrator's voice submerges under the expanding whiteness; he becomes quite literally choked out, garbled and inarticulate. In this sense, the text induces the voiceless condition of the medium. The ectoplasm manifests through the whitening text, robbing the body of breath and denying access to language. The disappearing text relates directly to the action of *informe*. Georges Bataille writes that *informe* is:

not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have

¹⁸⁸ I elaborate on the use of repetition in performative writing/writing as performance in the following chapter.

its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm.¹⁸⁹

Michel Leiris, in a text that inspired Bataille, describes spit as “in its inconsistency, in its indeterminate contours, in the relative imprecision of its colour, and its wetness, the very symbol of the formless, of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchical.”¹⁹⁰ Bataille adopts this theme with one central amendment: *l’informe* becomes *informe*. He describes the dictionary as not only giving “the meaning of words,” but also “their tasks.”¹⁹¹ For Bataille, *informe* is more than a property – it is an action.

As is articulated in the first section of *Echo/plasm*, Marina Warner refers to the ectoplasm as *informe*, subsequently linking the amorphous ectoplasm to the action of *informe*.¹⁹² Bataille describes *informe* as a glob of spit, *un crachat*.¹⁹³ *Crachat* is a guttural utterance that catches in the throat, performing mucus clearing the lungs. As Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty explain, *informe* “is a form, but for humans, it exists largely apart from us, and gets destroyed (and destroys itself) when we come into contact with it.”¹⁹⁴ And this is true of the nature of ectoplasm: it shies away from human touch and recedes into the body of the medium at the slightest manipulation.

However, the use of the term destruction is misleading. Bataille describes the crushing of spiders and worms but there are always remains; in the same way that *un*

¹⁸⁹ Georges Bataille, *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

¹⁹⁰ Michel Leiris, “Crachat,” *Documents* 1 (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1929), 382, accessed May 7, 2016, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k32951f/f508.item.r>. For clarity in this text, I cite the english translation from Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, Introduction to *Formless: Ways in and Out of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 11.

¹⁹¹ Bataille, *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, 31.

¹⁹² Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 290.

¹⁹³ Bataille, *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, 31.

¹⁹⁴ Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, “The Interminable Detour of Form: Art and Formless,” in *Formless: Ways in and Out of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 189.

crachat is coughed up and spat out. In *Echo/plasm* the dissolution of form crushes the authorial voice to allow a new one to emerge in the form of its detritus. Yve-Alain Bois describes *informe* as collapsing the possibility of distinction between form and matter.¹⁹⁵ Although he writes that matter “cannot be reabsorbed by the image,” *informe* relates to a materiality that can never be formed because its function is to collapse form. *Informe* is between material and immaterial. It performs in the text-body through an increasingly white expanse submerging the formal voices of authority as they slip from form, becoming immaterial. *Informe* is the mucous that blocks the lungs – that which must be spat out – but it also crowds the interior of the page, choking it. The body of the text, flecked with an increasing whiteness, is slowly suffocated. Punctuation and spaces between words can no longer perform their function. Their ability to dictate the rhythm of breath is eradicated. The writing performs breathlessness through the choking activity of *informe* within and upon the space of the page.

On Photography and Material

I would like to take a moment to focus on the photographs in the performance text as well as the relationship of the text-as-object to its materiality. Although *Echo/plasm* is foremost a performance writing piece, it is also a material object that relies on these qualities to generate its performance. Situating itself against the deconstruction of one narrative, it actively constructs another. *Echo/plasm* uses constructed photographic images of ectoplasms in contrast to a disappearing narrative.¹⁹⁶ Roland Barthes divides the action of the photograph in *Camera Lucida* into the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* relates to the informational function of the photograph, limited to representation and documentation. *Punctum*, referring

¹⁹⁵ “Matter cannot be reabsorbed by the image (the concept of image presupposes a possible distinction between form and matter, and it is this distinction, insofar that it is an abstraction, that the operation of the formless tries to collapse).” Yve-Alain Bois, “The Use Value of Formless,” in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois et al (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 29.

¹⁹⁶ These images are photographs taken with a large format camera from 1910. I discuss later on in this section the creation of the photographs in detail.

to a metaphorical wounding, appropriates its etymological root to create a term that encapsulates the affective properties of the photograph. The *punctum* transcends quotidian semiotics – it is not concerned with the informational content of the photograph. Barthes writes that a “photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”¹⁹⁷ The *punctum* leaves a mark. It reaches out to the viewer and allows them to affectively engage with an image that is also perceived as a document. It describes an encounter where the representative function of the photograph cedes to experience. Unlike the caress of haptic visuality, Barthes’ *punctum* focusses on how the image affectively permeates the viewer. Where the poignancy of the image pushes past the metaphorical skin and marks its interior. This puncture is a kind of touching that pushes past the surface of things and affectively engages with the viewer.¹⁹⁸

The performance that Barthes describes is very different to the implementation of photography in von Schrenck-Notzing’s *Phenomena of Materialisation*. Von Schrenck-Notzing’s photographic documentation is accompanied by a title that attributes it to a photographer and a date of making to attest to its veracity. He notes when it is an enlargement or even when a photograph depicts a different angle. Their role is archival, serving as artefacts of events described in the text. They serve to establish the physical trace of the disappearing ectoplasm and in that sense are subsidiary to the written content.

Strangely enough, von Schrenck-Notzing’s work perpetuates virtually through a selection of photographs available on the Internet via google image search. It is these ectoplasmic images, bearing the trace of a fantastic performance, that haunt the viewer. Karl Schoonover notes that the qualities of the ectoplasm quickly become synonymous with the photographic medium.¹⁹⁹ The ectoplasm is obliterated by exposure to light but its trace remains etched into the negative. Ectoplasms also manifest photographically as

¹⁹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 1980), 26-27.

¹⁹⁸ I discuss touch in more detail later in this chapter as well as in chapter three.

¹⁹⁹ Karl Schoonover, “Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography,” *Art Journal* 62, no. 3 (2003): 31-36, accessed December 5, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3558519>.

projections of loved ones, ghosting an existing photograph while mimicking its properties. Although the photograph documents a manifestation, it also reproduces a manifestation's ephemerality and transience. According to Susan Sontag, because the photograph also bears the literal trace of whatever occurred before the lens it differs from other forms of representation and closes off avenues to interpretation.²⁰⁰ However, the falsity of ectoplasmic photography does not limit its affective impact. The ability of these photographs to induce affect allows them to reach beyond their intended indexical function. Sontag's assertion does not apply in this instance. The ectoplasmic photographs therefore rely on interpretation to produce a reading of the image. Von Schrenck-Notzing's photographic index of ectoplasmic manifestations is not diminished by their artifice; instead their manufactured real unfold into a myriad of interpretations and experiences. I can look at these photographs knowing that they are not real, and it does not diminish their appeal to me.

Photographs possess the ability to evoke affect by generating a familiar yet unrecognisable affinity with the image. W. G. Sebald describes the photograph's affective quality in an interview, stating that, "an enormous (*ungeheurer*) appeal emanates from these images."²⁰¹ The word (*ungeheurer*), untranslated and contained within parentheses, creates a dissonant moment in the reading of the interview. The word roughly translates as monstrous. Its usage is similar – it can denote excessive size as well as something outside of the natural order, something other. The use of *ungeheurer* suggests the haunting quality of some photographs, although many attribute this to the trace as testimony to that which is no longer there. The trace becomes a spectre, and in that sense, the photograph is haunted. Derrida describes the spectre as a "non-sensuous sensuous," "the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh but still the body of someone as someone other" – it is more than the "image of the image."²⁰² The spectre

²⁰⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 184.

²⁰¹ W. G. Sebald, "'But the Written Word is Not a True Document': A Conversation with W. G. Sebald on Literature and Photography," interview with Christian Scholz, trans. Marcus Zisselsberger, in *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W. G. Sebald*, ed. Christel Dillbohne et al. (Berlin: Institute Cultural Inquiry, 2007), 104.

²⁰² Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.

is an unsettling paradox. It is in a process of becoming body even as it recedes into an apparition.

The spectre returns: in Sebald's work the photograph is always shifting away from the *studium*. On page 133 of *Austerlitz* there is a photograph of a dark moth against a light background at the top of the page. On the preceding page Austerlitz tells us:

I believe...they know they have lost their way, since if you do not put them out again carefully they will stay where they are, never moving, until the last breath is out of their bodies, and indeed they will remain in the place where they came to grief even after death, held fast by the tiny claws that stiffened in their last agony, until a draught of air detaches them and blows them into a dusty corner.²⁰³

The moth could be in flight as it flits above the text, its position suggesting upward flight. The under-exposed subject of the photograph (if indeed the moth is the subject – the background demonstrates more detail) is so dark that it appears to be a shadow. Perhaps it is in fact its ghost, a shadow of itself haunting the story of the demise of its fellows, coming to “grief even after death.”²⁰⁴ The description of the dying and dead moths spreads out beneath the image like a shadow and drags at it. The photograph never quite becomes a representation because it is never clear what it depicts. The illegibility of the image disrupts the crisp text, becoming the spectre the draws your gaze because it is without context.

In a latter passage Sebald allows an exposed grave, three skulls and the upper half of a skeleton to stare back at us.²⁰⁵ Unlike von Schrenck-Notzing, Sebald does not accompany his images with titles. They occupy the space of the page, interrupting bodies of text and suggesting correlations without ever explicitly confirming relationships. The text alludes to a moment in time – even referring to the act of taking

²⁰³ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 132-133.

²⁰⁴ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 133.

²⁰⁵ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 185.

a photograph at the grave site – but the photograph eludes any testimony to this.²⁰⁶ James Elkins makes the distinction that Sebald is not necessarily concerned with questioning visual representation but with what cannot be represented.²⁰⁷ Sebald describes this in the context of the photograph’s ability to create an unreal world “of which one doesn’t exactly know how it is constituted but of which one senses is there.”²⁰⁸ This echoes how performance writing moves between registers, signalling the diverse spaces of writing. The spectres of Sebald’s pages are not representations of the text or of events passed – they are part of an encounter with writing’s performance on the page.

The photographs in *Echo/plasm* recreate ectoplasmic manifestations using pantyhose, muslin and a large format camera (5x7 Seneca) from 1910. The images were constructed in my apartment. I placed a thick black cloth over my couch to conceal the floral cushions and recreate the black interior of the special closets built to house mediums during a sitting. The photographs mirror the emergence of the ectoplasm in the text. They also function as a negative of the disappearing text, documenting the performance on the page through the small ectoplasmic traces fixed in a large black space. Because these pigment-rich images are printed onto thin newsprint paper the ink is visible through the reverse of the page and haunts the text.

This is not a confession: when I draw the curtain aside and show you the details of my trick it is intended only to expose more and to draw you in, intimately. The pantyhose are white with pink flowers. I put them on my legs to stretch them and retain the shape of my body in its absence. The photographs transpose the journey from material to immaterial, where the image becomes the referent to that disintegration, continually depicting informe. This making is not limited to the

²⁰⁶ “I went there quite often at the time, said Austerlitz, partly because of my interest in architectural history and partly for other reasons which I could not explain even to myself, and I took photographs of the remains of the dead.” Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 184.

²⁰⁷ James Elkins, “W. G. Sebald, The Rings of Saturn,” *Writing With Images blog*, accessed March 20, 2014, http://writingwithimages.com/?page_id=475.

²⁰⁸ Sebald, “‘But the Written Word is Not a True Document’: A Conversation with W. G. Sebald on Literature and Photography,” 105.

taking of the photograph. I draw you in to explicitly identify the material and to embody the page.

Lucy Lippard describes the dematerialisation of art in the late 1960s, due to the growing emphasis on the conceptual aspects of art-making, becoming an attack on the status of the object.²⁰⁹ This is reflected in the sculptural latex works of Eva Hesse: her materials of choice were entropic – prone to disintegration. Lippard is primarily concerned with the shift in emphasis within contemporary arts to the material or medium of the work. She also identifies the material of the work (within this particular shift) as ephemeral, cheap and “dematerialised.”²¹⁰ Hesse’s works are embedded within the materiality of the medium but embody the action of *informe* through the entropic dematerialisation of the latex. Hesse’s use of latex places the works within the realm of time and in contrast to the illusionary timelessness conventional art objects convey.

The dematerialisation of the text within the second section of *Echo/plasm* subverts its ability to contribute to a system of knowledge meaning that its function becomes something other – becoming something other than semantics – and this other is performance. The text becomes writing doing performance with the page as the relational medium through which the performance of writing is translated between artist and audience. Hélène Cixous describes writing as:

precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death-to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamised by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations

²⁰⁹ Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro et al (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 46-50.

²¹⁰ Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), vii.

of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn; but that's his other history).²¹¹

Through writing, multiple encounters and transformations are possible because it acts from in-between. Distinctions are constantly redefined through the shifting quality of in-between. It is with and without form, material and immaterial, self and other. Sartre associates a certain fear with the in-between, the slime that he describes as “fixed instability...discourages possession,” preventing any real sense of control.²¹² The resistance of slime comes to represent “a type of being not realised but threatening which will perpetually haunt consciousness as the constant danger which it is fleeing.”²¹³ When I open my copy of *Being and Nothingness* I see the chapter that discusses slime is marred with a circular stain, a blob impregnated into the material of the page, highlighting the word's gelatinous and hard liquid quality.

The viscous – the slimy – according to Sartre is the situation where being in itself “would draw the for-itself into its contingency, into its indifferent exteriority, its foundationless existence.”²¹⁴ He describes it as a “trap,” that it “clings like a leech” and gives the impression of fluidity – that it is a “phenomenon in the process of becoming.”²¹⁵ Similarly, the text in section two of *Echo/plasm* demonstrates that it is also in a process of becoming. The text is unfixed but the slime of the writing's performance clings to it, sticking everywhere. Slime occupies the realm of the uncontained as well as embodying the feared changeability associated with the female sex. Viscosity resists control in the same way that it resists adhering to a particular state: it remains in the fluid between-ness.

Antoine Roquentin, the narrator of Sartre's novel *Nausea*, attributes material qualities to language, suggesting almost that his perceived inability to control the formation of words and sentences is due to their material properties. He describes a “failure to fasten on to words” and that, as a result, his thoughts “remain misty and nebulous...they assume vague, amusing shapes and are swallowed up: I probably

²¹¹ Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 883.

²¹² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 774.

²¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 779.

²¹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 776.

²¹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 774-5.

forget them.”²¹⁶ *Nausea* depicts a man in the midst of an existential crisis who is losing his sense of control over language. He has no hold on words as they slip away, assuming amorphous shapes. As their form devolves, their formal content slips away as well, bringing the protagonist into a state of perceived inarticulacy. In his interaction with inanimate objects, pages and books in particular, he experiences them as unbalancing and consequently evoking an intense physical reaction: nausea. The physical reaction he has relates to the rhythms of the body being overturned and, in this sense, nausea is produced through a form of writing that resists control and overturns it.

Roquentin observes that “objects ought not to *touch*, since they are not alive” and also “But they touch me, it’s unbearable. I am afraid of entering in contact with them, just as if they were living animals.”²¹⁷ The chosen simile designates the objects as threatening because of their ability to touch. Derrida describes the self-touch, when the “I” touches itself, “it is itself – it contracts itself, it contracts with itself, but as if with another.”²¹⁸ Derrida refers to this loss of space as an extreme contraction, where the “I” loses touch with itself even as it contracts to touch. Over the course of Sartre’s novel the narrator splits from himself and implements a second voice, shifting from first person to third when he refers to himself.²¹⁹ His sense of self contracts through the loss of linguistic form; “I” becomes “he”, demonstrating the slipperiness of language.

Sartre is invested in the affective quality of slime, not merely its physical qualities. He refers to it in terms of its properties and the state it occupies. This state, permanently between, is neither solid nor fluid and gives the appearance of one thing

²¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 17.

²¹⁷ Sartre, *Nausea*, 22.

²¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 34.

²¹⁹ “The heart exists, the legs exist, the breath exists, they exist running, breathing, beating softly, gently gets out of breath, gets me out of breath, he says that he is getting out of breath; existence takes my thoughts from behind and gently expands them *from behind*...” Sartre, *Nausea*, 148.

only to, in Sartre's eyes, betray itself upon closer inspection.²²⁰ The affecting qualities of slime Sartre initially refers to can be determined through its performance. The slimy undermines any sense of form or authority. Slime does not lend itself to control. Slimy substances "stick to the hands" (and within the throat) – it is the stickiness of their subversion that encourages apprehension.²²¹ This same stickiness catches the argumentation in this chapter – an underlying friction permeates the irregular nonlinearity of arguments that appear and slip away just as easily. Slime refuses definition or access to a complete understanding of its nature because that is its nature. The closer you approach it, the more it shifts. Slime extends the body beyond its given definition, just as it extends the duration of performance beyond its initial boundaries. In this sense slime is also an action as well as a performance of writing.

Performing *Echo/plasm*

Returning to the disappearing text of *Echo/plasm*, in the second section entitled *Echo*, I look to past performative readings (aloud, and to an audience) of the writing. Writing (and by writing I refer to the disappearing text in *Echo*, the second section), as it functions in these subsequent descriptions, is as an emerging score that changes with each new reading.²²² John Hall describes the experiential impact of certain forms of writing on the and how they function as a "score for any number of later enactments which are the processes of its reading."²²³ Readings of

²²⁰ Some of the metaphors that Sartre employs are unfortunate – and denigrating to women. While I certainly agree that Sartre demonstrated misogyny in his writing (and arguably within his personal life as well), I do not believe that the slimy is, as a result, fundamentally maligned. See Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce, "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis," *Philosophic Forum* 5 (1973): 133. Sartre's misogyny is also addressed in a more nuanced fashion by a collection of essays in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Julien S. Murphy (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999).

²²¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 771.

²²² I develop a concept of the score further in the work *Among the Salt Flats* (2014), see Appendix 6. I also write on the relationship between performance writing and site, referencing performances of the score in the journal article, "Bonneville Salt Flats: This Place," *Journal of Writing for Creative Practice* 8, no. 1 (2015): 55-62.

²²³ Hall, "Writing and Not Writing," 41.

Echo/plasm explore the performative qualities of the writing through performances of reading, revealing the processes Hall refers to. Within performance, writing can often feature in the preliminary stages of performance-making as a script or score – not limiting this notion to the script of a play or to the fluxus performance score but also to include notations, ideas and research that might inform a live piece at some point in the development process. I highlight two readings here to discuss their function as registers of performance writing as well as to explore the role of the voice in page-based performance.

Custom Sessions. Friday, September 6, 2013.²²⁴ In this reading of *Echo/plasm*, I read from pages 17-32 to a small audience in a domestic space lit only by a small light used to illuminate the pages.²²⁵ I determined beforehand that I wanted my volume and articulation to diminish along with the visibility of the text and to replace the space that emerged through the whitening text by breathing in and out for the approximate span of the obscured writing. The duration of the reading was intended to include the entirety of *Echo* but after twenty minutes, I began to black out due to hyperventilation.

In this reading, the book was present but the pages were not visible to the audience. In this sense, the page was audible but their experience of it was informed by my interpretation of the writing. Any interaction with the original site of the performance was entirely mediated through my body as I read from the page for my audience (rather than allowing them the opportunity to form a particular relationship to the page). My voice, and how I choose to implement it, determined the affective qualities of the performance. In allowing the rhythms of the text to dictate my breathing and volume, my voice and body became increasingly strained and breathless while also scoring breath patterns for the audience to experience and emulate.

²²⁴ Custom Sessions is an ongoing project run by Oda Egjar Starheim and Øystein Monsen. They host a bi-annual performance event in their living space and invite artists to present new work to a small audience.

²²⁵ Please refer to DVD included, appendices 5 and 7. The recording I include in the appendices is from 2015. It was recorded by Eleanor Vonne Brown in August 2015 and has superior sound quality to earlier documentation.

Sights and Frights; Interdisciplinary Conference on Victorian Visual Culture, Horror and the Supernatural. Thursday, June 19, 2014. In this reading of *Echo/plasm*, I read from pages 17-24 in a lecture theatre, in the context of an academic conference. The duration of the performance was limited to ten minutes and implemented the aforementioned performative choice to increase volume and articulation in relation to visibility. This reading was augmented by the use of a small microphone that I was able to insert into my mouth to amplify my breathing, leading to a greater emphasis on my inhalations and exhalations. Using a document camera, I projected my hand moving over the pages onto the wall behind me for the duration of the reading. As a result, the audience was able to follow my reading through the projection of the text. Their reading was also impaired by the movement of my hand over the text and the gradually diminishing legibility of the writing. The visibility of the page led to a layering of readings occurring as multiple surfaces and sites in relation to each other. These multiple readings of the page create permutations of breathlessness as writing performs in the spaces that language moves between. Through this interaction with the page, the text is rewritten and emerges as an ephemeral negotiation with an emergent score.

Both of these readings exemplify performances of writing and I cite them in order to broaden the forms through which the performance on the page manifests. I do so to emphasise the multiplicity of writing and how, within the live space, the voice and bodily limits impact permutations of performance writing. Although these particular readings adhere to conventional definitions of liveness, and in particular Phelan's ontology of performance, as they are singular and non-reproductive, they bear the distinct trace of the page that shapes their particular forms, and it is through this specific medium that they come into being.

The performance of the page is evident through its generative production of new experiences and readings with each visitation. The performance potential of the page is revived through each new encounter, whether that be through an initial encounter, a reading aloud, a scoring or a rereading. Key to this process is the position of the voice in the making of readings. This places the text directly within a body and layers the performative writing with a corporeal agency omitted from historical narratives of the

female body. The trace of past performances informs the creation of a new one as writing opens up new permutations of performance to the reader.

Conclusion

Originating in the interior and emerging out through the mouth, breathlessness can be found in the movement between materiality and immateriality. The shifting quality of breath – and its apprehension – is apparent in its fleeting quality. Breathlessness is a kind of apprehension, a grasping of the throat, but even as the interior is impeded by its own productions these material forms slip away. Ectoplasmic productions give way to a series of interpretations of the nature of breathlessness – and what this *lessness* entails – through an exploration of buccal blockages, asthmatic wheezes, mucosal productions and ultimately slime. These forms embody the movement from interior to exterior and between material and immaterial.

Echo/plasm performs a loss of voice through an emergent ectoplasm that haunts the page. This loss is present in the apprehended speech and disintegration of conventional language. The loss of voice particular to this chapter embodies one form of breathlessness, one that is contingent on impediment – a suffocation that threatens to overwhelm from within the body as it becomes externalised. The performance of *informe* is apparent through collapses in form, imbuing writing with an agency to evade control and undermine a fixed notion of authority. This performance of breathlessness is pervasive, like the qualities of the various substances spread over the preceding pages. Present in all of these subjects is an overwhelming sense of tension – they apprehend, block and prevent breath in distinctly threatening ways. The juddering stop and start of argumentation, including fricative integration of practice into this chapter, deliberately contrasts with later chapters to amplify these uncomfortable and slimy relationships. These are also introductory forays into performances of *lessness* within the text. There are no distinct boundaries to contain slime because it does not adhere to any singular definition. Live performances to shape the voicing of *Echo/plasm* serve to overturn historicised understandings of the body present in psychical research and to demonstrate modes of linguistic agency in the female body. In this sense, the work utilises a literal experience of physical breathlessness to negotiate the metaphorical impact of its affect

when silencing the voice. However, this is not the only form. The following chapter will explore the plosive potential of excess as a form of breathlessness and how metaphorical yet embodied understandings of breathlessness contribute to its performance on the page.

CHAPTER 3. *These Lungs*

Introduction

*Unfold its cover. Open it up. Touch these lungs. Feel the paper between your fingers. Spread the pages out in front of you or regard them one by one. How you move between these pages differs from encounter to encounter.*²²⁶

These Lungs. These halves. These lovers. The title draws you into the interior. I inhale you with one utterance.

This chapter is an extended reading of *These Lungs*. It is supplementary to its performance of breathlessness on the page and, as such, a copy of *These Lungs* rests at the outset of this chapter as an invitation to experience the work prior to delving into this expanded reading of its contents.

The performance on the pages of *These Lungs* manifests through embodied writing mediated by layered narratives, a dual columnar form and breathless writing. This chapter discusses the ways these forms of writing use mirroring, plenitude and the limit enact a performance of excessive breathlessness on the page. Central to this performance of breathlessness are permutations of excess: erotic encounters, endless caresses and narratives without end. Reconceiving the limit in relation to embodied experiences – where the skin, orifices and organs mark the passage between in and out – is central to *These Lungs*' exploration of excess. Leslie Hill writes that "limit, in order to be what it is, implies an outside as well as an inside; limits can only be drawn if they have been breached, just as laws only come into existence when they have been broken."²²⁷ Within the context of the body, touch defines liminality through feeling out the boundaries of the flesh. However, excess moves within the terrain of surfeit. Focussing on the skin as a porous representation of the limit, breath becomes a caress of the interior. This particular touching pertains to the erotic: to desire, the libidinal and its lack of finitude.

²²⁶ Please refer to <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182777.v1> in the electronic version of this thesis to read *These Lungs*.

²²⁷ Leslie Hill, *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 220.

Erotic writing situates itself within the body of the reader and facilitates a shift from representation of an experience through writing to the performance of writing. Writing the body onto the page through the use of embodied writing in *These Lungs* borrows from *écriture féminine*, a term Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément use to describe a form of embodied writing that demonstrates the primacy of lived experience over semantic knowledge in language. Bodily excess is central to *écriture féminine*. This is what Cixous means when she writes that the “flesh speaks true” and that within *écriture féminine* the writer “physically materialises what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body.”²²⁸ These ideas are present within the prose and form of *These Lungs* and manifest in and through readings of the writing. *These Lungs* begins to speak the body, or several bodies, destabilised by shifts in form and language. The semantic order of language suffocates under incrementally building layers and layers of readings. As the structure of the columns falters, the constructs that organise reading crumble and allow for repetitions and returns, interruptions and utterances no longer carefully modulated by punctuation, grammar or logos. *These Lungs* de-emphasises the distinction between bodies by a lack of a defined “I” or “you” accompanied by a conflation of objects (and their surfaces) with the skin and textures of an increasingly present yet intangible body. Breathlessness arrives through the endless permutations of *These Lungs* as it expands in reading, invoking a libidinal experience and overturning the primacy of semantics in language.

The form of the text supports a performative reading of *These Lungs* by highlighting the materiality of the page and enlivening the writing. *These Lungs* is a short dual-column publication with parallel-running narratives printed onto unpaginated sheets of A5 paper.²²⁹ These loose pages are housed in a folder and can be assembled to be read in any order. The two-column structure invites plural readings

²²⁸ Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 881.

²²⁹ The dual-column form was also used in a performance lecture entitled “Materialising the Text: Material Phenomena and Sartre’s Slime,” which I gave in January 2014 at Central Saint Martins, London, UK. For this performance, a running projection of the right-hand column – an assemblage of descriptions of ectoplasm from the entirety of von Schrenck-Notzing’s *Phenomena of Materialisation* – accompanied a reading from the critical analysis spanning the left-hand column. See appendix 1. I also explore this technique in appendix 4.

and allows for multiple points of entry to the text. Looking at the space between the columns – in the gutter – we see a space that guides overflow and regulates the relationship between columnar forms. The columns undulate against each other as constant shifts in width undermine the function of the gutter. The visual flow of one column irregularly permeates the other, an effect that is emphasised through words, themes and images that cross from one column to the next. This disrupts a pure linear reading, extending the time and duration of the experience beyond the page, and generates a multiplicity of unique encounters. The columnar forms prove wholly permeable and this destabilises the underlying structure of the page, furthering the performativity of the writing.

Permeability relates to touch – to writing that touches and is touched. The mirror, a central motif in *These Lungs*, conversely prevents touch as it reflects the subject before it upon its surface. This representation elicits touch, dutifully replicating every texture of a body, but is unable to permit it. The mirror performs the limit: the surface is the boundary between life and death, breath and breathlessness. The mirror may prevent touch but, as it is also a surface, it too can be touched. As I explain in the introduction to chapter one, when Laura Marks refers to “haptic visuality” she means a way of looking that directly relates to touch and interacts with the material substance of the surface of things.²³⁰ This caress of the gaze questions the nature of tangibility, its relationship to materiality, while simultaneously proposing new modes of experiencing writing on the page. *These Lungs* conflates objects and their textures with bodily experiences, which invites embodied forms of writing. In turn, writing offers a live and embodied experience of the page as a journey through an erotic landscape.

