



# **Echoes and Citations in Art and its Writing**

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## Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Lisa Barnard

## Acknowledgments

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*To Abi*

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# Abstract

This thesis defines echoing in relation to the production and interpretation of contemporary art, writing and critical practice. Informed by the action of performing to the camera, where a body in anticipation of a transmission taking place addresses a perceived audience, and where acts of speech, gesture and attention are front and centre, I locate echoing and reverberation within the body, as visceral events driving language, social relations and subjectivities.

Following a trajectory from 1970s performance and video art through to twenty-first century developments in writing-as-practice, echoing is established as a frame through which to interpret citational tendencies in the practice and discourse of contemporary art. Beginning with Nancy Holt and Richard Serra's *Boomerang* (1974) and Sharon Hayes's *Screed #13* (2003), I consider echoing as an auditory effect, breaking it down through Brandon LaBelle's *Lexicon of the Mouth* (2014) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Echo' (1993). I argue that, unlike appropriation, echoing is not an exact copy of its source, but one transformed by the interruptions and impediments emerging through the circumstances of its respeaking and rewriting at a different place and time and called forth by a different body. In exploration of Edward George's expression that 'the body is a body of citational writing' (2021) through Martine Syms's *Notes on Gesture* (2015), I enact writerly practices of citation – such as closely reading a source, embodying it through rewriting and respeaking it aloud, reconfiguring, holding and making it visible – and test how these can challenge conventions for writing and make way for different messages and sensations.

Applying J.L. Austin's speech act theory to writing, both as action and a form that is prepared for action, specifically the script, the thesis is written performatively, with the writer, 'I', adopting the role of an academic researcher undertaking the task of a practice-based research project, one that is rooted in writing, in anticipation of the reader, 'You', extending the performance through its reading. It is modelled and tested through the practice of integrating existing texts and artworks into new arrangements via processes of repeating, restaging and rewriting. These reconfigurations are presented online, at <https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/echoes-and-citations-in-art-and-its-writing>, and the reader is directed to them at certain points in the body of the thesis. The interacting transmissions – of reading, writing, enacting, recording and documenting – are viewed as performing points of contact between reader, writer, text and practice. Documents and objects (language signs and symbols; printed matter; audio visual recordings; workshops) are simultaneously reconfigured as source, process and outcome.

# Orientation

## CONTEXT

This thesis, titled ‘Echoes and citations in art and its writing’, is conceptualised through finding affinity with remarks made by the artist Sharon Hayes about her work in a conversation with the artist Every Ocean Hughes.<sup>1</sup> During the discussion, programmed alongside Hayes’s exhibition *Echo*, at the Moderna Museet, Sweden, in 2019, the two artists reflect on their experiences living and working in New York in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Hayes describes feeling like a witness, not fully part of the scene both artists were involved with, having arrived later after moving from Los Angeles:

Hayes

...because I didn’t feel quite of a time... I’m looking to other times, for my affinity, or for a kind of collaboration, or for some kind of recognition, to see myself, to understand myself... I don’t think I have yet found the right word to describe sort of my position, because it isn’t exactly witness, it is something like kind of having this secondary impact, through, or being almost there, or just next to, or adjacent...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Hayes, ‘Sharon Hayes & Every Ocean Hughes | Artist Talk’, Moderna Museet, April 12, 2019, video, 01:01:36, April 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXId8vUhGRI&t=1s>.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Hayes, *Echo*, cur. Lena Essling, presented at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, April 13, 2019 – August 11, 2019, <https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/sharon-hayes/>.

<sup>3</sup> Hayes, ‘Sharon Hayes & Every Ocean Hughes | Artist Talk’, 00:33:56-00:35:59.



The desire to see and understand oneself is explored by the writer Brandon LaBelle, in his book *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of the Oral Imaginary* (2014), who argues that listening is ‘a type of knowledge structure from which understandings of social life, bodily identities, and cultural practices can be considered and brought into dialogue.’<sup>4</sup> LaBelle owes much to the work of the writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant, who conceptualised a ‘poetics of relation’ (in his book of the same name, 1997) via the observation of such connections, between human bodies and their languages and surroundings, through a social and literary lens.<sup>5</sup> Following Glissant’s emphasis on the relations between bodies, LaBelle proposes listening as a ‘position of *radical empathy*’, through which we learn ‘*how to be a body*’, but wherein also contains the potential for critical and creative thought and action as individuals in relation to others.<sup>6</sup> *Notes on Gesture* (2015), a video of a performance made by the artist Martine Syms, shows a similar interest in understanding self, others and the relations between.<sup>7</sup> The artist Diamond Stingily, as the performer in *Notes on Gesture*, embodies such processes of ‘*learning how to be a body*’, specifically through incorporating the movements of others.<sup>8</sup> In an interview with the curator Amy Kazymierchyk, Syms explains that some of the gestures are Stingily’s own, while others are copied and improvised from the photographs and stories of Syms’s relatives she shared with Stingily during filming.<sup>9</sup> Attempting to understand identity formation, LaBelle maps listening beyond the ears to the mouth, arguing that as the site of speech it demonstrates our capacity for listening as reciprocal action, evident in the mouth’s ability to rehearse, formulate, feel and sound out responses to one’s surroundings. As we try words and mouth movements on, we are at the same time trying on those aspects of subjectivities that we come across, in attempts to find our

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<sup>4</sup> Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of the Oral Imaginary* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), viii.

<sup>5</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Italics in original. LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, viii-ix.

<sup>7</sup> Martine Syms, *Notes on Gesture*, 2015, video, 00:10:27, <https://www.martinesyms.ms>.

<sup>8</sup> Italics in original. LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, viii.

<sup>9</sup> Martine Syms, ‘Borrowed Lady’, *C: International Contemporary Art* 132 (Winter 2017): 10-15, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/borrowed-lady/docview/1856097750/se-2>.

own.<sup>10</sup> Informed by the action of performing to the camera, where, in anticipation of a transmission taking place, a body addresses a perceived audience, and where acts of speech, gesture and attention are front and centre, I locate echoing and reverberation within the body, as visceral events driving language, social relations and subjectivities.

*Boomerang*, produced by the artists Nancy Holt and Richard Serra, is a recording of a performance originally broadcast live on public television in Texas in 1974.<sup>11</sup> In this work, Holt is seen to speak haltingly as her speech is transmitted back to her at a slight delay. As Holt waits, increasingly accustomed to the artificial delay in her hearing, the materiality of her voice, its substance and resonance, is brought into dialogue with the cognition required to produce it. The echo, as noun and verb, is staged here as an auditory event taking place within a body.

In a second recording produced by the Moderna Museet in 2019, Hayes describes the rationale informing her exhibition:

...I've been always fascinated by the mythological figure of Echo, and in particular these feminist writers who I appreciate, and the way that they've talked about the feminist possibilities in this mythological figure, who in some ways was punished for her gift with language. And what I think is interesting is that Echo's curse was that she was no longer able to speak her own words but had to repeat the words of others, and for me, the sort of relation or intersection I find in my own life- in my own work, or with my own work is that idea of repeating something that has already

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<sup>10</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 159-160.

<sup>11</sup> 'Nancy Holt, Richard Serra. *Boomerang*. 1974.' Museum of Modern Art, New York, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/314418>.

been said, can actually be an act, it can be an action, it can have the force of language, or the force of original speech.<sup>12</sup>

One such writer of ‘the feminist possibilities in this mythological figure’ is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who in 1993 wrote the article titled ‘Echo’.<sup>13</sup> Drawing comparison to the subaltern woman as subject, Spivak rewrote the mythological Echo’s punishment, observing voice where at first there seemed none. In her earlier article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, first published in 1988, Spivak defines epistemic violence as that which discredits individuals and groups, to the point of disenfranchisement, marginalisation and oppression, citing the globalised ideology intent on ‘constitut[ing] the colonial subject as Other’ while suppressing any ‘trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity’.<sup>14</sup> In deconstructing Spivak’s deconstruction of a silenced subject, I consider how echoes can shift convention and make way for different voices, messages and sensations. Influenced by Spivak’s philosophy of ethics, I question the ethical aspects of echoing via methods of citation. Citation has the potential to exclude and dis-contextualise sources, and as such can be interpreted as systemically influenced, with the erasure of text extending into the socio-political realm and manifesting as an element of epistemic violence. Unlike echoing, which emerges as a reflection of a present and accessible source, citation is demonstrably cognitive, a more clearly thoughtful process based upon selection and acknowledgement.

Citation is extensively considered by the artist and writer Edward George in ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’,<sup>15</sup> an article written about the similarly titled film ‘The

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon Hayes, ‘Sharon Hayes: Echo | Introduction’, Moderna Museet, video, 00:30:12, June 13, 2019, [https://youtu.be/IGowgkm\\_PbM](https://youtu.be/IGowgkm_PbM), 00:00:47-00:01:35.

<sup>13</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Echo’, *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 17-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/469267>.

<sup>14</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 76.

<sup>15</sup> Edward George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, *Third Text* 35, no. 2 (2021): 205-226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2020.1867364>.

Last Angel of History’, co-produced almost thirty years earlier by George and Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC).<sup>16</sup> In his text published in 2021, George models writerly practices of citation while describing and analysing the citational ethos driving the film’s original production. He highlights the significance of citation for creative practice and practitioners and its impact on a larger scale, particularly in the production and consumption of popular culture, via connecting groups of people who have been culturally and physically displaced. George’s analysis deals with the experiences and histories of Black people in relation to Africa, in particular the psychic effects of the Euro-American slave trade upon those displaced and their descendants. George describes a disorientation of subjectivity experienced by Black diasporic communities, linked to the suppression and denial of ancestral knowledge that was enforced among the plantation complex, the effects of which are remembered, felt and arguably still codified in law today. For George, citation begins to close the gap, both real and perceived, between Africa and its people, inclusive of those who reside there and those who do not.

The desire to draw subjects, objects and ideas together is evident in a second work by Martine Syms, the performance lecture *Misdirected Kiss*, arguably a companion piece to *Notes on Gesture*.<sup>17</sup> In a method that visualises and narrativises her thinking process, Syms shares photographs of known and unknown origins with the audience, while reflecting upon a series of personal, cultural, and professional references. George writes, ‘the body is a body of citational writing’, and we are once again back to the body as a site of knowledge production and acquisition, here brought into dialogue with action, writing and referencing.<sup>18</sup> In her work *Symbionese Liberation*

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<sup>16</sup> *The Last Angel of History*, directed by John Akomfrah, produced by Black Audio Film Collective, commissioned by Channel Four and ZDF, broadcast October 1995, cited in George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 206.

<sup>17</sup> Martine Syms, *Misdirected Kiss*, 2015. For the video recording, see Martine Syms, ‘Martine Syms at the Center for Experimental Lectures’, The Center for Experimental Lectures, video, 00:41:48, uploaded October 1, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/141071786>. For the written transcript, see Martine Syms, ‘Misdirected Kiss’, Center for Experimental Lectures, September 6, 2015, [http://www.experimentallectures.org/files/Martine\\_Syms\\_Misdirected\\_Kiss.pdf](http://www.experimentallectures.org/files/Martine_Syms_Misdirected_Kiss.pdf), 1-6.

<sup>18</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 207.

*Army (SLA) Screeed #13*, a video recording of a performance in front of a live audience, Sharon Hayes performs receiving and speaking language verbatim, with the artist's stutter providing a way to interpret the voice as a thing, an object in motion, channelled through various bodily conduits.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sharon Hayes, *Screeed #13*, 2003. See 'Screeed #13', Sharon Hayes, video, 00:10:56, September 22, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/106825534>.

## CONTRIBUTION

This thesis defines echoing in relation to the production and interpretation of contemporary art. Following a trajectory from 1970s performance and video art through to twenty-first century developments in writing-as-practice, echoing is established as a frame through which to interpret citational tendencies in the practice and discourse of contemporary art and writing. I argue that understanding the ethics of echoing and citation and the challenges they pose to relational constraints of possession, originality, and the finiteness of objects and subjects, is important to understanding contemporary intersectional subjecthood and its politics.

Owing to the work of George, Glissant, Hayes, Holt and Serra, LaBelle, Spivak and Syms, I offer echoing as a tool for the practice of art's production, staging and interpretation. In this thesis echoing is modelled primarily in forms of writing and as such is intended as a contribution to the field of art writing, defined as writing that is and is about art.

The works discussed here, connected via human language manifested in speech, gesture, and writing, serve to highlight the potential for citation within echoing. Earlier in this text, I used the word 'scene' in reference to the conversation between Sharon Hayes and Every Ocean Hughes. Deliberating over the circumstances of their time in New York, the artists define the word 'community' as a relatively organised group of people and thus prefer the word 'scene' to describe their shared, loose-knit group of artists and friends who knew each other and knew of each other.<sup>20</sup> In dialogue with the boundaries of personal and professional relationships, the idea of friendship occupies this thesis, peripherally.

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<sup>20</sup> Hayes and Hughes, 'Sharon Hayes & Every Ocean Hughes | Artist Talk'.

The reader of this thesis follows a narrative of thinking and writing through an artwork. Practice is modelled in stopping, starting, and stopping again, as I work to transcribe a source; in pausing to check and fixate on details; in the uncertainties and questions that interrupt clearly drawn conclusions; in using senses and experiences, beyond looking, to materially and theoretically contextualise work; and in attempting to anticipate how others might approach interpretation. I argue that an echo is not an exact copy of its source, but one transformed by the interruptions and impediments emerging through the circumstances of its respeaking and rewriting, at a different place and time and called forth by a different body. I enact writerly practices of citation – such as closely reading a source, embodying it through rewriting and respeaking it aloud, reconfiguring, holding, and making it visible. What are the qualities informing attention and transmission across and between bodies, and how are these qualities performed in writing as and about art?

This project is the result of sustained research into contemporary art from and within this predominantly Western context, extending from the present 2020s back to c. 1960. Over the course of the twentieth century, engagements with speech, sound and text in contemporary art have developed alongside performance and video. Significant artists and practitioners in these fields include John Cage, Laurie Anderson and Pauline Oliveros. The role language played in the organisation of society became a significant feature of artistic discourse from the 1960s onwards, evident in text-based and conceptual work (Conceptual Art, Art & Language) and in the naming of techniques of appropriation that relied upon found content, such as *détournement* (the Situationist International) and the Cut-Up (the Beat Generation). As more and more artists staged temporary events outside of traditional gallery spaces and discursive focus shifted beyond the idea of artwork as commodity, performance art grew in popularity in the form of happenings, scores (Fluxus) and actions (Viennese Actionism). Engagements with transgression, the corporeal and abjection can be traced through writing of the 1970s and 1980s by writers of

feminist perspectives and those associated with *Écriture Feminine* (Hélène Cixous, bell hooks, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Audre Lorde, Monique Wittig). Such ideas – the dematerialisation of the art object; the body as a site of action; critique of capitalism – continue to inform art through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, in contemporary embodied writing practices (Maria Fusco, Katrina Palmer, Cally Spooner) and writing about sound (Daniela Cascella, Kodwo Eshun, David Toop).

Though mostly uncited in this thesis, a number of artworks, exhibitions and texts have significantly influenced my practice and research. They are, in no particular order:

Christopher Knowles, *Emily Likes the TV* (2017).<sup>21</sup>

Alvin Lucier, *I am sitting in a room* (1969).<sup>22</sup>

Ana Mendieta, *Imágen de Yágul* (1973).<sup>23</sup>

Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975).<sup>24</sup>

Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975).<sup>25</sup>

William Pope.L, *Skin Set Drawings* (2001-2005).<sup>26</sup>

Cally Spooner, *Scripts* (2016).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Knowles, 'Performance: Christopher Knowles "Emily Likes the TV"', uploaded by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, December 22, 2017, video, 00:06:39, <https://youtu.be/er83Icj4RYk>.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Lucier, 'Alvin Lucier (1931-2021)/I Am Sitting in a Room', UbuWeb, audio, 00:15:23, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.ubu.com/sound/lucier.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Ana Mendieta, *Imágen de Yágul*, 1973, see 'Work', The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, photograph of an artwork, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.anamendietaartist.com/work/67f45e26-9b6f-4358-92d8-01f3c4091410-xsyhr-lgr36/67f45e26-9b6f-4358-92d8-01f3c4091410-xsyhr-lgr36/67f45e26-9b6f-4358-92d8-01f3c4091410-xsyhr-lgr36>.