Bound up in our understanding of the erotic is its relationship to death (as limit). This is reflected in permutations of breathlessness as constant negotiations with the limitation(s) of life. Rather than concentrating on the juxtaposition of the erotic with death to investigate an understanding of excess, the erotic manifests itself within *These Lungs* as a spiralling plenitude expanding and enfolding every limit. Instead than conceiving the erotic as defined by the limit, whether that be orgasm, death or consummation, Audre Lorde describes the erotic as “a well of replenishing and

²³⁰ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, 142.

provocative force” redefining the erotic as limitless.²³¹ The common trope linking the erotic/libidinal with death bleeds through literature, the arts and psychoanalytical thought, and this complicates the development of an understanding of the erotic as excessive through its innate plenitude. Like Lorde, Georges Bataille refutes this through developing an understanding of how death, and by extension the erotic encounter, allows us to experience a sense of continuity in contrast to the discontinuity of the human experience. The subject, in Bataille’s limit experience, is wrenched from itself – becoming more, becoming other. Death becomes like any other limit – once surpassed, it simply expands into another. Michel Foucault expands on this process and how it relates to transgression, drawing a parallel to the action of the spiral.²³² The libidinal provides an affective avenue to an ecstatic and embodied performance of excess – and by extension, breathlessness.

The undulating movement of narratives onto adjacent columns and the blurring of “I” into “you” generates intimate proximities within the text. Shifting modes of address, moving from the direct “you” to the exclusive “I” to the inviting “we”, allow the reading to fluctuate between positions of interaction, embodied response and sudden awareness of the voyeuristic position of the reader. Mirroring in the text, present in both form and content, creates a sense of plurality and endlessness. Internal repetition of words and images within the two columns, juxtaposed against each other, underlines this experience and, as it builds, creates a sense of breathlessness. The expanse of this encounter stretches out, reflecting, repeating and endlessly gasping. Pluralities of voice and layering of textures, especially as they are explored within poetic practices, establish a sense of the performance on the page. A performance of this writing endures past the limits of its pages because excess generates new pluralities of experience.

A quick shuffle. The reading changes. Pause. Repeat the same page. Follow the line of the left-hand column and directly begin with the right. Read them in

²³¹ Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1984), 54.

²³² Michel Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

tandem. The left-hand path and the right, guiding and pulling. They move into each other as lovers.

A Friction of Surfaces

And suddenly he begins to speak, not volubly at all, but slowly, collectedly. His voice, low and warm like that of a female alto, leaves me stupefied. Never in my life had I heard a voice with such prolonged echoes, such gravity, such sliding tones of sexual melancholy, with its passionate surges, with all the lower registers of joy. The voice seemed to me to give off colours, so filled it was with voluptuous elation. It possessed me completely.²³³

Embodied writing enacts a performance of writing that engages with the audience in a live and temporal way. In *écriture féminine*, the body generates diverse surfaces and sites of writing: the page, the live performance, the performer's body, the audience's bodies and the residual traces of language. Embodied writing is not singular, neither in its address nor in its voice. Writing, in this context, is heterogeneous and not limited to any singular voice or iteration. Embodied writing initiates a way of writing through the body that permits the page to engage with its audience and generate a live experience. Writing through the body allows for a redefinition of the qualities of the limit, its relationship to excess and how these concepts contribute to the performance of breathlessness on the page. *Écriture féminine*, situates writing within the body, demonstrating a primacy of experience over language. This is what Cixous means when she asserts that "the flesh writes and is given to read; and to be written."²³⁴ *Écriture féminine* sketches out models for the performance of excess within writing. Cixous notes that "language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back," while simultaneously carrying forward writing into

²³³ Blaise Cendrars, *Moravagine*, trans. Alan Brown (London: Penguin Books, 1979, 1926), 27.

²³⁴ Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing," in *Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jensen, trans. Sarah Cornell et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26.

the realm of the live.²³⁵ As the body spills out through writing, it finds a new voice that provokes embodied forms and understandings of writing.

By conflating writing with voice, Cixous and Catherine Clément establish that embodied writing takes place within and through the body.²³⁶ In this piece of writing, as well as within the larger context of my practice, stretching the singularity of my voice within the work is vital. By invoking my voice here, I draw to attention to my body and the way that it translates performance writing into multiple permutations of live performance. Cixous locates *écriture féminine* within the female body, and by extension female sexuality, which she defines as distinctly heterogeneous, overflowing and infinite. It is a body that she emphasises lacks any real representation or language within the phallogentric order.²³⁷ In this sense, my work seeks to explore the relationship between writing and voice. The corporeality of the voice enters into writing and transforms its singularity of experience and time into a multiplicity. Properties ascribed to the feminine do not require a conventional binary distinction: converging layers of heterogeneous and profuse voices do not rely on a given biological body. By eliding gender altogether, embodied writing subverts the phallogentric order of language that works to deny the body within writing while simultaneously avoiding the gender binary implemented in Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa."²³⁸ Rather than employing one central voice, embodied writing speaks through a distinctly material body with many heterogeneous voices. Cixous and Clément's proposed plurality ties in with Charles Bernstein's writing on plural vocality, as explored further on in this chapter. Pertinent to this work is both the relationship to the body that Cixous and Clément construct within and through writing practices as well as the pluralities of identity and experience that they explore.

²³⁵ Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 889.

²³⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, ed., *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: University of Minnesota, 1986), 92.

²³⁷ See Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 878 – 879, 881. Cixous defines the phallogentric order as embedded in reason and a system of thought and practice that excludes the female body (and consequent lived experiences) from social and arts discourse and practices.

²³⁸ See Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 878 – 879, 881.

Écriture féminine deliberately locates writing within the body, which allows writing to inhabit the physical realm and generate embodied experiences. It shifts the focus of writing from the representation of knowledge to the presentation of embodied understandings and experiences through writing. Rather than use terminology associated with logos, Cixous locates her vocabulary within the body. She describes it as a “world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity” and in doing so, also sketches out the operative modes of embodied writing practices.²³⁹ This tactic is employed by Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa” where she posits that by censoring the female body in writing you censor breath as well.²⁴⁰ This pairing of censoring with breath implies a literal censure: the censored body is breathless and therefore cannot speak. The specific use of the word “breath” in lieu of narrative or speech equally indicates the primary import of the body in *écriture féminine*. Although Cixous is concerned with writing a “female” body, her articulation that bodily censure in writing prevents a specific narrative from finding “breath” is central to the development of an understanding of embodied writing.²⁴¹ Embodied writing invokes the corporeal on the page and puts to use many of the ideas and tactics set out by Cixous, Clément and others.

These Lungs demonstrates the embodiment of writing through writing intimate encounters in a manner that invites an affective and visceral response. Cixous begins the opening chapter of her novel *The Third Body* by describing the narrator’s body so completely embedded in her lover’s that when he leaves a literal detachment takes place; she states that he leaves her with his back dripping in blood.²⁴² She draws the reader into the body of the text through the bodies described on the page. Unlike

²³⁹ Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 876.

²⁴⁰ Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 880.

²⁴¹ A lot of the language Cixous uses in her early work subscribes to a gender binary. She uses bodily experiences associated with the female body to explore the relationship of the body to writing and vice versa. I use quotations around the term female to highlight how her work, as well as my own, works to redefine what this term entails.

²⁴² Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body*, trans. Keith Cohen (Evanston: Hydra Books/Northwestern University Press, 1990), 1.

sensation. What “you” and “I” touch through, be it a nothingness or a between-ness, evades definition, creating multiple sites of encounter and, by extension, multiple readings of the text.

An innate plurality expands the potential readings of *These Lungs* as each iteration is layered by the text that precedes and follows it as well as the textual mirroring in the adjacent column. Layering within writing practices is not uncommon. Charles Bernstein uses this technique to good effect in his series of word compositions entitled *Veil* (1976).²⁴⁵ The piece consists of a series of six large printed pages. *Veil* has subsequently manifested in print, electronically and as sound pieces. It is difficult to read: the composition of the text consists of layers and layers of typed writing that obscure each other. The tendency to describe this composition as overprinted is refuted by Bernstein. He asserts that *Veil* is a form of *overwriting* and is therefore “a form of writing, not design.”²⁴⁶ In an interview with Manuel Brito, Bernstein describes *Veil* as his most visual work and says that it is “produced through several layers of overtyping, so that much, but not all, of the freely composed writing is obliterated.”²⁴⁷ Key to this statement is the use of the term “obliteration”. This resonates with the erotic experience, *la petite mort*, where the subject is obliterated in the excesses of pleasure. *Veil* is not an aesthetic exercise – it is a performance of writing where the excessive layers of text enact a form of breathlessness. See the following page for an image of an excerpt from *Veil*:

²⁴⁵ Charles Bernstein, *Veil*, 1976 (EPC Digital Library, 2004), accessed May 27, 2016, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/bernstein/books/veil/veil-3.html>.

²⁴⁶ Charles Bernstein, “My Veils,” *Jacket 2*, June 28, 2011, accessed December 31, 2014, <http://jacket2.org/commentary/my-veils>.

²⁴⁷ Charles Bernstein, “An Interview with Manuel Brito,” in *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31.



Fig. 1. Charles Bernstein, *Veil*, 1976. (EPC Digital Library, 2004).²⁴⁸

The title, *Veil*, refers to layers between individuals that form boundaries as well as points of contact in communication. The interjection of the body within language substantiates the veil of language. As Bernstein writes:

²⁴⁸ Charles Bernstein, *Veil*, 1976, (EPC Digital Library, 2004), accessed May 27, 2016, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/bernstein/books/veil/veil-3.html>.

Our bodies veil us from transparency (say, assimilation) and the veil acknowledges that: that we can't communicate as if we had no veils or bodies or histories separating us, that whatever communication we can manage must be in terms of our opacities and particularities, our resistances and impermeabilities – call it our mutual translucency to each other.²⁴⁹

These veils within communication manifest through the overwriting in Bernstein's piece. *Veil* depicts a body of writing enshrouded and encumbered by the weight of excessive layers and layers of language. There is a tendency to call this work a palimpsest but it differs fundamentally. Unlike the palimpsest, this work does not erase the previous layers in order to make room for a new text. The many writings veil each other, providing many simultaneous readings as the writing moves closer and closer to obliteration.

This particular form of layering is experimented with in later manifestations of *Veil*, particularly on the recent recording *Crazy of Objects (Veil)* (1999/2014), available as a 4-track recording or in stereo sound. The recordings layer speech, replicating the performance of *Veil* and expanding it through the use of echo, repetition, shifts in pitch, vocal modulation and overlapping. Bernstein implements a cut and paste method to construct these recordings, creating a dense patchwork shroud through which only single utterances become audible. A reading of *These Lungs* uses a similar method to layer iterations of adjacent columns and to allow them to occupy the same time.²⁵⁰ (I go into this further later on in this chapter.) This in turn obscures language as the layers of speech blur and conflate words and consequently transform them into a form of speech beyond language.

Consider the veil as a garment. A lightweight veil is made of chiffon, organza, net or tulle. A heavy veil is made of jersey, viscose, satin or knit. These fabrics cover and protect the body while simultaneously concealing the characteristics of an individual. A veil layers over the body, hanging from the head to create a mysterious surface through which the body can barely be discerned.

²⁴⁹ Bernstein, "An Interview with Manuel Brito," 31-32.

²⁵⁰ See appendix 8 to listen to a reading of *These Lungs*.

Because the veil can be used to conceal the body, there is a tendency to read its performance in these terms. However, it is not that simple: one revelation does not preclude another. In Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé*, the young woman of the title performs "the dance of the seven veils" for the Tetrarch, Herod, who is her stepfather.²⁵¹ She layers herself in veils which she successively draws away until she is bare. She does so in order to gain a favour from the Tetrarch, asking for the head of John the Baptist, who has publicly denounced her mother. Salomé slowly unveils her body, and, in doing so, she binds the will and power of a ruler. She bares her body but the action cloaks her in power. Salomé disguises her intentions with her many veils and these garments allow the Tetrarch to project his desire onto her. Simultaneously, she utilises the veils to subvert her own objectification. Unveiling generates power, and through Salomé's performance she creates new layers to protect and conceal her desires. By cloaking her body in desire it becomes impossible for the Tetrarch to discern her intent beneath the surface of the dance. Bernstein's work may lack any erotic content but the movement of *Veil* certainly recalls the constant unfolding of desire in those moments where a single word or phrase penetrates layers of veiling to expose itself. The erotics of this unveiling are reflected in the performance of *These Lungs*; the movement of writing in and out of language necessitates a reading through the body.

In folklore, those born with a caul can part the veil dividing this plane from a spiritual one. The amniotic membrane encloses the baby, veiling them from the world in the moment they enter into it. In Mormonism the divide between the premortal life and our contemporary one is referred to colloquially as "the veil."²⁵² In W. E. B. du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, the author describes othering as a "vast veil" and writes that in seeing beyond the veil, the black man sees himself in a "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and

²⁵¹ Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, trans. Oscar Wilde (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002).

²⁵² The veil is used in Mormon ritual and symbolism, in addition to its colloquial use. See the article by Bruce C. Hafen, "The Value of the Veil," *Ensign* (June 1977), accessed June 17, 2016, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1977/06/the-value-of-the-veil?lang=eng>. I was raised in a Mormon household; the linguistic particularities of the culture surrounding Mormonism are familiar to me for this reason.

pity.”²⁵³ Du Bois describes a particular mirroring of the self within society, in which the self is always perceived through the lens of a society that holds it in contempt. (I handle the mirror later on in this chapter.) It is important to note here that I in no way want to detract from the lived experiences of black people and the psychic traces that du Bois describes. However, this double consciousness that du Bois writes about demonstrates how social constructs influence concepts of self and necessitate multiple identities within society. The veil enables a fricative layering of multiplicities of self, time and experience.²⁵⁴

In *These Lungs* a reader pauses to take a breath – a momentary pause – and layers of reading open up to highlight a single articulation. Veils shift, falling open, and different readings emerge through the layers of writing. The relationship between the sounding of writing and its performance explored in Bernstein’s collection of essays, *Close Listening*, raises a number of questions surrounding the performance of writing. As a poet, he refers to his subject as poetry but in effect what he describes is also applicable to the field of performance (as well as performative) writing. Bernstein asserts that contemporary poetry writing only comes into being when it is activated in some way – read aloud or heard. He writes: “To be heard, poetry needs to be sounded – whether in a process of active, or interactive, reading of a work or by the poet in performance. Unsounded poetry remains inert marks on a page, waiting to be able to be called into use by saying, or hearing, the words aloud.”²⁵⁵ However, he bases this argument on the premise that contemporary poets do not use predetermined forms but tend to shape the rhythm of the work according to their own tastes and preferences – and the demands of the work. At the time of

²⁵³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co; Cambridge, MA: University Press John Wilson and Son, 1903; Bartleby.com, 1999), accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.bartleby.com/114/>.

²⁵⁴ I have chosen not to handle religious use of cloth veils in this section. There is a tradition of veiling in Mormonism, Catholicism as well as in Islam. The political loading and heavily contested position of the burka, niqab and hijab in both Islamic practices and in contemporary culture make it a difficult subject to handle appropriately in the space I have available. It is for this reason that I do not mention it in the text.

²⁵⁵ Charles Bernstein, introduction to *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

writing, Bernstein's concern was to establish the validity of the poem as a performance event. In this sense, his assertions concerning the import of "sounded" poetry do not necessarily undermine any arguments concerning the performance of writing.

Writing is fundamentally plural because of its ability to transform through multiple performances where each reading presents a unique permutation of the text. Bernstein writes:

The poem, viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual intertranslatability, has a fundamentally plural existence. This is most dramatically enunciated when instances of the work are contradictory or incommensurable, but it is also the case when versions are commensurate. To speak of the poem in performance is, then, to overthrow the idea of the poem as a fixed, stable, finite linguistic object; it is to deny the poem its self-presence and its unity.²⁵⁶

The permutation of writing Bernstein describes here is one that is fundamentally unfixed and infinite in its potential performances. Although Bernstein does address the influence of the author's voice upon any given reading, he does so only to display the underlying lack of unity in any one reading of a text. The individual rhythms and cadences of each performance inform the reading of the writing. According to Bernstein, this lack of unity is inherent to the plurality of the poetry performance.²⁵⁷ Although Bernstein ultimately seeks to establish that poetry performance is an independent medium, he lays the foundation for developing an understanding of the plurality of writing and the ways in which its performance potential is activated.

This plural existence that Bernstein refers to when he speaks of the poem relates directly to the plurality of genders and voices present both in *These Lungs* and the work of Hélenè Cixous and Catherine Clément. Plurality is active on the pages of *These Lungs* through the shifting columnar forms. (The following section

²⁵⁶ Charles Bernstein, introduction, 9.

²⁵⁷ Borrowing from Andrew Benjamin, Bernstein identifies finitude and singularity as requisite characteristics of unity. See Charles Bernstein, introduction, 9. Also see Andrew Benjamin, "Translating Origins: Psychoanalysis and Philosophy," in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992), 24.

explores the performativity of the columnar form in depth.) Embodied writing speaks to the body of the reader and situates itself within their lungs and loins. One reading differs from another but, within a composition that demands a plural reading because it is by definition unfixed, we plunge into breathlessness. Suffocation is superficially present in the word composition, *Veils*, by Charles Bernstein, but ultimately it is only through a live experience of the writing that we are able to approach an understanding of breathlessness on the page. *These Lungs* exceeds the limit because its polyvocality manifests through the body of the reader. The writing embodies an experience of erotic breathlessness through effluent and inexhaustible language spilling out past the limit.

I have a pre-recorded reading of the right-hand column set to “play”.²⁵⁸ My pace is set by the rhythm of the sentences. Their composition is verbal; each sentence has been recorded, played and rewritten according to its sound. Each sentence is an exhalation. Each pause a slow gasp. The span of each page confines the paragraph, encapsulated by margins.

Blank space. Airless. I read the left-hand column aloud through a microphone. My recorded voice hums through my live one. My voices intermingle. Words blur. I count the wait between spaces and pauses in breaths. Iteration suffers. I do not speed up. I keep it slow, lingering. Breath spills out. I gasp to sustain the caress between readings. To extend the time of the present, moving forwards and backwards through a reading expanding and unending. (It would look something like this:)

inside out and alpine cold and
 howls like the wind in the
 thin gold light of the pom-pom maybe you
 in the air a h-pstic wuhah miming
 gleam and intense desperate motions to
 replicate what I would do to you
 & I just copy on the
 glass mottled brown
 and crusted; it flakes
 away under my fingernail touch you if
 nail. This nail would not there
 have burrowed beneath
 the skin to make this
 decoration. Marring
 the elegant surface, the
 smears mark time. And rash glass
 trace the vapors leaking
 from our eyes as we gaze
 upon it. and locate
 a needle on a compass wavering

²⁵⁸ See Appendix 8 to listen to the recording.

Two Columns, Two Bodies

Two unequal columns...envelop(e)(s) or sheath(es), incalculably reverses, turns inside out, replaces, remarks, overlaps [recoupe] the other.²⁵⁹

In *These Lungs* columns undulate against each other through constant shifts in placement and width. The gutter, a space guarding overflow and regulating the relationship between columns, buffers the contact of columns. The columnar form destabilises, creating rifts and flows in the body of the text. One column attempts to permeate the other, an effect that is emphasised through cross-pollinating words, themes and images. Multiple points of entry further this impression of permeability of form as the reading is not guided by a set numerical order. *These Lungs* rewrites the Narcissus myth, a story of a young man who rebuffs the affection of Echo, a wood nymph, and then falls in love with his own reflection. *These Lungs* uses Narcissus' encounter with his reflection as a template for exploring a non-penetrative erotic encounter with the self as a performance of breathlessness on the page.

A dual column narrative structure subverts the formation of a distinct and singular voice in order to depict an erotic encounter between shifting selves, excessive and breathless. Jacques Derrida opens his book *Glas* (cited above) with a description a form both fractured and fundamental, one that envelopes and overlaps. Derrida uses the two columns to create a parallel-running critical analysis of Hegel on the left and Jean Genet on the right occupying the same space of the page. He disrupts their structure through thematic overlaps and shifts in form. Citations support and splinter the columns as they supplement and disrupt the content of the critical analysis with external sources. Derrida's negotiation of the columnar form introduces an understanding of the performativity of writing through the instability of the text on the page. He reveals the shifting actions of writing that undermine and contradict their given form. *These Lungs* adopts this specific negotiation of form on the page as a way of activating the performance of the text and opening up written structures to encapsulate new modes of interacting with the page. As the columns collapse upon

²⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr et al (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1.

each other in *These Lungs*, these permeations of structure and their demise perpetuate a performance of breathlessness.

Within the text of each column Derrida refers to its form, drawing attention to the performativity of writing through the modulating form. Derrida guides our interpretation of the form through descriptions of columns that are initially “intact, unbreached, smooth” and “only later are notches, excavations, openings made in the columns, in the flank...”²⁶⁰ Jutting into the paragraph this citation stems from is another small square of text perforating the smooth exterior of the column. The column in turn envelopes the perforating object, as Derrida states at the outset of *Glas*. Although the gutter between the two main columns is respected, the individual columns are pockmarked with citations paralleling the “lateral marks...coming over the phallic columns...apparently unperforable.”²⁶¹

...each column rises with an impassive self-sufficiency, and yet the element of contagion, the infinite circulation of general equivalence relates each sentence, each stump of writing...to each other, within each column and from one column to the other...²⁶²

These stumps of writing cut laterally across the space separating the columns; the structures of each column inform the contagion of one into the other. Although the columns resemble plinths, the passage of writing from one into another undermines this apparent function. Words worm into them from within and without. In this sense, the column does not withstand writing nor does it need to. Writing passes through the columnar form or it is enveloped within it. The permeation of the written structure is a constant negotiation between the two columns moving into each other.

This structure replicates the mirrored halves of a reflection. The mirrored image contains within it an affective response to the dissonance resulting from an inability to recognise the reflected self. These columns enact the othering experience of reflection – this inability to gaze fully upon the self when held in close proximity. Indeed, the self fractures within this instant. You do not see a whole being but an

²⁶⁰ Derrida, *Glas*, 3.

²⁶¹ Derrida, *Glas*, 3.

²⁶² Derrida, *Glas*, 1.

assemblage of articulate parts as reflections upon the surface of the mirror. The function of the column erodes through articulation as its wholeness – that which completes its form and function – is permeated and split into parts.

These Lungs adopts this laterally compromised structure using the gutter between columns to facilitate a visual bridging. In effect, the gutter becomes a passageway and is no longer a boundary. The width of the individual columns expands and contracts from page to page, mimicking the natural function of the lungs. This fluctuating width facilitates the seep of one narrative into the other. This margin between the columns diminishes to a gap between words, a space containing a breath or the space stringing a sentence together. Flow from one column to the other shifts in and out. Rather than adhering to a rigid structure, the writing prompts a sense of the movement between lovers: the back and forth of the caress and the gasp in the moment – an imperfect undulation punctuated by stops and starts.

The friction of the two columns writhing against each other and their moments of collapse into each other enlivens the text with a sense of the body. The two narratives shiver into each other and they shudder against each other. As much as they assume a classic architectural form, their performance recalls bodies moving against one another. Their points of mirroring enact sites of touch and penetration. Any boundary that the gutter – or the column – represents is permeated when the reading flows from one column to the other.

The performative function of the two columns is to enact within the space of the page a complex layering through the destabilisation of its boundaries. Excess can only be achieved through an engagement with a limit, whether that limit is the polished exterior of the column or the untouchable reflection a mirror proffers. The rigid structure of the column is quickly subverted through a performance of writing. The undulation of one column against the other and the haptic qualities of reading build a series of layers that progressively expand beyond the given limits of a singular concrete form or space of writing. The perceived limit of the page falters as its end leads to a subsequent page, echoing the movement of the gutter. Just as the columns seem to touch each other through the shifting position of the gutter that separates them, they remain intact yet permeable. Excess is defined by its limits – and it is through

these moving columns, running from page to page and into and onto each other, that the permeability of the limit is evident.

Of Eyes That Gaze Upon the Other

What I love is untouchable.
We are kept apart
Neither by seas nor mountains
Nor by the locked-up gates of cities.
Nothing at all comes between us –
Only the skin of water.²⁶³

One of the first written versions of the Narcissus myth is contained in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which begins with the love call that Echo shapes from her repetition of phrases spoken by Narcissus.²⁶⁴ Narcissus calls to his friends and Echo repeats his invitations back to him. When Echo approaches him, having mistaken the direction of his address, he rebuffs her. Refused, Echo wastes away. Narcissus then falls in love with his reflection as he reaches to drink from a pool of water. Reflection is foregrounded through the reverberations of Echo, who can only repeat and consequently mirror Narcissus in order to communicate her desire. Similarly, Narcissus is constrained by the literal reflection of his image – as there is no substance underlying its surface he is unable to access the object of his desire. Left without any avenue to satiation both Narcissus and Echo transform and physically embody their desire: Echo becomes the gasping expression of her longing and Narcissus drowns in the mirroring of his desire:

A little water sunders us. He longs
For my embrace. Why, every time I reach
My lips towards the gleaming pool, he strains
His upturned face to mine. I surely could

²⁶³ Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid*, adapt. Tim Supple et al (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 18.

²⁶⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 64.

Touch him, so slight the thing that thwarts our love.²⁶⁵

Touch is reoccurring theme in the Narcissus myth. First with Echo's clumsy attempt and then later, when Narcissus disrupts the surface of the water his image is reflected upon. Touch becomes a gesture that is fraught with tension. The wasting demise that results from touch links desire and the erotic with death.

As a gesture, touch aids the development of an understanding of the time of the page in *These Lungs*. Tension builds through proliferating descriptions of erotic longing and contact between surfaces and, through this, the time of the text develops. An interplay of denial and tangibility prolongs the perceived duration of the text. Breath manifests as gasps multiplying within *These Lungs*, shaping the surfaces of objects and bodies forming the sensual landscape of the text, a landscape only accessible through mirrors, reflections and the reverb of the page. Touch suggests a degree of access and when touch is denied, delayed or postponed it can also extend how one experiences the duration of time. Denial also provokes an interrogation of the relationships between sites, surfaces and textures:

it eludes me you elude me cold
and hard slick the semblance of
some thing or some one maybe
you in this you I just watch
miming me and my desperate
motions to replicate what I would
do to you if I just could

how can I touch you if
you're not there²⁶⁶

A description of a desire to physically engage with something intangible is paired in *These Lungs* with descriptions of gleaming points of light, pin pricks and the dirty surface of a mirror. Who "you" is, is not clear – "you" remains intangible. Descriptions of "you" progress through the text, describing the exterior and interior of a body, nude and clothed, covered and uncovered, always changing and unattainable. We encounter different modes of touch and different landscapes,

²⁶⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 64.

²⁶⁶ Worden, *These Lungs*, unpaginated.

ranging from the textured geographies of the writing to the shuffling layers of paper, in the writing of *These Lungs*.

Mouths, tongues, mirrors, skin and fabric relate to each other within *These Lungs* as details that comprise a composition. These various textures layer each other and prolong an experience of the text, forming a landscape of writing. Landscape is a metaphor that Gertrude Stein uses to describe the dissonance of time in the experience of a performance.²⁶⁷ The separate components of a play exist outside time, positioned in a landscape “not moving but being always in relation [...] any detail to any detail, the story is only of importance if you like to tell or like to hear a story but the relation is there anyway.”²⁶⁸ The space of the page allows for a juxtaposition of each of these elements in relation to each other. Stein writes:

Your sensation as one in the audience in relation to the play played before you your sensation I say your emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening.²⁶⁹

“You” comprises of parts in relation to each other. The time and experience of “you” is not fixed; each reading presents a new juxtaposition of parts in relation to the other. The proximity of a reflection reveals its texture but it remains intangible; the touching of it lies just out of grasp. These textures exist within the text in relation to one another, united through their inaccessibility. In this sense, they become live through their relationships to each other within a composition and infinitely prolong the moment before and after touch.

It seemed to me yesterday that I spoke to my mirror.

It seemed to me that I saw rather far in the distance as if by lightning flashes a region where anguish has led [...] A feeling introduced by a

²⁶⁷ “I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there.” Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 122.

²⁶⁸ Stein, *Lectures in America*, 125.

²⁶⁹ Stein, *Lectures in America*, 93.

sentence. I've forgotten the sentence: it was accompanied by a perceptible change, like a trip release cutting the ties.²⁷⁰

The image of the mirror performs a dual function, simultaneously allowing and denying access. When Narcissus sips from a pool of water he encounters his reflection and this reflection becomes the object of his desire. However, reflection exists within a barrier. Its superficial nature denies touch. The mirror-based representation of the self is defined by an inability to fully identify with the self that is reflected. Aristotle describes this as an inability to disentangle our self-image from what we expect to see in the mirror, stating: “we are not able to see what we are from ourselves.”²⁷¹ Despite the ability of the mirror to reflect an image, it does not enable recognition of the self within the reflected image. The mirrored self is consequently perceived as other. The glass surface of the reflection only emphasises this barrier. Narcissus only recognises the subject of his self-love in the instant prior to his death. It is as Plato describes: “the lover is his mirror in whom he is beholding himself, but he is not aware of this.”²⁷² The nature of love is to find oneself reflected and, in this sense, love is a process of reflection. Narcissus' love for another is only possible through his inability to recognise his self within his reflection. In this encounter the mirror holds Narcissus in a moment of self-love, between water and earth, hovering over the threshold of life.

In *These Lungs* the permeability of the mirror is questioned through descriptions of marred surfaces and contamination with bodily residue. The mirrored surface of a spoon exits the mouth and the self is no longer evident in this reflective object. Instead, the mirror has been transformed by this contact with the body, acting out the same fearful staining gaze that Aristotle attributes to menstruating women.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Georges Bataille, “Oresteia,” in *The Impossible*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991), 140.

²⁷¹ Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 1213.

²⁷² Plato, “Phaedrus,” in *The Internet Classics Archive*, ed. Daniel C. Stevenson (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology), accessed July 30, 2014, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>.

²⁷³ See Rosamond Kent Sprague, “Aristotle on Red Mirrors (‘On Dreams’ II 459b24-460a23),” *Phronesis* 30, no. 3 (1985): 323-325, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182237>.

Bodily residue permeates the mirror by undermining its primary function: to reflect. With “a thousand fingerprints and the saliva from my mouth transferred” the body reveals (through marring) the permeability of the mirror.²⁷⁴ Even as the mirror denies touch, its function is undone by touch. Marred by contact with the body, the mirror no longer functions as a boundary and becomes a threshold, a site of passage between bodies and states.

This threshold that the mirror enacts resembles breathlessness; is the orgasm, *la petite mort*, the space between *you and I, I and I*, and in between. The phrase *la petite mort*, the little death, refers to the orgasm and conflates the perceived culmination of the erotic act with death. The tendency to conflate libidinal experience with death is an aspect of the perception of orgasm as a liminal experience. Breath hovers between bodies, before touch and after each sharp exhalation where the body is – temporarily – without air. *These Lungs* describes the surface of the mirror as a point of contact, a negotiation of the boundaries between bodies. Breath similarly negotiates these boundaries as it continually enters and exits the body. It is a self-caress that supersedes a perceived intangibility. Breath beading on the mirror, as described in the text of *These Lungs*, is the physical manifestation of touch – a touch that extends from an interior and reaches out towards an impenetrable surface. This beading also indicates a barrier to breath, resulting in a kind of breathlessness. The mirror comes to bear the traces of breath which Marsilio Ficino, in *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, attributes to the hardness of the mirror’s surface, writing: “a mirror, on account of its hardness, stops the spirit on the surface.”²⁷⁵ The hardness of the mirror allows breath to transform into saliva, demonstrating the ability of one materiality to impact and transform the materiality of another.²⁷⁶ Through contact with the body, the mirror becomes wet and slippery and consequently undermines the boundary it represents. This contact consequently leaves a transformative residue that subverts the liminal qualities of the mirror’s surface.

²⁷⁴ Worden, *These Lungs*, unpaginated.

²⁷⁵ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 160.

²⁷⁶ “For our breath, flying out from the saliva, having been condensed on that material, falls back into saliva.” Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 160.

The way in which *These Lungs* explores the material properties of different surfaces invites an embodied reading that facilitates the transformation of writing into a live experience. Writing will always have a relationship to representation but, similarly, as Laura Marks points out in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, representation is “inextricable from embodiment.”²⁷⁷ Derrida describes in *Glas* how language is made through the body and perpetuates its various forms.²⁷⁸ The physical body shapes language through the organs it uses to produce speech. Marks is primarily concerned with the relationship between mimesis (as a form of representation) and the body. Her concept of haptic visuality describes how “the eyes themselves function as organs of touch.”²⁷⁹ The focus on the haptic as a property of the gaze allows for looking and seeing to begin correlating with touch and texture. Incorporating touch demonstrates how representation is capable of generating experiences and not merely reproducing them. The eyes “touch” the texture of a surface and this stroking explores the permeability of the boundary. The eyes can always gaze through the mirror, much as Narcissus does, without ever realising that it is indeed a reflection carried by a surface. In the realm of *haptic visuality* the embodied experience of the surface is opened up as a texture and a terrain. We are no longer looking beyond the surface towards the live, or towards the reflection, but are interacting with the registers of the surface as individual experiences.

Moving between the different pages of *These Lungs* we encounter different surfaces and relate to them through different modes of touch. The fingers shuffle the fine pages; the ears hear the flick and crinkle of paper. The eyes read the two columns, shuffling between one and the other as a ghostly reading reverbs in the mind. You can almost hear it, as words are “spoken” internally through reading. All of these bodily interactions demonstrate different forms of touching, through which the body comes into contact with writing. This touch could be literal: the fingers moving over paper

²⁷⁷ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, 142.

²⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr et al (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 142. A reading of *Glas* is developed further in this chapter.

²⁷⁹ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, 162.

pages. Touch negotiates the threshold between the limit and the body through writing. By conflating touching with writing, Jean-luc Nancy, in his book of critical writing, *Corpus*, ascribes the same qualities to writing that Marks attributes to the “skin of film”:

But, finally, it has to be said that touching upon the body, touching the body, touching-happens in writing all the time. Maybe it doesn't happen exactly in writing, if writing in fact has an 'inside.' But along the border, at the limit, the tip, the furthest edge of writing nothing but that happens. Now, writing takes its place at the limit. So if anything at all happens to writing, nothing happens to it but touch. More precisely: touching the body (or some singular body) with the incorporeality of 'sense.' And consequently, to make the incorporeal touching, to make of meaning a touch.²⁸⁰

The conflation of the verb of *touching* with *writing* highlights the action of writing: that it takes place within time. This shifts the focus from writing – as – inscription to writing – as – performance while still maintaining the ability of writing to “make meaning.”²⁸¹ Nancy questions the interiority of writing and focuses on the surface of writing. Like touch, writing occupies the space between objects and individuals. By becoming a surface in and of itself, writing develops beyond representation through the malleability and temporality of touch. When holding a copy of *These Lungs*, the shuffle of the pages reassembles to “make sense” of the writing. The glide of columns and textual overlap perform a kind of touching that reconfigures meaning. The page interacts with the hand as they work together to make sense of their touching and the touch of writing.

The mirror stands at the threshold of touch. It prevents touch even as it mimes the gesture. This barrier reverbs inaccessible textures of surfaces, propelling the experience onward and extending desire without ever satiating it. These surfaces act as different manifestations of the limit. Moving through the pages of *These Lungs*, our eyes shifting across columns and a constant delay of touch, we enter into an extended and unfolding encounter with the limit. Although the encounter in *These Lungs* never fully realises a touching between lovers, this delay prolongs time of the page. As the

²⁸⁰ Nancy, *Corpus*, 10.

²⁸¹ Nancy, *Corpus*, 10.

duration of the page in *These Lungs* expands, the focus turns to the materiality of the page. Our eyes, with our hands, touch the page. Writing is experienced as a surface to be touched and that touches in return. Reciprocal touching places writing at the very limit – and opens up space to explore liminality within writing and how this relates to performances of breathlessness on the page.

Textual Excess of the Limit

...eroticism is assenting to life even in death.²⁸²

Poetry opens the night to desire's excess. In me the night abandoned by the ravages of poetry is the measure of a refusal – of my mad will to exceed the world. Poetry also exceeded this world, but it could not change me.²⁸³

Textual excesses in *These Lungs* move along the plenitude of the unfolding limit, always pushing past and into a performance of breathlessness. *These Lungs* borrows its punctuation from Pierre Guyotat's novel *Eden Eden Eden*. His novel negotiates the relationship between performativity, the erotic, writing and the limit through content and structure. Guyotat's structural and stylistic decisions provide a template for the way in which writing performs breathlessness on the page. The primacy of the libidinal in Guyotat's novel draws attention to the dissolution of the self and how this relates to the limit, whether that be through experience or through writing. The critical writings of Georges Bataille on eroticism, self-dissolution and the limit contextualise and deepen our understanding of the relationship between the self and the limit. However, the limit is not what it seems. Reading the erotic experience through Luce Irigaray and Audre Lorde, it is possible to develop an understanding of the libidinal as without limit which draws the very definition of the limit into question.

Guyotat's novel uses the erotic to approach the limits of writing and to transgress its conventions. He does this through his subject matter as well as his style. This break with structure frees writing from semantic constraints, creating what Roland Barthes describes in his preface to the novel as a "free text: free of all subjects, of all objects, of all symbols, written in the space (the abyss or blind spot) where the

²⁸² Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 11.

²⁸³ Bataille, "Oresteia," 162.

traditional constituents of discourse (the one who speaks, the events recounted, the way they expressed) would be superfluous.”²⁸⁴ The erotic encounters in *Eden Eden Eden* enact dissolution of the self and, by extension, the traditional structure of a novel. (I include later in this section a quote from *Eden Eden Eden* to allow the reader an experience of its performance.) Like *These Lungs*, by abandoning the semantic function of language and approaching writing through the body *Eden Eden Eden* creates a performance of breathlessness on the page through a transgression of writing’s limits.

The body is preeminent in *Eden Eden Eden*, a novel depicting the atrocities of the French-Algerian war. The primary character is a young Algerian prostitute, Wazzag. However, through the progression of the novel it becomes difficult to distinguish him from others through the proliferation of violent and sexual encounters between and with other bodies. This could be because there is no “self” present in the writing at all, just an accumulation of violent and sexual activities constantly permeating the limits of (predominately male) bodies.²⁸⁵ Bataille describes “discontinuous being” as an experience of isolation and how transgressive activities can initiate an experience of continuity or connection with others.²⁸⁶ This is what Bataille means when he states “the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation... The most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being.”²⁸⁷ For Bataille, human existence is a discontinuous one. Death is the primary event affording an experience of continuity. Eroticism is linked to death through the temporary respite from discontinuity that both experiences provide. This is what Bataille means when he states the purpose of eroticism “is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still.”²⁸⁸ Exceeding the limit through the erotic is a means of subverting

²⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, preface to *Eden Eden Eden* by Pierre Guyotat, trans. Graham Fox (UK: Creation Books, 1995), vii.

²⁸⁵ *Eden* lacks a female presence – the role of women and of women’s erotic experience is noticeably absent within the novel. There are women, and their bodies are acted upon, but a sense of the female experience is not represented.

²⁸⁶ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 17.

²⁸⁷ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 17.

²⁸⁸ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 17.

the function of writing. It allows writing to evolve beyond its representative function and into the live. The self dissolves in flow of the text, subsumed under a seemingly endless perpetuation of fleshly enactments.

A discontinuous self is never fully evolved within *These Lungs*. There is a slippage in and out of a discontinuous state. The “I” is never fully extricated from the “you” or the “we”. The replica of the Narcissus figure is never identified as male or female, singular or plural. Like in *Story of the Eye*, an erotic novel by Bataille, *These Lungs* does not feature a phallus nor does it locate itself within the genitals.²⁸⁹ Desire rushes through the extremities, in and out of the mouths, teeth and tongues. Yet because the self is always shifting in and out of continuity, orgasm is not possible. Instead, the pleasures of desire are infinitely extended and simultaneously precluded. Climax is constantly elided in *These Lungs* through the slippages in and out of continuous states.

Unlike in *These Lungs*, penetration is a key interaction between bodies in *Eden Eden Eden*. The penetration of bodies is portrayed as specifically violent and grotesque, deliberately contextualising it within the obscene. (This is not to say that the penetration of male bodies is inherently obscene.) Guyotat draws from his time in Algeria as a French soldier and the many atrocities that were committed. The violence in his novel conflates the bodies of the characters with war-torn landscape they are set within. Simultaneously, there is a breakdown of the landscape of the body – and certainly its autonomy – as the various parts of a whole are articulated in great detail. The novel guides us through orifices, fluids, pelts and limbs, echoing the heightened textures of the body of *These Lungs*. And as in *These Lungs*, the entirety of the body is never present despite the heightened focus on every smell, taste and texture. This allows writing to fully situate itself within the body but it also simultaneously inhibits body’s wholeness within the text. The destabilisation of the body within *Eden Eden*

²⁸⁹ *Story of the Eye* is unusual for its genre. Unlike the works of other transgressive writers, such as de Sade, *Story of the Eye* doesn’t portray phallic penetration nor does it focus on male or phallic pleasure. The sites of desire, identified by his erotic imagery, are eyes, vaginal openings, eggs, bowls of milk and so on. The focus of desire shifts away from a reproductive narrative and concentrates on a plurality of pleasures as our attention is deflected from male genitals and procreative sex practices. Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin Books, 1979, 2001).

Eden is inherently different to the porous and shifting body of *These Lungs* but the affect is the same: diminishing boundaries between bodies allows the corporeal to pass into writing.

In order to replicate the affective and corporeal qualities of Guyotat's writing, I transcribe here an entire page from the novel. The overwhelming airlessness of the text is difficult to convey in writing. To understand the overwhelming nature of the prose I invite you here to read what Guyotat writes:

taken from pockets sticky with jissom, shifting haunches : glans, detached from cotton inside pants, discharging last drops of jissom ; farts rippling from sweating arses ; sentry squatting, arse hairs caked with faeces pulling apart, buttocks spreading, pressing nostrils over holes in floor ; scent of jissom wafting up from soldiers' open shirts, mixed with whiffs of toasted tobacco rising from lips, from fingers smeared with seed ; at changing of guard, sentry running from tower, hardened glans pinched in elastic of pants, towards palm-grove behind barbed wire, dragging woman, pulling feet, beyond tree, into salt-marsh slick, lying over body — breathing stopped — spreading bruised lips of vulva, pushing in member retracting on contact with cooling flesh, kissing woman's shrivelled lips, eyes, soldiers' saliva, spat over iris, drying ; woman's vulva closing around member, squeezing, crushing ; Peuhl, cold sweat oozing from pores, coating hairs, standing up, pulling fingers out of woman's wilted locks — sweat drying in tufts, lice, fleas jumping out ; flies, ichneumons diving in, heavy with black powder from charred fringes of male palms, digging down to greenish skin of scalp —, carrying fingers to member, squeezing base, pulling at hairs caught in vulva ; secreting balls clasped in free hand, white sweat seeping : mosquitos, ants stuck in foam, between sentry's fingers ; breathing, sentry choked by salt stench ; standing up, lifting woman's hips against belly, stepping forward, legs spread, staggering, weight of woman pulling down on member, stretching skin over vertebrae of sentry's neck, over atlas, axis, sternum ; on platform of dry sand, at edge of palm grove, sentry stopping : flies, mosquitos crawling under cap, in knot of hair on occiput ; woman's legs stiffening, beating against sentry's shins ; sentry kneeling, sprawling, woman's legs unfolded, varicose veins shrivelling against sand, panting over cold belly, groin muscles, tissues of member straining ; fist striking around vulva, fingers pulling on lips, digging, under folds, into stiffened muscles ; Peuhl unsheathing dagger at hips, tracing with point of blade — bent :

youths gutted against onyx wall — semi-circle around vulva, plunging
blade into mute flesh, tearing,²⁹⁰

By destabilising the structure of the text, Guyotat enables language to begin to write through the body and approach the limit of writing. This situates writing within the realm of embodied experience, pressing against and expanding the limit of writing. Graham Fox describes interaction with the limit of writing as a “struggle against [his] own medium in an effort to bring language back to the body.”²⁹¹ *Eden Eden Eden*, as well as *These Lungs*, strategically displaces full stops. This forces writing past the limits of breath, extending beyond boundaries between bodies and creates an embodied experience of writing. Guyotat undermines the structures of writing within his work and, through this, his writing is no longer a semantic representation of language but is instead what Graham Fox terms a “fully material practice of the text.”²⁹² Writing, for Guyotat, is therefore a practice based in materiality and through this practice a material experience of the page manifests both literally and metaphorically within the body of the reader.

Punctuation governs the pauses between words and sentences in writing. The full stop is not present in *Eden Eden Eden* and this lack leads to a sense of breathlessness. The contents of the work are a single sentence comprised of terse fragments separated by dashes, commas, semicolons and colons. Each action is active and punctuated with a slight pause linking one fragment with another, leading to an overall experience of suffocating preponderance of accumulated erections, oozings and spasms. *These Lungs* uses this absence of the full stop to a similar end. The boundaries between bodies and columns blur through the absence of the full stop. The full stop represents the limit. Without the full stop writing becomes excessive and overwhelming, a spillage without end. *These Lungs* lacks the violence of Guyotat’s

²⁹⁰ Guyotat, *Eden Eden Eden*, 6. The em dash and spacing before the semi-colon is a replica of the original text.

²⁹¹ Graham Fox, “Denotation and plurality: a study of Pierre Guyotat’s ‘Edén, Edén, Edén’,” (PhD diss., University of London, 1986), 26. Fox accents Edén and shifts the emphasis of the word to the ending. An accent would normally not be used in French or in English.

²⁹² Fox, “Denotation and plurality: a study of Pierre Guyotat’s “Edén, Edén, Edén”,” 17.

work and therefore breathlessness accrues accumulatively through visual leaps between columns and the excesses of ungoverned prose.

To bridge the gap between writing and the body, Guyotat unites them through their mutual destruction. Although Bataille's understanding of the erotic act is mired in heteronormative sexuality (he divides erotic activity into active and passive roles with women relegated to the latter), he asserts that a "fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution" is possible.²⁹³ Erotic desire therefore initiates a dissolution of self which fulminates through erotic activity. Guyotat's writing replicates the sex act in the Batailleian sense: simultaneous dissolution allows articulate parts to fuse together. Through the libidinal encounter we become aware of the discontinuity of our existence and simultaneously experience a brief respite in the joining with another person. Similarly, the collapse of columns into each other in *These Lungs* perpetuates a dissolution of self. The two readings mingle in such a way that makes it difficult to distinguish the identity of "I" or "you" within the text. Rather than destroying distinct identities, however, *These Lungs* uses Bataille's understanding of the erotic's encounter with the limit to create a multiplicity of selves.

These Lungs makes a conscious effort to disengage from the conflation of the erotic with death and to resist the notion of a libidinal finitude. It extends the duration of the writing, stretching out the erotic experience endlessly. *These Lungs* also rejects a concept of orgasm as a pinnacle of the erotic encounter. The libidinal exchange in *These Lungs* is endless, passing from page to page in the manner that Luce Irigaray describes in her seminal essay, "When Our Lips Speak Together," as a passage between two lips.²⁹⁴ Irigaray defines the exchange between two lips (playing on the Latinate *labia*, meaning lips, and its conventional use in English for outer female sex organs) "from inside to outside, from outside to inside, knows no limits."²⁹⁵ *La petite mort* commonly refers to the orgasm, likening the 'culmination' of the erotic experience to a little death. However, in *These Lungs* orgasm is dispersed through the

²⁹³ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 17.

²⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray and Carolyn Burke, "When Our Lips Speak Together," *Signs* 6, no. 1 (1980): 72, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173966>.

²⁹⁵ Irigaray and Burke, "When Our Lips Speak Together," 73.

writing and does not culminate at any given point. It permeates the spaces between columns and performs in the seemingly blank spaces of the page.

In *These Lungs* an excess of writing permeates the space of the page. Text shifts rather than fills because it moves into space that was never empty. Reading facilitates this constant movement of writing across the page as text moves into spaces endlessly opening up to the reader. Audre Lorde, in her essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” likens the erotic to a kernel, stating that when “released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colours my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitises and strengthens all my experience.”²⁹⁶ Using terms like kernel and pellet, Lorde draws parallels with the clitoris. Through this understanding of the erotic, the orgasm exceeds the limit and suffuses through all aspects of living. Reading *These Lungs* through Lorde’s writing, the libidinal experience of the page becomes generative and endless. In effect, the performance of the page becomes one full of breathlessness. *Lessness* translates the open spaces of the page; they expand and contract like two lungs working with the effulgence and fullness of the erotic experience. These spaces are never empty with themselves; comprised of libidinal promise, writing exceeds its limit.

Writing occupies the page and through its occupation it expands beyond the particular limit of the page, enacting a performance of breathlessness manifesting through the bodies of its readers. *These Lungs* performs an erotic encounter through writing that is without an apparent limit. The circular, un-paginated text proceeds from page to page and from column to column and collapses the space of the page reserved for brief respite to catch one’s breath. The jumps from column to column by fragments unhindered by full stops perpetuate a ragged pattern of pauses occurring only at apparent exhaustion of breath. The erotic develops a model of expenditure that is without limit even as it reaches its own limits. Limits collapse, unfold and reveal that there is more and more and more.

²⁹⁶ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 57.

On Corpses and Bodies

Imagine: you have a body before you. The eyes of the body are closed. The hands and arms and legs of the body are limp. The body does not move when you touch it. You take out a pocket mirror, a silver clamshell that flips open. You hold the mirror directly above the body's half open lips and watch for condensation – some kind of evidence of breath. And without it the body becomes a corpse. It is transformed. A breathless body is not a body at all but something else entirely.

If the ultimate limit is death – and breathlessness exceeds the limit – then a dead body is a breathless body. However, what becomes of the limit once this has occurred? Hélène Cixous scrutinises the existing definitions of death (as a limit) in relation to embodied writing practices. She conceives a body of writing that is without limit, one that is so plentiful that it cannot do anything other than spill over the boundaries of writing, filling the voids beyond the limit. This revision of the nature of death as limit is taken a step further in Hiromi Ito's poem, *Part of a Living Man*.²⁹⁷ The writer uses the corpse to address the transformative potential of the limit, thereby allowing an understanding of the ability of the limit to evolve. Even the corpse is imbued with live qualities, attributes that allow the “dead” to engage with the living and create an exchange back and forth between the perceived limits of writing, the body and breath.

These Lungs renegotiates the relationship between writing and the limit by transforming the nature of the interaction with the limit. As a potentially endless text, writing pours out over its own limits and subsumes them within writing. The parallels between death and the limits of writing are explored as extended metaphors in Hélène Cixous' work, often in contrast to the performativity of *écriture féminine*. Death becomes, for Cixous, “not an opportunity for destruction but for wonderful expansion” and she consequently proposes a writing model “endlessly charged with

²⁹⁷ Hiromi Ito, “Part of a Living Man,” trans. Sawako Nakayasu in “Sawako Nakayasu translating Hiromi Ito,” *HOW2* 1, no. 6 (2001), accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_6_2001/current/translation/ito.html#part.

a ceaseless exchange from one to another,” which subverts existing definitions of the limit.²⁹⁸ Cixous writes in *Prénoms de Personne*:

I do not believe that writing – insofar as it is a production of desire – or the desire which can do anything, cannot be defined, nor that it is to be defined in accordance with death’s border. Death is nothing. It is not something. It is a hole. I can fill it with fantasies, and give it a name, freely.²⁹⁹

Death is a void, according to Cixous, and one that can be filled with the ceaseless exchange between bodies. *These Lungs* imagines a body that is dispersed through the text in a constant exchange of identities, making it impossible to articulate the separate parts of “I” or “you”. The model of writing Cixous proposes through her work defies the very notion that the boundaries commonly presented by the limit – by death, and by extension all limitations placed on writing and the body – are boundaries at all. In this sense, the excess of *These Lungs* rests with the profusion of bodies and their collapsed delineation. The border that death should delineate transforms into a void that *These Lungs* fills with an excess of writing. Similarly, *These Lungs* treats its own limit as a reservoir, from whence each page overflows and expands onto the next.

Use of the term reservoir connotes both excess and filling. Cixous defines reservoir, in the essay *Sorties*, as a gift and one that is particular to the feminine. What Cixous means by “gift” and “giving” in relation to the feminine can best be read through Bataille’s writing on giving. Drawing inspiration from Marcel Mauss’ essay *The Gift*, Bataille conceives of a gift-giving that circumvents exchange: its purpose is to defy the possibility of a reciprocal gesture.³⁰⁰ Cixous modifies Bataille’s reading of the gift in *The Newly Born Woman*. Woman is able to give of herself endlessly – and is defined by her ability to supersede any apparent boundaries – because her body is without limit. When Cixous writes that she “can fill it with fantasies, and give it a name, freely,” she refers to the ability of woman to “deappropriate herself without self-interest: endless body, without ‘end,’ [...] a whole made up of parts that are wholes,

²⁹⁸ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 86.

²⁹⁹ Hélène Cixous, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, trans. Deborah Cowell (London: Routledge, 1994), 27.

³⁰⁰ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002).

not simple, partial objects but varied entirety.”³⁰¹ Cixous distinguishes that in this model of giving woman gives of herself without disassembling into articulated parts of a whole. This endless body cannot be subsumed by finitude, by death or the limit because even as it gives of itself, it remains whole. In this context, to be woman – and to write the feminine – is to enact a spillage into the void and consequently displace the limit. Cixous imagines an effulgence that renegotiates the parameters of death by rewriting the physicality of the limit with feminine bodily excess.

Bodily excesses transform our relationship to the limit and generate new modes of interacting with death, as well as the erotic experience, as manifestations of the limit. The limit is consequently displaced through feminine effulgence, and its relationship to the body and to death is renegotiated through Hiromi Ito’s poem, *Part of a Living Man*. Ito references Sada Abe in her poem, a woman who strangled her lover, as part of a shared and consensual erotic practice, killing him, and who then excised her lover’s genitals and carried them with her in her purse until she was apprehended by the police. The intentionality of the death was overshadowed by the apparent castration of the male corpse. Sada Abe’s transgression lay with her subversion of gender roles. Her particular grooming of her lover’s corpse – to remove and keep the genitals – displayed a barbarism associated with masculinity, which became the most damning aspect of her crime.³⁰² However, the moment her lover died, he became an object, something Ito describes as having a “thingness to it.”³⁰³ The lover therefore becomes an assemblage of parts and, by removing his genitals, Sada Abe allows her lover’s corpse to finally overthrow the “monarchy” of his body, an endeavour they pursued together through the displacement of pleasure from the phallus

³⁰¹ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 87.

³⁰² This slippage between gender roles is apparent in the ‘slip’ in pronoun where the translator has chosen to attribute to a male pronoun to Sada Abe when describing the actual killing: “I don’t think Sada Abe was thinking about this as he killed, pulling hairs out.” To attribute a male pronoun to this activity indicates the subversion of normative gender roles that occurred when Sada Abe killed and mutilated her lover. Ito, “Part of a Living Man.”

³⁰³ Ito, “Part of a Living Man.”

to the lungs and throat.³⁰⁴ Abe bestows upon her lover's body the feminine "gift of changeability" by removing the corpse-body's focal point: an organ that is just one part of a living man.³⁰⁵

The ability of the body to transform after death (if only through its transformation from body to corpse) layers the relationship between death and the limit. The corpse, in this text, signifies a body in transition. Hiromi Ito writes:

And then, so a corpse is, after all, kind of like that, um, I think it was originally the same, right, but that it's different, something like that, it's like it becomes something different, or, it's turned into something different, by death, yes, by death.³⁰⁶

This hesitant approach to a definitive conclusion replicates the same tentative shifting of the body within the lover's perception. The corpse continues to transform "into something different," circumnavigating the finitude death represents through constant transformation.³⁰⁷ This transformation demonstrates an understanding of the limit opening upon itself, which is supported by Michel Foucault in his essay, "A Preface to Transgression." Foucault describes the limit as opening "violently onto the limitless." For Foucault, the limit is a downward fall in a spiralling motion. He goes on to define the spiral as a symbol of plenitude, expansion and the unending.³⁰⁸ The limit is ultimately subsumed by the limitless, carried by transgression into a confrontation with what Foucault asserts is its imminent disappearance.³⁰⁹ However, in passing from one state to another, much like Hiromi Ito's corpse, it is not its disappearance that the limit faces but its imminent and endless transformation. The

³⁰⁴ Cixous and Clément describe the singularity of focus on the phallus in masculine desire in contrast to female bodies and desire as a monarchy. Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 87.