<sup>24</sup> Carolee Schneemann, 'Interior Scroll, 1975', The Carolee Schneemann Foundation, photographs of an artwork, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.schneemannfoundation.org/artworks/interior-scroll>.

<sup>25</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no.4 (1976): 875-893, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239>.

<sup>26</sup> William Pope.L, *Skin Set Drawings*, 2001-2005, drawings of varying media and dimensions, see 'William Pope.L | Video in American Sign Language', uploaded by Whitney Museum of American Art, November 14, 2013, video, 00:03:29, <https://youtu.be/zeS4ODU190Q>.

<sup>27</sup> Cally Spooner, *Scripts* (London: Slimvolume, 2016).



Cally Spooner with Am Nuden Da, *It's 1957, And The Press Release Still Isn't Written* (2012).<sup>28</sup>

Valie Export, *TAPP und TASTKINO* (1968).<sup>29</sup>

Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece* (1964).<sup>30</sup>

Lorraine O'Grady, *Mme Bourgeoise Noire* (1980-1983).<sup>31</sup>

Hannah Black, *Some Context* (2017).<sup>32</sup>

Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West* (1992-1994).<sup>33</sup>

Daniela Cascella, *F.M.R.L.: Footnotes, Mirages, Refrains and Leftovers of Writing Sound* (2015).<sup>34</sup>

Cameron Rowland, *3 & 4 Will. IVC. 73* (2020).<sup>35</sup>

Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle* (1967).<sup>36</sup>

Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984).<sup>37</sup>

Sturtevant, *Finite Infinite* (2010).<sup>38</sup>

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Lawrence Abu Hamdan : [inaudible] A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts* (2016).<sup>39</sup>

Vito Acconci, *Seedbed* (1972).<sup>40</sup>

Vito Acconci, *Open Book* (1974).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 'Memory Marathon 2012: Cally Spooner – It's 1957, And The Press Release Still Isn't Written', uploaded by Serpentine Galleries, February 1, 2016, video, 00:17:56, <https://youtu.be/6tQhjV7CW2w>.

<sup>29</sup> Valie Export, *TAPP und TASTKINO*, 1968/1989, see 'Valie Export', Museum of Modern Art, New York, photograph of an artwork, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/159727>.

<sup>30</sup> Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964/1965, in 'Cut Piece', MoMA Learning, Museum of Modern Art, New York, accessed January 1, 2023, [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/yoko-ono-cut-piece-1964/](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/yoko-ono-cut-piece-1964/).

<sup>31</sup> Lorraine O'Grady, *Mme Bourgeoise Noire*, 1980-1983, in 'Mlle Bourgeoise Noire', Lorraine O'Grady, photographs of an artwork, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://lorraineogrady.com/art/mlle-bourgeoise-noire/>.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Black, *Some Context*, presented at Chisenhale Gallery, London, September 22 – December 10 2017, <https://chisenhale.org.uk/artists/hannah-black/>.

<sup>33</sup> Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West*, 1992-1994, in 'The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West', Coco Fusco, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.cocofusco.com/two-undiscovered-amerindians>.

<sup>34</sup> Daniela Cascella, *F.M.R.L.: Footnotes, Mirages, Refrains and Leftovers of Writing Sound* (London: Zero Books, 2019), Kindle.

<sup>35</sup> Cameron Rowland, *3 & 4 Will. IVC. 73*, cur. Richard Birkett, presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, January 29 – April 12, 2020, <https://www.ica.art/exhibitions/cameron-rowland>.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (New York: Grove Press, 1978).

<sup>38</sup> Sturtevant, 'Sturtevant, *Finite Infinite*, 2010', in *ArtForum*, video, 00:02:06, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.artforum.com/video/sturtevant-finite-infinite-2010-49020>.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Lawrence Abu Hamdan : [inaudible] A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts* (Berlin: Sternberg Press; Frankfurt/Main: Portikus; St. Gallen: Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Vito Acconci, 'Vito Acconci (1940-2017)/Seedbed (1972)', uploaded by UbuWeb, video 00:11:11, [https://www.ubu.com/film/acconci\\_seedbed.html](https://www.ubu.com/film/acconci_seedbed.html).

<sup>41</sup> Vito Acconci, 'Vito Acconci (1940-2017)/Open Book (1974)', uploaded by UbuWeb, [https://www.ubu.com/film/acconci\\_book.html](https://www.ubu.com/film/acconci_book.html).

Kimsooja, *To Breathe: Invisible Mirror / Invisible Needle* (2005).<sup>42</sup>

Adrian Piper, *Letters to the Editor* (1990-2021).<sup>43</sup>

Contemporary Art Writing Daily, *Untitled* (2016).<sup>44</sup>

Natalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, *If You Fail to Cross The Rubicon (On A History Of Lateness)* (2017).<sup>45</sup>

Kenneth Goldsmith, *Printing Out the Internet* (2013).<sup>46</sup>

Laurie Anderson, *Spending the War Without You: Virtual Backgrounds* (2021).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kimsooja, 'Kimsooja (b.1957)/To Breathe: Invisible Mirror/Invisible Needle (2005)', uploaded by UbuWeb, video, 00:09:53, [https://ubu.com/film/kimsooja\\_breathe.html](https://ubu.com/film/kimsooja_breathe.html).

<sup>43</sup> Adrian Piper, '\*@#%!!CENSORED: Letters to the Editor', Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin, accessed January 1, 2023, <http://www.adrianpiper.com/censored.shtml>.

<sup>44</sup> Contemporary Art Writing Daily, *Untitled*, 2016, in 'Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash' cur. Ed Atkins and James Richards, presented at Eden Eden, Berlin, October 20 – January 16 2016, [https://cdn.contemporaryartlibrary.org/store/image/110400/imagefile/original\\_jpeg-8a711455792e2f294ec744a02a00037e.jpg](https://cdn.contemporaryartlibrary.org/store/image/110400/imagefile/original_jpeg-8a711455792e2f294ec744a02a00037e.jpg).

<sup>45</sup> Nathalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, *If You Fail to Cross The Rubicon*, performed at 'Performance and Uncertainty Symposium', org. Kiff Bamford, Naomi Colhoun, Simon Morris, Harold Offeh, Vicky Sharples and Zara Worth, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, March 4, 2017, <https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/performance-if-you-fail-cross-rubicon/>.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *Printing Out the Internet*, presented at Labor Gallery, Mexico City, 26 July – 26 August 2013, <https://labor.org.mx/en/exhibitions/printing-out-the-internet>.

<sup>47</sup> Laurie Anderson, 'Spending the War Without You | Laurie Anderson's Norton Lectures', uploaded by Mahindra Humanities Center, December 14 and December 15, 2021, 7 videos, 09:20:17, <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtxVM47qfVNCAPdgEesjlfIQX6rptwXDp>.

## KEY TERMS

While defining the key terms, I also insert as footnotes some citations taken from the thesis to provide anchor points for the reader.

### Listening and Close Reading

Following LaBelle's listening approach and Glissant's 'poetics of relation', I frame listening as an inherently social process, critical to identity formation and manifesting in our attempts to think and act in relation to the bodies of ourselves and others. Unlike the markedly passive activity of hearing, listening can be thought of in terms of paying attention, a '*caring for the extremes*', marked by duration, depth and detail.<sup>48</sup> Where listening, as a methodology for knowledge production, of the self and others, is applied to the field of sound by LaBelle, I take it into the field of text to close reading and writing. Elements of consciousness demanded in listening's moment of action are similarly required when closely reading a text. Close reading also requires active, sustained attention to carefully question a text's particularities. It encourages proximity to a source, getting so close as to see a person's tastebuds,<sup>49</sup> reading their thoughts,<sup>50</sup> or following their lead.<sup>51</sup> Spivak refers to a 'deconstructive embrace' taking place between herself, the text she is reading and its author,<sup>52</sup> while George describes reading 'with an eye for a tear in the text',<sup>53</sup> both evoking a space of attention and questioning which I test through picking apart details in language, content and mode of address, as in my figuring of the word 'strip' and the writer Assia Djebar's word '*aphonie*' in Chapter Two.<sup>54</sup> Close reading and listening enables space for repetition, pausing and reflecting on one's own uncertainty,<sup>55</sup> space that must also open itself up to interference, as

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<sup>48</sup> Italics in original. LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, viii.

<sup>49</sup> 'I notice the wetness of her tongue, its tastebuds and the small indent in the centre.' Chapter Three, 115.

<sup>50</sup> 'Uttered words become caught, flooding Holt's head and body. She is thinking and waiting and waiting and choosing where to go.' Chapter One, 42-43.

<sup>51</sup> 'I anticipate with her... trying to remember how her sentence began, to finish it, compelled to finish it for her.' Chapter One, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 29-36.

<sup>53</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Reading, Writing, Performance', 218.

<sup>54</sup> Chapter Two, 99-102.

<sup>55</sup> 'I have been having some trouble with the term itself, "speech act".' Chapter One, 48.

external noise or inner voices,<sup>56</sup> in order to map points of intertextuality, those moments of connection and recognition that in fact exist in all texts.<sup>57</sup>

### Transmission

Transmission is conceived as a message set in motion and then received. While traditionally it refers to an electrical transfer of information, in this thesis I locate transmissions between bodies, between human figures, made apparent in their instantiations of speech, mouth, gesture, sound, feeling and energy. A message travelling through a body is dependent on its materiality as fleshy physiology bound by internal processes and sensory systems.<sup>58</sup> An artist performing to the camera and an audience viewing the recording is a clear example of information transmitted from one body to another. Further, a body engaged in language (speech, gesture, writing or otherwise) can communicate and fulfil its message at the same time. Take for example the speaker who states:

I am speaking

or

I am transmitting.

Speech therefore has action embedded into it when defined as an act of transmission. When making a transmission one generally anticipates, and sometimes recognises, its reception by another body at another place or time. This process has an affective relation to its maker, who anticipates varying degrees of reception, listening and reciprocity. There are feelings involved,

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<sup>56</sup> 'Imagine a text begun some time ago and composed under pressure to meet a deadline. You know the writing is unfinished. I know it is barely begun.' Chapter One, 51.

<sup>57</sup> 'Finding his body "still", not moving and still being, still there, George finds his body "multiplied", still, in the film and in Africa... and declared "I know".' Chapter Three, 112-113.

<sup>58</sup> 'Still, I remember to breathe deeply instead of shallow, while perhaps she reaches for 'a tall bottle of water to drink', Chapter Three, 119.

relative to the transmitting body and the receiving body, in the anticipation of another, in the inherent performativity of conducting a transmission.<sup>59</sup> A transmission often performs its completion – its moment of reception by another – with the transmitting body, who in presuming its completion, inevitably behaves (or enacts) accordingly. Who the receiver will be is another matter, and a transmission may be instigated or maintained for oneself, as in instances of listening to one’s inner voice or speaking words aloud simply because ‘I want to hear them.’<sup>60</sup> My definition is therefore strongly informed by Austin’s widely known speech act theory, proposing that certain utterances complete their intended action through their being spoken aloud.<sup>61</sup> Austin’s speech act and Djebbar’s *aphonie*, conceptualised by Spivak as midway between women’s oral culture and patriarchal scripture, particularly drive my interest in the materiality and qualities informing a transmission.<sup>62</sup>

### Citation

Speaking in the previously cited interview with Amy Kazzymerchyk, Martine Syms describes noticing points of intertextuality between people:

I worked with an actor named Diamond Stingily to perform some of those gestures and to physically think with me about everyday performance, the performance of identity and the kinds of movements and gestures that connect people in a group. We

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<sup>59</sup> ‘At 00:05:35, she playfully exclaims “What are you doing!?” directly to the camera, to you, and you feel conspicuous, sitting there, headphones on, at a desk that is not your own, reading about yourself again.’, Chapter Three, 131.

<sup>60</sup> Nancy Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:02:34-00:02:41. See ‘Nacy (sic) Holt & Richard Serra, Boomerang’, uploaded by John Muse, April 17, 2010, video, 00:10:26, <https://youtu.be/8z32JTnRrHc>.

<sup>61</sup> Austin presented his theories over the course of a lecture series, The William James Lectures, at Harvard University in 1955. His research was published posthumously as J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter One, 46-50, and Chapter Two, 99-102.

talked about women in our families and I asked her to do impressions of them.<sup>63</sup>

Edward George theorises and practices intertextual methods in his article 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', while describing Black Audio Film Collective's processes of naming sources, aligning and connecting them and making them aware of one another. Following a path of intertextuality, one is compelled from one source to another, as George's data thief wanders the ruins finding fragments of inscribed stone,<sup>64</sup> sometimes interrupted or, like Nancy Holt, 'stim-u-lated, in a new direction, by the first half, of the word.'<sup>65</sup> There are difficulties in tracing and referencing multiple sources at the same time, apparent in instances of convoluted citations and the use of secondary sources, or citations with multiple origins, such as George's reference to the Blues musician Robert Johnson, whose musical origin story lingers through the texts and stories still shared today.<sup>66</sup> Through citation one chooses to care for a source and its context or origins, driven by a desire to rectify, reveal, connect and disseminate.<sup>67</sup> In this way, citation is perceived as an ethical partner to echoing, as its conscience and its conscious-ness.

The connections made through citation and the desire to connect are summed up in the term 'affinity', as mentioned by Hayes in her conversation with Hughes, and a term I found also on the artist Mason Leaver-Yap's website, used to categorise their project work with other artists.<sup>68</sup> With a history in feminist and civil rights groups working to establish communities of people

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<sup>63</sup> Syms, 'Borrowed Lady', 12.

<sup>64</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 214.

<sup>65</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:08:20-00:08:31.

<sup>66</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 206-207 and 209-210. See Chapter Three, 109-113.

<sup>67</sup> 'The multiplicity of conjunctive thinking, of citations informed by citations, is further conceptualised by George, as a strategy to close the distance between Africa and its diaspora, and between Africa as social reality and optical illusion.' Chapter Three, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Mason Leaver-Yap, 'Affinities', accessed August 1, 2022, <https://leaveryap.com/affinities/>.

with shared backgrounds and objectives, ‘affinity’ points to moments of understanding between people, our attempts to relate to others. From here I consider the significance of friendship as well as the figure of the muse in Syms’s *Notes on Gesture*. Stingily embodies the figure of the muse, both captured and directed by Syms, but not completely and improvisation is evident. The balance of power is unclear, and signs of friendship, of informalities, are communicated between the actor and the figure behind the camera. Noticing signs of friendship in the production, staging and audience participation in *Come and Go*, a performative exhibition curated by the artist Philomène Hoël (PH) at her home, the significance of relation is framed through the desire to know something or someone, through placing value in the bodies of the artists. Similarly, the artist who finds a muse is driven to engage and re-engage, out of curiosity for something, some feeling or thought. As a visitor, I entered PH’s world momentarily, as if she were my muse, and yet I consider her a friend.<sup>69</sup>

Alternately, citation is not without its complications. In a pre-recorded conversation produced in advance of the writer Yaniya Lee’s virtual workshop, ‘Ideas From Moving Water’ (April 14, 2022), the writer Letticia Cosbert-Miller finds use in the term ‘problematic fave’, to articulate her interest in Flannery O’Connor, a writer working in the 1940s and 50s American South, who wrote racially-stereotyped ‘black characters... [with] no interiority’ while imbuing her stories with a criticality of her white characters’ racist thoughts and behaviour.<sup>70</sup> In this thesis, the violence of citation is explored through the phrase ‘to cite is to cut’,<sup>71</sup> and through antagonisms between authors that continue to drive new texts, such as between Hayes and Patricia Hearst (*Screed #13*) and Spivak and Sigmund Freud (‘Echo’) discussed in Chapter Two, and Stingily and Kathy Acker

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<sup>69</sup> *Come and Go*, cur. Philomène Hoël, presented at Flat Deux, London, July 8, 2022 – July 9, 2022. See Chapter Three, 117-118.

<sup>70</sup> Letticia Cosbert-Miller and Yaniya Lee, ‘Ideas From Moving Water: Letticia Cosbert-Miller in conversation with Yaniya Lee’. Video, April 2022, presented in conjunction with the research programme *Season 8: Lorraine O’Grady is on our mind*, cur. Kim Nguyen and Jeanne Gerrity, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, California, September 21, 2021 – August 26, 2022, <https://wattis.org/calendar/thursday-april-14-2022>.