³⁰⁵ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 88.

³⁰⁶ Ito, "Part of a Living Man."

³⁰⁷ Ito, "Part of a Living Man."

³⁰⁸ Foucault, "Preface to Transgression," 34.

³⁰⁹ Foucault writes that transgression "carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognise itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall." Foucault, "Preface to Transgression," 43.

corpse replicates the changeability of the feminine body; it is both the same and never the same, a “moving and boundless change.”³¹⁰ In this sense, the corpse-body within this work embodies the same excessive plenitude. Death is not a barrier but a marker washed away by the transformative capacity of Hiromi Ito’s corpse. This corpse-that-is-not-a-corpse is an embodiment of a breathless body.

Having moved beyond the apparent limits of life, the breathless body occupies the same territories as the vampire. Imagine it: the undead body spreading with each parasitic contact its own breathless state. This othered status, transformed through passage beyond the apparent limits of life, engages with the peripheries of life and operates within liminal spaces. Although the vampiric body does not change with time, the process of transformation from living body to the undead demonstrates a transgression of the limit so dramatic that this particular body cannot be reflected in a mirror. This is not to say that the vampire has lost its reflection. The expansive process they continuously undergo cannot be represented through the static reflection of the mirror. The vampire perpetuates its own breathless state through a kiss: the vampire mouth shares breathlessness, passing it from one body to another. *These Lungs* transforms this process into an erotic exchange where shared breath collapses the boundaries between bodies:

bite into your lips my
blood translates in your
senses my body is itself
coursing within your veins
pumping through tough
muscles of our heart I
inhale you exhale you
inhale I exhale there we
stay in the moment of two
m o u t h s t o g e t h e r
as one³¹¹

The bodies of *These Lungs* shift and transform through their interaction with each other, sharing breathlessness back and forth as a fluid exchange between bodies.

³¹⁰ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 87.

³¹¹ Worden, *These Lungs*, unpaginated.

Moving within the liminal spaces of the erotic, breathlessness transforms into a gift shared between the excesses of bodies.

The transformative capacity of bodily excess transmutes the page into a live space, activated by and through the body. Ito's corpse that is not a corpse, and therefore undergoing change, is paralleled in writing's association with fixity and its contradictory changeability. The text of *These Lungs* is not dead, the writing is not archival and it does not document. Instead, it uses the excesses of an erotic bodily experience to activate a performance of writing. The limit transforms through its proximity to the body, diminishing the finite line between breath and breathlessness. Even though its *lessness* refers to an absence or a loss, breathlessness perpetuates itself and defies the models of finitude commonly applied to it. Breathlessness on the page constantly gives of itself with each encounter with its audience without repletion. This performance of breathlessness in *These Lungs* redefines notions of the limit. The text continues forward, ceaselessly, as it enacts its performance.

Conclusion

Writing excesses of the body in relation to the limit as a way of performing breathlessness on the page, raises questions surrounding the nature of the limit. Due to its close associations with erotics and death, breathlessness is rarely perceived as a liminal state capable of continual transformation. Although there are superficial links between the erotic and breathlessness through tropes surrounding the female orgasm, breathlessness can also be understood through the erotic as a self-perpetuating experience capable of infinitely generating itself on and through an interaction with the page. Reading *These Lungs* through the work of H elen  Cixous and Catherine Cl ement highlights the relationship between breathlessness and the erotic in such a way that it creates a way of navigating the *lessness* not as a loss but something other. Redefining the relationship of the erotic to the limit through embodied writing generates a model by which breathlessness performs on the pages of *These Lungs*.

The performance of *These Lungs* is present in its navigation of form as well as how this form evokes a material experience of the writing. The dual columnar form resembles the mirrored surface of Narcissus' erotic encounter but also evokes touch

and caress. Considerations of materiality and embodiment alongside form blur the peripheries of distinct sites of writing. The parameters of the limit become indistinct through the movement between column, form, material, page, body and performance. By undermining the clear delineations within the text it becomes impossible to reconcile the limit with finitude. Excess permeates *These Lungs*, proliferating along the touch of eyes and of hands, multiplying through the successive and endless encounters between bodies and through the undulations of the columns otherwise “fixed” on the page.

Conflations of death and the erotic confuse our understanding of the excesses of the body. The erotic becomes defined through its proximity to death, rather than that death, and consequently the limit, is conversely influenced. Turning these conflations around to scrutinise the perceived finitude of the limit within writing, whether that relates to breathlessness, the page or its performance, is necessary to build a better understanding of the performance of writing. Once the limit is unhinged, it becomes possible to layer breathlessness with its own excess, demonstrating its performance.

Redefining the nature of the limit opens up channels by which the apparent *lessness* of breathlessness can be approached and questioned. If breathlessness can be achieved through excesses of the body and performed through models of plenitude, what does that mean for the perceived “absence” of breath that breathlessness has come to represent? With this new understanding of the fullness of the limit and the permeability of boundaries, the intangible becomes tangible and it becomes possible to negotiate the presence of absence that is *lessness*.

CHAPTER 4. Of *Lessness*

Introduction

All language is referential, but it need not reflect concepts; when language instead refers back to the material circumstances of its own production, we can hear the murmur of its materials. When speech continues without communicating anything, when speech intransitively reaches the limit at which its communication becomes silent, we can hear the body speak.³¹²

Listen to your body speak in the silence of breathlessness: we speak through failed utterances, slippages in and out of articulatory and tripping over those signs that indicate these moments out of time, out of breath.

What is the *lessness* of breathlessness? The preceding chapters focus on proposing embodied forms of breathlessness on the page and use writing to initiate breathless states. These performances of writing inform and are informed by the material and form of the page, perpetuating a building breathlessness through their relation to each other. The seeping mucosal ectoplasm and the erotic desire of the preceding works both suggest and occlude an underlying *lessness*. By articulating *lessness* (written here in italics) as apart from breathlessness, it is possible to begin to examine the complex relationship to absence that *lessness* bears within a process of representation. Because performance writing is always bound up in a process of representation, a representation of absence will always result in some form of presence. The *lessness* of breathlessness negotiates this space, marking the trace of breath. *Lessness* indicates the space in writing where the absent becomes present. Breathlessness is not an absence; it is something else. This chapter will bridge the occlusion of *lessness* from the performance of breathlessness on the page and will explore on and through the page the *lessness* of breathlessness. Unlike the preceding chapters, this chapter merges the sites of practice and critical analysis, allowing the performance of writing to take place within the pages of this thesis and to perform a double-disruption – that of breath and of the critical form.

I embed my practice within this text to negotiate the absence of breath through permutations of *lessness* present in the writing. Inserting performance writing into this

³¹² Craig Dworkin, “The Stutter of Form,” in *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. Marjorie Perloff et al (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 167-8.

body of text draws attention to the disruptive qualities of breathlessness. Interrupting the rhythms of critical writing with creative practice calls attention to the performance of breathlessness and its impact on the body. To mark the different modes of address, italics indicate performances of *lessness* whereas a bold font distinguishes direct address of the reader from the critical analysis forming the bulk of this text. Disrupting a body of critical writing with breathless writing breaks its cohesion. This elicits a stutter, pause or break in an experience of writing. The form of writing, in this context, becomes so strained that it performs through pauses and breaks in structure. Such breaks could be perceived as failures in articulation, yet these disruptions in form allow for a performance rather than description of breathlessness. This develops the relationship between critical writing and practice-based research, creating a performance of *lessness* on these pages through performance writing. Key to this section is the conflation of grammatical units with bodily experiences, imbuing structures of writing with affective qualities that in turn muddy the distinction between performance and writing.

The perceived *lessness* of breathlessness negotiates its presence through its disruptions in the forms and rhythms of writing, the body and the page. This performance wends through the perceived absent-present binary of breathlessness, as manifested through bodily disruptions that are similarly defined by their lack of presence. *Lessness* is present in the stutters in speech, visual and literary gaps in form, in-between states of consciousness and the blank spaces of the faint. *Lessness* exists in relation to presence, characterising the absent, while simultaneously undermining the rigid division between absent and present. Breathlessness, similarly, defines itself through its relationship to breath – through the breath it does not “have”, the breath that it continually refers to and, yet, can only exist in the absence of. Acknowledging the interdependence of breath and breathlessness, and the underlying exchange that perpetuates this relationship, the following sections will navigate page-based performances of breathlessness that explore stuttering, the parenthesis, syncope and absence as extensions of *lessness*. A disruption of the whole leads to a fissuring of the notion of a whole – a gap that one might call an absence (but is not one) – an understanding of the *lessness* of breathlessness.

Stuttering draws the reader directly in to an embodied performance of language: the tongue trips over itself and the body makes its presence known. Stuttering is a physical process, impeding and affecting the verbal production of language. However, its performative action extends to the remit of writing. Stuttering undermines the rhythms of language through untimely arrhythmic interruptions that create new spaces within language and writing – spaces that exist in tension with presence. Such performative actions, which locate the stutter as a disruptive or exhaustive force within language and contend with definitions of silence and articulacy, are key to this exploration of the stutter within writing. Gilles Deleuze, in his collection *Essays Critical and Clinical*, writes of a language so strained that it begins to stutter, shifting the focus of the stutter from the literal presence in speech to its performance in writing.³¹³ This fall into silence provokes the question: is it the body that disrupts language or is it that language stumbles upon itself, having reached a point of exhaustion? Perhaps it is not a question of either/or; indeed, the body and writing both initiate performances of breathlessness on the page through their relationship to each other within a shared space. The performative qualities of the stutter direct attention to the relationship of the affected body to writing. Beginning from this position allows for an inquiry into *lessness* (and all of the connotations it may contain in terms of collapse, exhaustion and failure) within a lived, embodied and material context as negotiated through a performance of writing.

An understanding of disruptions in form as presences of *lessness* within a performance writing work can be approached by considering the writing of the stutter into language. However, the impact of syntactical marks on the text body increase the ways in which this is articulated in performance writing practice. The parenthetical mark, in all its manifestations – bracket, lunulae, and parenthesis, singular or paired – embed within the structure of the text body and create spaces for a performance of writing. Bracket is a general term that refers to a group of punctuation, which the parenthesis is part of, that are used within a text to set apart a selection of writing from the whole. Lunulae is an old-fashioned term for parenthesis (it refers directly to their shape and how they resemble the crescent shape of the moon). Although parenthesis

³¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith et al (London: Verso, 1998), 113.

and lunatae are, in theory, interchangeable terms, their movement through form to action suggested by my reference to the moon identifies the performativity of the parenthetical. The moon is in thrall to the Earth but it is the gravitational pull of the moon that leads to the tides of the seas. As with the moon's relation to the Earth, bracketed spaces exist beside and in relation to the space of the page and exert influence over its contents. Blurring the distinction between grammatical marks and their affective registers within writing highlights the complex relationship of breathlessness to binary understandings. Like breathlessness, performance writing negotiates a complex relationship between absence and presence. Description, explication, is often absent as a communicative device: the affect of the text exists precisely in the spaces of what is unsaid or absent. An understanding of the space of *lessness* evolves through the performative actions of grammatical marks and the influence of their affecting characteristics.

Duration plays an important role in distinguishing the performativity of the parenthesis in comparison to the syncope or ellipsis in writing. The parenthetical space acts more as an aside, located specifically within the material of the page, whereas syncope and ellipsis refer to a space and time exterior to the page. The ellipsis relies on the omission it enacts, whereas the syncopal function in language is to identify the omission of something known, such as the collapse of a word with an abbreviated spelling. Unlike the ellipsis, the parenthesis communicates in relation to the space of the page that it resides within and disrupts. The parenthetical mark mars the continuity of a single time and thereby introduces multiple times and textures to the page. By referring to something outside the materiality of the page, syncope and ellipsis create modes in which not only is the time of page infinitely expanded but also distinctions between absence and presence are blurred.

As a diacritical mark the ellipsis indicates an undetermined span or space occurring outside of the body of the text. The ellipsis directs the reader to an othered space, one that is exterior to the present and occurs within its own time. Similarly, syncope can be used to describe othered states. Syncope has multiple meanings; it describes an omission of sounds or letters within a word, loss of consciousness due to disrupted blood flow or a skipped beat within a musical composition. The emphasis here is on how syncope operates between things and how this informs an

understanding of *lessness*. Elliptical spaces within the body of a text enact a syncopal experience, gesturing towards a place exterior to the text yet simultaneously present and experienced. Ellipsis and parenthesis affect the material experience of the page, simultaneously creating spaces both inside and outside the time of the page. Just as writing within the parenthetical mark is not absent but beside, the location of the syncopal experience is both present in the body but also resistant to representation. These in-between spaces that syncope negotiates through the body are similar to the performance material that amendments to the structure, form and material surface of the page create. Bodily understandings of syncope extend outward, overlapping with performances on the page to offer up further interpretations of what this perceived absence of breath contained within *lessness* can be.

The final section of this chapter focusses on the nature of *lessness* and explores the co-dependency and disintegrating binaries between absence and presence. This shifts the focus from the use of grammatical forms to intervene and perform *lessness* to manifestations of absence in the text-body. These perceived absences interact with writing beyond the remit of grammatical units and expand to include gestures within writing that initiate a performance of *lessness* on the page. As permutations of *lessness*, these literal absences, gaps and pauses in the structures of writing operate through gesture and affect, overturning binary distinctions between absence and presence. Bridging from an expanded understanding of the performative actions of semantic units, these gestural interventions in writing invite new understandings of the durational and affective properties of *lessness* on the page.

Twisting Tongues and Blurry Binaries

I was saying: Promethea has already put in so much that is hers and more, she drew unstintingly on her organs, her desires, her memory; the text can be said to be made, physically, morally, nervously, and above all virtuously, mostly of her.³¹⁴

We will start from the body, beginning with the stutter, over which the tongue trips. The stutter in common parlance refers to a speech disorder. The World

³¹⁴ Hélène Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, trans. Betsey Wing (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 5.

Health Organization defines it as “characterised by frequent repetition or prolongation of sounds or syllables or words, or by frequent hesitations or pauses that disrupt the rhythmic flow of speech.”³¹⁵ The stutter indicates a disruption or snag that places a mode of exhalation outside the norms of articulation. The stutter exists within the same disrupted space as the pause between inhalation and exhalation. Both body activities suggest an alternative to binary perceptions of states of being, experiences of the body and modes of performance. A narrative of a body between states evolves within this writing, placing itself literally within the critical body of writing. This narrative judders the critical form, through a literal, visual and structural disruption of critical analysis. Writing performs the stutter as a mode of disrupting breath and articulating the *lessness* of breathlessness on the page, enacting itself in this text through critical writing interwoven with a disjointed narrative of a body between states. Approaching the stutter from the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Craig Dworkin, this section examines the relationship between the disruption of speech and the body emerging from writing as a performance of *lessness*. The position of the stutter within communication as a form of disability draws out the implications of failure inherent to *lessness* and allows for a more complicated understanding of *lessness* to evolve. These differing forms of writing draw attention to the shifts between states, performing what comprises the *lessness* of breathlessness.

(promethean endeavour) warm skin of invisible hairs: illusion of butter left out overnight our knife transforms it into epidermis (layer (existing of many others) that) slowly reveal themselves like the interior of a squash

Prometheus is a Titan condemned to spend eternity chained to a rock where his liver is eaten by an eagle and is by each dawn regenerated: his body is perpetually

³¹⁵ “The ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioural disorders: clinical descriptions and diagnostic guidelines,” Geneva: World Health Organization, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2010/en#/F98.5>

disrupted, excavated and consumed. Chained to a rock, the miraculous properties of his anatomy allow his liver regrow and to be eaten daily, eternally, over and over again. His body is a site of excavation where what is excised and absent continually returns – regrows. The cavities of his body are never truly empty as they are constantly replenished by the conditions of his damnation.

Hard-won and juicy, a cavity forms when muscle folds over splayed into an inventory of objects:

the toughest of hearts, draining out fast all emotion washing with each muscular squeeze

sunken lungs of pink sponge

blackest slippery liver, lived-in (love-her/I)

twin hard kidneys, tucked away, behind the guts cutting deeper to reach:

those twin sacs, antlers embracing the pouch

treasure chests filled with tiny glittering jewels, miniscule and precious. So mundane and lost, expelling at a constant rate

not knowing it was a diamond but they

set it on ice (a delicacy)

The endocrines. The bladder. The primordial gut. The bile duct. Wasted, along with the contents of the intestines and the bowels. (These must not be disrupted.)

Eyes and lips and tongue: repurposed I disappears over time cut a sliver of knowledge laying here (carved) am knowledge laid open

In Hélène Cixous' novel, *The Book of Promethea*, Promethea is a "she" without distinct form and her constantly shifting state re-enacts the miraculous regenerative quality of Prometheus' liver. Because Promethea is freed from a fixed form, when asked if she is a woman the response is: "Yes. No. Y-Yes...Naynayno. Whynoyes."³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, 8.

Promethea stammers out an articulation of gender that appears contradictory. However, it is not contradiction but a vacillation between states that is expressed in this particular stutter. The stutter becomes a mode by which Cixous navigates a perceived absence of identifying organs. The focus here is not on the absence of a consistent form but the ways in which these shifting states enter into language and how this is expressed through the rifts of disruption.

A rift is not a rift. This is the first conclusion that can be drawn from Promethea's stammered response. "Yes" and "No" expand into sing-song permutations of themselves, becoming both positive and negative, affirming and denying. It is not that gender is necessarily irrelevant here but that, as Cixous clarifies:

First, never had Promethea thought of saying: "I am a woman."
(Though she is...) No, the truth is: Promethea IS. Is Promethea.
(Inside IS – so wonderful.) (The book that follows is inside her. It is
maybe even her womb itself.)³¹⁷

Promethea's gender is more complex than a simple binary difference; her existence can only be expressed between the stops and starts of language. The displacement and relocation of the reproductive organs within writing create a collapse of difference that the text trips over. These movements initiate a stutter. Fallibility lies not with the stutterer (Promethea) but with the language that only offers such reductive terms. In order to convey the complexity of these shifts, language itself must undergo a similar procedure – it must stutter. Cixous embeds writing within the body and blurs the distinction between the body that is written and writing that is embodied. These blurs and shifts between distinct forms and functions initiate a performance of what Cristof Migone describes as: "the pervasiveness, persistence and proliferation of the stutter."³¹⁸ Migone also identifies that the performativity of the stutter (as inarticulacy) "impedes the dissipation of the nebulous, it serves as reminder that the polysemic must be heard amplified by the

³¹⁷ Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, 8-9.

³¹⁸ Cristof Migone, "Untitled Performance," in *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language*, ed. Brandon LaBelle et al (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001), 170.

polyphonic.”³¹⁹ Migone positions the polysemic as contingent on the polyphonic, suggesting that a multiplicity of meanings is possible through a shift in the emphasis of writing towards its experiential, affective and material properties. The pulling out of Prometheus’ flesh in all its renditions, from Hesiod’s early plays to the transformation of Prometheus into a tragic hero in Aeschylus, remains purely demonstrative, focussing on the semantic properties of language rather than its performance or affect. Conversely, in Cixous’ novel, the permeability of the flesh is present in and through the writing – the stuttering out of sex strains the confines of semantic language in order to perform the stuttering within writing that is necessary to convey Promethea’s gender. The stutter accommodates space for the nebulous and ill-defined within lapses of writing.

it croaked out, the response croaked out, a frog, caught in the throat, croaked, the croak, being a cry, creases in the folds of the throat and on the parched tongue (unoiled creaking) cracks due to a dissipation of moisture (insides gone dry) time for a wipe down! I creak out...could’ve said catching at all sides of the muscular mass sticking to the soft palate, my croak, my croak exceeds all utterances...formulations, my croak issues in absence of a dribble or a drool...

Writing becomes the landscape through which rupture, as an opening of perceived *lessness*, takes place: it takes on the halting, humming and murmuring qualities of the stutter. Gilles Deleuze begins his essay, “He Stuttered,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, by disseminating different forms of stuttering in writing. He lists examples where writers have introduced a stammer into inscribed speech or have indicated its presence through direction. Deleuze refers to J. L. Austin’s work on performative writing when he indicates another manifestation of stuttering in writing: “when the stuttering no longer affects pre-existing words, but itself introduces the words it affects; these words no longer exist independently of the stutter, which selects and links them together through itself.”³²⁰ Deleuze disentangles the stutter from speech

³¹⁹ Migone, “Untitled Performance,” 170.

³²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith et al (London: Verso, 1998), 107.

and identifies that the writer can become a “*stutterer in language*.”³²¹ He describes how this occurs in Samuel Beckett’s work, citing the novel *Watt* as well as Beckett’s poem *What is the Word* (1988), a translation of *Comment Dire?*(1982), as exploring what he refers to as the “disjunctions” within the writing and how they perform the stutter.³²² *What is the Word* demonstrates the stutter through a repetition of alliterating words and phrases:

folly -
folly for to -
for to -
what is the word -
folly from this -
all this -
folly from all this -
given -
folly given all this -
seeing -
folly seeing all this -
this -
what is the word -
this this -
this this here -
all this this here -
folly given all this -³²³

Beckett dedicates the poem to Joe Chaikin, a long-term collaborator and director of some of Beckett’s plays, who suffered from partial aphasia following a stroke.³²⁴ By dedicating the poem to Chaikin, Beckett contextualises the poem within the inarticulate space of Chaikin’s aphasiac condition – at the very edge of speech production. Alliteration of the fricative “f” sound initiates a repetition that replicates

³²¹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 107.

³²² Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 110-111.

³²³ Samuel Beckett, “Comment Dire What is the Word?,” in *Selected Poems 1930-1989*, ed. David Wheatley (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 191. The dash in the block quote is the same as used by Beckett.

³²⁴ Eileen Blumenthal, “Taking Speech to Its Limits,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1987, accessed October 13, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/07/theater/taking-speech-to-its-limits.html>.

the difficulties that the stutterer undergoes. Beckett similarly repeats “this” without ever articulating what “this” could be, performatively placing the subject “this” outside of the recall of the speaker. The dashes that follow each fragment indicate a trailing off of a statement, suggesting that there is something left unsaid or that something prevents the saying of something. Additionally, the breathy alliteration of the “f” in Beckett’s work performs the same aphasic mush-making of language production. To not be able to recall a word is not the same as it not existing. Aphasia produces the same conditions within the mind under which *lessness* operates. The individual consistencies of the words in Beckett’s work break down on a verbal level, performing Deleuze’s stutter in language. Under these conditions, words lose what Anne Carson refers to in *Eros the Bittersweet* as the edges of words that writing introduces into language.³²⁵ Carson writes that “heard words have no edges, or varying edges,” while later clarifying that consonant sounds mark the boundaries of words.³²⁶ These boundaries extend to the body of the reader as writing introduces separation both visually and performatively. The variable edge to words strains against the perceived constrictions of writing, making space for a performance of writing to permeate through the delineated limits of the page and into the body.

Consider the moment where Deleuze creates his own stutter within language, exhausting language in order to achieve the affective weight of the stutter. Deleuze describes “*a language so strained that it starts to stutter...*” and enacts the stutter through falling into ellipsis.³²⁷ The ellipsis creates a brief pause, enacting the moment that Deleuze concludes is when “*language in its entirety reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence.*”³²⁸ The lines of this sentence embody strain through italicising the words describing the condition of language, placing it under pressure that results in a trailing off into ellipsis. Ellipsis cannot define what this

³²⁵ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 30-61. Carson writes extensively on the edges of words, comparing the differences between oral and written forms of language and defining written words as “separable, controllable units of meaning, each with its own fixed and independent use.”

³²⁶ Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 50, 55.

³²⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 113.

³²⁸ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 113.

silence is: it is a failing not of the sentence but of language itself. Reading may rely on an inhibition of the senses but in instances of performance writing its affective qualities require an interaction with the page that encompasses the entire body. Writing that extends beyond its semantic function reaches out to affect the organs and limbs of the body and create its performance within them.

Consider the role of the tongue in Antonin Artaud's work (in as much as he proposes a body without organs, comprised solely of electric nerves). The performative qualities of Artaud's writing enact an exhaustion of language that manifests as a linguistic stutter. Utterances from Artaud's work require that they occur at a point of lassitude, exploring the same terrain that Deleuze distinguishes as the purview of the stutter. In Artaud's radio play, *To Have Done With The Judgement Of God* (1947) the author demands that:

Everything must
be arranged
to a hair
in a fulminating
order.³²⁹

Artaud removes this sentence, along with the glossolalic utterances that frame it in the written version of the piece (the repetition of the violent expulsion of *kré, kré, kré*), from the broadcast version. The term glossolalic, as employed extensively by Allen Weiss, implies a tongueless speech.³³⁰ This is misleading. The plosives Artaud inscribes are wholly bodily. *Kré, kré, kré* emerges from a tripping of the tongue and teeth over an escaping breath. The plosive sounds of the consonants forming the non-linguistic words are enhanced by Artaud's use of the term fulminating, suggesting that they exit the body with a violence akin to the stutter. These tones emerge from a grating of the tongue against the throat, requiring from the reader that they collapse the edges between the words and their body to allow a performance of writing.

³²⁹ Antonin Artaud, *Watchfiends & Rack Screams: Works from the Final Period*, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman et al (Boston: Exact Change, 1995), 283.

³³⁰ Weiss writes at length about the correlation between glossolalia and Artaud's writing practice. Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 19-21.

Writing exhaustively tends to read as the total interrogation of a specific subject or theme. In this sense, writing serves to fix ideas rather than explore them performatively. This overlooks the affective potential of writing, particularly in the ways that grammatical conventions impact an experience of writing. I explore exhausting sentence structure in a short piece from 2015 entitled “Orientation really only means that something is rising”:

I am walking down the road. Out of the corner of my eye I see a blackbird perched on the roof of a car. I glance again and see that it was never there. On the ground, as I walk further, a flickering pigeon forms a ball with its body and rolls away from my footsteps as a crumpled paper bag.³³¹

The punctuation in this piece is terse at the outset of the paragraph. The sentences are brief. They initiate a rhythm that the final sentence overturns, drawing out the breath to perpetuate the same disorientation leading to the hallucination described in the final sentence. The eye rolls forwards and the body exhausts itself in following the movement of the transformation of one thing into another. A sigh fills the respite (the paragraph break) following the conclusion of the sentence.

(Imagine here a space of panting:

Breathing in quick succession with brief inhalations panting works to draw breath rapidly into the

the pant allows the body to recover from the strain of the stutter its

its action in opposition to the irregular and violent expulsion of breath that accompanies the

³³¹ Jessica Worden, “Orientation really only means that something is rising,” *Spectrum* 3 (2015): 5, accessed November 1, 2015, [http://artistsmovingimage.net/onewebmedia/CAPTURE% 20PDF.pdf](http://artistsmovingimage.net/onewebmedia/CAPTURE%20PDF.pdf).

*the Panting articulates physiological and psychological strains and uses
uses rapid inhalations of breath to regulate the flows of the
the taking in saturating the body with oxygen
However, when the duration extends to a longer period of time
time leads to a hyperventilation manifesting in the same symptoms as suffocation a
tingling in the lips and limbs
limp numbness and black-out*

)

Imagine here, in the silence that the stutter confronts, a listening to the body:

Silence is far from the final outcome of the stuttermen within language. Craig Dworkin, in his essay “The Stutter of Form,” points out that in the silence of language, when speech and language have become so strained that they no longer communicate, it becomes possible to listen to the body.³³² It is through this strained procedure that the body presents itself. In the inarticulate space of the stutter, the body is far from silent. Dworkin introduces the notion of disability towards the end of his essay, but he does so largely in contrast to his exploration of writers who have handled the formal aspects of the stutter within language. His interest lies in what he summarises as:

The stutter structures language in two opposing directions, both blocking certain speech and impeding the facile consumption of language, while at the same time permitting or producing literary compositions based on its formal characteristics.³³³

Dworkin points out that the stutter – due to its ability to negotiate the paradox of its premise, what Dworkin terms, “the impeding and the productive, between the embodied individual and the social abstract” – challenges “the ideologies of normalcy, fluency, transparently communicative expository eloquence, and any notion of dematerialised or disembodied language.”³³⁴ The juxtaposition of the performance of the stutter within language to the individual allows for parallels to emerge between

³³² Dworkin, “The Stutter of Form,” 168.

³³³ Dworkin, “The Stutter of Form,” 182.

³³⁴ Dworkin, “The Stutter of Form,” 182-3.

states of disability and permutations of *lessness*. Michael Davidson, whom Dworkin also references, has written extensively on the role of disability in the production of art and argues that writing can serve as the site by which the normalised body can be undermined and redefined – through a writing that “defamiliarises not only language but the body normalised *within* language.”³³⁵ Davidson’s work challenges the prevalence of a normalised body within the arts through the examples he uses to highlight the role of the disabled body within the production of art. The breathless body is similarly aberrant, signifying a state of tension, anxiety and danger, away from what is seen as the “default” position of calm stability. The negative connotations of *lessness* pervade perceptions of the breathless body as less – less able, less normal, less stable, less whole.

Lessness, within the context of permutations of failure in writing, refers to lapses in formal structure and consequently alludes to breaks in the forms and structures writing. The disruption of the “hale” paragraph or the structure of an essay, such as the spaces occupied by the italicised text that does not entirely comply with any existing rhythm, performs the stutter within the space of this text. These interjections also fail to announce themselves. The slant of the italicised word alters its weight and propels itself into the path of the reader. These stutters do not result in absences – they generate spaces wherein presences of writing manifest through the lapses left in the wake of semantic failure. The stutter highlights the fallibility of the body, pushing its representation outside of semantic and structural norms, and suggests modes by which the performance of writing initiates understandings of what the *lessness* of breathlessness can be.

Reading the absence of breath through the lens of *lessness* challenges the perception of what it means to be “less than” and consequently *without* characteristics or markers of the hale body. Hale meaning, of course, to be whole, to be filled and full of something like health. The relationship of breath to the fallibilities of the body is central to the sound work *News Piece 9 8 2011*, one of a series of altered news broadcasts by Holly Pester that extract and crystallise the inhalations of breath made

³³⁵ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand, Disability and the Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 118.

by BBC Radio 4 newscasters.³³⁶ Pester preserves key phrases and words that suggest the content of the various news stories upon an exhalation, distilling the individual journalistic reports into singular emphatic sighs. This gives the recording a stilted and panting quality. Through the emphasis on the points of pause within speech Pester highlights the points in speech where the voice recovers itself and transforms this moment into a faltering stumble.

Pester's work enacts what Deleuze terms the "minorisation" of language, comparing the way that minor chords create "dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium" to forms of writing wherein language begins to stutter.³³⁷ The effects of minorisation draw parallels to the performances of *lessness* within writing, minor being also lesser than. Pester creates her own *minor* writing by embracing the often ignored breaths that permeate radio broadcasts, using them to make a language that, as Deleuze predicts, exceeds the possibilities of speech.³³⁸ Pester's performance uses the flexibilities of language to create an instant of impossibility within speech, lodging speech within the bodily process of breathing. Although Pester's work focusses on speech acts, performed poetry and sound art, her relationship to language locates itself within the interstices of writing and speech. Having created a stammering inarticulacy through highlighting breath, Pester's work explores the temporary space of the stutter through the underlying vulnerabilities of the body. These literal pauses expose the unreliability of perceptions of *lessness*. Pauses transform into content, demonstrating a performance of the *lessness* of breathlessness.

³³⁶ "News Piece," Holly Pester, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://www.hollypester.com/poetry/news-piece/>. Holly Pester, *News Piece 9 8 2011* (Holly Pester, 2011), from SOUNDCLOUD, MP3, 3:31, accessed September 1, 2015, <https://soundcloud.com/holly-pester/news-piece-9-8-2011>. Pester compiled a series of her news sound pieces to create "The Murmur Line" (2012), a piece exploring limits of the voice through breath expenditure.

³³⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 109.

³³⁸ "They are great writers by virtue of this minorisation: they make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch's line, ceaselessly placing in a state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms, following an incessant modulation. This exceeds the possibilities of speech [...]" Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 109.

similarities in experiences of writing that is heard in a reading or recording and writing that only exists for an audience of one in the mind of the reader. He writes:

There is a wide and inevitable disparity between how we hear the poem when we read it silently, and how we sound it, saying it aloud; the poem performed in the head is an imagined poem in the world of sound. This may be why, when we voice the poem, we can never match what we breathe to what we think we heard. The inward speaking we hear as we read it not the voice we hear when we outwardly speak, and the noises we make when we read a poem aloud are never the noises we think the poem makes.³³⁹

Quartermain questions “the noises we think the poem makes,” highlighting the disparities in experiences of writing. He does not suggest that one experience of a reading is less valid than the other, nor any less “live”, but simply that each sounding of a piece of writing is always in relation to the moment in time it is read and the bodies that read it. When Quartermain writes that “we can never match what we breathe,” he identifies that the materiality of a body impacts the reading of writing, that, in this sense, writing is affected by the reading body thereby creating singular and unique permutations of writing. The stutter performs within the incongruent rhythms of writing and language. Like breathlessness, the stutter is dependent on the disparate spaces *in between* language.

What are those spaces *in between* language? The spaces created within the body of the text through disruptions in language and on the page craft modes by which the *lessness* of breathlessness can move into a performance on the page. Stuttering within writing is reliant on negotiations of form that disrupt or draw attention to alterations of form. Because the stutter occurs at the collapse of language and form, it suggests similar strategies for constructing a performance of breathlessness through performance writing practice.

³³⁹ Peter Quartermain, “Sound Reading,” in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 221.

Temporal Fugue of the Parenthetical

A play with the different forms and structures of writing allows for a recuperation of the distance that semantics introduce to writing. Instead of relying on the semantic properties of writing to convey information, these interventions shift the focus to a material and embodied experience of writing and language. The parenthesis in particular highlights the embodied and material attributes of the page by introducing multiple surfaces to a single structure. A concept of multiple surfaces enhances the performativity of the “blank” spaces created by the parenthetical mark and questions the underlying *lessness* they are perceived to contain. The *lessness* within the temporal layers of the page manifest through the spaces contained within parenthetical marks and between words; this occurs through italicised textual interventions as well as critical analysis of precedent use of the parenthetical form. One convention for writing contained within parenthetical marks is that it remains unspoken. This specific instance of auditory omission identifies a form of absence through presence within writing. In this sense, the space within parentheses – and the writing contained within it – performs the same negotiation of a presence through absence as enacted by the breathless state. The parenthesis negotiates the material premise of breathlessness by replicating the material conditions of its inception on the space of the page. (*And take a breath.*)

The parenthesis appears to be “fixed” within language however a reading of its operative attributes and character blurs the ways in which the parenthetical mark operates on the page. In the essay “E. E. Cummings’s Parentheses: Punctuation as Poetic Device,” Roi Tartakovsky asserts that the semantic function of punctuation is “fuzzy”, despite the number of handbooks devoted normalising the application of punctuation within writing.³⁴⁰ Attributing fuzziness to punctuation suggests what Tartakovsky describes as the “semantic in-between-ness” of punctuation and how this characteristic opens up the function of individual punctuation marks for personal

³⁴⁰ Roi Tartakovsky, “E. E. Cummings’s Parentheses: Punctuation as Poetic Device,” *Style* 43, no. 2 (2009): 215, accessed July 25, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.43.2.215>. Tartakovsky chooses to capitalise e. e. cummings, despite the poet’s decision to defy conventions and use lower case when writing his name.

interpretation, appropriation and innovation.³⁴¹ Tartakovsky limits his description of marks of punctuation to “fuzzy” and “opaque”, concentrating on the texture and performance of a perceived materiality.³⁴² However, the personification of the semicolon in Gertrude Stein’s essay “Poetry and Grammar” (which Tartakovsky uses to push his argument forward) attributes human qualities to punctuation, indicating not a fuzziness to punctuation but a fugue-ness.³⁴³ (*pause*) The fluctuating characteristics of personified marks of punctuation in Stein’s essay position the identities and consequent performances of marks of punctuation as susceptible to the shifts of a fugue state. Stein notably fails to attribute any personality to the parenthesis. The parenthesis slips from Stein’s essay, not necessarily because it is overlooked or ignored but because the parenthesis embodies the fugue state through its non-presence. The performativity of the parenthetical mark within a text body acts as an insertion of a dissociative fugue. It works as a gap within the larger identity of a work, performing a presence within an absence.

(And breathe in again, in big gulps.)

This brings us closer to the tensions of the parenthesis in relation to the body of the text. (*Haltingly. Stumble.*) The fugue addresses the oratory dilemma concerning the presence (and iteration) of writing contained within parentheses. Parenthetical writing slips from speech. It remains on the page, unspoken, both present and absent. Invoking the phenomenon of the phantom limb, through a slippage from parenthesis to prosthetic, the unease of constantly feeling around for something not “there” captures the performance of the parenthesis within writing. This same tension is caught

³⁴¹ Tartakovsky, “E. E. Cummings’s Parentheses: Punctuation as Poetic Device,” 215.

³⁴² Tartakovsky, “E. E. Cummings’s Parentheses: Punctuation as Poetic Device,” 215-216.

³⁴³ Gertrude Stein, *Lectures In America*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (Boston: Beacon Press, Boston, 1985), 214-222. Tartakovsky also cites Stein’s work, using the logic of her personification of the semicolon to argue the fuzziness of marks of punctuation. Tartakovsky, “E. E. Cummings’s Parentheses: Punctuation as Poetic Device,” 216.

within the moment of breathlessness where a struggle to encapsulate what this nothing is takes place. The place of the parenthesis *beside* the text body introduces a movement in and out of a temporal space distinct to the present of the text. The representation of a “missing” appendage as a new form perpetuates the present absence of the parenthetical space while simultaneously performing new modalities of the live. The “lack” of breath inherent in the breathless state similarly gestures towards the absent presence of breath within breathlessness.

(Imagine here a space of

)

The text suggests you imagine a space – and then breaks off. The break could mean a gasp or an exhalation. The text remains open for the body of the reader to respond to the space in parentheses. In Emmanuelle Waeckerle’s artist’s book *PRAELUDERE* the author inserts a command to inhale between parentheses and thereby defines the performative action of the space.³⁴⁴ She reserves a space within the body of the text – both separate to and contained within it – for inhalation. Waeckerle describes her work as four ballads, “verbal scores,” with the potential to be activated and enacted by any one or anywhere.³⁴⁵ Her command articulates the often silent and implied inhalation as determined by punctuation but also simultaneously removes it from the text. By writing an inhalation, Waeckerle identifies and articulates breath on the page but, paradoxically, her use of parenthesis implies that the inhalation remains unspoken. In *PRAELUDERE* arrows direct the gaze upwards to each command to “inhale” which allots a visual as well as verbal pause for breath. Waeckerle’s score creates room for breath that is simultaneously absent and present in a performance of breathlessness. Is the space in parenthesis a breathless space? Is the parenthetical statement breathless because it might be

³⁴⁴ Emmanuelle Waeckerle, *PRAELUDERE* (London: MOIeditions, 2013), 4.

³⁴⁵ “PRAELUDERE,” Emmanuelle Waeckerle, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.ewaeckerle.com/projectbox/PRAELUDERE/>.

unspoken? Perhaps. The parenthesis demarcates a space separate to the text, yet contained within the text, forming and shaping readings as well as innovating new modalities of form through temporal presence.

(breadth of a pair of lungs)

(pumping of a heart)

(gesture of oxygen molecules)

(streams of blood)

The presence of the parenthesis in writing iterates a material trace of form, as implemented in the translations of Sappho by Anne Carson. Carson initiates a twofold performance of the square bracket within her translations of Sappho. She describes her use of them in *If Not, Winter* (2003) as a way of indicating “missing matter,” writing that they “are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it.”³⁴⁶ Carson discards the syntactical function of the square bracket in her text and uses it to recall its function within writing to iterate a performance of absence. The single square bracket disrupts the materiality of the page with the absence it represents, simultaneously performing what it is intended to represent – both in this text and in Carson’s translation. Brackets permeate the page, performing Carson’s experience of the original document as well as the movement and escape of breath from the body. At one point, Carson conveys an absence in the body of the original

³⁴⁶ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter* (London: Virago Press, 2002), xi. She goes on to iterate: “I emphasise the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it.” Her specific use of *affect* further underlines the embodied experience that she conveys through the use of square brackets. Lunatae retain their syntactical function and are used to isolate the phrase *now again*, a translation of a temporal adverb. These serve to crystallise the “newness” of the moment, calling to attention, a moment in an erotic poem that reads as a gasp or an orgasm. (See also Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 3, 357-8.)

document as “and neither any [] nor any,” placing the square brackets in a traditional configuration to isolate the space between two occluding statements.³⁴⁷ The square brackets initiate palimpsestual layerings of material absence, articulated in each fragment with performative marking, through the parentheses to create a material presence of absence. Like Carson’s use of bracketing in her translations, the parenthetical spaces contain activities absent from the text-body and direct the reader to consider their own body. The performative residue of these marks transposes writing into the live and identifies parenthetical modes of performance.

In the article, “Reading the Parenthesis,” Robert Grant Williams challenges the tendency to relate to the parenthesis as an interruption.³⁴⁸ He seeks to redefine the position of parenthesis by questioning the hierarchy of the parenthetical text in relation to the larger body of the text. Williams relies on the etymological root of this mark, using the Greek origin of the word, meaning: to place in beside.³⁴⁹ The placement of the parenthesis mitigates the syntactical and grammatical structures of the sentence it is contained within, altering the literal and figurative readings. Referring to the parenthesis, Williams writes:

turns the text inside out, outside in, in and around itself, upside down
[...]. A rhetorical figure dividing a discourse against itself, the trope of
the parenthesis establishes an alternative syntactic space whose
position forces the reader to consider its relationship with ‘properly
grammatical syntactic’ space.³⁵⁰

The parenthesis does not function exterior to the text but instead creates spaces next to and within existing textual spaces. What would normally be considered a gap or an interruption transforms into a textual space *beside* as well as *within* another textual space. The parenthesis functions in relation to the space that it is placed beside and within. It displaces the surrounding text in order to create room for itself within the larger discourse and, by doing so, impacts the perceived wholeness of the text body as well as the reading of the body it now accompanies. The parenthesis becomes a

³⁴⁷ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 187.

³⁴⁸ Robert Grant Williams, “Reading the Parenthesis,” *SubStance* 22, no. 1 (1993): 53 - 66, accessed December 5, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3684730>.

³⁴⁹ Williams, “Reading the Parenthesis,” 60.

³⁵⁰ Williams, “Reading the Parenthesis,” 65.

point of permeation within the text. It functions like an open mouth: containing constantly escaping breath that exists only in relation to the body it escapes from but nonetheless transforming the body through its relationship to it.

Developing a permeable model of the page, in relation to the body and, by extension, performance, is possible by applying Deleuze's concept of the schizophrenic body to the page. He states in his book *The Logic of Sense* that: "Everything is body and corporeal. Everything is a mixture of bodies, and inside the body, interlocking and penetration."³⁵¹ Turning to the page as a material perceived primarily along its surface, Deleuze's assertion that "everything" is corporeal allows for an understanding of the text as not a surface but an embodied depth to evolve. When Deleuze writes that "everything is body," he allows the surface of the page to transform from a surface into a thickness. Deleuze simultaneously rejects the idea of surfaces in relation to what he calls the "schizophrenic" body, reconceiving the body as a sieve consisting of increasing depths waiting to be penetrated.³⁵² In this sense, the page is body and the page is corporeal. Within the logic of the schizophrenic body a "collapse of the surface" invites a penetration into the depths of corporeality through the porosity of the page.³⁵³ Writing mediates the penetration of the page and becomes the pathway by which permeation rejects the page's perceived superficiality. When handling questions surrounding the nature of performance in relation to writing as a performance practice, the page-become-body enables a more generous perception of writing's performance potential. Simultaneously, the thickened page creates an environment wherein the parenthesis penetrates different temporal terrains, initiating many different times of the present.

Within Deleuze's thickened terrains, the parenthesis performs alongside the surfaces of the text, never fully within and never fully without. Despite the fugue-like nature of the parenthetical, its occupation of time is particularly limited. Although it may take positions alongside the present of writing, the duration of the parenthetical space is determined by the enclosure it performs. The nature of the parenthetical is

³⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2004), 99.

³⁵² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 99.

³⁵³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 100.

to be brief – a comment in passing. The parenthetical form demarcates a space separate from the text, contained within the page, which informs and shapes a reading without necessarily being “present”: its performance is a material remnant of an emergent live experience. The trace of the parenthetical space on the page is determined by its own relationship to materiality; it occurs through inscription but evokes different temporal spaces within the inscribed surface. Like the space contained within the parenthesis, this section is brief. It captures just a tiny breath of *lessness*. Consider the parenthetical space as the syncopal remnant, a mark of interruption that performs itself.

(A cough lasts no more than a second, forced out through the lungs and throat, and disappears into memory. It is a production of the body that displaces the perceived presence of the body. It transfers the focus to an instant in a process of passing. A cough occupies the transitory space of between-ness.)

Syncope as Elliptical Space: *Lessness* as Between-ness

*eye lids flutter and roll doll-like against movement being tipped up and down
“Mommy!” it would cry this mechanical sound of weeping coming from closed lips
eyes do not open no response to no sounds issue not even a groan or a giggle unmoving
with a stillness of a dead fish no electric singing in the slime of the exterior wiping
down skin giving endlessly inward bruised peaches the trickle of yellow liquid
remorseless weeping incomprehensible soundless expressions motionless silent
porcelain cracks along the brittle edges unmade by friction and motion between caught
lips relaxing into a grimace of drool against skin pooling twitch-less from the slightest
brush of a feather or a pin dragging piercing the slow glide of metal rushing
murmuring static whirring blur buzz tread of soft steps in canvas heavily veined from
standing a hair out of place remains curled half covering a sightless eye and nostril
inflating with the slightest of gestures lightless pineal core unflexing ravelling out a
dense pulsating globe moving inwards towards flat laying flesh rolling doughy wet
pink unwieldy and defenceless the sword swallower’s envy permeates an attack of the
interior to perpetuate within the soft tissues lubricated in saliva and tearing open so
quickly with the slightest force leading to the damp corners behind the ribs that rise*

and fall to the beat of beep flickering iridescent glow in the semi-dark artificial light casting shadows beneath and along an open cluster of curtains spilt milk rustling as efficient breezes by aging white paint embedded in a heavy stink of wipe-clean oil-based emulsions light emerges slowly from black

*a grimace contorts the skin browning flesh mealy winter apple pressed against invisible and darkening under a painful flash of sparklers fizzing away in the black of night the crackle and pop of bones and joints and ligaments rearranged unaware by strange hands feeling for strange heart beats and listening to the slow soft gasps whistling past nostrils swollen tongues and the driest lips cracked and coated in peeling skin of the lightest layers of an onion falling away with a single gentle caress of brittle parchment dampened crinkle crackle from the furthest reaches rooms away even miles underground as the tiniest gurgling from rivers of blood rushing through the ears pulsating into the recesses of the body thrumming under a mechanical beat of the heart pumping and pumping even after the body forgets to breathe and the soft tissues inflate under the pressures of gasses flowing through tubes and masks and the care of others who use two hands to prop open the lips push aside the tongue and penetrate deep into the throat plastic implements like the architecture of caves assisting the areas where the air is stale deprived of nutrients where the yellow bird stops singing where rapidly pulsating pink organs littered with dark veins simply
stop*

(And I bring you back)

(And I bring me back)

(We bring us back)

(We are back)

dim corners of a space saturated by overblown highlights from the beams of sun entering by way of a window although this shape, like all other shapes, is unformed and blurred each relating to the other by way of form and light against dark the gradations of which shift and transform through the movement of objects becoming other things that speak

*a cacophony of birds is how it sounds undistinguishable this mush of time and space
a soup unrecognisable outside of its liquid form spilling out over everything*

An interruption, a silence, an omission: the ellipsis replicates syncope within the experience of writing. The function of the syncope in writing is not limited to the ellipsis; it is a grammatical term that describes the omission of the interior of a word or the collapse of an enunciation. The function of the syncope in language is many things. It is more than a lapse or an absence. It is more than an omission. Syncope identifies a passage outside of the time of things, becoming a gap in life and living and entering into some breathless form. Ellipses act as disruptions within the time and space of writing while simultaneously functioning entirely within its remit. Syncope negotiates the performance on the page by referring back to the material origins and embodied aspects of writing. By doing so, this operative model of syncope initiates overflows of writing into the live. The ellipsis indicates an unfixed duration, an unstable presence that can only appear through its absence – it is a gesture that becomes itself through its own elision. Like the parenthesis, the ellipsis beds within the material of the page. The page becomes layered with multiple times and spaces through this process, shifting writing into the live. These perceived lapses within writing create disruptions within the time of the page as they shift from marks to performative gestures. The mark collapses and permeates through the material of the page, becoming live, performative and embodied. Like the moment of syncope, this shift is temporary and fleeting and can only occur through dissonance. The transitory nature of syncope performs the ephemeral in-between-ness of breathlessness, as a time outside of time, while also suggesting possible manifestations of the *lessness* of breathlessness.

The moment of syncope is fixed to the bodily. It is understood through disruptions in natural rhythms and flows, through instances of a brief absence or lapse. Collapses in language that rely on the relationship between the written and oral – particularly in the grammatical function of the syncope – draw attention to the fleshiness of writing. In the poem “Epithalamion” Gerard Manley Hopkins contracts the space between individual words to form tongue-thick articulations like:

Built of chancequarried, selfquained locks,

And the water warbles over into, filleted with glassy grassy
quicksilvery shives and shoots
And with heavenfallen freshness down form moorland still brims,
Dark or daylight on and on. Here he will then, here he will the
fleet
Flinty kindcold element let break across his limbs
Long. Where we leave him, froliclavish, while he looks about
him, laughs, swims.³⁵⁴

Hopkins collapses the pause between the consonants of individual words to create a thick and chewy language that highlights the deftness of the tongue. By collapsing space, Hopkins evokes some of the qualities of the stutter: the point where the fallibility of language disrupts articulation and natural speech rhythms. Hopkins' omissions rely on existing linguistic rhythms and prosody of repetitive consonants to layer the reading with the pleasurable mouthfeel of language. Hopkins' linguistic formations bleed the words in to each other, creating terms such as "kindcold" and "froliclavish," to simultaneously create a strange and rushed tension within the clash of two becoming one. Paul Celan explores similar collapses in language in his poetic practice, most notably with his use of the term *atemwende* (breathturn). Celan describes poetry as a breathturn, "a turning away of breath" operating as an alternative force to silence.³⁵⁵ The conjoining of breath with turn imbues breath with a performative agency. The particular affectivity of the tension held within the collapse between words suggests a bodily experience of syncope.

As mentioned earlier, syncope is also a medical term for fainting. It describes an instant of vasovagal disruption where the blood flow and central nervous system are disrupted, resulting in a loss of consciousness. Catherine Clément, writer and philosopher, describes the moment of syncope in her collection of essays *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* as a "cerebral eclipse."³⁵⁶ This use of the term eclipse indicates

³⁵⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Epithalamion," *Poems and Prose*, ed. W. H. Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 86.

³⁵⁵ Paul Celan, "The Meridian," *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (New York: Routledge, 2003), 47.

³⁵⁶ Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll et al (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1.

an overshadowing of something that is present, thereby removing it from sight. The relationship between breathlessness and syncope is established early on in Clément's work. She writes that the "simple bodily signs that suspend breathing belong to the sphere of syncope."³⁵⁷ The cough, the phlegmatic rattle, the asthmatic constriction of the throat – all correspond directly with syncope. All of these examples of bodily manifestations of syncope demonstrate (through their materiality) a clear presence through a perceived absence. Ironically, Clément identifies that the use of the term syncope, within the medical profession, is similarly eclipsed by euphemistic use of words like stress and collapse in lieu of syncope.³⁵⁸ The performative gesture of syncope in language appears to be infinitely expansive.

Operating from her practice as a writer, Clément explores the greater remit of syncope – from its role in grammar to varying forms in cultural practices and histories – and explores the ways in which performative writing focusses on the modes of *lessness* inherent to syncope. Clément does so by naming the ellipsis as the syncope of punctuation, reflecting on the function of the ellipsis within writing to gesture towards the unsaid or omitted.³⁵⁹ Traditionally, the ellipsis takes up a space within the structure of writing as three dots that break into a sentence and fill a space with something – something not defined or known, merely alluded to.³⁶⁰ In Jenny Chamarette's essay, "Flesh, Folds and Textuality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and Robert Frank," Chamarette identifies the ways in which what she terms the "absented space" of the ellipsis creates meaning through literal textual absence.³⁶¹ Ultimately she concludes that "it remains forever out of contact and beyond our affective grasp, nonetheless reiteratively demanding the

³⁵⁷ Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, 7.

³⁵⁸ Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, 10-11.

³⁵⁹ Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, 212.

³⁶⁰ It is important to note here that I am interested in the application of ellipsis as an extension of breathlessness on the page. For this reason, I limit my discussion of Cixous and Clément here to applications of ellipsis.

³⁶¹ Jenny Chamarette, "Flesh, Folds and Textuality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and Robert Frank," *Paragraph* 30, no. 2 (July 2007): 38, accessed August 3, 2015, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/220621>.

elliptical, continually enfolded journey of making sense.”³⁶² Although Chamarette is concerned with the visual affect of the presence of ellipsis on the materiality of the page, when she asserts that “the ellipsis allows us to pass through or between texts,” she begins to establish the performative potential of blank spaces within writing.³⁶³ The affective action that both Clément and Chamarette attribute to the ellipsis reverbs Roland Barthes’ concept of the *punctum* – the puncture wound within photography that elicits an affective response that supersedes or circumnavigates readings of an image through a political, cultural or linguistic lens.³⁶⁴ The ellipsis, as a mark, punctures the page and creates an absence within its structure – as part of its structure. This hole that the ellipsis introduces to the space of the page allows writing to continue to generate experiences and meaning in the literal absence of language, gesturing towards the possible performative territories of *lessness*.

The lapse of the ellipsis found in the moment of eclipse visually replicates jumps in prose from one moment to another, with each indicating an undefined passage of time through a necessary absence that is simultaneously fertile with meaning, potential and possibility. Through the elliptical transmutation of the word eclipse, the word collapses in upon itself, omitting the “c” and becoming a homophonic form of ellipsis. In Clarice Lispector’s novel, *The Passion According to G. H.*, the protagonist, referred to only as the abbreviated G. H., experiences a crisis of self.³⁶⁵ (This crisis of self is also reproduced through the syncopation of the protagonist’s name to mere initials.) Time slows, expanding the duration of moments over the span of the novel. This occurs through the repetition of the final sentence of each chapter in the beginning of the new one. For example, the first chapter concludes with the sentence: “A world wholly alive has a Hellish power.”³⁶⁶ The following chapter begins on the facing page

³⁶² Chamarette, “Flesh, Folds and Textuality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and Robert Frank,” 48.

³⁶³ Chamarette, “Flesh, Folds and Textuality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and Robert Frank,” 48.

³⁶⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 25-27.

³⁶⁵ Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, trans. Idra Novey (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

³⁶⁶ Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, 14.

with the sentence: “A world wholly alive has a Hellish power.”³⁶⁷ This device perpetuates with minor amendments. The concluding sentence of chapter three is: “Then I went up the dark hallway that leads to the service area.”³⁶⁸ On the facing page Lispector begins with: “I went up the dark hallway that leads to the service area.”³⁶⁹ These repetitions collapse the distance between pages while enhancing an elliptical space between instants.