<sup>71</sup> Chapter Three, 128-130.

(‘Pilgrimages to Nowhere’)<sup>72</sup> discussed in Chapter Three. Writing itself is one such antagonism, as a representation of human language charged with legitimising powers while crammed with inconsistencies and never quite complete.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, my understanding of citation is informed by Syms’s views on the concept of borrowing:

Borrowing... has an ephemeral quality to it – like you’re just going to take it for a second and it’s going to lead to something else.<sup>74</sup>

Again, this evokes a carefulness in accessing and engaging a source, suggesting its return or future use elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> Narrating one’s processes of locating and using citations can provide clarity for a reader, and as George writes of finding Johnson through Greil Marcus, Pete Welding, Robert Palmer and others,<sup>76</sup> I describe moving words from one source to another.<sup>77</sup>

### Echoing

Beginning with echoing as an auditory phenomenon where sound bounces back to its source, I perceive it as extending a transmission. An echo is not a perfect replication of a sound, rather it is changed by the conditions in which it travels. The space of the echo is embodied in the

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<sup>72</sup> Diamond Stingily, ‘Pilgrimages to Nowhere’, May 9, 2019, in ‘Diamond Stingily responds to an archival Kathy Acker piece’, Life and Culture, *Dazed Digital*, Spring/Summer, May 9, 2019, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/44366/1/diamond-stingily-responds-to-an-archival-kathy-acker-piece>.

<sup>73</sup> ‘...Lee articulated that while in the past five years or so Black artists were beginning to be featured in art programmes in more substantial and authentic ways, the surrounding discourse was slow to reflect this. She proposed that writing by and about Black contemporary art and artists could work to consolidate this context...’, Chapter Three, 106-107.

<sup>74</sup> Syms, ‘Borrowed Lady’, 12.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Martine Syms’s great-aunt Burnetta is the object of a fracturing, through a chain of “borrowing”, where a discrete item of movement, such as speech, gesture or expression is passed on for future use, through photographs, through Syms, through Syms’s father, through Stingily, through Echo.’ Chapter Three, 110.

<sup>76</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 206-207, and 209-210.

<sup>77</sup> ‘I move their words into *Notes on Gesture*: Stingily: I follow Syms’s advice: I relax. I get into a groove, a rhythm of moving, of borrowing... and a rhythm of being still.’, Chapter Three, 110.



spaced-outness of Patricia Hearst’s voice in her first ransom tape, slurring and slippery, and doctored somewhere in the airwaves.<sup>78</sup> Even in the case of intentional, verbatim speech, there are errors, ‘stutters and mishearings, and a kind of inability to have a whole picture or a whole understanding’.<sup>79</sup> The term itself, ‘echo’, is misleading as it is rarely (almost never) singular. An echo always expands into reverberation, into a ‘wild... expressive... monstrous... hybridity of voices’.<sup>80</sup> Picking words and expressions apart, acknowledging the multiple meanings of words and their overlapping with other words, parts of words and phrases, evident in ideas of fallen language<sup>81</sup> or gender fluidity<sup>82</sup> for example, follows the uncontainable echo, expanding a transmission beyond any ‘narrative of the “original”’.<sup>83</sup>

Echoing relies heavily on the ‘re’ prefix, as in ‘respeaking’, ‘restaging’ or ‘rewriting’. There is a sense of doing something again, after but also during, responding and returning to reconsider, reflect or revise. The significance of tense and retrospection is evident in the action of writing after something: after a text, as Spivak, in 2021, reflects upon the limits of time, knowledge and language that informed subsequent readings of her text ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, originally published in 1988; or after a film, as George, in 2021, acknowledging the limits of context and the form that a transmission takes, maps out the citational practices of ‘alphabetical, phonographic, cinematographic writing’ that were translated, restored and incorporated into the making of *The Last Angel of History*, first released in 1995.

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<sup>78</sup> Patricia Hearst, ‘Audio Messages’, audio, 00:11:23, in ‘Patty Hearst Trial (1976)’, Famous Trials, uploaded by Douglas O. Linder, accessed August 4, 2022, <https://famous-trials.com/pattyhearst/2206-audio>. See Chapter Two, 72-76.

<sup>79</sup> Hayes, ‘Sharon Hayes: Echo | Introduction’, 00:28:55-00:29:26.

<sup>80</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 170.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Bodies and languages are transformed into symbols of tortuous complication and divergence from an ideal.’, Chapter One, 69.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Engaging the body as text, a language in formation, at the threshold of reading, of writing, Tiresias’s announcement, that “women have greater sexual pleasure”, works like an echo, expanding any one moment of transmission.’, Chapter Two, 97.

<sup>83</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 170.

Echoing brings out the complexity of authenticity when trying to ascertain degrees of intention at play in the echoing body, confused further by degrees of interference, known and unknown, marking a transmission and its echo. For Spivak, it is the presence of an aporia that is most compelling in our reading of the mythological Echo, figured as both the presence of the impossible and the potential for revealing truth unwittingly.<sup>84</sup> The irresolution of authenticity is also dealt with by LaBelle who asks, ‘Is not speaking a process of seeking out agency?’ in relation to social processes of identity formation (such as repetition, mimicry and other forms of echolalia).<sup>85</sup>

Echoing draws together listening, close reading, transmission and citation. It is brought into practice as a method of making, staging and interpreting art, and the echoing and citing techniques by artists and writers discussed here inform my own methods of figuring out through reconfiguring. The receiver, as reader and writer, reconfigures the sources, in a kind of textual reverberation, through writing, moving and replacing the texts, bodies and voices.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Spivak, ‘Echo’, 19 and 41.

<sup>85</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 141.

<sup>86</sup> ‘He wants us to do it, else his hypothesis remains unanswered, un-echoed: ... Locutionary: He said to us, “Try identity on”. Illocutionary: He suggested we try identity on. Perlocutionary: He convinced us to try identity on.’, Chapter One, 50.

## METHOD

Both writing and performance as art forms provide the rationale for this thesis. The practice-based method proposes script and transcript as form, tool and document in performance art practices. I use writing as a strategy for production, while writing about and enacting its formal conventions and applications in performance art. Through a consideration of how forms of speech are staged by artists, this thesis investigates how an act of transmission might be obstructed, interrupted and intercepted, and how these disruptions might be interpreted.

Applying Austin's speech act theory to writing and text, as action and formats prepared for action, the thesis is written performatively, with the writer, 'I', adopting the role of an academic researcher undertaking the task of a practice-based research project, one that is rooted in writing, in anticipation of the reader, 'You', extending the performance through its reading. Conceived as enacting and speaking to the transmission of messages, sources are performatively interpreted with citation and close reading driving production towards embodied texts and actions.

Documents and objects, including language signs and symbols, printed matter, audio visual recordings and workshops, are reconfigured as source, process and outcome. Some of these reconfigurations form the body of the written thesis, and where others are presented online, at <https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/echoes-and-citations-in-art-and-its-writing>, the reader is instructed to find them. The interacting transmissions – reading, writing, enacting, recording and documenting – are viewed as performing points of contact between reader, writer, text and practice.

The written component is built around the practice-based method, which involves producing texts while drawing on examples produced by other artists, and tracking and exploring what George refers to as 'citational chain[s]' of sources within sources.<sup>87</sup> For example, while working

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<sup>87</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 209.

on Chapter Two, I came to Assia Djebar through Spivak through Hayes, and via Spivak I spoke with the artist Manali De (MD) about traditional Bengali stories concerning Radha and Krishna. Echoing is modelled and tested through integrating existing texts and artworks into new arrangements by way of repeating, restaging and rewriting. The online documentation and the written thesis are submitted together as the practice component. Sometimes the writing informs a different editing process, for example a video recording, and sometimes the writing exists just as writing.

In my selections of works by other artists and writers, and in my own work, there is a tendency towards text, as written or printed matter in the form of essays, interviews, transcripts, scripts and books, and other kinds of textual matter aligned with language, gesture and speech manifesting in more abstract or non-written formats such as lectures, workshops, conversations, still and moving image, audio and performance. The written thesis is presented as an essay with some sections arranged as scripts and transcripts. The script format is established in Chapter One, through my assigning names to dialogue along with descriptions of sound effects and stage directions. It is apparent to a lesser extent in Chapters Two and Three in the formatting of block quotations. My transcriptions of non-written works, such as Holt and Serra's *Boomerang*, Hayes's *Screed #13* and Syms's *Notes on Gesture*, were produced through processes of watching and rewatching, pausing and restarting, checking words and audio to be certain of my ascribing language to the speakers, ascribing characters to voices and to live and non-live entities. For example, when transcribing *Boomerang*, I give the names Serra, The Crew, The Blue Graphic, The Interference and AUDIO TROUBLE to the sounds and voices that do not come from Holt.

## DETAILS OF PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

‘A Body of Citational Writing’. Presented at the ‘Centre for Book Cultures and Publishing Postgraduate Study Day’, ch. Claudia Rifaterra Amenos, Pritha Mukherjee and Andrea Romanzi, July 1, 2022, University of Reading.

*Stimming [live] pathologising [ifitfits] and restaged made, in a staged setting, repeat non – eye – contact – contact.*

Shortlisted for the Ivan Juritz Prize 2022, a collaboration between the Centre for Modern Literature and Culture at King’s College London and Mahler & LeWitt Studios in Spoleto, Italy. Screened at the prize-giving ceremony held at King’s College London, June 23, 2022.

‘Echoes and Citations: An Essay Problematizing the Language of Interpretation’. Published in *On Waiting... For Their Words To Leave Our Mouth*, ed. Alun Rowlands, Susanne Clausen and Mirjam Bayerdörfer (Zürich: Strauhof Museum, 2021). Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same title, presented at the Strauhof Museum, Zürich, December 3, 2021 – January 9, 2022.

*Beauty Will Be Convulsive Or Will Not Be At All*. Produced in collaboration with Dave Peel. First shown at the exhibition *Wretched of the Screen*, presented at Magdalen Arts Centre, Oxford, and online at Digital Artist Residency and The Wrong Biennale, February 15 – 29, 2020.

## DOCUMENTATION

There are fourteen additional works to be considered part of this thesis. The full catalogue is presented online at the platform Are.na under the title 'Echoes and Citations in Art and its Writing' and can be found at the following link,

<https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/echoes-and-citations-in-art-and-its-writing>. These works take the form of texts, images and video and audio recordings. You, the reader of this text, will find eleven instructions further on, directing you to find eleven of these works. A clickable link will be provided, showing as 'Click here' in blue text, with the full link provided in a corresponding footnote. The full list of works is as follows:

1. *Remove Transcript Future Stagings*  
2021, audio, 00:02:11, <https://www.are.na/block/18053975>.
2. *Deep in the social field with all my friends, where all my friends are*  
2021-2022, video, 00:04:10, 1080 x 1920 px., <https://www.are.na/block/17968349>.
3. *Friendships and Antagonisms*  
2022-ongoing, Are.na channel, 112 blocks,  
<https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/friendships-and-antagonisms>.
4. *SMALL TALK in six acts*  
2021, audio, 00:06:39, <https://www.are.na/block/17936339>.
5. *Old Fuel*  
2021, video, 00:05:39, 1920 x 1080 px., <https://www.are.na/block/17968338>.
6. *And these seven words which define it have another value*  
2022, text, <https://www.are.na/block/17877250>.

7. *Texture of screen*  
2016-2022, Are.na channel, 56 blocks,  
<https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/texture-of-screen>.
8. *The Cut Off*  
2021, video, 00:10:47, 1920 x 1080 px., <https://www.are.na/block/17862104>.
9. *Audio Trouble*  
2022, publication, 19 pages, 13 x 20 cm, <https://www.are.na/block/17862141>.
10. *I Was Really Everyone*  
2021, text, 15 pages, 21 x 29 cm, <https://www.are.na/block/17862145>.
11. *Open Folds*  
2020-2022, video, 00:02:30, 1920 x 1080 px., <https://www.are.na/block/18053905>.
12. *dimension strip*  
2022, video, 00:14:58, 1920 x 1080 px., <https://www.are.na/block/17862118>.
13. *Stimming [live] pathologising [ifitfits] and restaged made, in a staged setting, repeat non - eye - contact – contact*  
2022, video, 00:05:58, 1920 x 1080 px., <https://www.are.na/block/17862132>.
14. *The Address*  
2022, text, 3 pages, 21 x 30 cm, <https://www.are.na/block/17862142>.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE READER

### Inline Citations and Speech Marks

When using inline citations, I have chosen to use single quotation marks. I refrain from using italics, except when referring to titles of books, artworks and films. This is intended to distinguish between text with emphasis and actual citations.

### Block Quotations

Block quotations are conceptualised as images in support of written analysis. The convention for placing a name before a block quote is taken from script and transcript writing formats. It is intended to help the reader discern who is speaking, and when combined with a footnote, displays the source of the text.

There are two types of instances when a block quotation is without a footnote. Firstly, there is no footnote when I have authored the text, as on Page 43 of Chapter One:

‘The Crew	There is to be no scripted dialogue, they say, only stage directions filled with errors in the allocation of lines to speaking parts.
Holt	Due to audio trouble, there will be no sound check.’

Secondly, there is no footnote when a quotation is a repetition and has been cited earlier, such as a line by LaBelle on Page 50 of Chapter One:

‘LaBelle	<i>We must try identity on.’</i>
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The above quotation appears as an inline citation with a footnote on Page 45, as follows:





‘Holt

In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger. The burning of a book arouses no sensation in me. I know it hurts to burn. There are flames of napalm in Catonsville, Maryland. I know it hurts to burn. The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning. I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor’s language.’<sup>91</sup>

Sometimes the block quote is introduced in the preceding sentence. In such instances, I do not name the speaker again, for example on Page 73 of Chapter Two:

‘Writing of a discussion with the ethical philosopher Bimal Matilal, Spivak recalls:

[Matilal] discussed an argument advanced by Gangeṣa, a twelfth-century linguist, that the production of truth was not necessarily dependent upon the speaker’s intention. (This is *bhrāntapratāraṅkāya*, the case of the deluded deceiver, who speaks the truth while thinking to lie.)’

### The Last Angel of History

To discern between two similarly titled sources, in the body of the text of Chapters One, Two and Three, Edward George’s article ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’ is referred to as ‘Last Angel’ (A), and Black Audio Film Collective’s film is referred to as *The Last Angel* (F).

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<sup>91</sup> Adrienne Rich, ‘The Burning of Paper Instead of Children’ (1968), accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/99/jrieffel/poetry/rich/children.html>.

### Initials

PH refers to the artist Philomène Hoël, and MD to the artist Manali De. AR refers to the curator Alun Rowlands, primary supervisor of this project, and PK and GK refer to the artists Pil and Galia Kollektiv, secondary supervisors.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

### Chapter One: Audio Trouble

In Chapter One, I frame Holt's externalisation of her speaking and listening processes as an act of transmission and consider this framing in relation to Austin's speech act. Informed by LaBelle's '*caring for the extremes*', I identify the sounds of Holt's transmission, paying attention to parallel utterances, languages and objects, those sounds at odds with precise speech. I deconstruct these object-sounds, find their fragments, definitions and origins, while they continue moving, interfering and interrupting. My reading of *Boomerang* is developed in parallel with my reading of LaBelle's *Lexicon of the Mouth*, particularly the chapters 'Inner voice, self-talk' and 'Recite, repeat, vow'.<sup>92</sup> Other prominently cited works are Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, Spivak's 'Echo', Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*, Rich's 'The Burning of Paper Instead of Children', the Bible, Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Selah Saterstrom's *The Meat and Spirit Plan*.<sup>93</sup> Engaging these texts with the transmission, cutting the words and movements together and forcibly allowing language to slip, I define and problematise the language of my interpretations. If we cannot block extraneous events and fleshy messages from landing on our eardrums, can anything be contained in language?

### Chapter Two: A Stuttering Verbatim Performance

Examining Hayes's *Screed #13* together with Spivak's 'Echo' in Chapter Two, I address the echo at work as a repetition after words or sounds of an external source. I follow the lines of others, acknowledging variations and distortions of personal or public history, while resisting my desire to find the truth. Spivak attends to the language and translations of Ovid's 'Echo and Narcissus',

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<sup>92</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 87-101 and 159-171.