When each chapter of Lispector’s novel ends in a moment repeated at the beginning of the subsequent chapter, the time between ending and beginning each chapter similarly collapses. The repeated sentence spans the blank space, marking the end and beginning between chapters, creating an elliptical shudder in the space – the pause – between chapters. By shortening the traditional pause between chapters, this repetition suggests a broken continuity in the overflow of one articulated space into another. Accentuating the pause between chapters creates a sense of something inarticulate occurring within these elliptical breaks. Lispector describes this space as an instant, writing that the “instant is imminent” and that “[a]t the same time I live it, I hurl myself into its passage to another instant.”³⁷⁰ In so much as the repetition of the same sentence in *The Passion According to G. H.* indicates that there is always a beginning within an ending, this particular repetition creates an imminent space that does not adhere to any binary understanding of present or absent.

Repetition of the same within Lispector’s novel draws attention to elliptical spaces within writing and highlights the seam between one iteration and the next. According to Jacques Derrida, who describes the ellipsis as an action within writing that renegotiates the relationship of repetition to writing, it is “*there*, but out there, *beyond*, within repetition, but eluding us there.”³⁷¹ Derrida concentrates on the notion of trace as integral to elliptical writing, which implies that there is an origin that

³⁶⁷ Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, 15.

³⁶⁸ Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, 28.

³⁶⁹ Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, 29.

³⁷⁰ Clarice Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, trans. Elizabeth Lowe et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 62.

³⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 300.

precedes the trace within the space of ellipsis. However, relying on trace to renegotiate the relationship of *lessness* to breathlessness unfortunately doesn't recognise mutual dependence of one to the other but instead relegates *lessness* to the role of remnant. The filmic convention of a "fade to black," indicating a passage of time, an erotic interlude or a loss of consciousness, identifies that something occurs within elliptical space, which is what Derrida means when he refers to the ellipsis as something "missing from the grammar of this repetition."³⁷² The state of breathlessness, like the elliptical performance within writing, is a concrete thing primarily understood in relation to what it stands in for. The repetition of the same within Lispector's novel draws attention to a developing understanding what a *lessness* is and does, rather than what it is not.

These breaks within the space of the page initiate places for the performance of *lessness* within writing. Interruptions in the time of the page perform different kinds of literal and metaphorical black-out that navigate the activity of the syncope within a performance of writing. "I blacked out" indicates an irrecoverable passage of time, a space within time unmarked by memory or recollection. *Lessness*, similarly, continually asserts its resistance to articulation: it blacks out. Within writing, black marks obscure text and render it unable to participate in a system of articulation. The meaning of obscured writing is absorbed by the mark that obscures it, however, a black void on the page often occludes a reading of what its performative *lessness* might encapsulate. Consider how the smear of ink that eclipses the speech of Philomela, in Caroline Bergvall's drawing series, "Philomena Aria" (2014) and "PHILOMENA (exploded house)" (2013) (see fig. 2), negotiates the space of *lessness*.³⁷³

³⁷² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 296.

³⁷³ Caroline Bergvall, "Aria for Woven Voice," *PAJ: A Journal for Performance and Art* 36, no. 2 (May 2014): 18-21, accessed August 5, 2015, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/545520>. Caroline Bergvall, "PHILOMENA (exploded house)," in *The Dark Would*, vol. 1, ed. Phil Davenport (Apple Pie Publishing, 2013). The author also has reproductions available to view on her website at: <http://www.carolinebergvall.com/image-project-detail.php?id=27>.



Fig. 2. Caroline Bergvall, *PHILOMENA (exploded house)*, 2013.

Bergvall's work explores the Ovidian tale of Philomena whose apprehended tongue manifests through a black smudge. It performs the same violent silence perpetrated by Tereus of Thrace as he cuts out Philomela's tongue in order to conceal his assault of her by silencing her. Philomela circumnavigates this censor by turning to writing – by weaving her story into a tapestry that she sends to her sister. The smear in Bergvall's drawings perpetuates absence through its own trace, which simultaneously performs the absent tongue. Particularly in the series "Philomena Aria" (2014), Bergvall writes a tongue-less song where the words themselves cut off to perform "the violent tearing from speech and articulacy, on the last uttered cry."³⁷⁴ The tendency to relate to the black mark only within the context of what is absent and what it may represent unfortunately dislocates the performative violence of the black mark (regardless of what it may conceal or absent). The black mark does not simply indicate an absence; it consumes the space with the void it creates.

When considering Bergvall's black smears, it becomes possible to negotiate the censorial mark as something more than an omission. This dates back to the black page in Laurence Sterne's experimental novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram*

³⁷⁴ Bergvall, "Aria for Woven Voice," 18.

Shandy, which was published in nine volumes from 1759-1767.³⁷⁵ The black page in Sterne's novel invites the reader to form their own relationship to the ostensibly "blank" page. Rather than acting as an omission, the black page presents an inscribed space open to the new inscriptions of each reader. The active eclipse of writing through the censorial mark becomes a new enunciation. Like the arias in Bergvall's work, the performativity of the writing initiates a layered reading of the black mark where it is possible for the mark to indicate something more than an absence. Even though, as Bergvall asserts, the drawings gesture towards "the brutal point of cut," contained within the moment of cutting is something more than negation.³⁷⁶ The time of an eclipse occurs within a disruption of the gaze, when the presence of the sun or moon is *replaced* by the same blackness that so often serves as a representation of absence. In Sterne's work the black page acts as a site of contemplation. Absence is belied by the literal presence necessary to create this form of representation. The linguistic collapse of eclipse into ellipsis implies an underlying relationship between the two words. Although this may not etymologically be the case, both words gesture towards something that is left out or omitted. As each word indicates an absence, both rely on trace remnants of that which is no longer visible to provide context for this absence. This is reminiscent of the photographic remnants of a break-up, where the visible traces of the body of the loved one are purposefully removed. Imagine here a photograph of two bodies, where one body (or face) is excised with scratches on the emulsion or with a bold black marker pen. Although the face or body of the estranged lover is no longer identifiable, the space of effacement remains as a document of the excised individual. This describes a situation where the only trace of a presence exists along the violent surfaces of omissions: there is always something embedded, something more than simply a lapse.

Breath enters and exits the body through the mouth. This orifice signals the point of the cut. Rather than regarding *lessness* as something removed from writing – as cut out – the presence of the elliptical suggests that it instead cuts into the layered

³⁷⁵ Laurence Sterne, "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman," *The Works of Laurence Sterne. In Ten Volumes Complete* (London: 1793), 57.

³⁷⁶ Bergvall, "Aria for Woven Voice," 18.

surfaces of the page.³⁷⁷ The difference between “cut into” and “cut out” is important. Although the ellipsis consistently refers to an exterior space (something that is not classically present within the whole), this space exists entirely within the “omitted” space representing it. This is best demonstrated through filmic conventions surrounding the use of ellipsis to bridge the structural gaps between one scene and the next. The slow pan of the camera from an embracing couple to a flickering hearth that slowly fades to black initiates an erotic pause in the structure of the narrative. And although the visual representation of this erotic encounter utilises the language of negation (blackness or omission), it does not mean that it has been removed from the film, but rather, it is present within the elliptical space of the cut. Instead of demarcating a space of exclusion, ellipsis performs an inclusion beyond the limits of visual representation. It exists in its own time and space, but its presence is always predicated on the context with which it coexists in a constant process of inclusion.

Stop.

Just stop.

Where were we in that moment?

The duration of the syncopal space is reliant on the framework that upholds it; the space of the page that it cuts into determines its particular length. What are the durations of these points of suspension? The quandary that surrounds the duration of the syncope relies on the perception of the “break” that it represents – as well as perpetuates – as being outside of time. Clément describes the psychotic break as resulting from an inundation of reality, in which the “insane” individual is intensely permeated by and through reality.³⁷⁸ She likens the insane person to a “crustacean without a shell” and states that they are “completely porous to the outside world.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 100.

³⁷⁸ Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, 154.

³⁷⁹ Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jaques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 91-92.

The boundaries between the individual and the world become indistinct and the point at which they blur into each other forms a kind of ecstasy. Clément refers to the yogic perception of a blackout to illustrate this point, writing that a yogi “would not speak of a blackout of consciousness, but on the contrary of a consciousness broadened to the emphatic perception of the whole universe.”³⁸⁰ A suspension of breath prolongs the duration of the experience as the focus turns inward, the gaze fades and the experience of breathlessness transforms into something simultaneously intensely real and intensely beyond the mundane scope of experience. When the framework – in this instance, the self – becomes permeated by the conditions of its inception, its duration expands infinitely as it absorbs the experiences around it. A “break” transforms from an interruption in time to an expansion of time mirroring the expanding scope of the individual experience. This process subsumes the individual, permeating the self until becomes impossible to truly identify the limits of the syncopal experience.

They call it suspended animation. The involuntary functions of a body (my body? I cannot say/no longer can say) are incrementally slowed down to the point of cessation. All blood drains from the body. A chilled saline solution enters intravenously, filling the emptied veins. The baseline temperature of all organs lowers, declining the metabolic rate and with it all of the processes that keep the body in motion. Because the body is suspended, motion is not necessary. Heart beats reduce to the faintest shiver. (Ice formation damages cell integrity. Crystals break up the meat of the lungs. This must be avoided.) The brain no longer craves to the same degree the oxygen the lungs cannot provide. Lungs desaturate to the tiniest trickle. The body is pliant and the mouth hangs open. Saliva glistens as it glides off the tongue at half speed. Eyes are closed and (a hallucination of a flicker, I? subsides) kept closed.

Liquid sloshes minutely. The vessel encases and is encased. Porous matter. Sightless eyes (perceive? deceive? Is this even possible?) flowing through a dense material through which no light pulses. Through which no light can be seen: the iris is inactive.

³⁸⁰ Clément, *Syncopa: The Philosophy of Rapture*, 157.

And yet, permeating this vast space are the synaptic pulses of nerves no longer registering

And yet, permeating this vast space are the synaptic pulses of nerves

And yet, permeating this vast space

And yet,

(I? cannot see) existing sightless within this dense mass exploding around what was I and no longer can be I nor he nor she

drowning and drowned and gasping and inhaling enveloping everything filling up until the expanding moment of a pop! still whole ever broadening encompassing breadth of porous suspension:

The blood preserved in vials and bottles and tubes pumps back into the body with a mechanical bellows. The oxygenated liquid squeezes out and pulses back into the veins. It slowly permeates the tissues. Everything begins to warm under the thick layers of heated blankets. The heart and lungs and liver are heavy and pink. A tiny jolt! forces them into motion. The skin glows and slowly, slowly the breath begins to whistle from between the lips.

The text breaks to a description of suspended animation. You read this. You return abruptly from the cut. The pace of writing within the cut extends over unfinished run-on sentences. This extends the duration of the writing, suspending its performance within the in-between space it occupies. It is in-between paragraphs, arguments and lines of thought. The text suspends. The use of suspension in writing embroils it in a relationship to time that belies its etymological origins and the modes through which it conveys an understanding of *lessness*. Suspense implies a slowing down and a delaying of fulfilment in the same way that suspended animation describes a state that is entirely within time or at least slower than real time. The term “real time” relies on a concept of time in relation to a twenty-four-hour day as well as refers to something occurring in live space. The duration of suspension extends, placing it alongside time but never entirely exterior to it. The

not-knowing of suspension impedes a full understanding of what is to come because it is not yet known. The point of suspension in a novel precedes disclosure, where all becomes evident, and until this happens the scope of suspension is infinite. Suspended animation describes a state in which the processes of the body are slowed down in order to prevent brain damage. All of these examples rely on a relationship to time and duration. However, to suspend refers literally to the hanging up of a thing or a person: this action translates into language to refer to a point of disruption. The gesture of hanging up translates into a cessation of movement, a break in flow or other breaches that would block or deny access. Suspension becomes a point in time that is placed out of reach. This is not to say that it is unreachable but rather that it is momentarily out of reach, replicating the experience of breathlessness. One is out of breath and therefore exterior to breath (or vice versa breath is exterior to them): breath is suspended, apprehended in a *lessness*.

Performances adopting the operative modes of syncope and ellipsis, as explored through critical analysis, fissure the body of writing. These permeations of a perceived whole (employed throughout this chapter) create spaces within writing for embodiments of *lessness*. This is not to say that these operative modes replicate omission; rather it is that these performances of writing employ tactics associated with absence that simultaneously preclude its possibility. Introducing breathlessness to a piece of writing can occur through means other than omission, excision and occlusion, even in instances where this appears to be the sole means by which *lessness* is apparent. Common perceptions of elliptical and syncopal diacritical marks accept that they refer to something omitted or excluded, but their occupation of the material space of the page indicates that their relationship to presence is not strictly oppositional. Nor are they synonymous with absence. Syncope and ellipsis both gesture towards an in-between space, using the page as the site through which access is granted to something both absent and present.

Presences of Absence

Finally, and most emphatically, words, like ourselves, in order to live at their ease, need privacy. Undoubtedly they like us to think, and they like us to feel, before we use them; but they also like us to pause; to become

unconscious. Our unconsciousness is their privacy; our darkness is their light... That pause was made, that veil of darkness was dropped, to tempt words to come together in one of those swift marriages which are perfect images and create everlasting beauty.³⁸¹

Every place is a palimpsest.³⁸²

Lessness: lapse, gap, stutter, trip, fall. The parenthetical space. A cut to in-between. An absence? This section focusses on the nature of absence as it relates to *lessness*. Ephemerality dictates the nature of breath as always diminishing and disappearing yet continually returning. The duration of the breathless state is limited. Breath returns as the lungs refill to exhale another breath lost to the air that surrounds us. Primary to understanding *lessness* is to understand that it is not nothing and is therefore never truly “blank” nor absent. The presence of *lessness* (within the context of this writing) is predicated on a negotiation of performances of perceived blank spaces in writing. This section will explore different permutations of blankness, gaps and absence in writing by interrogating works that use permutations of these modes as well as works that refer to their own disappearance or treat directly with notions of absence through erasure, silence and blankness. These performances of *lessness* demonstrate the embodied and affective qualities of these seemingly empty spaces. Blankness becomes an emotion, experience or state of being. Unlike the preceding sections that expand on the performance and affect of grammatical interventions, this section focusses on different works that perpetuate a gesture or an action to generate an affective and embodied experience of [breath]*lessness* on the page.

A pause. A blank space is a pause. No, it is a breath. You take a breath. You relax. The spaces between words articulate them to the eye and draw them distinct from one another. The spaces between paragraphs extend to articulate different arguments and present them as related but distinct from each other. These spaces are not waiting to be filled – they serve a clear purpose in governing the time and

³⁸¹ Virginia Woolf, “Craftmanship,” in *Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1942), 205-206.

³⁸² “Every Place A Palimpsest,” Emma Bolland blog, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://youwillhearmeall.wordpress.com/2012/06/19/every-place-a-palimpsest/>.

flow of a piece of writing. An early exploration of the performance potential of the page, Stéphane Mallarmé's long poem "Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard" uses non-normative typesetting to lengthen the blank spaces of the page. The poem was not published in Mallarmé's lifetime; the first publication took place in 1914 according to detailed instructions left by Mallarmé regarding the specificities of its typeface and layout. In his essay, "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument," Mallarmé articulates the performative function of the page and how this can lead to an affecting experience for the reader/audience. He writes that a "tremendous burst of greatness, of thought, or of emotion, contained in a sentence printed in large type, with one gradually descending line to a page, should keep the reader breathless throughout the book."³⁸³ The movement Mallarmé describes from one typeface to another creates different points of focus that disrupt a linear reading. By forcing the reader to realign their gaze, Mallarmé's work highlights the time and textures of the page. In this sense, the material conditions impact readerly experiences of writing, transforming the duration as well as points of entry and exit to the text. As the duration of "Un Coup de Dés..." moves outside of linear reading conventions, the piece shifts from read poetry to performance writing. These initial innovations in form and the use of space in Mallarmé's work draw attention to the blank spaces of the page and the ways in which they can enhance a performance of writing.

A contemporary re-working of Mallarmé's text by Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield relies on the performative action of the palimpsest to enact within the erasure of existing texts the formulation of a new one.³⁸⁴ A palimpsest is an existing document that is erased or obscured to create space for new writings to occupy. This literal undertaking transforms the original text while simultaneously burdening the new text with the weight of the preceding writing. In "A Picture of French Literature" Dronsfield replicates the positions of the text in Mallarmé's work as blank spaces interrupting the text of a two-page reproduction of a critical response to Deleuze and Rancière's writing on Mallarmé's work. Dronsfield acknowledges the history of "Un

³⁸³ Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument," in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions Books, 1982), 83.

³⁸⁴ Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield, "A picture of French literature" in *Materiality of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield (Birmingham: Article Press, 2011), 73-95.

Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard” and engages with the discourse that surrounds it through the content of the two-page spread while simultaneously enacting a performative response. Unfortunately, Dronsfield’s work lacks the affecting qualities of the original in that his study doesn’t contain the same arresting innovations in form. Dronsfield’s spread repeats with the sole alterations appearing through the changing positions of erased text and remains an intellectual gesture towards its lineage. The palimpsestual action in Dronsfield’s work uses erasure to conjure genealogies of previous writings in the seemingly blank spaces of his work. Due to the lineage of this particular palimpsest, the erasures that Dronsfield undertakes are never fully effaced. However, because of the absence of semantic units, the erasure introduces a performativity to the text-body of the *lessness* that Dronsfield articulates through absence.

Dronsfield’s effacement also recalls Marcel Broodthaers’ *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard. Image*. (1969), which follows the specifications of Mallarmé’s original but renders the writing in linear black blocks. Broodthaers’ rendering of Mallarmé’s text as rectangular units perfectly replicates the size, placement and form of the original text, reducing semantic units to image. The black blocks impede access to the original text but, rather than simply effacing, Broodthaers’ intervention exaggerates the heightened tensions and affective qualities of Mallarmé’s innovative typesetting. Jacques Rancière writes at length on the relationship between Mallarmé’s work and Broodthaers’ in relation to the space of the page. Rancière describes the performative action of “Un Coup des...” as “the spacialising power of word ideas,” which challenges the hierarchies and attributes attached to form.³⁸⁵ Broodthaers negotiates the space of *lessness* by preserving the structures of the page while replacing writing with a present absence. For the duration of the exhibition *Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé* at Galerie Wide White Space, Antwerp, visitors gained access to the original text through listening to a pre-recorded reading by

³⁸⁵ Jacques Rancière, “The Space of Words,” in *Porous Boundaries: Texts and Images in Twentieth-Century French Culture*, ed. Jérôme Game (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 58.

Broodthaers.³⁸⁶ By extending the field of writing to the aural space of the gallery, Broodthaers multiplies the sites of the work to permeate the visual excisions with their own palimpsestual genealogy.

The absences in Dronsfield's work enact an erasure but one that gestures through the action towards that which is being erased. This action refers to Derrida's term *sous rature*, which translates to mean: under erasure. This term stems from Heidegger's textual intervention in *The Question of Being* where he crosses out the word "Being" in the text.³⁸⁷ Heidegger's intervention of Being, by placing a crosshatch over the word, creates an active negotiation between absent and present.³⁸⁸ The word remains, performing the conflict between the presence of the word and a concept of nihilism that Heidegger initiates through the crossing out of Being. It is important to note here that Heidegger is not at all concerned with the trace of Being (trace being an important concept in Derrida's work) but rather that, as he writes: "Nothingness would have to be written, and that means thought of, just like Being."³⁸⁹ Crossing out Being is an action that creates a distance and sense of prohibition that a simple strikethrough could never do. The prohibitive action of the crossing out of Being makes clear the impossibility of the recuperation of Nothingness within language. This does not prevent Heidegger from communicating the essence of nihilism, which he simultaneously demonstrates through the performative capacities of writing. The crossing out of a word places it at a distance from us and from the body of the text, despite the space it occupies within the text. Representation of nothing necessitates its presence within language. This contradiction reflects in representations of breathlessness. What Heidegger demonstrates within his text is that an understanding of nothingness arises through

³⁸⁶ Michael Compton, "Marcel Broodthaers," in *Marcel Broodthaers* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1980), 22.

³⁸⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 23.

³⁸⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. William Kluback et al (New York: New College and University Press, 1958), 33, 81. I retain the capitalisation of "Being" and "Nothingness" as used by Heidegger in the source text.

³⁸⁹ Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, 83.

some sort of interaction with Being. Similarly, the *lessness* of breathlessness must be negotiated through an interaction with breath.

There is little written by Derrida to define what it is he means exactly by *sous rature*. He refers to Heidegger's 'X' at the outset of *On Grammatology*, writing:

That deletion is the final writing of an epoch. Under its strokes the presence of a transcendental signified is effaced while still remaining legible. Is effaced while still remaining legible, is destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign.³⁹⁰

Heidegger's crossing out of "Being" effaces the word while simultaneously allowing it to remain. *Sous rature* is the point at which the presence of the erased is in conflict with its absence. Underlying tensions of breathlessness rely on this same interplay between the absence suggested by *lessness* and its presence within language, representation and performance. Heidegger suggests that *lessness* must first be conceived and brought into representation in order to exist. However, the underlying difference between *lessness* and Nothingness is that *lessness* operates in a space between absent and present. *Lessness* is simultaneously the performative marker of an ephemeral experience and the experience itself. Even the forward slant of the term indicates its rapid departure from the present and slippages into representation but *lessness* remains, somewhere between the present and gesturing towards a past or future, signalling its negation.

Within the space of erasure, performances of *lessness* take shape and undermine the binary distinctions between presence and absence. Nick Thurston notes, in his novel-length performance text *Reading at the Remove of Literature*, that a "sense of self disallows any vacancy of the present...in that the presence of the absence means a sense of some one is always constructing the present."³⁹¹ Thurston's work marks the act of reading Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* through Thurston's annotations and removes the text of Blanchot's original.³⁹² All that

³⁹⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 23.

³⁹¹ Nick Thurston, *Reading at the Remove of Literature*, ed. Craig Dworkin (York: Information as Material, 2006), 39.

³⁹² Thurston uses the term "conceptualist reading performance" to describe this work. The way in which the work negotiates the act of reading as a kind of performance adheres to basic conditions of performance writing. See Stephen Voyce, "Of the

remains are the traces of reading in the form of marginalia. The work vacillates between making Blanchot's writing absent and articulating the conditions of presence through the present-making of reading on the page. This present-making manifests through the absenting of the original text, thereby capturing the ephemeral conditions of the readerly act. Like breathlessness, this mode of making occurs at the juxtaposition of poles. Blanchot writes in *The Space of Literature* that "nowhere is nonetheless here," referring to the conditions of death but also remarking on the necessity of presence within absence.³⁹³ Blanchot overturns the binary between absence and presence by identifying the modes by which absence comes into being through presence. Thurston calls this the "paradoxical conditions of the void" and identifies the properties at work in the performance of *lessness* on the page.³⁹⁴ Thurston employs the erasure of one text, not at its own expense, to highlight the contradictions Blanchot identifies in his work about the performative life of writing. The *lessness* of Blanchot's work is present against the traces of Thurston's reading, assuming the characteristics of absence while simultaneously subverting an understanding of to what that nothingness pertains.

Oddly, in sketching out a history of writing that negotiates the blank spaces and perceived absences on the page, some artists and writers fail to consider the body in these structures. Dronsfield's concept-based interventions in form are a prime example of this. The tendency is to explore form and concept over gesture and experience or feeling and to shift the focus to metaphysical notions of existence. These ideas, although often performative and engaging with a sense of the live, tend to ignore the body in and of writing. This stands at odds with the very notion of breathlessness and overlooks entire layers of the palimpsestual space of blankness. Although it is important to trace precedents as well as their contemporary responses, these modes of *lessness* only explore and breakdown a binary understanding of absence.

Subcontract: An Interview with Nick Thurston," *The Iowa Review*, 44, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 100, accessed January 5, 2015, http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/thurston/Voyce-andThurston_Iowa%20Review%20interview_2014.pdf.

³⁹³ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982), 30.

³⁹⁴ Thurston, *Reading at the Remove of Literature*, 39.

Understanding the ways in which the body inhabits, produces and translates these blank spaces is key to developing an understanding of the performative affect of *lessness* on the page.

Breathlessness, as a bodily condition, refers to the perceived negative space or absence of breath. When negotiating the complexities of performance writing, the space that breathlessness inhabits in relation to the body demands that the body occupy the blanks and silences of the page. Fiona Templeton asserts in bold font at the outset of her chapter “Speaking for performance / writing with the voice” that:

Speech is not writing by the body. Writing is signs of speech.³⁹⁵

In the chapter she discusses how she develops text for performance through, by and for the body. Although Templeton clearly defines writing as a sign of speech, she is careful to articulate that speech, as it exists within a post-scriptural reality, “can be informed by the memory of writing, or perhaps the forecast of its possibility.”³⁹⁶ She says of her writing method that “in the generated parts of the language, the absence of the visual page allowed a different concentration, lived in silence not in blank.”³⁹⁷ By circumnavigating writing in her generative process, Templeton suggests a mode in which blankness is reconfigured as silence. The inscription of the body into writing practices – even ones predicated on a premise that writing is the signification of speech – simultaneously reinscribes blankness, activating within the space of blankness a fulminating fertility. Relating to performance writing through the body resuscitates the spaces contained within it: blank pages and white spaces between individual words become sites for the body to interject itself. Interpreting blank space as inhabited by bodily experience exemplifies the ways that *lessness* is never nothing.

In a recent conversation, Fiona Templeton suggested to me that a blank page might also be a sign of restraint.³⁹⁸ She referred to her work *Cells of Release*, and how

³⁹⁵ Fiona Templeton, “Speaking for performance / writing with the voice,” in *Sensualities/Textualities and Technologies: Writings of the Body in 21st Century Performance*, ed. Susan Broadhurst et al (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 177. I retain the bold font here.

³⁹⁶ Templeton, “Speaking for performance / writing with the voice,” 177.

³⁹⁷ Templeton, “Speaking for performance / writing with the voice,” 180.

³⁹⁸ Fiona Templeton, conversation with the author, October 6, 2015.

a command to “refrain” precedes blank spaces.³⁹⁹ *Cells of Release* is a poetry installation and publication that was developed over a six-week residency in the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁴⁰⁰ The installation is of a single continuous scroll that Templeton inscribed, on a daily basis, with an indelible marker. The empty space of the scroll fills with words as the scroll moves through the individual and isolated cells that make up the now-abandoned penitentiary. The writing generated over the course of six weeks permeates the individual cells and flows from one to the next, disintegrating the structure of the prison and altering the original constraints to movement within the architecture of the building. In writing about the emptiness of the cells, she describes the spaces as heavily inscribed and writes: “I was very conscious of being only the most current of its writings.”⁴⁰¹ The cells are not empty but are already literally and figuratively inscribed by the past. The empty spaces on the scroll demonstrate restraint and consider the violent histories of the architecture. As the scroll moved from one cell to another, hanging from high and unlit spaces, the legibility of the document would diminish, challenge and extend the duration of the reading.

The space between days, moving from one cell to the next, is performed through a gap between phrases echoing the duration of its inception. Punctuation is not used, neither on the scroll nor in the resulting publication, indicating that the reading should occur over a period of time, producing conditions similar to an experience of the original piece. The book does not reproduce the original because it cannot reproduce the material conditions of the scroll nor the physical space it was installed in. Breaks in the text are not facsimiles of the poetic line but rather isolate concrete, continuous thoughts. The spaces are, as Fiona stated in a recent conversation, “more like little breaths, actually.”⁴⁰² Due to the lack of punctuation, the articulation of separate cells and concrete thoughts occur through the pauses in writing, as points of restraint. These pauses, like the empty cells, are a site of constant inscription and make

³⁹⁹ Fiona Templeton, *Cells of Release* (New York: Roof Books, 1997), un-paginated.

⁴⁰⁰ Fiona Templeton, *Cells of Release*, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia PENN, April 2-May 17, 1995. Installation.

⁴⁰¹ Templeton, *Cells of Release*, un-paginated.