<sup>93</sup> The Bible in Today's English Version, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: The Bible Societies, 1976); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993); John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin Classics, 1989); Selah Saterstrom, *The Meat and Spirit Plan* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2007).

connecting Echo's inability to voice (to respond and be responded to as herself) with that of the subaltern woman who is unable to participate meaningfully in any political dimension.<sup>94</sup> The notion of restricted, verbatim speech is presented in Hayes's *Screed #13*, as the artist recites the words of Patricia Hearst, an American heiress held captive by the controversial left-wing activist group, the Symbionese Liberation Army, in 1974. Following Spivak, I address authenticity as an ethical dilemma while attending to the future of the echo in its traces and endings. The stutter is considered through reflections on memory, distance, honesty and personal investment, to present the voice as a thing, an object in motion, channelled through various bodily conduits. Notions of friendship – relations between bodies – begin to emerge as I attempt to write at the threshold of speech, of the not visual, across and through bodies.

### Chapter Three: There is, In Retrospect

Chapter Three considers the relationship between echoing and citation, exploring how language crosses spatial or formal boundaries of bodies and texts. I examine Syms's *Notes on Gesture* and *Misdirected Kiss* alongside George's 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance'. George highlights the significance of citation for creative practice and practitioners, and its impact on a larger scale, particularly in the production and consumption of popular culture, in connecting groups of people who have been culturally and physically displaced. He states that the production techniques used in the film (Black Audio Film Collective's *The Last Angel of History*) were deliberately intended to 'affirm and cohere the ideas, practices, practitioners, technologies, artefacts and historical resonances of black cultural and political esoterica'.<sup>95</sup> If a context can be marginalised by human attempts to sever, silence or eradicate, presenting evidence through citation helps a context to perpetuate so that individuals and communities discover one another and forge relationships. While identifying signs of friendship between Syms

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<sup>94</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 27-28.

<sup>95</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 206.

and Stingily in *Notes on Gesture*, I consider the ethics of citation and the friendships and antagonisms at work between authors that arguably lead to new works and texts.

# Audio Trouble

*Boomerang* is an artwork produced as a live TV broadcast in Texas, USA, by Nancy Holt and Richard Serra in 1974.<sup>96</sup> *Boomerang* remains in circulation today as a video with a duration of 00:10:26.<sup>97</sup> This video documents the artists staging a transmission within the contexts of a recording studio, a public broadcasting channel and a TV audience. Nancy Holt is the visible protagonist, the only body we see, and her voice dominates the auditory sphere. Sometimes from the background we hear other voices. I refer to these collectively as The Crew.

BLUE BACKGROUND

+

WHITE TEXT

‘AUDIO TROUBLE’

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Nancy Holt, Richard Serra. *Boomerang*. 1974.’ The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>97</sup> See Nancy Holt and Richard Serra, ‘Nacy (sic) Holt & Richard Serra, *Boomerang*’, John Muse, uploaded April 17, 2010, video, 00:10:26, <https://youtu.be/8z32JTnRrHc>.

Nancy Holt speaks into a microphone (input).

Her immediate speech is audible, unmediated, received: This is her voice.

Her voice is transmitted as an audio output (headphones, speakers, airwaves).

The transmission is received by herself, The Crew and the TV audience.

~~The transmission is received at a slight delay: This is her echo.~~

Holt speaks and her voice is immediate, audible, received. She speaks into a microphone and her voice is transmitted at a slight delay. Holt wears headphones. This completes the electrical circuit positioned on her body, a circuit that amplifies and extends her voice. Her voice of her body. The production of speech and its delayed playback combine audibly in the form of an echo, manifesting, as Holt describes, as ‘words... things... boomerang-ing, back. Boom-mer-rang-ing-ing. Boom-mer-rang-ing-ing, back’.<sup>98</sup> Holt speaks, and her voice is immediate, audible and received. She speaks into a microphone and her voice is transmitted at a slight delay, beyond her body. Transmitted outwards, her voice and its echo are heard by The Crew, the TV audience, and us watching the video now. Several times we hear the voices of those working with the audio-visual equipment to produce the broadcast. Holt can and does engage with The Crew throughout. We are certain of others responding, of dialogue, when we hear voices off camera (clarity aside), but The Crew’s non-verbal signs, such as body language, facial expression, hand gestures and eye contact, remain elusive. One member of The Crew addresses Holt often, letting her know what is happening and instructing her. The video restricts our view of Holt’s surroundings, of the physical space and of those around her. The camera is fixed towards her

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<sup>98</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:03:17-00:03:38.



face, a talking head. Holt's location on the screen, her profile and gaze shift over time with the angle and proximity of the camera. Her face and neck stay contained within the shot. There are two exceptions to the visual field. At 00:04:28 the video cuts to a blue graphic with the text 'AUDIO TROUBLE'. At 00:05:22 we return to the studio and to Holt's profile, where she is in dialogue with The Crew. The blue graphic, minus its previous title, appears once more at 00:05:51. Holt's voice and echo remain audible, her monologue continues, and she reappears at 00:05:55.

It is unclear if the entire audio exchange was heard in the same way as we perceive in the video. Were Holt's voice and echo heard aloud by The Crew in the studio, in the live moment? Were The Crew wearing headphones? They would have needed to receive an audio output to be certain that the broadcast was working as intended. Was Holt's echo muted or recorded separately to be edited in later? Holt looks at whoever she talks with, indicating that non-verbal communication is taking place. The Crew can hear something of her in real time, either aloud in the space or through headphones.

As the central and active body in the scene, Holt's task is to translate the experience into audible language which she does through a performed monologue. Her speech shows signs of distraction, including varied rhythm and emphasis, repetition, filler words, long pauses, stuttering, nervous laughter, asking for clarification, and justifying her actions. We are seeing and hearing Holt navigate her ordinary and atypical vocal qualities. She is having to concentrate:

Holt	Yes, I can hear my- eh- echo.
	And er, the words, are coming, back onnnn- on top of me.
	Uh-

The words are spilling out of my head, and then, returning into my ear.<sup>99</sup>

In his book, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, Brandon LaBelle argues that language's force lies in its 'socializing' capabilities.<sup>100</sup> We learn the words, but we must also learn the movements to make these words, and their sounds and meanings, happen. Speech is based on acts of recital and echo that are learned, performed, and sited in the mouth. He describes 'a figuring of the body', a combination of movements, shapings and contourings demanded of our bodies to participate in shared language. For LaBelle, language is 'prior' to individual or collective identity, and I am thinking about what is written onto and into Holt from the outside.<sup>101</sup> Addressing herself, and her satisfaction, some behaviours appear more deliberate than others:

Holt   The words, keep tumbling out, because I want to hear them, I want to hear, my own words, pouring, back in on top of me.<sup>102</sup>

Holt is wearing headphones and a microphone. She faces the camera, but her eyes look beyond, towards The Crew. She speaks mostly to herself, occasionally to The Crew. Following their instruction, Holt is trying to speak her thoughts as her thoughts to herself but is distracted by the sound of her voice and its echo. Becoming accustomed to this, she begins to speak and listen for her own enjoyment. She is experiencing pleasure from speaking her words and hearing them come back to her. Often disjointed, her sentences spread across two, three, four pauses. Uttered words become caught, flooding Holt's head and body. She is thinking and waiting and waiting

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<sup>99</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:00:03-00:00:25.

<sup>100</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 159.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>102</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:02:34-00:02:41.

and choosing where to go. The Crew, male voices, combine urgency and frustration when instructing Holt. The camera is fixed with Holt in shot, a portrait in bright studio lighting against a muted grey set. Holt is learning to speak.

Using naming conventions including ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘my’, ‘they’re’, ‘me’, ‘you’ and ‘your’, Holt addresses her speech in relation to an other, to the outside of herself. This is not in itself unusual. It is through speech, LaBelle describes, that we acknowledge existing frameworks, ‘the outside of oneself’, because to take part in language we must possess some of its rules and processes.<sup>103</sup> Naming designates, aligns and locates. It is this movement, its provocation of expansion and capture, which acts. Naming initiates action. Naming is action. It is a speech act.

Holt is receiving very few instructions. The Crew handed her a script, telling her to ready herself. Someone will bring you a headset, they said. Before arriving, they say to wear something you feel comfortable in, something you wear a lot. Holt is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, old clothes held together by muted grey threads. Anticipation and awkwardness charge the atmosphere. Someone will fit your headset for the broadcast, they say. The headset will have over ear headphones and a stick microphone for positioning beside your mouth.

The Crew	There is to be no scripted dialogue, they say, only stage directions filled with errors in the allocation of lines to speaking parts.
Holt	Due to audio trouble, there will be no sound check.

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<sup>103</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 160-161.

Someone approaches offering a headset. Holt takes it. She places the headphones over her ears and positions the stick microphone beside her mouth. Anticipation and awkwardness charge the atmosphere.

The Crew                    [SHOUTING]

Soundcheck!

Holt                            In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger. The burning of a book arouses no sensation in me. I know it hurts to burn. There are flames of napalm in Catonsville, Maryland. I know it hurts to burn. The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning. I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language.<sup>104</sup>

Through acknowledging identity, we (must) refer to the existence of other identities:

LaBelle                      The name, which is placed over a body and subsequently draws that body forward as an identity, also enables further naming – it gives to the one who is named the potentiality of naming again, of addressing the world around and in doing so, to conjure, capture, or pronounce; to command, resist, or appeal.<sup>105</sup>

An 'I' allows for a 'you' and a desire to designate: To you, I am you; To me, I am I; to you, you are I; to me, you are you. These names enable 'us' (another name) to distinguish and repeat this pattern. When the body is named, identity emerges as a possibility. The body, having undergone

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<sup>104</sup> Rich, "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children".

<sup>105</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 160.

a naming process, has seen, and learned, an example, a model, such that it can repeat, apply it onto others. LaBelle calls this sequence a 'citational chain', where enacting performative techniques, such as appropriation or mirroring, enables experiments with identity.<sup>106</sup> He cites Judith Butler, from her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*:

Butler                                 ...agency is the hiatus of iterability, the compulsion to an  
identity through repetition, which requires the very contingency,  
the undetermined interval, that identity insistentlly seeks to  
foreclose.<sup>107</sup>

For Butler the foundation of speech is the very capacity to speak or to be spoken of or to be spoken to. This capacity demands respeaking. Therefore, it is only through respeaking that we can attempt to establish any sense of individual or collective agency. I write the opening of Butler's sentence in antonymic terms:

Oppression is the continuation of silence.  
Prison is the maintenance of the unspoken.  
Imprisonment is the continuation of the unspeakable.

LaBelle says, 'We must try identity on', implying a need, an impulse to do so.<sup>108</sup> What compels us to try identity on? I find it difficult to imagine an existence, a people, without language, without repetition of the external, of a shared reference-language, drawing outside within. This adopt-adapt approach and difference among bodies demonstrates how identity is never finished or fixed. We do not arrive as a complete, fully formed subject 'I', operating instead among mutable

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<sup>106</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 160.

<sup>107</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 220, quoted in LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 171.

<sup>108</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 160.

acts and linguistic processes. In LaBelle's words, we modulate, animate, discover.<sup>109</sup> Agency, should it occur, does so only through replaying what has been experienced or interpreted in others. These flashes of agency are few in comparison to the proliferation of iteration, again, and again, and again, but there is the possibility of possibility.

LaBelle *I am always already in this gap.*<sup>110</sup>  
I place myself here.

Holt's words intensify when she plays with her echo, testing and responding to its qualities and effects. She waits, taking turns with her echo, repeating words, extending sounds and syllables, and describing her enjoyment of the sensations produced. Holt's segmentation of the words 'a mirror reflection, reflec-tion, reflec-tion. A mir--rr-rr-ror re-ee-flection', becomes what it describes, a functional, active description.<sup>111</sup>

Speech acts do something, perform something, as well as present information. In a series of lectures presented in 1963, J. L. Austin set out three main types of speech act: Locutionary; Illocutionary; and Perlocutionary. The following examples are quoted from this lecture series, collected and published in the book, *How To Do Things With Words*:

(E. 1)

Act (A)            or Locution

He said to me 'Shoot her!' meaning by 'shoot'  
shoot and referring by 'her' to *her*.

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<sup>109</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 161.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:06:09-00:06:20.

Act (B) or Illocution

He urged (or advised, ordered, &c.) me to shoot  
her.

Act (C. a) or Perlocution

He persuaded me to shoot her.

Act (C. b)

He got me to (or made me, &c.) shoot her.

(E. 2)

Act (A) or Locution

He said to me, 'You can't do that'.

Act (B) or Illocution

He protested against my doing it.

Act (C. a) or Perlocution

He pulled me up, checked me.

Act (C. b)

He stopped me, he brought me to my senses, &c.

He annoyed me.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 101-102.

I have been having some trouble with the term itself, 'speech act'. 'Speak' is a verb, and to speak is to carry out an action, to carry out the action of speaking. But to say that to speak is to act is ambiguous. Speaking of an action does not mean the specific action has taken place. Speaking is not acting, in the same way that thinking is not doing. To recognise a speech act is to recognise it as an act, beyond its manifestation of speaking as a verb, beyond the body doing speech. Reading this name, again and again:

speech act

speech act

*speech*

*act*

helps me further. I have been conceptualising it as 'speech as the subject or object'. This is odd, because the typical convention in English is 'blue book', where it is the book (the subject or object) that is blue (the verb or descriptor). Switching this order makes the words and meanings strange,

adjective-noun vs. noun-adjective

blue-book vs. book-blue

speech-act vs. act-speech.

Where it is dependent on speech taking place, I have been thinking that the word 'act' is the descriptor or adjective, as in:

active speech

or actioning speech



or action caused by speech.

Literally 'act speech'.

While this might be relevant to defining the forms of speech acts, especially the perlocutionary speech act, it is not what the term speech act means. Austin conceptualises it as an act first, an act codified by speech. Other kinds of acts we might express through language as 'acts of', for example, 'acts of heroism' or 'acts of God'. Rewording Austin's term as 'acts of speech' helps me further:

A speech act is an act rooted in speech.

It is an act that is spoken action or speaking action,

or,

speech emerging from action.

The speech act is not always, or not only, represented by the literal words or sentence. The act itself can be implied or be caused to happen.

Austin

We can similarly distinguish the locutionary act 'he said that...' from the illocutionary act 'he argued that...' and the perlocutionary act 'he convinced me that...'<sup>113</sup>

'He said that' speaks to its literal meaning with little regard for outcome, whereas 'He argued that' implies that intention was made evident. 'Argued' does not mean 'said'. They are not sufficient substitutes for one another. 'He convinced me that' describes an action that has been

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<sup>113</sup> Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 102.

caused to happen, through some ways or means of communicating with me. He has changed my thinking or caused me to carry out an action regardless of whether my thinking has changed.

LaBelle *We must try identity on.*

Is this statement an instruction or an observation coded in metaphorical language? Or is it a speech act? It is not locutionary. As a research outcome, evidence of work done by an academic, it can be a simple observation, or we can read it as an order, a demand, or a warning. He wants us to do it, else his hypothesis remains unanswered, un-echoed:

Locutionary He said to us, 'Try identity on'.

Illocutionary He suggested we try identity on.

Perlocutionary He convinced us to try identity on.

LaBelle describes the premise of the film *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006), whose protagonist Harold Crick, notices a voice inside his head. This voice, new and seemingly separate from Crick's mind, narrates his life to him, inside his head. It is not heard by those around him. The message of the film, LaBelle concludes, is embodied in Crick's happiness and sense of purpose improving as he pays greater attention to this, his inner voice. LaBelle challenges the laziness of this sentiment for equating happiness with freedom from the 'institutional and the mundane', for even presenting this relational distance as a possibility, and for ignoring the ways we internalise external ideological systems. Following Michel Foucault, he then presents the counter argument that our inner voice gathers up the outside to reconfigure a pervasive internal presence, one '*keeping us firmly in place*'.<sup>114</sup> Our inner voice is held hostage, ignorant to social and psychic narcissisms, to

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<sup>114</sup>LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 91-92.

sentimentality, and the indifference characterising neo-liberal capitalism. But our inner voice is also active. It can interrogate itself, checking our beliefs and values. Citing the words of Adriano Cavarero, LaBelle charges self-talk as not only of cognitive value, but that we find and seek pleasure in speaking, in announcing ‘uniqueness of being,’ and in enacting experiments with legality and taboo in the social realm.<sup>115</sup> Self-talk embodies ‘the core sensuality of voice’.<sup>116</sup> Where are the boundaries between the external and internal voice? What separates these? How do we proceed?

Holt                               The words, keep tumbling out, because I want to hear them, I want to hear, my own words, pouring, back in on top of me.<sup>117</sup>

The Writer                      Imagine a text begun some time ago and composed under pressure to meet a deadline. You know the writing is unfinished. I know it is barely begun. You remember patching over hasty research to compensate for my shallow understanding. To write this past writing You must find a way back in. Reading and re-reading, putting the old words back in my mouth and speaking them out loud, You must hear and feel them, even those which are not mine. You imagine speaking words for the very first time. I think about creating language, about ownership and originality. I pretend the words are mine and You drive them in and out of my body. You watch the video, *The Cut Off*. [Click here](#).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Adriano Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), cited in LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 101.

<sup>116</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 101.

<sup>117</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:02:34-00:02:41.

<sup>118</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862104>.

Holt's verbalised exchange is unusual. She is not simply noticing a thought, saying it out loud, feeling and hearing it in her body as she speaks it. Instead, she is noticing a thought, saying it out loud, feeling it in her body, and then a secondary voice, an echo, is added. Holt quickly learns to expect her echo to follow any utterance she makes. She describes needing extra time to verbalise her thoughts, and to start and finish her sentences:

Sometimes, I find, that I can't, quite, say a word, because, I hear s-, a first, part of it come back, and I forget, the second part, for my mind is stim-u-lated, in a new direction, by the first half, of the word.<sup>119</sup>

There is an anticipatory moment when we have words, when we are almost about to transmit them. LaBelle writes that this self-talk '*must* come out', and when it does, 'I speak to myself as if I am two. I feel myself as *another*.'<sup>120</sup> Like a rehearsal process, the formation of a script, self-talk underscores the social contract, anticipating contact and conversation. When spoken aloud it shows the flow between self and surroundings. A testament to the performative power of language, it does a transformation.

I hear Holt speak her sentences in sections or halves. I watch her wait for the echo (herself), for her turn to respond to it (herself). I sense her thinking and planning for the next step. I anticipate with her. Her echo does not simply cut her off, subtract or cancel her out. Repeating what she has said, it elongates the exchange, problematising attention, forming an artificial echolalia. I am watching, and hearing her, struggle, to adapt, to continue, trying to remember how her sentence began, to finish it, compelled to finish it for her.

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<sup>119</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:08:02-00:08:31.

<sup>120</sup> Italics in original. LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 93-94.

LaBelle Whether such a conversation in fact ever takes place is not so much the point, but rather, self-talk seems to psychologically prepare us for its possibility, and its imagined dialogical flow.<sup>121</sup> ...that must sound within the mouth.<sup>122</sup> ...dipping in and out of audibility...<sup>123</sup>

As well as Holt's own echo, there are several moments and sources of interception and interruption coming from outside of her:

The Crew Multiple voices who verbally interrupt Holt to provide instruction or to explain what is happening.

The Interference Separate audio recordings are fed into the audio and frequently cut off Holt's address. These are short clips of voices, feedback sounds, and other transmission-type noises. Sometimes the words are recognisable and sometimes they are not.

Audio Trouble The video cuts to The Blue Graphic with its title, 'AUDIO TROUBLE'. Running time 00:04:28 to 00:05:22. The Interference can be heard.

The Blue Graphic The blue graphic, minus its previous title, appears once more at 00:05:51. Holt's voice and echo remain audible, her monologue continues, and she reappears at 00:05:55.

The Interference is noisy subjects and objects which sound like metal. I hear it as a precursor to the larger disruption, and its visual echo, Audio Trouble, and then The Blue Graphic.

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<sup>121</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 94.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

Interrupting Holt, I hear them, her inner voice externalised. While they change the tape, someone opens the studio door. Holt shuts her eyes, says nothing audible.

[ HOLT ]

LaBelle ...the construction of an imaginary voice, if not the imaginary itself as it exists in articulated or worded form, and always marked by an inner silence and its conjuring reverberations.<sup>124</sup>

The Interference SOUNDS OF A DOOR OPENING AND A HARD OBJECT  
MOVING ACROSS A HARD SURFACE.

Holt It is-

The Interference Wilder, thee

Holt It is-

The Interference Than, loo-

Holt I'm hearing other, things-

The Interference OBJECT OR FOOTSTEPS ON A HARD FLOOR.

The tenuous-

[ BREAK ].

[READ THE OTHER *AUDIO TROUBLE*. [CLICK HERE](#).]<sup>125</sup>

The Interference ness.

Holt Coming in on, me. There's something, else, besides, my own,  
voice.

[ MOUTH THE WORD 'VOICE' ].

[ THE SOUND OF THE WORD 'VOICE' IS OBSCURED BY

The Interference ].

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<sup>124</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 98.

<sup>125</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862141>.



[ 00:04:20 ]

[ GRAPHIC : BLUE / 'AUDIO TROUBLE' ]

Audio Trouble

SQUEAKING SOUND OF WINDING MAGNETIC TAPE.  
AMBIENT ELECTRICAL NOISE. AIR.

IN THE STUDIO, HOLT REMOVES THE HEADSET AND  
BEGINS TO EAT IT. METHODICALLY PICKING IT APART,  
CONSIDERING HOW TO INGEST EACH SHAPE.  
SWALLOWING, WHILE CONTINUING HER NARRATIVE.

Holt

Think of it, eating an entire bicycle. A Schwinn Shimano 3-speed with a Stingray Gripper Slik back, an iridescent blue aluminum frame, liner-pull pedals, brakes perched like doves in the crook of curved handlebars, vinyl grip-taped. Some parts of the bicycle could be swallowed as plunking a penny in a well. But others like the chain wheel would have to be let. Lowered through upward rippling esophagus, sprockets snatching linings, eviscerating the passages, until cavities jam, then fist knocked, in. Other parts like the alloy kickstand would require the entire body for acceptance, a slow-motion robot dance. He didn't eat it all at once. That would be crazy. He ate through time. At the hospital when technicians see the x-rays they spit their tea. Word gets out and in the local papers. He was the guy who ate an entire bicycle. Why did he do it? I ask Ruth and Ian. They think it's hilarious a guy would eat a bicycle, but why? Did he eat a bicycle so we don't



have to? Maybe God sent a man who eats bicycles. He was probably mentally ill but is mental illness a disqualifier in the realm of men sent from God? We don't know that it is. We can't say there is a God. The I-just-know-it-in-my-heart feeling could be impure. It could be confused with something darkly sexual, for example. Don't you think it's tragic that a man would eat a bicycle? It's a lonely thing to do.

I think the man thought if he ate the bicycle he would save himself from spontaneous human combustion. The heel-licking threat of disappearance. I think he thought if he ate the bicycle he could stay. Ruth and Ian laugh and Ruth splashes half her pint she laughs so hard.

That night I sit in front of the bay window, and in my head I say to Ruth and Ian that when you hear a story about a man eating a bicycle it's like hearing a story you already know, it is impossible, but isn't. I say: May the story of the man who ate a bicycle be a lesson to you.<sup>127</sup>

The Crew hands over a script and mentions something about maintaining the correct use and emphasis of tense. There is no scripted dialogue, only stage directions filled with pronominal errors and ungrounded grammatical tense.

[ 00:05.20 ]

[ HOLT ]

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<sup>127</sup> Saterstrom, *The Meat and Spirit Plan*, 129-130.

The Crew [ INAUDIBLE ]. ...Corrected.

Holt Am I on?

The Crew Yeah, go ahead.

Holt What?

The Crew [ INAUDIBLE ].

Ok!

Holt Yes?

The Crew Sixty seconds.

Holt Alright. I just had to, wait for, six-ty seconds, to come back on, which makes me think, about, the difference, between, the instan-ta-

[ THE BLUE GRAPHIC ]

Holt neous times, in words,

[ HOLT ]

Holt and, delayed time. Instan-ta-neous time, is an immedi-ate perception, whereas, delayed time, is more like, a mirror reflection, reflec-tion, reflec-tion. A mir--rr-rr-ror re-ee-flection. Delayed time, puts another-

I don't hear my own voice again; I've lost the words.

The Interference AMBIENT NOISE OF AN INTERIOR SPACE.

Holt It is-

The Crew [ INAUDIBLE ].

Holt	It is-
The Interference	Than, loo-
Holt	Am I on?
The Interference	Wilder, thee
Holt	S- ... u-lated.
The Interference	The tenuous-ness.
LaBelle	The voice is circumscribed by this linguistic structure, empowered by the enabling support of language, while at the same time tensing what counts as proper speech. <sup>128</sup>

‘Tensing’ is a verb. The root word ‘tense’ refers to timing as in past, present, and future, and beneath these, the murkier grammars such as past-perfect and future-imperfect. The future-imperfect tense describes a speculative proposition, through asking ‘what if...?’ Future-imperfect tense gives permission to ask questions.

Tension.

Tensing refers also to muscles or physiology, as in your tightening limbs for everyday movement or your body reacting involuntarily to stress, becoming agitated, for example.

‘Tensing what counts as proper speech.’

Before understanding there are murmurs and fragments. Referencing *Sleep Talk Recordings Vol. 1* (1998-1999), a series of sound works by Paul Dickinson, LaBelle argues that sleep talk episodes

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<sup>128</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 159.

‘occupy or spirit a liminal territory’, both internal and external.<sup>129</sup> Tense has an application in phonetics:

tense<sup>1</sup> > adjective <sub>1</sub> (especially of a muscle) stretched tight or rigid.

■ Phonetics (of a speech sound, especially a vowel) pronounced with the vocal muscles stretched tight. The opposite of LAX.<sup>130</sup>

Tension implies limits, enveloping a range or spectrum between lax and tight. LaBelle acknowledges a social aspect to language where, through choice or otherwise, we are producers, consumers, and critics. Our words, non-words, slang variations and mispronunciations rise and fall along our mouth movements. Mouths contort rules, words and sounds embody. The non-words, mutterings and inaudible speech introduces tension in the transmission. Holt mouths the word ‘voice’. I instinctively move with her mouth. ‘Voice’, we mouth, in silence.

Holt is performing a monologue to translate the experience into speech, her voice addressing both inside and outside of her body. I want to know what she can see. Is she alone in a confined space or in a studio with a group of people? Is she watching herself or others on a monitor? To do their job of documenting the closed audio loop, The Crew need Holt to perform. They wait for her speech, for her echo. For LaBelle, most of our conscious, deliberate self-talk is driven by ‘energy derive[d] from the involuntary, unconscious movements of the oral imaginary. In other words, to the unvoice, as that voice behind voicing and that tempts the mouth into speech.’<sup>131</sup>

Echo

We must try words and mouth movements on.

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<sup>129</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 93.

<sup>130</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>131</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 100.

BLUE BACKGROUND

+

WHITE TEXT

‘INTERNAL NEGOTIATION + EXTERNAL INFLUENCE’

BLUE BACKGROUND

+

WHITE TEXT

‘PRONE TO MISHEARINGS, MAD  
REVELATIONS, AND SPIRITED HAUNTINGS’<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 92.

In *Lexicon of the Mouth*, LaBelle navigates words of semantic similarity. Chapter Eleven, titled ‘Recite, repeat, vow’, opens with a short introduction followed by eight sections, which are, in order, ‘Prior’, ‘Accent’, ‘State’, ‘Oath’, ‘Public’, ‘Echo’, ‘Doubling’ and ‘Repeat’. ‘Recite’ does not reappear as a section heading. Some words reappear or else diverge into similar but different associations, an ordering system demonstrating the multiplicity of meaning. Words and lexical identities are messy. Three prominent words in LaBelle’s chapter are:

Recite

Repeat

Echo.<sup>133</sup>

LaBelle connects echo with repeat and recite, words which invoke controlled, deliberate vocal production, but then argues that ‘repetitions and echoes are prone to surprising interference’.<sup>134</sup> I think of multiple speakers with varied vocal physiology:

I repeat what you have said and my respeaking generates and demonstrates difference.

This respeaking not only repeats the original (when or whatever that is) but others it, expanding the ‘narrative of the “original”’.<sup>135</sup> From worshipping the ideal, a single original, to recognising the multiple, the space widens and *more* is permitted, more words and meanings, more languages. In tracing old words, a channel opens to negotiate the past with the present by ‘literally amplifying the skin’.<sup>136</sup> It is the echo that embodies a ‘hybridity of voices; the echo always

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<sup>133</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 159-171

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

threatens to exceed into noise.<sup>137</sup> LaBelle's evocation of worship, its bodies and idols, its ideals and monsters, swells speech, taking it beyond the self to a more public, yet still intimate and bodily presence.

I can repeat Holt's words, recite her monologue, echo her mouth movements.

I can recite Holt's words, echo her monologue, repeat her mouth movements.

I can echo Holt's words, repeat her monologue, recite her mouth movements.

The headphones act as a physical barrier, closing Holt off from and minimising sounds made by others and the ambient noise of the room, enabling her to speak to herself with less auditory input from her surroundings. The headphones also psychologically separate Holt because she is aware that she cannot hear other people around her as she normally would. Headphones are a common everyday item worn by users to listen to audio with reduced external noise and to enhance a sense of isolation. The function of a microphone is to amplify and direct audio towards a specific location or receiver. Microphones are used in AV transmissions but are also very commonly built into everyday items like mobile phones and headphones. Wearing a microphone in a room of people where Holt can freely communicate in the knowledge that she is also addressing a larger unseen audience undermines any clear sense of isolation for her performance and we can watch this knowing that she knows she is being watched. It is possible, for Holt, that hearing the audio playback through the headphones intensifies the delay of the echo. It is possible that Holt is wearing noise-cancelling headphones and cannot hear her voice

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<sup>137</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 170.



and each word that she speaks. In this setup, she speaks a sentence without listening to her own voice as it happens. She only knows she has spoken by recognising the movements her body makes to produce vocal sounds. She is effectively speaking into a void, or a vacuum, like trying to scream to interrupt a nightmare but no sound will come out. In this setup, she speaks, and time passes before her ears register that she has produced any sound. Her body's sensory feedback system is obstructed or interrupted. In another more likely scenario, the headphones are not noise-cancelling, they are just regular headphones so she can hear what she says as she says it with no interruption but at a lower volume and muffled by the headphones.<sup>138</sup> The casual interactions with 'The Crew' tell us that she can speak to them freely when needed. Holt's voice is the only voice we hear as an echo. In the transmission, the instantaneous speaking-hearing feedback loop works as normal but then is also very quickly added to. Holt hears what she says as she says it, but she also hears it again, in a different time and space, less than a second later.

In his book *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant describes,

The plantation, like a laboratory, displays most clearly the opposed forces of the oral and the written at work – one of the most deep-rooted topics of discussion in our contemporary landscape. It is there that multilingualism, that threatened dimension of our universe, can be observed for one of the first times, organically forming and disintegrating. It is also within the plantation that the meeting of cultures is most clearly and directly observable, though none of the inhabitants had the slightest hint that this was really about a clash of cultures.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> AR later points out that noise cancelling headphones were invented in 1989.

<sup>139</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 73-74.

Spanning the individual and the collective, bodies and cultures bound at once, a silencing was enforced across the plantation. The prevention of subject-formation drives owners to control their possessions, their objects.

LaBelle    The silent, inner voice is paradoxically an articulated figure; a second, shadowy body that at times may come alive, here and there, to extend our own.<sup>140</sup>

In her essay ‘Echo’, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak studies the ancient Greek myth, Echo and Narcissus. She speaks of the imbalanced research of these two figures, with colonial patriarchy favouring the male, if only to cast narcissism as a specifically feminine trait. Reading Ovid’s version in *Metamorphoses*, Spivak rewrites Echo’s punishment as containing its own reward. While Narcissus is stuck and always alone with his same view, Echo embodies possibility. It is not known who she will meet, who she will echo. Her voice remains.<sup>141</sup>

Echo    Out there, is the feeling of sound. Along the edges, mute. Does even the ground feel my footsteps? You are leaning too far over the edge. The water is freezing, I cry, but you don’t hear. The almost words rough up my throat. Its river narrows. Can I write my own words?  
  
Here,  
  
I am,  
  
I move...

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<sup>140</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 92.

<sup>141</sup> Spivak, ‘Echo’, 17-43.