⁴⁰² Fiona Templeton, conversation with the author, February 9, 2016.

space for the body to inhabit and to articulate itself within the liveness of reading. In the published version of *Cells of Release*, the material form of the scroll and its duration is replicated through half-empty pages where the preceding and following texts are visible through the paper. In the Corridor between Cell 4 and Cell 6 she writes, “even the darkness here is white,” suggesting that whiteness, like the blankness it most commonly represents, is as equally inhabited as night-fall and shadows.⁴⁰³ Returning to Templeton’s suggestion, the pause between phrases indicates the moment of restraint wherein the writer (in this instance, Templeton) stems the impulse to continue filling the space of the scroll. The inscription of the scroll must be tempered by the already-said and already-inscribed that remains within the cells of the penitentiary. In writing these delicate phrases, Templeton releases amplifications of the multitude of inscriptions that precede her endeavour. In this sense, even the perceived freshness of the scroll is already laden with emerging fullness.

Cell 2

Slip into this hollow
Surface pushes its not
Your surface their not
You pushing it in
I have moved to your body
my failure keeps time
where the mind cannot hold
a poor offer but passage
or throat
and tongue
ready by inside
made naked my poverty of showing
did you steal a wallet
must a pen draw blood
I have a hand in this empty cupboard
The stains on the wall are from veins of relation
Cut

⁴⁰³ Templeton, *Cells of Release*, un-paginated.

To shame of imagining⁴⁰⁴

Reading Templeton's scroll from "Cells of Release" in the form of a publication alters the time of the reading as well as the physical experience of an encounter within the space with the writing. The isolation of the experience of the single cell is undermined by the materiality of the paper, where the writing in relation to one space is visible in another through the bleed of the ink. The spaces purposefully left blank are in fact inscribed by the faint echo of writing that precedes and follows the singular experience of the cell in question. As much as Templeton may be concerned by the papery taint of writing on speech production, the material conditions of the publication perform the flow of the scroll, defying the boundaries between the cells. The different sections of the scroll are laid out in the publication according to their position within the building. The writing is centred, often taking on a columnar form resembling the shape of the original scroll. The space that aerates this publication denies the commonplace logic of typesetting and, in doing so, draws attention to the points of restraint in a performance of writing.

Similarly, the blank space in John Cage's work subverts the performative expectations of absence by challenging notions of silence (as the performative outcome of blankness). In a version of Cage's written score for *4'33": For Any Inst[r]ument or Combination of Instruments* (1953), he dedicates this variation (of which there are many) to Irwin Kremen.⁴⁰⁵ It is this written dedication, along with minimal notation, that breaks up the white space of the page. The reproduction I refer to is different to the original (which comprises folded sheets of 11x17 inch paper, the same size used for tabloid publications) and is reproduced in book form. This reads differently to folded sheets of primarily white paper, and to negotiate this difference, the pages are reproduced against a black background to emphasise the material life of

⁴⁰⁴ Templeton, *Cells of Release*, un-paginated.

⁴⁰⁵ *4'33": For Any Inst[r]ument or Combination of Instruments*. Graphic score in proportional notation. 1953. Printed version of ink on paper manuscript. 10 pages, 8 1/2 x 11 in. PUB: C.F. Peters in 1993 (EP 6777a) first published in 1967, in *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde #2*, July 1967, also published in 2012 by C.F. Peters as part of *4'33": John Cage centennial edition* (EP 6777c). Original manuscript consists of 3 folded sheets, 11x17 in, owned by Irwin Kremen, in, *Sounds Like Silence, John Cage 4'33": Silence Today*, ed. Dieter Daniels et al (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2012), 116-127.

the score as an object. The minute notations are lines, numerated with seconds, and the aforementioned dedication. The ostensibly blank space that surrounds these inscriptions comprises the same white noise that Cage seeks to highlight through the “silence” observed during this piece. Over the duration of the four minutes and thirty-three seconds, the environment of the performance highlights the muted cacophonies of life that occur within and without silences. What Cage makes clear, both in this performance as well as in the flesh of the score, is that the forms of *lessness* (perpetuated here through modes of blankness and silence) are not defined in relation to what they “lack” but rather that they occupy their own space, time and permutations of performance.

Another way that Cage negotiates blankness is through his “Lecture on Nothing,” where he utilises blank space in the written composition of his lecture. Cage undermines the performative expectations of nothingness by iterating in the foreword to the piece that a reading must not reflect these spaces of nothing, nor should these gaps introduce silence, but rather that the text be read with the rhythms and cadences of everyday speech.⁴⁰⁶ The writing of the lecture is laid out on the page using a columnar structure that breaks up the lateral run of a sentence across the page, introducing gaps and spaces that disrupt the visual flow of the writing. Cage writes that “[w]hat we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking.”⁴⁰⁷ This creates a tension between the visual and the auditory forms of the piece, where the one is lost within the other. A normative delivery glosses over the disruptions in the writing on the page by filling the points of visual silence with speech. By disrupting the expectation for blank space to represent silence in performance, Cage simultaneously redefines the performative qualities of “nothingness” within his compositions. Cage’s use of blank space in musical compositions and writing highlights the interdependency of silence and noise while simultaneously questioning conventional understandings of nothingness.

The space of silence, in the absence of speech or some form of pre-determined composition, fills with the noises of the body. The duration of silence in Cage’s work

⁴⁰⁶ John Cage, “A Lecture on Nothing,” in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 109.

⁴⁰⁷ Cage, “A Lecture on Nothing,” 109.

is constantly overturned through the very spaces that traditionally articulate a pause or break. Cage positions blank space, by virtue of the pervasive and permeating qualities of noise, as distinctly ephemeral. The blank spaces in Cage's writing are permeable and inconstant, performing the same movement between breath(ful) and breath(less) states. Silence may represent absence but, as Cage demonstrates through *4'33"*, the perception of silence as not-noise is fundamentally flawed. The body persists in writing itself into the blank and breathless spaces of the page, becoming present through the bodies of its audience.

Both Cage and Templeton provide instances of absence in writing that evoke the affect of *lessness*. The pauses, gaps and silences within their work arrest speech while simultaneously giving, within the blanks, an opportunity for another permutation of writing to articulate itself. Derrida surmises in *On Grammatology* that:

What writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit's relationship with itself. It is their end, their finitude, their paralysis. Cutting breath short, sterilising or immobilising spiritual creation in the repetition of the letter, in the commentary or the exegesis, confined in a narrow space, reserved for a minority, it is the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of being.⁴⁰⁸

Derrida describes the moment in which writing betrays its speech origins through the introduction of the non-phonetic as a threat to the life of language. The non-phonetic relates to the moment in which writing no longer represents nor relates directly to the sounded foundation of speech. As Derrida writes, "is their end, their finitude, their paralysis."⁴⁰⁹ By placing these limitations on the performance of writing, Derrida overlooks the potential of writing to impact speech performance beyond simply foreclosing lived experiences within or through writing. Because the parousia of speech colludes with an expenditure of breath, writing naturally occupies the residual state of *lessness* when it asserts a different but equal permutation of presence. Although Derrida's writing on trace often best describes the performative qualities of writing, common use of the term trace refers to the remains of a live event. Trace, when used in this way, mistakes the live and performative qualities of writing for

⁴⁰⁸ Derrida, *On Grammatology*, 25.

⁴⁰⁹ Derrida, *On Grammatology*, 25.

remnants of a speech-act or reproductions of the already-seen or heard. However, the blank spaces within writing are certainly inscribed by the traces of the already-seen, heard and read, as evinced by the work of Fiona Templeton and John Cage.

Blank spaces on the page suggest emptiness but, as shown in both Templeton and Cage's work, these spaces are not absent content. In the poem "Decomposition" by Alice Notley, from her collection *Alma, or the Dead Women*, the poet uses empty space within stanzas to break up the reading, add tension and challenge normative modes of reading.⁴¹⁰ The collection begins with free prose poems incorporating multiple narratives in block paragraphs, devoid of full stops or complete sentences which slowly devolve into increasingly sparse and broken-up forms. In a recent interview, Notley says that, although the composition of a poetic line is primarily auditory for her, she tries to "score for the page, so the reader will know how to say the poem silently."⁴¹¹ Notley conjoins the auditory with the visual by negotiating the ephemeral space of performance writing and asserting an underlying recognition of the intricate reverb of writing into speech and vice versa. Alan Clinton's review of *Alma, or the Dead Women*, suggests that the polyvocality of the work haunts the blank spaces of the text.⁴¹² Clinton's reading of the text leans towards the notion that the work conjures or acts as a medium for the dead and that a multitude of voices occupy the blank spaces of the text. This notion is predicated upon the idea that the space that becomes inhabited is fundamentally empty or blank – a suitable vessel. This recalls the problematic discourse surrounding the mediumistic performances covered in chapter two as well as the conflation of the female body with an empty vessel. However, Clinton's reference to polyvocality introduces the notion that putrescence flows outward from the text and into the spaces that permeate the text body.

⁴¹⁰ Alice Notley, "Decomposition," in *Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems 1970-2005* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

⁴¹¹ Alice Notley, "Evident Being: A Conversation with Alice Notley by KR poetry editor David Baker," accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.kenyonreview.org/conversation/alice-notley/>.

⁴¹² Alan Clinton, review of *Alma, or The Dead Women* by Alice Notley, *Reconstruction* 7, no. 4 (2007), accessed March 30, 2016, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/074/clinton.shtml>.

Alternatively, the spaces in the text could be the points at which the text body, mid-disintegration, collapses upon itself and reaches into the surrounding spaces. With that in mind, it is not the voices of the text echoing within the blanks of the page but rather *lessness* reverberating throughout the text body.

The corpse occupies space while simultaneously embodying presence and absence. The physical presence of the body rearticulates the absence of the spirit – or that necessary consciousness to animate the body. Notley’s writing in “Decomposition” performs the decomposition of form through the blank spaces in the text. These spaces simultaneously challenge the hierarchies of presence commonly attributed to blank spaces in text as well as the notion that blankness indicates a void or an absence. She writes:

i am bleeding only to intone and see through mandala eyes
it is for you i tone, or for the tone itself as a smell is the tone of its own
corpse, the corpse flesh sings it

strokes my abstract wound in abstraction nothing hurts
and i start and cry out. intone the real pain imaginary⁴¹³

Notley describes smell as being the “tone” or resonance of a corpse. She recognises that the corpse body relies on more ephemeral forms of articulation, ones not necessarily comprised of words or forms subject to decomposition. The blank space separating these two sections is the song of the corpse flesh, with blankness resonating as the tone of a body absent spirit. Intoning dead flesh through non-textual blank space renders a song of a breathless body on the page. The writing seems to pause at the outset of the gap but this blank space is simply another intonation of writing. This perceived pause is the space wherein *lessness* begins to resonate.

The space of breathlessness on the page comprises a between-ness, merging the binaries of absent and present. Even the corpse, in Notley’s work, enacts an ongoing transition from one state to another. The blank spaces in Notley’s work resonate through the piece and create nodes of occupation where the blankness coagulates. Maya Deren, in her autobiographical account of Haitian religious

⁴¹³ Notley, “Decomposition,” 328.

practices, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, coins the term “white darkness” to describe a state of spirit possession.⁴¹⁴ Deren writes that she must define this state of being in contradictory terms, “its whiteness a glory, and its darkness, terror.”⁴¹⁵ It is important to note here that Deren’s terminology raises concerns about perceptions of blackness in contemporary discourse as innately negative. Voodoo does not favour polarities of existence over each other and does not value a hierarchy of light over dark or vice versa. Although there might be a superficial association with racist tropes, I believe that Deren’s aim was the opposite as she conjoined the two to convey an ecstatic experience. Rather than thinking about the term *white darkness* in relation to its inherent contradiction, the contrast between the two polarities combined into a single term identifies the underlying affect of breathlessness. *Lessness* straddles the same space of *white darkness*: it is both present and absent, adhering to neither edge of a binary.

In this final section, the embedded work retreats. It is not absent from the text. The outset of this section addresses the reader and their body. In the preceding section handling performances of syncope in writing, there is a break in the text. At least, this space within the text reads initially as a pause. This blank space reads both as an absencing of writing as well as a live inscription of the between-space already read, already written and yet to come. As a page, it is not empty but rather invites the body of the reader to respond within the space it proffers. The body becomes breathless through its encounter with writing and writing perpetuates breathlessness through challenging notions of space and duration in relation to the page. Rather than relate to writing and performance within a binary framework, where one can never be the other, these two forms blur at the edges of where one appears to begin and the other seems to end. As boundaries between forms break down, the definition of breathlessness as merely “without breath” falters.

⁴¹⁴ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1953), 259.

⁴¹⁵ Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, 259.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, the creative work recedes from an independent life and performs within the composition of this document. By merging different forms of writing, performance writing in particular, within the same document, a collapse between disciplines occurs. Critical analysis shifts under a gaze generally directed at performance writing and vice versa, leading the reader to experience the space of the page as a site of myriad performances. This chapter considers grammatical devices and the way in which they interact with the form and structure of writing, and how this can be extended to an understanding of performances of breathlessness on the page. By stretching the use and definition of these devices, their passive functionality diminishes against their growing performative qualities. To this end, the discourse in this chapter deliberately pairs diacritical marks with affective qualities to initiate embodied actions and material interventions in the space of the page.

When considering the *lessness* of breathlessness, it is necessary to break down binary distinctions in order to sculpt an understanding of a between space. If breathlessness is to be considered more than an absence of breath, then the discursive approach must equally challenge expected binary roles, actions and performances. To achieve this end, this discourse moves between structures of writing and embodied experiences to perform a collapse of difference within the text. This chapter relies on associative logic to draw parallels between experiences of the body and performances of writing as well as reader's response to fissures in traditional form. In an effort to define *lessness*, various modes of disruption explore the points at which stuttering, parenthetical inclusion/exclusion, ellipsis, syncope and literal blankness create absences within writing that simultaneously assert some form of presence.

By questioning the parameters of binary thinking, this writing opens up a space in which performance writing can operate. Explorations of *lessness* as non-binary and transitory spaces integrates things typically positioned as polar opposites and locates where they merge. This is particularly important in developing an understanding of performance writing in relation to performance practice. Rigid definitions of performance seek to exclude writing, focus on its passive semantic functions and overlook the points at which writing begins to "do". This highly ephemeral point of action is most present in the absences of writing, where the action collapses onto

terrains where alternate forms of reading operate via embodiment, visual representation, materiality, affect and performance.

Throughout the text, the registers of writing shift and change. They move from critical analysis to direct address to performative poetics. This interweaving of writings replicates the physical action of breath returning and dissipating into breathlessness. These layers puncture the structure of the text, creating multiple points of permeation. This allows for a non-sequential reading to occur, creating further layerings within a performance of writing and its duration. Using an associative logic, the text explores the nature of *lessness* through paralleling writerly conventions and embodied experiences, and it relies on the affect these things produce within the reader. Writing can never fully embody breathlessness due to the presence of the reader: it is only through the absence of a body that a text is fully bereft of breath. And in the instance of performance writing, the body is never far behind.

CONCLUSION. Of Endless Breath

The word conclusion signifies an end. It conveys a finality that practice lacks. In making work about breathlessness, I come to conclusions about the ways in which it performs on the page. The three works that comprise this body of research stem from a much larger body of practice. Each of these branches feed into the development of practice and understandings of breathlessness. Each work, as well as this work, explores different ways that a performance of breathlessness comes into being on the page. These performances rely on negotiations of performance and the relationship of liveness to time, location and duration. However, breathlessness itself defies conclusion.

At the outset of my research, I turned to studies of verbal inarticulacy and forms of impeded speech. Moving past language was a tactic for bringing an ephemeral and embodied experience such as breathlessness into writing. One of the initial difficulties in establishing the performance of writing was due to concepts that defined writing as a fixed form. The perception that writing lacks fluidity often holds it at a false distance to performance. Performance writing collapses the small distance between the two words, performance and writing, creating a juncture between the separate practices. In attempting to write the ineffable, writing shifts beyond its semantic function and partakes in an active space of making performance. Concentrating on physiological impairments to breathing, such as mucus and asthma, I opened up the space of the page for performative interventions to occur.

A literal state of breathlessness is bound up with anxieties and an underlying sense of helplessness. In as much as breath practices such as yogic breathing and auto-asphyxiation seek to control breath, our bodies remain reliant on the perpetuation of a cycle of breathing. Inhalation is as equally necessary as exhalation. Bodily impairments that might impede this process, like the metaphor of the ectoplasm, invite consideration of the tensions that these states evoke. Breathlessness draws attention to the mechanisms of the interior and how it challenges notions surrounding form. Like Georges Bataille's *informe* and Jean Paul Sarte's slime, the mutability of these forms replicates the unknown characteristics of the interior and defies fixed definitions. They defy a sense of limit altogether.

In creating a text that disappears, as *Echo/plasm* does, you enact the same performativity as *informe* – where the seemingly fixed proves mutable. When the text submerges under increasing whiteness, it becomes filled with the affective registers of physical breathlessness. Fractions of words permeate the blanketing effect of manifesting breathlessness and act as disrupted inhalations and exhalations of breath. In subverting the wholeness of language, the rhythms of breath become similarly impaired. Because the interior remains unknown, this emergence remains perceivably blank. Not because it is blank (as I explore in chapter four) but because the potency of the interior is in its resistance to form. The authorship of *Echo/plasm* comes into question as its form manifests through each individual reading. Fixed authorial traits often attached to writing stymie perceptions of writing's performative capabilities. Utilising the materiality of the page, the disappearing text explores the immaterial qualities of breathlessness while directly relating to emotional and physiological responses to breathless states.

Echo/plasm uses these interventions in form, allowing the materiality of the page to produce experiences of disorientation, loss of control and anxiety. A focus on the material situates writing within the physical realm, where a smothering out of writing produces a bodily response to the work. The particular location of the work (on the page) is irrelevant to the constraints of performance as the materiality of the work bridges to the live through the corporeal. The work is successful in its particular investigation of bodily experiences of breathlessness as well as the anxieties, fears and tensions breathlessness generates. In this instance, it is possible to generate live experiences through material interventions on the surface of the page, treating it as one would a body. Form remains a key aspect of experiences of the page but is ultimately an important yet singular register within the scope of performance writing. In a sense, form directs focus to the exterior and this thesis seeks an intimacy with the interior.

Linking the materiality of the page to physical impediments to breath and the affect it generates creates bedrock for a move towards the interiority of the body and the more ephemeral aspects of performance writing – to that space in between. *These Lungs* negotiates between boundaries and excesses that spill over into the interior and issue forth towards the exterior. The work generates the same push and pull of the breath cycle while exploring a landscape of corporeal pleasure and excess. Although I

am not concerned with creating binary contrasts between the overall tone of the different works that comprise this thesis, the tonality of *These Lungs* is different to *Echo/plasm*. This is not to say that one is better or more valid but rather to emphasise the relationship between bodily experiences and the affect they produce, and how performance writing negotiates these boundaries. Key to this is how *These Lungs* treats form as well as metaphorical forms of breathlessness, as produced through erotic excess and its relationship to the limit.

Questioning the fixity of the limit and probing its permeability further blur distinctions that perpetuate a binary understanding of breathlessness. With the demise of the Performance Writing department at the now defunct Dartington College of Arts and the dispersal of practitioners working this way across the UK and beyond, discourse surrounding the relationship of performance to writing has similarly scattered. These practices, like my own, sit best in between disciplines. It seems fitting that considerations of the space between performance and writing replicate the ephemerality of this particular performance. In this sense, it is all the more pertinent to establish the permeability of the limit, both in relation to breathlessness as well as performance writing. When considering the relationship of the page to the limit, or indeed writing and the limit, binary modes of thinking necessitate disruption through interventions in form and interdisciplinary approaches.

When considering forms of writing, particularly within the context of this work, the strictures surrounding academic writing produce a counterpoint to the space my work explores. The final work in this study of breathlessness takes place within the body of the thesis in order to draw further attention to the space of these pages as a site of performance writing. As the discussion of breathlessness focusses more on understandings of *lessness* than the physical state, intermeshing performative writing with critical writing produces performance akin to notions of the between space that this work explores. These various mediations of form explore different ways in which writing bridges its semantic function into the realm of the live and produces performance. The page, in this sense, operates as a multi-layered site through which performance writing comes into being. Form facilitates an interrogation of the definitions of writing and performance as well as expanding the boundaries that each definition consists of. It is for this reason that the outset of the last chapter focusses so

heavily on redefining different grammatical signs and opening up understandings of their performative characteristics. Relevant to performance writing in the same way that *informe* is relevant; form serves as a tool to question fixed definitions of performance and writing. As I state at the outset of this work, it is necessary to undermine, overturn and disrupt conventional and binary definitions of performance *and* writing in order to produce works that explore and perform breathlessness on the page. Breaking form is a way of redefining fixed concepts of writing – as well as how the page operates within this process of “fixing”.

Time is an essential component of this consideration of page-based performance. The work here extends the duration of writing as well as produces endless encounters that can be experienced through shifts in address and form. As the form of the page is challenged and reworked into a layered landscape, the textures it produces invite multiple encounters to take place between the audience and the text. Most present in the final chapter of this work, fluxes between form as well as modes of address create junctures through which writing shifts from an expository mode to an address to the reader. The time of the page is not necessarily fixed, particularly when the writing disrupts a linear reading and enables a multiplicity of durations. The textual duration extends and contracts at different points and varies with each encounter. The movement within this body of writing between registers additionally disrupts fixed notions of the “time of the page” by invoking multiple points of encounter. These encounters are situated within the moment they occur and cannot be returned to, despite the material conditions of the page. Approaching the page as a layered materiality generates a liveness that can be successively produced but not identically replicated. In this sense, the page becomes a site for live, ephemeral and non-reproductive performances.

The page transforms into a site of encounter through the multiplicity of times it evokes in my work. By eliding a linear reading, the page becomes a landscape through which the reader travels. Perspective diminishes as it becomes possible to return to singular points to summon different images and voices that in turn compile a singular experience with each visit. Treating the page as a mutable score transforms the expository function of writing to one that facilitates a performance on the page. This occurs in different ways throughout this body of research: from the disappearing text in *Echo/plasm* to the shifting and circular reading of the dual-columned *These*

Lungs. Mutability occurs both through the design of the performer/artist as well as the agency of the audience. The reader thus shapes the performance and is complicit in its inception.

Breathlessness encompasses a range of affective experiences, from the fear and tension surrounding impaired breath to desire and wonder to the otherness of fugue states. *Echo/plasm* concentrates on the literal impairment of breath and the primal emotions that this physical state evokes. A whitening out or smothering of the text of *Echo/plasm* produces a literal breathlessness and the unease attached to it. *Echo/plasm* consequently brings into focus perhaps the most concrete and material definition of breathlessness explored in this work. Grounding the outset of this exploration of breathlessness in primal and universal understandings establishes the affective and embodied tone of this work. When moving towards metaphorical extensions of breathlessness, this particular beginning perpetuates an embodied understanding and response to the work. *These Lungs* explores an erotic landscape that is based in excesses of the body and the nature of the limit(s) defining breathlessness. *These Lungs* offers an emotional counterpoint to *Echo/plasm* through a focus on libidinal pleasure and a constant expulsion and return to breath. The affective range of breathlessness extends beyond the singularity of any one emotion. Through extending definitions of breathlessness beyond initial boundaries to include experiences of pleasure, excess, desire as well as syncopal spaces, space for performances of breathlessness are created that explore the very nature of the terms that define it.

Each aspect of practice that this work uses to explore performances of breathlessness on the page questions understandings of what *lessness* entails. Performance writing and breathlessness gesture towards locations between disciplines and definitions, permitting a meeting point for cross-pollination and multiplicity. *Lessness* doubles in this sense as a challenge to the limit and the tendency in discourse to rely on binary reductions of complex ideas. This is to challenge underlying notions of lack that surround breathlessness and to define its particular manifestation of *lessness* as something entirely other than a lack or mere absence. This parallels the operative tactics of Luce Irigaray, who redefines the interior of the female body in its own terms and independent of the reproductive potential of the sex organs. Frustrations that surround concepts of lack are overturned here in order to assert the validity of

those between spaces and what they have to offer. This manifests as a commitment to multiplicity; multiple voices, modes of address, potential readings as well as sites of encounter. An understanding of *lessness* occurs at the point where multiple and varied contradictions meet and merge, in those places just exterior to linear time and logic, embedded within the body.

Breathlessness manifests in this work in myriad forms, never reliant on a singular interpretation of being merely “without breath”. It emerges in the different works ephemerally and briefly, producing the same conditions as the physical state it describes. The many voices, encounters and experiences that the page calls into being fracture doubly when the linearity of writing succumbs to performance writing. In concluding this body of work, I am drawn to reflect on the manifestations of these works outside of here. I invite the reader to form their own relationship with the works contained within these pages, but these works extend beyond these pages and live in the world in increasingly ephemeral forms. The previously mentioned mutability of these works enables a live reading that equally only comes into being at the moment of encounter. Through the many live readings that I have performed over the past years, it becomes increasingly clear that each reading is a suggestion, merely a singularity transforming in the event of each reading. There is a performance of breathlessness that takes place on the page: its nature is variable, complex and many. And it cannot take place without you.

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Materialising the Text: Material Phenomena and Sartre's Slime

The soul escapes through the mouth in words. But words are still the body's effluvia, emanations, weightless folds in the air escaping the lungs and warmed by the body.¹

Ectoplasm is, according to the dictionary, a "viscous substance that is supposed to exude from the body of a medium during a spiritualistic trance and form the material for the manifestation of spirits."² Ectoplasm was a term coined by Gustav Geley at the turn of the 20th century to describe physical manifestations of psychic phenomena. Contrary to traditional representations of spirits as noncorporeal or immaterial, ectoplasms presented a significant shift in thinking regarding psychic phenomena.

Psychical researchers – predominately male and educated, coming from backgrounds in science and medicine – of this phenomenon (ranging from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries) describe various forms, textures and consistencies that this substance may take on during a process of materialisation. Many accounts from researchers as well as lay persons of sittings where manifestations occurred concentrate on the phenomenological aspects of the experience. These documents employ scientific language and method to catalogue the different types of ectoplasm, and fill pages with sensory perceptions of it and supplement their firsthand accounts with photographic documentation, which was at the time a comparatively new and increasingly

1. Jean-luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, 2003), 151.

2. Stuart Webb, *Ghosts* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2013), 76.

a white-clad figure white-clad figure
closely disappeared a white-clad figure
face beardless light of a bluish colour

the body was bent over in front but
no arms or legs (light was flashed) a human
face of female aspect aluminous haze
on that side a figure clad in light grey and
partly white material shown in half
profile bent sideways a white strip was
first seen at the lower gap in the curtains
and then a white-clad figure

when the curtain was opened

an illumination (bright phosphorescent) strip

then a form-less mass of light grey
colour disappeared and reappeared
first vague and indefinite a fluctuating
motion brighter and more solid changed
into a white luminous material a heap of
the finest white chiffon veiling stretched

accessible technology. The property of the camera to ‘arrest’ the viscous emanations in a literally fixed form created opportunities to study and verify phenomena that were, by their very lack of definition, ephemeral and constantly receding from grasp.

There is no definitive description of ectoplasm. They range from “a solid, liquid or vaporous substance produced by ghosts or spirits”³ to a “viscous white substance which is said to be released from the orifice of a medium and used by spirits to take on a physical form”⁴ to simply a “filmy, quasi-solid substance which supposedly issues from the bodies of mediums.”⁵ Charles Richet, who later adopted the term ectoplasm, describes in 1905 a “white luminous spot” appearing on his photographs, referring to this phenomenon as effluvia.^{6,7} Effluvia indicates the shift of ectoplasmic phenomenon from the “fleecy cloud” Judge Peterson states he observed in 1877 to what C.E.M. Joad describes in 1933 as “a shapeless, fluid substance of the colour and consistency of congealed porridge.”⁸ This transition from gas to solid begins towards the end of the nine-teenth century where the emphasis changes from apparitions and ghostly spirits to material excretions. By the 1930’s the majority of the photographic and textual documentation as well as physical evidence of material phenom-

out beyond the curtain byahand and again withdrawn massdissolvedlosingsolidshape

alightstripfrom the quiescent hand a columnof luminoussmoke luminoussmoke along white band shape of(a bleached human thigh bone)solid form (air)abroadwhite strip brightwhiteveil

stripswhitecreamy substance serpentine wavescolourless smoke inthethe body nebulous and half-liquid or solid structures inapaleroze

colour emanationof rays streaks radiation flowing back(sphericalshapesolid whitenucleus(a human head))veils and textilefabrics

opening of the curtains

longveiltransparent soft white materialthreadscashmerewoolhairsoft vague andsketchyformfirstfingerpointing upwards from a stalkor

3. “Paranormal Terminology,” My Paranormal Podcast, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://myparanormal.tumblr.com/terminology>

4. “Paranormal Encyclopedia,” accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.paranormal-encyclopedia.com/c/>

5. “Definitions,” Carroll Area Paranormal Team, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.carrollareaparanormalteam.com/id16.html>

6. Charles Richet, “Concerning the Phenomena,” *Extracts from the Annals of Psychological Science* Oct & Nov (1905): 280.