I write... no sound comes out. Can I write my own words? To recite is to re-say, re-utter, repeat. Do you hear me? You show disappointment. I promise you turn to stone while I cannot reproduce my thoughts. I cannot focus my eyes to meet your gaze. My expressions are emotionless. My tones are flat.

Narcissus                    Say something! Look at me!

Echo                         Look at me.

Narcissus                    You are weak!

Echo                         ...are weak.

Narcissus                    Go away!

Echo                         ...away.

Narcissus                    If you won't leave, then I will! Goodbye!

Echo                         Goodbye... Goodbye.

                                  My mouth goes flat.

                                  I watch you leave, aggravated,

                                  I watch,

                                  you disappear. Like

                                  listening, can I speak

                                  of act?

In the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, John Milton expands the biblical story of Adam and Eve, who are tempted by the serpent into eating the forbidden fruit. In this Christian narrative, innocence and obedience are God's plan. These characters are lost after 'The Fall'. Adam and Eve, punished by God, become guilt-ridden mortals tortured by knowledge.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> The significance of 'fallen' and 'unfallen' language in *Paradise Lost* is discussed in detail by Liam D. Haydon in his essay 'Ambiguous words: *Post-lapsarian language in Paradise Lost*', *Renaissance Studies* 30, no. 2 (2016): 174-191. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26618846>.

- Genesis He said to him, 'You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad.'<sup>143</sup>
- LaBelle ...to the unvoice, that voice behind voicing and that tempts the mouth into speech.<sup>144</sup>
- Eve And I perhaps am secret; Heav'n is high.<sup>145</sup>
- Genesis As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding and realised that they were naked...<sup>146</sup>

Echo can emerge unexpectedly, catching off guard the audience as well as the speaker. I am thinking of Adam and Eve, before, then waking up together, and after, watching their dazed flesh grow wild:

- Milton So said he, and forebore not glance or toy  
Of amorous intent, well understood  
Of Eve, whose Eye darted contagious Fire.  
Her hand he seiz'd, and to a shady bank,<sup>147</sup>  
...up they rose  
As from unrest, and each the other viewing,  
Soon found their Eyes how op'n'd, and their minds  
How dark'n'd; innocence, that as a veil  
Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gone,<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Gen. 2:16-2:17.

<sup>144</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 100.

<sup>145</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 9, line 811.

<sup>146</sup> Gen. 3:7.

<sup>147</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 9, lines 1034-1037.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 9, lines 1051-1055.

...They destitute and bare  
Of all their virtue: silent, and in face  
Confounded long they sat, as struck'n mute.<sup>149</sup>

After the Fall of Man, we can talk about shame, about the monstrous, about sin and temptation. Innocence is lost and what remains is the abject and horror. Bodies and languages are transformed into symbols of tortuous complication and divergence from an ideal. The body becoming echo. I relate this to LaBelle's description of a 'wild... expressive... monster', the echo exceeding suppression.<sup>150</sup> Like Spivak recognising Echo's punishment as its own reward, I want to hear Glissant's multilingual world and LaBelle's insistence on the abject grow among prelapsarian Edens. Recitals of identities, frequently subconscious, even accidental, are more like echoes, echoes of identities. This is where agency is the hiatus of iterability.

LaBelle marks the mouth as a channel, but then complicates these figurative associations with the mouth's presence as a literal channel, drawing the metaphor back from abstraction to the body.<sup>151</sup> When we speak about things other than speech and language, we can only 'tell' of them. An example:

I am watching the transmission.

The mouth acts. When we speak about speech, we can do the things we speak about at the same time with the thing which is doing the speaking.

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<sup>149</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 1062-1064.

<sup>150</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 170.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Echo Mouth open, 'wild... expressive... monstrous'.<sup>152</sup>

Spivak ...the lithography of Echo's bony remains merely points to the risk of response... It is the catachresis of response as such.<sup>153</sup>

LaBelle writes the section 'Echo' towards the end of the chapter. Reciting what has come before but wilder into echo, it functions like a mouth speaking about speaking: this is a text echoing about echoing. The mouth is a speech act. It speaks about speaking and acts about acting all at once. I am stuck on the idea that self-reference somehow embodies the speech act:

Locutionary My mouth said, 'I will speak for you'.

Illocutionary My mouth recommended that it speak for me.

Perlocutionary My mouth blocked my voice, it spoke for me.

Watch *Old Fuel*. [Click here](#).<sup>154</sup>

As I read again 'Introduction: Movement' in LaBelle's book, where he outlines listening as an area of interest, I thought that this book is not about listening at all. It was recommended to me some years ago because of my interest in reading aloud and in speaking texts. After buying a copy, I spent a few months reading and re-reading the same pages of 'Introduction: Movement'. This year, the same thing, reading and re-reading the same paragraphs but this time starting in 'Preface: Associative', where, echoing Glissant, LaBelle outlines his 'proposition for an acoustical position of *caring for the extremes*', where listening is 'the basis for knowledge production that is equally a position of *radical empathy*'.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 170.

<sup>153</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 27.

<sup>154</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17968338>.

<sup>155</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, viii.

I thought about these ideas a lot, in that month or so. I did not stop thinking when the speaker coughed mid-sentence.

When I finally returned to the book years later, I finished ‘Introduction: Movement’, and after ‘Preface: Associative’, again, I scanned ‘Index’, where I moved from ‘Sister McCandless’ to ‘Siren’ to ‘Contents’ to ‘Lisp, mumble, mute, pause, stutter’. I listened to voice, to the mouth, the lexicon of ‘burp’, ‘gasp’, ‘recite’, ‘chew’ and more, all beyond or vehicles for language, words, speech words, spoken words. And the more I flicked from ‘Lisp’ to ‘Scream’ to ‘Suck’, I figured these are the extremes LaBelle advocates to care for – the parallel utterances, languages and objects, the others to our clear-cut spoken turns of phrase. Through transmissive rewriting and respeaking the words of others, through background noise and audio trouble, we cannot block extraneous events and cellular messages from landing on our flesh.

# A Stuttering Verbatim Performance

I am watching *Screed #13*, a performance by Sharon Hayes recorded and shared online.<sup>156</sup> Hayes has partially memorised a transcript and is speaking it aloud in front of a live audience. The audience, who refer to copies of the text, are meticulous, as well as obstructive, in correcting mistakes made by Hayes. I picture both Hayes, memorising Patricia Hearst's words in 2003, and Hearst herself some thirty years prior, in the moment of recording those words onto tape.<sup>157</sup> In 1974, nineteen-year old Patricia Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a radical left-wing political organisation known for 'tactics of expropriation, direct action and armed propaganda to stimulate public awareness and action around issues of poverty, housing, racism, women's rights, and prison issues.'<sup>158</sup> Hearst is the granddaughter of William

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<sup>156</sup> Hayes, 'Screed #13'.

<sup>157</sup> In an accompanying text on the artist's website, Hayes describes this process as follows, 'I partially memorized the transcript of the audio tape and spoke the text in front of an audience to whom I gave a transcript of the text. I asked them to correct her when she was wrong and to feed her a line when she needed it.' Sharon Hayes, 'Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20 & 29', accessed November 12, 2021, <http://shaze.info/work/symbionese-liberation-army/>.

<sup>158</sup> 'Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA)', The Freedom Archives, accessed January 7, 2022, [https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view\\_collection=251&keyword\[\]=Symbionese%20Liberation%20Army%20\(SLA\)&author\[\]=SLA](https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=251&keyword[]=Symbionese%20Liberation%20Army%20(SLA)&author[]=SLA).



Randolph Hearst Sr, founder of the Hearst Corporation, a multibillion-dollar media conglomerate.<sup>159</sup> Is it through empathy, disdain or ambivalence that Hayes directs her attention to Hearst and the SLA? I find myself beginning to draw my own verdicts about Hearst's intentions and relationships. Writing of a discussion with the ethical philosopher Bimal Matilal, Spivak recalls:

[Matilal] discussed an argument advanced by Gangeṣa, a twelfth-century linguist, that the production of truth was not necessarily dependent upon the speaker's intention. (This is *bhrāntapratāraḥ kavāḥya*, the case of the deluded deceiver, who speaks the truth while thinking to lie.)<sup>160</sup>

In her essay, 'Echo', where the above quotation is cited, Spivak deconstructs and rewrites the mythological figure of Echo. Referring to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Spivak argues that while the Roman poet did not intend that his writing of and for Echo invoke *bhrāntapratāraḥ kavāḥya*, he unwittingly demonstrates the possibility of truth emerging where it had not been intended, and where perhaps it had been assumed there was none to be garnered and cultivated. We can trace the word truth to the word authority, to a linguistic domain where the subaltern woman cannot be responded to because her truth lacks an institutional backing, because her truth lacks authority. Echo herself is not truth, rather she embodies the unforeseen emergence of truth and knowledge. This is how Spivak wants to reframe Echo – as producing this possibility of truth, unwittingly.

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<sup>159</sup> 'The Hearst Corporation: Overview', Media Data Base, Institute of Media and Communications Policy, accessed August 4, 2022, <https://www.mediadb.eu/en/data-base/international-media-corporations/the-hearst-corporation.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 19-20.

In her trial in 1976, Hearst maintained that any alleged self-serving impulsivity and diminishment of responsibility could be explained and excused by the blackmail and violence she was subject to by members of the SLA, in addition to her fear of prosecution by the FBI.<sup>161</sup> In a review of Jeffrey Toobin's biography, *American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst* (2016), author Susan Choi critiques prevalent tendencies that view Hearst as a free agent, challenging Toobin's fixation on what he alleges as Hearst's perpetually rational, level-headed mindset as well as the SLA's one-sided version of Hearst as 'so zealous they couldn't get rid of her'.<sup>162</sup> Choi concludes that Hearst's behaviour is that of a people-pleaser, a person whose actions are consistently inconsistent, who could therefore be viewed as in service of others, others who Hearst may have felt exerted the largest authority, or posed the biggest threat, upon her at any given time. For Choi, the experience of kidnap at gunpoint cannot be ignored and questions about Hearst's perception of her identity are crucial to understanding the relevance of coercion to this case, with evidence suggesting a potentially vague sense of self.<sup>163</sup>

Demonstrating how variations in language and syntax in Ovid's account of the dialogue between Echo and Narcissus alter the style and tone of Echo's address, Spivak notes that Echo does not repeat whole sentences, instead she 'gives back the end of each statement'.<sup>164</sup> At one moment, it is Narcissus who is 'receiving back', at another, it is Ovid reporting Echo's words from the outside, as a witness to the scene, as when 'she calls him calling, calls the calling one, voices the voicer':

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<sup>161</sup> See Patricia Hearst and James Browning, 'Excerpt of Cross-Examination of Defendant, Patty Hearst: Cross-Examination by Mr. Browning', in 'Selected Trial Transcript Excerpts in the Patty Hearst Trial', Famous Trials, uploaded by Douglas O. Linder, accessed August 4, 2022, <https://famous-trials.com/pattyhearst/2210-excerpts>.

<sup>162</sup> Susan Choi, 'Unfree Radical', *Book Forum* (Sep/Oct/Nov 2016), accessed August 4, 2022, <https://www.bookforum.com/print/2303/a-biography-attempts-to-solve-the-conundrums-of-the-patricia-hearst-kidnapping-16508>.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 24.

Spivak

If in the *fugis/fugi* reporting, Ovid reports Narcissus as receiving back the words *he* said, in the *veni/veni* reporting, Ovid gives Echo a plenitude of voicing: *vocat illa vocantem...* The ethical-instantiation reader must choose between a gendered agency... or a gendered aporia...<sup>165</sup>

In other words, does Echo act to fulfil her intention – to echo those around her – or does her voice operate within a larger, gendered history? Where Narcissus embodies the possibility of self-knowledge and Echo embodies that of the other, the two figures present two fields of knowledge that are connected yet often contradict one another. Further, these relations, interconnected as sites of knowledge and inevitably actions, demand analysis through an ethics lens. Echo's punishment does not permit her the capacity for agency and so it is the gendered aporia, the irresolvable internal contradiction, that provides the most compelling interpretation of the story of Echo and Narcissus.<sup>166</sup>

In an interview accompanying her 2019 exhibition *Echo*, at the Moderna Museet, Sweden, Hayes explains that 'this left-wing group kidnapped [Hearst] in order to have access to the media'.<sup>167</sup> It is reasonable to attribute the considerable media coverage of Hearst's kidnapping to the wealth of her family and its power over the national press. Initially a prisoner, Hearst soon after declared allegiance to the SLA and remained with them for over a year until her arrest in September 1975. During this time, the SLA recorded and released four cassette tapes in which Hearst describes their political stance and accounts for several events and actions linked to the organisation. Sometime between February 4 and 13, 1974, the first tape was sent to Hearst's father and a copy of the recording was broadcast on public radio in California amid numerous

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<sup>165</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 41.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>167</sup> Hayes, 'Sharon Hayes: Echo | Introduction', 00:26:19-00:26:25.

press reports.<sup>168</sup> In the recording there are sounds of the tape being sped up and recorded over and Hearst verbally acknowledges the stops and starts to her speech. Clearly corrections and performance breaks were necessary to allow Hearst time to ‘collect [her] thoughts’.<sup>169</sup> At her trial, Hearst describes being given words written down on paper to read from.<sup>170</sup> I picture again Hearst in the moment of recording her words onto tape and Hayes in the moment of reciting them. Hayes, by asking her audience to interrupt and provide verbal instruction, makes them public in their role as collective directors of the performance, unlike the SLA, who, if present with Hearst during the recording, remain silent. Hayes’s recording is unedited. The ‘mistakes’ of her speech and its staging, point to the constructed and artificial nature of Hearst’s first tape. What happened to Hearst’s mistakes? What were the reasons for stopping and restarting the tape? What happened in the gaps during recording? While these missing objects may have produced a confused communiqué, as markers of how the tape came to be, they evoke intimacy, which, beyond opening scenes of excitement and novelty, grows over time more intricately unlike a model and social connection reads imperceptibly from outside of itself.

In mapping out the significance of the impossible in ethical discourse, ‘of the aporia between self-knowledge and knowledge for others’, Spivak points to cultural difference:

Professor Matilal argued that nineteenth-century Indologists were basically correct in estimating that India had no tradition of moral philosophy in the Western European sense. But they had not been able to grasp either the Indic tradition of rational critique or

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<sup>168</sup> Patricia Hearst, ‘Transcript of Tape Recording of Patricia Hearst’s Voice Broadcast by Radio Station KPFA’, *The New York Times*, February 13, 1974, accessed September 5, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/02/13/archives/transcript-of-tape-recording-of-patricia-hearsts-voice-broadcast-by.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Hearst, ‘Audio Messages’, 00:03:22-00:03:31.

<sup>170</sup> Hearst, ‘Excerpt of Cross-Examination of Defendant, Patty Hearst: Cross-Examination by Mr. Browning’.

the tradition of practical ethics in India. According to Matlal, the latter was based on the reading of narrative instantiations of ethical problems.<sup>171</sup>

As Matlal testifies to India's historical existence, Spivak attempts 'to "give woman" to Echo, to deconstruct her out of traditional *and* deconstructive representation and (non)representation, however imperfectly.'<sup>172</sup> For such a deconstruction to take place, beginning with Ovid's version of Echo, Spivak must trace examples of representation and (non)representation in Western Europe, accordingly identifying and analysing 'Freud's recognition of the aporia between terminable and interminable analyses, and Derrida's thinking of ethics as the experience of the impossible.'<sup>173</sup>

In her penultimate footnote, Spivak inserts an uncited quotation in Bengali script.<sup>174</sup> In conversations and written notes, the artist Manali De (MD) translated the text into English for me, while describing its relevance to Indian traditions. Describing 'the complexity of the necessities of men and women coexisting in this world' in reference to Radha and Krishna, the Bengali versions of the deities, the question or problem both MD and Spivak raise is the presence of a perpetual call for woman's significance: there exists a need to assert that both men and women are necessary.<sup>175</sup> I reconfigure MD's literal translation of Spivak:

Male bird

My Lord is the one who picked up the mountain to save the world.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 19.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>175</sup> MD, note to the author, 2022.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

Female bird	It was the influence of Radha that gave Krishna the strength to uproot a mountain to help the people. Otherwise, it would not have been possible. <sup>177</sup>
Spivak	Where was Echo, the woman in Narcissus's story? <sup>178</sup>
MD	Krishna is not just a God, he is the universe. And Radha is the climate, the environment and everything required for the universe to exist. <sup>179</sup>
The Narrator	Read the text, <i>I Was Really Everyone</i> . <a href="#">Click here</a> . <sup>180</sup>

Reading around Spivak's writing, I find that it has been often criticised for being difficult. Who by? White men? Anti-feminists?<sup>181</sup> I continue to read silently and aloud, counting the multiplying meanings of one word, rewriting in questions, tracing text, fixating on Spivak's citation of Lacan:

Spivak	He points and declares, <i>iste ego sum...</i> <sup>182</sup>
Lacan	In the subject to subject recourse we preserve, psychoanalysis can accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the ' <i>Thou art that</i> ,' where the cipher of his mortal destiny is revealed to him... <sup>183</sup>
Echo	...to him... <i>thou art that</i> .  ... <i>thou art that</i> .
Narcissus	He points and declares, <i>iste ego sum</i> : 'I am that.' <sup>184</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> MD, note to the author, 2022.