7. *Effluvia*: a gas, vapour or discharge. It comes from the Latin to flow

8. Andrew T. T. Peterson, *Essays from the Unseen, Delivered Through the Mouth of W. L., a Sensitive, and Recorded by A. T. T. P.* (London: J. Burris, 1885) As cited in: Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* vol. 2. (London: Cassel and Company, Ltd., 1926), 89, and Cyril E. M. Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing LLC., 2005, 1933), 174.

ena were thoroughly debunked - the sittings were ultimately elaborate performances designed to provide audiences with the illusion of an existence beyond our immediate one.

Albert von Schrenck-Notzing produced a study entitled *Phenomena of materialisation: a contribution to the investigation of mediumistic teleplastics* in 1914, translated by Edmund Fournier d'Albe into English and expanded with additional material for 1920 and 1923 editions printed by Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & company, limited. These editions contain 225 illustrations, most of which are reproductions of photographs. They accompany detailed descriptions of sittings spanning over four years with the medium Eva Carriere. He describes the various forms, textures and consistencies that this substance assumes during the process of materialisation. Many accounts of the sittings concentrate on the visual aspects of the experience, however, whenever possible, he would describe sounds, smells and textures.

These emanations von Schrenck-Notzing describes originate from a body that gradually recedes - from view and from text. It becomes less and less articulate. Photographs of the sittings diminish role of the medium's body: the body is entirely concealed, enshrouded by specially tailored costumes to prevent trickery, hidden behind a curtain and sometimes even bound to furniture.⁹ The body is present only within the context of the substance emanating from and returning to it.

The text that scrolls along the right hand side of these pages is a collapse of form - it is a composition of the entirety of von

⁹. See von Shrenck-Notzing's *Phenomena of Materialisation* for detailed photographs of costumes.

band continuous veil

indefiniteshadowysoft

fluid broadbright whitishwisp
proceeding fromthe mouth ending at
the knees greyor whitish flakes cloudsor
wisps indefiniteandvarying(besidestheco
lour of the veiling was a greyish yellowor
whitishand not a brilliant white) a cloudy
massagreymist

which moves grows andcondenses
somewhat resembling a torn handker-
chief of fine grey tulle lowerhemtorns-
mall piecesandstrips dissolvedlarge
striped flocculent mouth(respirations)
and convulsive muscular effortsit grew
andcondensed

slowlysink(heap)ofthefinest

stripedgreyveilingfollowed every
motionenveloped in a large veil cloud
bright fragments and strips hungdown
upon

this dissolved like a fogand theface
was again distinctly seen

the face was indeed quite moist as
if with mucus(loudconvulsivecoughing)
deep groaning and(respiration)first nebu-

Schrenck –Notzing’s documentation. The distinctions between one sentence, one phrase, one articulation to another have been dissolved into new manifestations that shiver away from any one congelation. The duration of this scroll is limited to this performance but the permutations of form continue to evolve in the slimy iterations of the text.

The ectoplasmic manifestation replaces the natural in- and exhalation of the body and by extension—speech. Any emanation from the mouth literally prevented articulate speech and as a result, many mediums were reliant on nonverbal communication during the course of a sitting or on the observant eye of a companion or assistant to determine the length of any given performance.

In the absence of speech, and in the absence of any self-determined narrative, it becomes necessary to examine what the ectoplasm means and the ways in which it replaces the absent voice of the medium. What is happening here, in this unsaid? Helene Cixous described feminine writing as occurring beyond or even extraneous to the page writing that “she makes what she thinks materialize carnally, she conveys meaning with her body.”¹⁰ Cixous deliberately includes forms associated with inarticulacy – it is after all, according to her, the flesh that “speaks true.”¹¹ It is within this context that I consider Sartre’s slime and how it performs resistance.

The viscous – the slimy – according to Sartre is the situation where being in-itself “would draw the for-itself into its

¹⁰ Helen Cixous, “Sorties,” *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Besty King, ed. Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 68.
¹¹ Helen Cixous, *ibid.*

lousfloculentcondensingand descend-
 ing slowly chin to breast with mouth on
 the left outer rim of this mass threadlike
 projection hung down grey structures
 already detached grey folded filmy veil of
 a whitish colour

smoky filmy substance(breathing)

floculent whitish grey mass floated
 large muslin veil of the finest texture I
 expressedawishtotouch

“ Not yet, later”

a bright vertical wispamorphous
 materialissues beyond the lips dark skin
 a(mushroom cloudy)cloud cigarette
 smokefloating

intheairwithout sinking

thepainful shuddertouchingthe
 cloud destroyed a spider’s web

bright light

bright strip

veilbunched up and partly torn
 dissolvedinvisible vapour luminositya
 wisp(torn)putting finger into crept like
 asnakeslowly the luminosity veil ever
 shorter disappeared

then the curtain just closedwas

contingency, into its indifferent exteriority, its foundationless existence.”¹² He describes it as a “trap”, that it “clings like a leech” and most importantly, that it gives the impression of fluidity – that it is a “phenomenon in the process of becoming” but that it ultimately refuses to change states.¹³ This “fixed instability... discourages possession”, ultimately undermining any attempt at appropriation.¹⁴ Ultimately, he concludes, it is the “horrible fear that time might become slimy” – that the concept of time and its duration is undermined. The resistance of slime to possession comes to represent “a type of being not realized but threatening which will perpetually haunt consciousness as the constant danger which it is fleeing.”¹⁵

When I open my copy of *Being and Nothingness* I see the chapter that encompasses slime is marred with a circular stain, a blob impregnated into the material of the page, highlighting the word’s gelatinous and hard liquid quality.

Sartre is invested in the affective quality of slime – not merely its physical qualities. He refers to it in terms of its properties and ultimately, the state it occupies. This state, permanently between, neither solid nor fluid, and giving the appearance of one or the other only to, in Sartre’s eyes, betray itself upon closer inspection. Some of the metaphors that Sartre employs are unfortunate – and denigrating to women.¹⁶ While I certainly agree that Sartre

quickly opened/closed again as quickly
and then opened for thesecondtime

light grey veils veils were crossed
behind the veilveiled/brightly veiled image
of an upright female figurea white mass
grew broader below and then vanished
veiled(I struck a match)/light-coloured
veil large rag

(deep respirations) (hysterical
sobs))

flat striped thread-like sticky cool
living/dourless/light grey orwhitish/fin-
gers remained moist/fromthetouchand I
took hold of it

“That hurts me, but I wish it all the
same”

coolmoist/living threads this veil
thewhole fabric of stuff and threadsand
disappeared

not fully formedand were(fugitive)
smoke or gaseous andformed/clouds from
which structures/veilsand/fabrics human
limbs developed grey patches hardlydis-

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 776.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 774-5.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 774.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 779.

¹⁶ See Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce, “Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre’s Psychoanalysis,” *Philosophic Forum* 5 (1973): 133, for a particularly righteous damnation. Sartre’s misogyny is also addressed in a more nuanced fashion by the collection of essays in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Julien S. Murphy, (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999).

demonstrated misogyny in his writing (and arguably within his personal life as well), I do not believe that the slimy is, as a result, fundamentally maligned. The affect of slime to which Sartre initially refers can be determined through its performance as the slimy begins to represent the failure to appropriate being-in-itself – how this project, whatever its appearance may suggest, consistently refuses. It refuses definition or access to a complete understanding of its nature because that is its nature. The closer you approach it the more it shifts.

Sartre attempts to argue that slime's association with particular moral attributes are what perpetuates the aversion it evokes. However, it is simpler than that. Slime does not lend itself to control – slimy substances “stick to the hands” and it is the stickiness of their subversion that encourages apprehension.¹⁷ Slime extends the body beyond its given definition just as it extends the duration of its performance beyond its initial boundaries.

Helene Cixous wrote in *Sorties* that, “thought has always worked through opposition,” referring to a system of oppositions bleeding through and guiding western philosophical discourses. Always, it is ‘or’, ‘against’ – in contrast.¹⁸ Where is “she”?, Cixous asks, indicating an articulation between black and white that eludes appropriation.¹⁹

In the instance of an unsuccessful photograph there are no clear highlights; the negative is ‘thin’. The surface is an indeterminate wash of grey with little differentiation between the vari-

tinguishable grew brighter and denser

(human hand) reappeared again and again touched a blow (hand-shaped body) being touched by a strongly developed large cool and moist male hand moistened

a bright patch where the curtain touched the floor limb living being (hand or foot) flat bright pink colour four fingers of a left male hand lying finger showing half-developed touched finger-nails or any other

bulk and outline motion sensations of animal character joined body fabrics veils or clouds delicate strip threads and fragments having a motion of their own (groaned) (gasped) or

(whined: softly) and a narrow luminous delicate ribbon veiling (stuff) wide released connect some greyish fragments of spider webs disappeared destroyed by (light) textile aggregates greyish white cloudy column small female hand endowed with a motion of its own this hand executed gracefully and beckoning

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 771.
¹⁸ Helen Cixous, “Sorties,” *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Besty King, ed. Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 67.
¹⁹ Helen Cixous, “Sorties,” 66.

ous components of the composition. I had this last week – something went wrong – and the face of the child that I had developed was strangely indistinguishable from the black cloth behind her. Her face was altered by its partial emergence from a grey haze.

And of course, I had to think of Sartre’s frustration as the child resisted definition.

Gustav Geley describes ectoplasm as a “substance” emanating “from the whole body, but chiefly from the natural orifices, from the extremities of the body, the top of the head, the nipples, and the ends of the fingers.”²⁰ He goes on to state:

It issues most frequently from the mouth...it can be seen exuding from the inner surface of the cheeks, from the arch of the palate, and the gums. It takes on different aspects—sometimes (and this is the most characteristic) the appearance of a kind of plastic protoplasmic paste, sometimes a number of fine threads. At other times it may resemble cords of different thicknesses like narrow, rigid rods; or a wide band; or, again, like thin tissues with an undefined and irregular outline. The most curious of these appearances is that of widely spread membrane with fringes and swelling, reminding one of the [epiploöm](caul). In fine, the substance is amorphous, or rather polymorphous.²¹

Substance – a word meaning “any kind of corporeal matter” – is used over and over again to describe ectoplasm.²² Material phenomena, substance, manifestation; every term used indi-

motions

vapour column moved to and fro keeping time with it beatingandwaving muslin this strip touchedbunchedupmediumheightstanding

upright fragments of headsand partial formationsfacesdarkundeveloped mass a face looking upwards bridgeofnoseforeheadhairand aforehead-bustheadneckandbreast in veils cloudy drapery falling becoming more and more dense(respiration)and ended in a sudden transformation

brightpinkstripveil and extending from her mouththickness of about vague indefinite clouds

strips

fists theknucklesandthefurrow betweenthefingersskindelicatepinkthetouch wascoolandmoistthefistthe healed amputation stump

smallpieceofadarkgreyveilforearms pink colourvagueandtransparent

hand a bright white patchmoving and livingelongationsflowing motion-

20. Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments*, 184.

21. Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments*, 184.

22. “Substance,” Online Etymological Dictionary, accessed February 3, 2013, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=substance>

cates the corporeal qualities of the sight seen and documented on photographic plates. As Geley describes, the “substance is amorphous”, ever-changing, constantly shaped and un-shaped.²³ Marina Warner refers to the ectoplasm as *informe*, and subsequently links the shapeless form of the ectoplasm to the breakdown in meaning described by Georges Bataille’s concept: *informe*.²⁴ Bataille describes *l’informe* as a glob of spit, un crachat.²⁵ Crachat is a word that catches in the throat, halfway in and halfway out. As Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty explain, *informe* “is a form, but for humans, it exists largely apart from us, and gets destroyed (and destroys itself) when we come into contact with it.”²⁶ And this is true of the nature of ectoplasm: it shies away from human touch and recedes into the body of the medium at the slightest manipulation. But the use of the term destruction is partially misleading. Bataille does describe the crushing of spiders and worms, but there are always remains, in the same way that un crachat is coughed up and spat out. The destruction here is merely the transgression of one form slipping away from and into another, always moving from one definition to another. It is not absent, as such, nor does it lack, but its amorphous substance prevents our ability to fasten it with a pin.

“L’informe” was first published as a dictionary entry in *Documents*, an arts and culture publication. It is placed after a brief

fingers of a skeleton hand white transparent handlackingthewhitemassislying between thighs white cloth bunched up structures and shapes were exposed(to the light)shyly and tentativelyandwith evidentreluctancecolouroftheskinbright pinknolonger recognisable a veil layon-theface swathedbright and nearly white hand

lying fingers flat white colour fingers white strips vagueimperfect development long veil strip(respiration)white strip pulled lightningrapiditywavedbeatinga pretty violent blow fingersthumbnails wrinklesandknuckles

pinkindefiniteshapepatchesand stripsa bright patch lying handkerchief viscouselongations appeared

theoutlineof

theoutlineof

flat dissolved amorphous mass bunchedupgreyveilgreyplacentapapthick round cords immobile white band thick

23. Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments*, 184.

24. Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 290.

25. Georges Bataille, “A Critical Dictionary: The Informe,” *Documents 1:7* (1933), 383. ed. Allan Stock, *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

26. Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, “The Interminable Detour of Form: Art and Formless,” in *Formless: Ways In And Out Of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 189.

article by Michel Leiris where he describes spit as, “in its inconsistency, in its indeterminate contours, in the relative imprecision of its colour, and its wetness, the very symbol of the formless, of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchical.”²⁷ Bataille adopts this theme with one central amendment: *l'informe* becomes *informe*. He describes the role of a dictionary as not only giving “the meaning of words,” but importantly, “their tasks.”²⁸ In this sense, *informe*, as it is written, does not indicate a property but an action. *Informe* “serves to bring things down in the world,” – the word designates its action.²⁹ Crowley and Hegarty write in their introduction to *Formless: Ways in and out of Form* that *informe* “works as a sort of undoing, an undoing that remains even when something takes or is given form.”³⁰

The cataloguing documentation of material phenomena, like Sartre’s project, serves as a kind of dictionary – assigning physical and affective properties, meanings, to their subject. The tasks of the ectoplasm are determined as they are written – its action is to manifest, and the ways in which it manifests – its forms – are interpreted for meaning. However, this project is impossible because like slime, the ectoplasm resists possession. Luce Irigaray believes that a body deprived of mucous is a corpse – that which makes it live ceases the moment that it no longer contains the slime that allows it to resist.³¹ Consequently, the performance ends and the body is fixed

27 Michel Leiris, “Debauche,” *Documents vol. 1* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1995), 382. As translated by Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, Introduction to *Formless: Ways In And Out Of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 11.

28 Georges Bataille, “A Critical Dictionary: The Informe,” 31.

29 Georges Bataille, *ibid.*.

30 Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, Introduction to *Formless: Ways In And Out Of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 12.

31 “Mucosity is what prevents a body from ever turning dry: a body deprived of all mucous is a corpse.” Michael Ner Mariano, “To Think of the Sexual Difference: Irigaray and

fine bright transparent veil
 long white lady’s glove
 perforatedaholeblackspotflatand
 sankdownlyinginherlap
 (flash-light)
 (flash-light)
 jointsfingershand
 transparent meshwork net white
 band bent longandlarger
 (flash-light)with a loud groan
 the curtain was stretched and
 inflated
 fine grey veilscondensed white grey-
 ish luminositywhite chiffon
 veiling light grey patches vague
 shapethese patchesballsandbands suffer
 (the light)
 emerged and disappeared
 white whitish grey emerging white
 viscousflowedlongnarrow strip
 (deepandaudible(respirations)and
 groanedandwhimpered)
 semi-liquid substanceanimal life

to a flat surface. However, the slime of the medium's performance extends its duration and is what allows it to continue to resist – to form the gesture of the ultimately failed attempt at appropriation.

columnmistsmocketapering
hand beckonedtous living female
handhumanskin
tissue
tissue
unfolded
folded
disappeared behind the curtain
handflatmobileandindependent
veilveil strip descending feebly woven
fabric(flash-light)bulgingforwardand
having
sharp edge of a fingertip
radiating auraluminous whitecol-
our stripinthe form of smokerays and
surrounded auraor ring of light
formedaheadhangingdownbecame
longer andbroaderasifto duplicate self
alsoofsome darkmaterialmouth
openand
(breathing)

the Psychoanalysis of Rationality," *Budhi*, 1:5, 2001: 34. Accessed February 15, 2014. doi: 10.13185/610. Mariano paraphrases Irigaray here in order to underline a relationship between mucous and creation. She writes that, "the body deprived of its relation to the mucous and its gesture is linked to the fallen body or the corpse." Luce Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Luce Irigaray, (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 17. Please note that "live" here should be pronounced like a 'live wire' and not like 'I live here'.

Appendix 2. *GHostings 13: Materialising Mucous: Sartre's Slime*. 2014. Promotional image.



more solid, changed into a white luminous material, a heap of the finest
white chiffon veil, stretched out beyond the curtain to a hand and
again withdrawn mass observed can beyond the curtain to a hand and
space over hand a column of luminous white strip, from the
a hand white hand, shape of a blotted human viscous material,
(the) a hand white strip, from the
Strip, white creamy substance, serpentine, waves colourless made in the
the body inclusion and half-hand or solid, substance in a pale rose
colour emanation, of rays streaks radiating from back (circular shape
solid white nucleus (a human head) veil and scaly fibres
opening of the curtain
long, veil, transparent soft white material through cabinet, wood, hair,
soft vague and bluish form first finger, pointing upwards from a silk or
hand, continuous veil
inclining shoulder soft
fluid hand, bright white strip, preceding from the mouth ending at
the knees, grey or whitish flash, clouds or wisp incline, and varying
(Besides, the colour of the veil was a greyish white, or white, and not
a brilliant white) cloudy mass, a grey mist,
which moves, grows and condenses, somewhat resembling a torn
handkerchief of fine grey silk, lower hem torn, small pieces and strips
disintegrated large striped fluorescent mouth (respiration) and convulsive
muscular efforts. It grew
and condensed, slowly sink (heap) of the finest
striped grey veil, followed every motion enveloped in a large veil, cloud
bright fragments and strips long down open

The curtain then opened again,

a large white mass appeared,
emerging
not quite brightly illuminated. Strip,
like a roughly
modelled and softened mask of white plaster
grey or brown and falling over
a white
mass a whitish indefinite mass
a hand.
indefinite
two finger-shaped
formed.
flat white mass brownish
structure, soft and
semi-liquid,
a transparent fabric
mouse-grey

the image fell from above
downwards and forwards
small white particles,
flattened.
small balls of paper crushed particles
resembling a fine dust.
a fragment hanging
wisps
grey cord,
twine, very fine twisted skin.
stretched string
long line, faintly luminous,
phosphorescent,
moistened
sticky substance

MATERIALISING MUCOUS: SARTRE'S SLIME
JESSICA WORDEN
GHostings 13: performance-lecture
Central St. Martins, February 15, 2014

"Jessica Worden's performance was mesmerising. Periodically, she broke off from her discourse on Sartre's Theory of Viscosity to read excerpts of text describing ectoplasmic manifestations in slimy detail. These descriptions were continually, slowly flowing on the screen behind her. When reading, her voice took on a the tone of liturgy of chanting of seduction, transporting the audience into a liminal time and space." *Sarah Sparks*

"The soul escapes through the mouth in words. But words are still the body's effluvia, emanations, weightless folds in the air escaping the lungs and warmed by the body." *Jean-Luc Nancy*

The cataloguing documentation of material phenomena, like Sartre's project, serves as a kind of dictionary – assigning physical and affective properties, meanings, to their subject. The tasks of the ectoplasm are determined as they are written – its action is to manifest, and the ways in which it manifests – its forms – are interpreted for meaning. However, this project is impossible because like slime, the ectoplasm resists possession. Luce Irigaray believes that a body deprived of mucous is a corpse – that which makes it live ceases the moment that it no longer contains the slime that allows it to resist. Consequently, the performance ends and the body is fixed to a flat surface. However, the slime of the medium's performance extends its duration and is what allows it to continue to resist – to form the gesture of the ultimately failed attempt at appropriation.

thick, projecting from.
a white
head-shaped disk moved past
two white
structures, arms, both
from the mouth.
large grey mass coming
fine muslin, smoke
fell
a moist
(flash-light)
wisps, cords, shreds, fine mouse-
coloured skin.
transparent spider's web,
dull red rubber on black velvet. strip
reddish,
and seemingly liquid patch.
grew pale and disappeared as quickly
as come.
lost their red
colour and visibility. Sticky, colourless.

a wisp
drops of liquid,
moistened the
hand,
rubbed off with a handkerchief,
distinct traces.

Appendix 3. *untitled (Brugmansia)*. 2014. Documentation of a live performance using text and b/w slides.

“setting out to make a garden in which...to take...delight, yet in soil most unfruitful and full of weeds...uproot the weeds and...set good plants in their stead...We have now... like good gardeners, to make these plants grow, and to water them carefully, so that they may not perish,

but may produce flowers which shall send forth great fragrance to give refreshment... so that...may come often into the garden to take...pleasure and have...delight among these virtues.”

with tears—or,
if there be none of these,

First the seed softened by time, pushing

past the surface of the earth, extending
through a stalk out into the air, unfolding
two leaflets like furry lances to fork
and grow
and grow
and grow into a tree.

All of these parts:

roots
bark
wood
foliage
calyx
corolla
pollen
fruit
and seeds
can be used.

“Already the flowers are opening: see, they are beginning to send out their fragrance.”

scopolamine and atropine. hyoscyamine, cuscohygrine, noratropine, meteloidine, littorine, and acetoxytropane.

All of these, the placidula eurynassa, eats as a fat worm: nibbling away at fleshy leaves and trembling corolla until there is nothing

left but the structural out-



lines of plant matter, digested and stored, suf-
fusing its tissues with toxins.
Never fall asleep, never sit
beneath the borrachero tree,
they say. Beware of opened, pend-
ulous blooms:

“The tree has a spirit in the form of an eagle
which has been seen to come flying through
the air, and then to disappear; it vanishes
completely in the leaves, between the
braches, between the flowers.”

She lays out arched
like Endymion
like Danae
The marble curve of her lips is
soft and hard, open with limp limbs
clothed

in mounds of white gleaming
cloth.
Eyes half-closed, seeing without sight.

Rapture is irresistible.
It comes as quick desire, violent
shock; you see and feel this cloud, or
this powerful bird rise, bearing
you upon its wings.

inward and outward we moved and
stared vacantly,
“See you are being carried away and you know
not where.”

Deathly pale, born off, lifted from
the ground:
away
away
away

“Grant me no more favours.”

Watching from the tree top:
cold sweat rolling, lips wet and
twitching without rhythm, joining
pools of tears

to water the
hard earth and the roots beneath.

Blood beats through the skin, the body
shudders.



“Sometimes, my pulse ceases to beat at all.”
To be, on the point of death,
like a rope around the neck—

Golden spear, iron-tipped, plunging
into the heart,

the entrails, not
once but many, dragging them out
to consume.

“There are things of which the memory has no
recollection.”

Trampling underfoot all the things
of the world, becoming unwrought.
We cease for no longer than the
twinkling on an eye; exceeding.

untitled [Brugmansia], JE Worden. 2014.

Appendix 4. *The Torture Garden by Octave Mirbeau; a reading in two voices.* 2013.

Writing experiment using Octave Mirbeau's *Torture Garden* (1899) as source text.

The Torture Garden by Octave Mirbeau; a reading in two voices
Jessica Worden

was extraordinarily pale and body trembled shaken by nervous spasm tried to take hands and icy I was
implored what's the matter with what are you suffering from speak to me replied a raucous voice and my body.
which issued painfully from contracted throat leave me alone don't touch me don't talk to me
sick pallor bloodless lips and rasping voice frightened thought was going to die terrified called my hands-
quick quick clara's dying clara's dying come quick but having parted the curtains and shown I replied:
chimera's face shrugged shoulders and exclaimed brutally that's nothing always like that when contracted
and grumbling returned to muscular exertions the bark lifted in the water slid more rapidly over pallor,
the stream crossed in front of sampans like from whose canopies with their closed curtains came my rasping-
songs the sound of kisses laughter and the groans of love mingled lapping water and the distant "quick quick quick"
almost reverberation of tom-toms and gongs in a few minutes the other shore and for a long time
glided by black deserted hulks lit and crowded low dives porter's teahouses for sailors and riff-raff taking place around me
through port-holes and lighted windows caught fleeting scenes strange painted faces lewd dances my face was-
wild debauchery faces of people opium remained insensible to all taking place around both in
the silken bark or on the face was pressed into the pillow and chewed on it tried to make breathe I chewed.
the smelling salts three times pushed the flask away exhausted heavy gesture throat bare breasts
bursting the torn material of corsage legs tense and vibrant as the strings of a violin breathing I pushed.
with difficulty to say and bent over with agonizing soul full of its tragic incertitudes and countless
troubles to reassure that it was really a passing crisis that nothing in had broken springs of life my breasts
grasped wrist under my hand pulse beat rapidly light and regular as the heart of a little bird a legs tense
little child from time to time a sigh escaped lips a long and painful sigh which lifted and shelled and I was.
rosy breast trembling murmured in a low and very gentle voice Clara Clara Clara face was
hidden in the pillow hair slipped hair red-gold under the glow of the lantern took on tones of My agonising soul.
old mahogany and projecting from feet clad in yellow leather still spotted here and there with
bloody mud Clara Clara Clara nothing but the song of the water and distant music the curtains My wrist.
the canopy down the fiery mountain of the terrible city and nearer the red green alert and sinuous
reflections diving about in the black stream like slender luminous eels supporting out with difficulty my pulse rapidly-
helped up the ladder cold and head was thrown slightly back and thick and sinuous hair entirely I, did not hear,
undone tumbled about shoulders in fiery waves coarse neck with a limp hand and almost fainting did not see.
uttered vague little moans and blurted out inarticulate little words like a child panting slightly my hair slipped,
under light groaned if only my god if only sneered with fierce mouth die no suffering body only my head,

corruption little friend of breasts and soul how beautiful you are like that as beautiful as a young girl dead hover you are not going to revive little friend of my lips revive under my caresses and perfumes of my mouth moistened forehead with a violent perfume and made inhale the salts yes yes dear little soul you fainted and you cannot hear me and you cannot feel my little fingers but your heart beats beats beats and love gallops in your veins like a young horse love bounds in your veins like a young tiger turned to me you must not be sad because always fainted when comes in a few minutes cry with delight over happy burning flesh to struggle muscles tightened and contracted frightful articulations cracked like the joints of a boat disabled by a storm an expression of horrible suffering all the more horrible for being silent masked face contorted like faces of tortured men under the bell in the garden half-closed twitching lids only a slender bluish trace of eyes shod a little froth foamed at lips and breathlessly groaned my god my god is it possible what's going to happen commanded hold down but leave free for the demons must leave in a moment begin to cry held wrists to prevent belabouring face with nails in a last convulsion arched from heels to neck and taut skin quivered then little by little the crisis abated muscles relaxed and fell back exhausted on the bed eyes full of tears for several moments wept and wept tears flowed from eyes silently and ceaselessly as from a spring and added it's the end

my thick and sinuous
 entirely undone.
 I uttered:
 muscles tightened,
 swelled,
 contracted,
 my face,
 my half-closed twitching.
 my body
 arched from my heels
 my skin.
 I fell back exhausted.
 "It's the end. In a moment I will
 begin to cry."

Appendix 5. *Echo/plasm*. 1st edition. 2013. See <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182786.v1>.

Appendix 6. *Among the Salt Flats*. 2014. See <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182789.v1>.

Appendix 7. *Echo/plasm*. Sound recording. 9'56". 2015. See <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182792.v1>.

Appendix 8. Excerpt of *These Lungs*. Live performance. Video. 2015. See <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5182798.v1>.