<sup>178</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 17.

<sup>179</sup> MD, note to the author, 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862145>.

<sup>181</sup> Dinitia Smith gathers some of these criticisms in her article, 'Creating a Stir Wherever She Goes', *The New York Times*, February 9, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/09/arts/creating-a-stir-wherever-she-goes.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 24.

<sup>183</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytical experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 7, Internet Archive.

<sup>184</sup> Ovid, 'Echo and Narcissus', in *Metamorphoses*, translated by Frank Justus Miller. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Cambridge, MA.: Loeb Classical Library, 1966), 156, II. 463-471, quoted in Spivak, 'Echo', 24.

Echo ...am that.

Lacan Thou art that.

Echo *Art that... art that... art that...*

The returning adaptation of all who speak to you... *art that...*

accent, personality, rhythm, the lull from ecstasy to monotone

and weak writing. How can this be reward? Is it y/ours when you

can only speak after you? Surely, it is y/our answer which is

inevitable. While he is stuck, you love Narcissus so that you can

love yourself. An example, intensity and duration of outcomes,

explicating expansively, hopefully and- You move on.

Hearst is repeatedly written off as an insincere and unreliable source. The prosecution questioned her in detail about unlocked doors and public outings, numerous occasions when, finding herself physically untethered to the SLA, she could have made a break for it and kept on running.<sup>185</sup> And yet no one, including the FBI, could get near her. Hayes recites with minimal drama and emotion, without a circus. The audience become increasingly pedantic and confident, while preventing Hayes from continuing her speech until she corrects herself, a process of delivery that is tedious, as the work's title suggests. Hayes engages a similar preoccupation for the oblique and laborious in her later work, *My Fellow Americans 1981-88*. In this ten-hour performance and video installation, Hayes reads aloud all thirty-four official presidential addresses given by Ronald Reagan during his term as president of the United States of America.<sup>186</sup> Though troubled by the act of giving airtime to things and people that are insincere and hateful, unwilling to learn and unwilling to want to learn, I follow Hayes's lead and picture

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<sup>185</sup> 'Excerpt of Cross-Examination of Defendant, Patty Hearst: Cross-Examination by Mr. Browning', Famous Trials.

<sup>186</sup> Sharon Hayes, *My Fellow Americans 1981-88*, performance, 00:10:00, 2004 and 2008. See Sharon Hayes, 'My Fellow Americans, 1981-88', accessed September 5, 2022, <http://shaze.info/work/my-fellow-americans-1981-88/>.

myself reciting all televised announcements delivered by the UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, since the first national Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. This task is tedious and exasperating. Over ten years of government cuts to public services by the circus who shrug off compassion and laugh. Beginning slowly, I labour each word trying to figure a rhythm for myself. There is talk of Boris Johnson being forced out of office and replaced in 2022. I think this is a useless distraction obscuring the increasingly corporate and conservative government that does not care about you. All the time I am reading I am frowning. Glaring. Greta Thunberg continues to challenge political and social insincerity by daring to show emotion and knowledge. Her frown is iconic, symbolising to me the extremes of feeling, of both fear and care, knotted up in the autistic self. Faced with many instances of adults around the world, political leaders and public figures, who belittled Thunberg's concerns and chose instead to bully a child (Thunberg turned 18 in 2020), it is clear to me that sensitivity is worth our time. There is something unsettling in taking words from a teenager and refusing to recognise their autonomy.<sup>187</sup>

Hearst

Knowledge of the self through one's own eyes compared with that in the eyes of others.

Knowledge of others through the eyes of the self, compared with that in the eyes of others.

The domains of private and public life are made hazy through the ransom placed on Hearst by the SLA, demanding her family provide \$2 million worth of food for the poorest people in California.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See Boris Johnson, "‘Blah blah blah’: Boris Johnson references Greta Thunberg in Cop26 speech", Ross Martin-Pavitt, Independent TV, accessed August 4, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/cop26/cop26-boris-johnson-greta-thunberg-v101d22b4>.

<sup>188</sup> '1974: Hearst "ransom" provokes violence', *BBC News*, accessed August 4, 2022, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/22/newsid\\_2948000/2948348.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/22/newsid_2948000/2948348.stm).



Hearst Mom, Dad, I'm O.K. If you can get that food thing organized before the 19<sup>th</sup> then that's O.K., and it will just speed up my release.<sup>189</sup>

Produced shortly after her abduction, it is plausible that Hearst was forced to record the first tape by members of the SLA and that she was threatened and fed lines in the process. While Hearst sounds out of it, spaciouly slurring her voice around the recording, I am still reciting Johnson's speeches and at the same time I am speechless. I want to make it clear that I am not with him. I want to be a pacifist. His words constrict my anatomy, breath, gurgle and sweating and shaking and all the spit in my mouth clacking and sticky.

Throughout *Screed #13*, the camera is fixed upon Hayes and cropped tightly around her face. She is slightly off-centre, to the right of the frame, and behind her is a pale grey background. Hayes stares straight ahead maintaining eye contact with the camera. Occasionally, when responding to the audience, she looks outside of the frame. The resolution of the video is clear enough to see inside her mouth. Sometimes, Hayes presents the words of Hearst. Elsewhere, Hayes receives the words of Hearst via the audience. Hayes is constantly filling up her mouth even when she is without words. Does the audience become Hearst, a source? Or are they Ovid, the narrator? Can we perceive Hearst as the root of her words? We, as readers and viewers, must choose between a gendered agency or a gendered aporia.

In her earlier text, 'Can the subaltern speak?', Spivak presents another aporia in addressing the subaltern woman's potential for voice-and-response. Can she speak? How might she speak? It is possible that the subaltern has some punishment as reward to reclaim, but it is not possible, nor

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<sup>189</sup> Hearst, 'Transcript of Tape Recording of Patricia Hearst's Voice Broadcast by Radio Station KPFA'.

is it ethical, to presume what this is and then impose it upon her. In 'Echo', Spivak confronts both writer – herself – and reader, with the realities and dynamics of everyday life, through an ethical lens:

Spivak                                 This feminist is *culturally* divided from the women at the bottom. I have already indicated that what she sees as *her* face she knows to be an 'it' which she loves and of which she desires the disappearance, which is the precarious moment of the Ovidian Narcissus; in order not to speak for, speak to, listen to, but respond to the subaltern sister.<sup>190</sup>

I am confused by Spivak's use of nouns and pronouns:

This feminist... I have already indicated... she sees as *her* face she knows... which she loves and of which she desires... the subaltern sister.<sup>191</sup>

Does she write of herself as the Ovidian Narcissus, or, of her readership, of all culturally distant feminists of colour? Or is it the subaltern sister who is the Ovidian Narcissus, who must respond to those close to her, her subaltern sisters?

Spivak                                 Simply put: love-your-own-face, love-your-own-culture, remain-fixed-in-cultural-difference, simulate what is really pathogenic

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<sup>190</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 27-28.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

repression in the form of questioning the European universalist superego.

...

The 'practice of freedom,' especially in the context of women divided into feminists and women, does not come simply because of the fact of gaining something called independence.<sup>192</sup>

It must be written of herself, the Ovidian Narcissus, the distanced feminist of colour, through the lenses of Echo and cultural identity... Uncertain in my reading, I return again and again to her writing:

The only thing we know is that 'be like me, be like my image' can never be on the agenda, from either side.

...

Echo will not have been dragged into the circuit of adequate political imitation.<sup>193</sup>

Policy can change, but it takes generations for ethical instantiations of relations to change. Echo herself is resistant to the idea of intention and we cannot therefore project onto her concepts of intentional subversion and the capacity to act from a constitution of freedom. She 'will not have been dragged into the field of political imitation' because it is not possible to imitate her. To do so, if one was to become her, would be an act of freedom. It is not possible to imitate the poorest people in the world. One cannot Echo willingly because it is a state of being that is directly enforced or emerges through tactics of marginalisation. We cannot be *like* Echo, merely

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<sup>192</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 28.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

repeating others (unethical) and imitating culture (unethical). Responding is not the same as imitation and '[i]n her own separate enclosure, the subaltern still cannot speak as the subject of a speech act.'<sup>194</sup>

Rather than acting the role of Hearst, Hayes recites the transcript verbatim without using her body to act or gesture with. The director Clio Barnard uses a similar theatre technique in *The Arbor* (2010), a film based on the playwright Andrea Dunbar's play of the same name (*The Arbor*, 1980).<sup>195</sup> In Barnard's film, the actors lip-sync their lines, while acting, through expressions and gestures, as if they are speaking aloud. The silent footage was then joined up with the words and sounds recorded in interviews with Dunbar's friends and family. The actors stand in for the interviewees, on location at the Buttershaw council estate in Bradford, where Dunbar and her children grew up, and I get lost in the chronology and voices. Wearing clothes more suited to the early twenty-first century, the actors replay scenes from Dunbar's play on the grassy spaces inside the estate where the residents are now the audience. I watch footage of Dunbar on the news and in interviews. The camera follows her taking a train, walking along a London street and entering a theatre. Dunbar's family appear on a front step speaking to the press in the 1980s and, elsewhere, I listen to them, mimed by actors, speak of her youngest brother who died in a car accident at eleven years old. I hear more recent interviews with Dunbar's three children, her siblings, parents and foster parents, again mimed by actors. The actors performing as Dunbar's children, Lisa and Lorraine, speak silently the words spoken aloud by Lisa and Lorraine in interviews with Barnard. Moving their mouths in time with the dialogue, the actors respond to Barnard's questions. In a podcast produced by ArtAngel, Barnard asks Lisa and Lorraine about their first memories, and earlier, Lorraine answers, 'Being in the house, Mum out in the pub, or

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<sup>194</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 30.

<sup>195</sup> *The Arbor*, dir. Clio Barnard, starring Manjinder Virk and Neil Dudgeon, 00:01:30, 2010, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Arbor-Neil-Dudgeon/dp/B00ET1RO9G>.

Mum comatosed (*sic*) in bed... And setting fire to the bedroom, to keep my brother and sister warm 'cause they was cold'.<sup>196</sup>

Hayes ...for me the relationship between a then and a now is much more complicated and more likely full of stutters and mishearings and a kind of inability to have a whole picture or a whole understanding, but that those past moments don't, they don't only exist in their own, they do circulate through our present moment...<sup>197</sup>

Realistic and imperfect, the verbatim technique challenges the degree to which theatre or performance is expected to work as an illusion. Noticeable stops and pauses in the audio along with mouth sounds present the viewer with the stuttering uncertainty of unrehearsed speech, an effect that is enhanced by slightly out-of-sync audio. The sliding accuracy of speech and movement reminds me that the actors are articulated by the sounds of a body or site that is not their own, like gastromancy, where sounds come from one but one does not make them, where sounds appear without thought. Their origin is not one. I think about those people and their voices now. What is Lisa's answer? What is Clio's answer?

I watch Hayes and try to read her, hoping to identify the moments when she recalls specific words and lines and how these attempts to access memories manifest externally. I notice her use of filler words throughout, such as 'er', 'um' and 'ah', and a tendency for extending syllables.

Hayes appears deep in thought, her eyes narrow and dart around the room between irregular and pronounced blinking. My own expression turns similarly sharp as I watch for the silent and

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<sup>196</sup> Clio Barnard, 'Podcast 3: Memory', Artangel, podcast, 00:27:20, August 19, 2014, <https://soundcloud.com/artangel-2/podcast-3-memory?in=artangel-2/sets/podcast>, 00:00:18-00:02:55.

<sup>197</sup> Hayes, 'Sharon Hayes: Echo | Introduction', 00:28:55-00:29:26.

repetitive gestures of her mouth. I am watching Hayes's mouth hang, between opening and closing, on the verge of speaking, of activating muscle memories. Her movements are incomplete physical attempts to draw out her rehearsing-body. I watch the same section repeatedly, switching the sound off and on again while trying to mirror her lips, pursing, and licking them, swallowing for time, pointedly resting my tongue on my front teeth.

Hayes

They-

[ EXTEND 'EY' SOUND ]

[ SILENTLY MOUTH THE WORD 'THEY' ]

[ MOVE MOUTH INTO 'TH' SHAPE. LIPS AND TEETH  
SLIGHTLY APART, TONGUE BEHIND FRONT TEETH,  
ALMOST IN THE GAP ]

[ PREPARE TO SPEAK ].<sup>198</sup>

It is rare that Hayes directs her speech at the audience to ask for help verbally, and although it is possible that Hayes gestures with her body, this is not visible in the recording. Rather, the audience senses when Hayes needs prompting through interpreting the more subtle movements and expressions of her face, as well as the rhythm of her speech and what LaBelle terms 'micro-vocables'.<sup>199</sup> Maintaining an expression of concentration, Hayes looks searchingly at the audience, appearing vulnerable alongside multiple voices correcting and distracting her from behind the camera. She signals for clarification:

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<sup>198</sup> Hayes, *Screened #13*, 00:00:50-00:00:55.

<sup>199</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 132.

Hayes

I'm sorry?<sup>200</sup>

U-usually?<sup>201</sup>

Her stammer and ascending pitch in the word 'usually' invites the audience to confirm her recital. Sometimes the voices provide words, but Hayes still does not speak. She cannot hear them, or the language does not make sense to her.

Introducing the chapter titled 'Lisp, mumble, mute, pause, stutter', LaBelle presents the mouth as an opening. I imagine a door leading to another door, an air-lock module on a spaceship. He highlights the mouth as a site primed for speech, though it may not always speak in ways that are understandably verbal. I am concentrating on my own mouth now, on its weak borders between voice, flesh, movement and breath, and the sounds I can make at 'the threshold of speech'.<sup>202</sup> Opening and closing my mouth and feeling inside it with my tongue, saliva seems to come from nowhere, covering the surfaces. It is always there but not there. I remember in my prolonged speaking aloud of Holt's transmission, my mouth dried up causing my throat to scratch itself, but now the wetness of my mouth makes me think that it is alive, or that the life of my mouth is embodied in its constant stream of saliva, or that the saliva itself is alive, protecting, cultivating and actively irrigating its 'material envelope'.<sup>203</sup> Is this system affected by how little or often I speak? Or does the system affect how little or often I speak?

LaBelle

As Migone identifies, language necessitates a primary relation to the substances and surfaces of the mouth, to that hole that is

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<sup>200</sup> Hayes, *Screeed #13*, 00:01:44-00:01:46.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:09-00:01:13.

<sup>202</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 129.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

always vacillating and puckering, spiriting words with great energy  
that may also run away with itself.<sup>204</sup>

What does it look like, the ‘great energy that [has] run away with itself’? Is it when, having begun to read silently, you become aware of breath and flesh squishing and sliding together inside you? Constantly moving, feeling, sensing, touching, staging a rehearsal behind the curtain, you breathe, stretch, contract and extend your jaw and finding your tongue, you prod and poke the roof of the mouth, the lumps of teeth. Is it when, sucking your cheeks inward until they meet each other, saliva squeaking, bubbling and forcing its way around your immobilised tongue until, suddenly, you lose suction accidentally, and quickly comes an exaggerated puckering sound, a cartoon kiss, with air rushing to the back of your throat, reverberating? Or is it when, having chewed on your lower lip you feel a piece of torn skin, loose and swimming in saliva on your tongue and you unthinkingly and hungrily swallow before sucking on the injured area, now metallic and hot tasting? Meat. The body of another brought unwittingly into mine, tongue touching tongue, lips licking lips. Apply pressure. Indent, indent, indent. Tender, tender, tender. Split. We can always taste, lick and feel, lips and tongue, always touching.

In the section ‘Elemental’, in the chapter ‘Movement’, LaBelle quotes Monique Wittig’s book *The Lesbian Body* (1975), where Wittig presents the ‘T’ as a divided self, a multiple in language (m/e, m/y) and in the body and in the crossing of bodies. ‘T’ is italicised, emphasised, stressed:

Wittig

*I gather into m/y mouth your entire reserves of air.*<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 41.

<sup>205</sup> Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 68, quoted in LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 112-113.



I read Wittig’s fragmented metaphors and partial realism and gather them together. Clustered, they undermine the whole as a metaphor and I have just read the word ‘literally’. *I* read the bodies, *I* read the texts. LaBelle argues that the voice is evidence of our repeatedly trying things out, evidence of our desires and actions.

LaBelle                                      Is not speaking a process of seeking out agency?<sup>206</sup>

Is it possible to say the mouth is always before speech, always about to speak? Discussing identity in relation to a body that does not speak, LaBelle quotes Butler’s ‘forced narrative’, an idea that goes beyond what remains of history, of its names and events, and how it is framed for us, and so reveals the standardising power of language where coherence, consistency and control are good, desirable qualities.<sup>207</sup> The voice is unique to the *I* but this *I* must act and speak of, with and within a universally accepted system of relations, i.e., colonialism, capitalism, post-Enlightenment reasoning and the global West. LaBelle problematises multiplicity and our sense of unique individuality, questioning where these ideas come from and how we deal with them, by asking if we *must* be unique. It is through voice that we announce our uniqueness, but it must be within the dominant ideologies and vernacular systems. You must be recognisable to me. There are social devices, ways of figuring out the other and the situation, for getting along. So frequent and familiar are the words, our going through the motions, but *I* search them for new guidelines on how to be. Specifically, how am *I* to be for you, here and now?

Narcissus                                      How are you?

Echo    ...are you?

Narcissus                                      How do you feel?

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<sup>206</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 141.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Echo ...do you feel?

Narcissus I hear an empty space.<sup>208</sup>

Echo ...an empty space... I hear *SMALL TALK in six acts...*  
[Click here.](#)<sup>209</sup>

In social space, authenticity remains inconclusive. We are stuck in this opening ritual. Y/our escape route is through the interruptions. Let the inconsistencies wobble out arrhythmically. Chatter into incoherence. Or better yet, let m/y mouth circle silence, posing and puckering, turning the volume down, un-speaking, the body as entity, here and now, considering ‘the obligations to *pronounce*’, bringing to the exchange the presence of ‘the ordering principles... that may also certainly bully us into speech. Into being “properly unique.”’<sup>210</sup> I am most comfortable exchanging information, but I am hooked on the possibility of not information.

LaBelle The loss of voice then is a loss of agency<sup>211</sup>; it is a prolonged hiatus that may never return from the subject back into the iterability of identity.<sup>212</sup>

...

Such views no doubt carry forward into ‘pejorative attitudes enshrined in the very language of loss of voice’ captured in the psychological view of ‘the neurotic personality.’<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:03:48-00:03:52.

<sup>209</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17936339>.

<sup>210</sup> Italics in original. LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 143.

<sup>211</sup> LaBelle’s footnote: ‘36 This is not to suggest that the one who does not speak is not without “communicative” or meaningful exchange, social presence, and modes of agency. On the contrary, rather, following Butler, it is to appreciate the *performative* dynamics by which “losing voice” gains signifying momentum by unsettling what we mean by “speech” itself.’, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 204.

<sup>212</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 143.

<sup>213</sup> Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 126, quoted in LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 142.

No literary or cultural work has yet transcended into perfect inclusivity, into a condition that is physically, linguistically, sensorially, mentally, culturally and economically accessible by all bodies. While it may be that ‘as with all types of speech impediments, aphasia is mostly the result of sustained trauma or illness’,<sup>214</sup> there is more to consider in the sensual pleasure of not speaking.<sup>215</sup> How can we conceive of mutism or aphasia as not forever underscored by trauma or illness? Might we see exchanges in silence as not less than, not stuck and not debilitating? It is difficult to conceive of a quietness in action, as not apathy and fear, as a challenge to the bullying demands of what is considered proper.

The relation between the performers (Hayes and the audience) in *Screed #13* mirrors that between the figures involved in producing the first tape (Hearst and the SLA).

Hearst    I’ve been stopping and starting this tape myself, so that I can collect my thoughts. That’s why there are so many stops in it. I’m not being forced to say any of this.<sup>216</sup>

Despite Hearst’s insistence of autonomy in producing the tape, both she and Hayes are held hostage, though in different ways, by an unseen director who appears to be forcing them to perform and record a particular mode of address. The uncertainty of Hearst’s lines is met with laughter in Hayes’s respeaking. The audience direct Hayes not to voice an approximation of Hearst’s words, but to speak them exactly as transcribed:

Audience    I’ve been stopping...

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<sup>214</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 141.

<sup>215</sup> LaBelle does some of this through his writing on the film, *The Piano*. See LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 143-145.

<sup>216</sup> Hearst, ‘Audio Messages’, 00:03:21 to 00:03:37.

Hayes I've been stopping and starting this tape myself, so that I can collect my thoughts. That's why there are so many stops in it.

Audience [ LAUGHTER ]

Hayes Um-

Audience I'm not being forced to say any of this...

Hayes I'm not being forced to say any of this.<sup>217</sup>

I take a screen cast of *Screed #13*, starting at the beginning and stopping the recording at 00:02:53. I edit my copy, deleting the sections where Hayes's voice is audible. This is not as precise as I want it to be as the soundwave representations do not match exactly in time with the smaller sounds I can hear. It is impossible to narrow in on when a sound begins and ends and the timeline races by too fast for me to catch, so I cut by ear. I mark and cut the clip when I hear Hayes's voice begin and end, regardless of how the soundwave representation looks. My recording of Hayes's performance, edited down to 00:00:45, is not silent nor without speech. I hear voices, bodies moving, a persistent background hum and an alarm ringing for a short time. The short clips of Hayes's silent mouth movements play in sequence, grouped into one continuous piece of footage. The effect is jarring. One moment she looks straight ahead, the next her head is turned to the right without us having seen the movements made to get there. She stops and starts, opening and closing her mouth, preparing to speak, correcting herself, shaping her lips and tongue in anticipation of speech, to be ready for the words which will come from herself or from others. It is difficult to use my muscles in the same way and to keep up with the artificial transitions of the edited video. Distracted by other movements around her speech, I find myself mirroring Hayes's facial expressions, the turns of her head and her eye movements, so I slow the speed of the clip to 50%, and then to 25%, and try again, making

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<sup>217</sup> Hayes, *Screed #13*, 00:03:46-00:04:02.

clearer attempts at the shapes of her mouth and lips with mine, remembering to locate and reposition my teeth and tongue with each change. I am closer to Hayes’s movements here where time is slowed down. Closer to the movements making the sounds of Patty Hearst, or the movements in between:

I continue moving my mouth with hers.

They move y/our mouth into a circle, holding before the *I* sound.

Silence is easily exploited. It is perceived as indifferent, weak, lacking, as a hole to be filled with thought and speech where there appears to be none. LaBelle presents micro-oralities, interruptions and losses of control as giving site to the gap that Butler delineates.<sup>218</sup> They are the gaps. Every tremble, in its weakness, is proof of its existence and a challenge to violent ideology. It is disproof of perfection, purity and the sacred.

LaBelle

The voice is pressed out of us – to support us by literally taking away our breath. In this way, speaking also fundamentally weakens us, which might be one of its essential lessons.<sup>219</sup>

The Narrator

Watch the video, *dimensionstrip*. [Click here](#).<sup>220</sup>

Is it more difficult to not shout ‘Hello!’ into the abyss? To not assume its vacancy, to not announce y/our property.

Writing about ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in an afterword of its reprinting in 2010, Spivak observes a general misinterpretation of her text:

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<sup>218</sup> LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 140-142.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>220</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862118>.

Spivak

The point that I was trying to make was that if there was no valid institutional background for resistance, it could not be recognized. Bhubaneswari's resistance against the axioms that animated sati could not be recognized. She could not speak. Unfortunately, for sati, a caste-Hindu practice, there *was* an institutional validation, and I unraveled as much of it as I could. My point was not to say that they couldn't speak, but that, when someone did try to do something different, it could not be acknowledged because there was no institutional validation. It was not a point about satis not speaking.

...

So that was in fact where the essay began. Not in understanding the subaltern as a state of difference.<sup>221</sup>

In her text, 'CHOOSING THE MARGIN AS A SPACE OF RADICAL OPENNESS', bell hooks writes:

I am waiting for them to stop talking about 'the other,' to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference... Often this speech about the 'other' is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there was silence, if we were there. This 'we' is that us in the margins... Enter that space.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'In Response: Looking Back, Looking Forward,' 228, in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>222</sup> bell hooks, 'CHOOSING THE MARGIN AS A SPACE OF RADICAL OPENNESS', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989), 15-23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>, 22.

hooks and Spivak are not writing to evidence a lack of speech, but to identify and claim a public space for speech.

Repeating the end of a sentence depends on the sentence ending. Where is the end of the sentence? What if it does not make sense? What if there are long pauses? What if there are no pauses? It relies on Echo knowing the language and its syntax. It does not consider the question of what it is to speak. Is it a gift, to Echo, for others to speak few words, long pause, few words, long pause, or is it patronising?

Following Spivak, 'institutional validation' is made possible through linguistic and political recognition. She traces the Global West's deep-rooted exaltation of Classicism (the reinterpretation of ancient Greco-Roman cultural ideals sited within, for instance, Renaissance Europe and Victorian Britain) to psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to Freud's work particularly for its ideological impact at a global level on how we perceive and relate to ourselves and others. To demonstrate, she refers to V. S. Naipaul, an Indo-Caribbean writer who Spivak argues has internalised negative ideologies, arguing that he sees himself through their eyes and not through his own.<sup>223</sup> Arguing that psychoanalysis is colonial and racist in theory and application, Spivak identifies specifically how Freud's modelling of Narcissus is ignorant to cultural difference and through which analysis of non-European cultures will always prove detrimental to said cultures:

Asia and Africa are always supposed to have had trouble with Oedipus. (Very broadly, and irreverently speaking, if – as a man – you can't get to Oedipus, you are stuck with Narcissus. Women can't pass through Oedipus, and therefore the secondary

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<sup>223</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 18.

narcissism of attachment to the (boy)child saves them from themselves, from penis-envy and so forth.) Their growth is arrested on the civilizational scale.<sup>224</sup>

Spivak states that *Metamorphoses* is not the origin point of the racism running through Freud's ideas, arguing that Freud appears to have deliberately ignored Ovid's narrative. Forming part of Ovid's mythological arc, we read about how Narcissus and Echo came to be, about their context and the figures surrounding them. However, in Freud's idea of primary narcissism there is no origin story. There is no pretext to the child who comes from nowhere: it just is. Further, if we read Ovid's Narcissus in the moment of noticing Echo via Freud's secondary narcissism, Narcissus would be expected to project his image elsewhere, onto Echo, as when the mother appears to the child only in relation to and recognition of itself – but this does not happen in Ovid's telling. Reconsidering Freud's theories as drawn out of and back into their colonial context while observing his careful mapping onto and alleged affinity with contemporary science, Spivak warns that scientific observation is itself not free from bias and speculation. Writing together analyses of 'primitive peoples' and children, as if they are comparable, Freud frames difference as a lack of education and life experience, as if 'primitive peoples' are less evolved and as if humanity itself is evolving as a child grows into an adult. Freudian analysis marginalises women, especially childless women, regardless of ethnicity. They too cannot pass through Oedipus, and elsewhere woman is immortalised not in the figure of Echo but in Narcissus, the boy child. Imagine woman sees man looking at her body and curious as to what he is looking at, she looks too. Before she can judge for herself, they have already called her out for this narcissistic act of looking.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 17-18.

<sup>225</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 20-22.



There is a mythological Narcissus and a psychoanalytical Narcissus, and perhaps there may be a consequential Narcissus of a sociological framing, of the culture taking on what it understands of Narcissus and remodelling it according to the specificities of said culture?

Spivak analyses the story of Echo and Narcissus in its [Ovidian] mythological context, discussing Tiresias, an oracle, who proclaimed upon the birth of Narcissus, ‘He will live as long as he does not know himself’. While punishing women for looking at their bodies, patriarchy reserves this gaze for male figures only. Earlier in the story, Tiresias ‘disturb[s] the copulation of holy serpents’ and is made to become woman as punishment. He repeats the crime and is made man once again. After declaring, ‘women have greater sexual pleasure’ he is made physically blind but given psychic abilities. Tiresias displayed unusual self-knowledge and was subsequently punished, a fate he later predicted for Narcissus. From profanity to fatality, Narcissus dies still desiring self-knowledge, having rejected Echo in favour of his own reflection. In receiving the divine punishment of becoming woman and then reverting to man and in concealing his motive from the Gods when repeating his crime, Tiresias speaks of the possibility to move between genders according to one’s desire. Showing that sexual difference is important, but not in the form of essentialist definitions of gender, Spivak questions biology as a foundation for knowledge:

Spivak                                 The story of Narcissus is framed, then, in the value-coding of affect in a spectacular dynamics of transgression and reward.<sup>226</sup>

Engaging the body as text, a language in formation, at the threshold of reading, of writing, Tiresias’s announcement that ‘women have greater sexual pleasure’ works like an echo, expanding any one moment of transmission. Even to speak now of woman’s sexual pleasure,

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

much less woman's self-sexual pleasure, is controversial in many cultures. I argue that Spivak's Tiresias is suggestive of an ethical instantiation, a citational embodiment of gender fluidity, and makes a case for an autoeroticism that goes beyond strictly female pleasure, an autoeroticism conceived through a non-binary or gender-fluid lens.

The Narrator

When I read the words of others, listen to the soundwaves of a song through my chest or force a microphone inside my mouth, what am I hoping for? Connection? Understanding? Validation? I am constantly surprised by my fixating on a word, movement or stutter and my need to relate to its origin. Imagining a key will unlock the mystery, I return to reading and writing and living again and again with the perception that I am missing something. What am I doing when I transcribe audio or video? If presented as such, in black and white terms, am I attempting to legitimise it in 'patriarchal scripture'.<sup>227</sup> After all, it is capture, power, control, for me to access more immediately through vision. With sound it is time-based: scan-reading and speed-listening are not equal when trying to locate specifics. So, is this my internalised phallogentricity? I find it hard to recognise words in speech – writing helps to correct my hearing. To fill in the gaps. If I can figure out the meaning of this pronoun's specificity, the reason for selecting certain texts, the values of the artist, then I will be OK with being present and accountable. I will find my sense of

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<sup>227</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 29.

self and finally assert it, not as complete but enough, enough to hold its own.

In a self-defined ‘deconstructive embrace’ with the novel *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, Spivak quotes its writer, Assia Djébar:

Each gathering... The ‘I’ of the first person will never be used...  
Each woman, flayed inside, is eased in the collective listening...  
all the verbal stagings are unrolled for unpicking fate, or  
exorcizing it, but never to strip it bare.<sup>228</sup>

The proliferation of meaning of a single word defines post-lapsarian language. Writing its meanings out now, the word ‘strip’ unveils itself as a plot device for the Edenic narrative, transitioning through sin to punishment:

strip... take off clothes... to undress... to perform a striptease...  
remove layer... remove everything... machine...  
punishment...<sup>229</sup>

Djébar’s vociferous attestation, ‘but never to strip it bare’, presents a threat to the self-knowledge of the gathered women, a vulnerability that is further expressed in the contrast and closeness shared between a spiritual eternity – the words ‘all’, ‘fate’ and ‘exorcizing’ – and a finite reality – the words ‘never’ and ‘bare’ – where stripping something bare would remove everything, as a

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<sup>228</sup> Assia Djébar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, tr. Dorothy S. Blair (New York, 1985), 154-155, quoted in Spivak, ‘Echo’, 29.

<sup>229</sup> Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, s.v. ‘strip, verb’, accessed August 5, 2022, [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/strip\\_2](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/strip_2).



Spivak

...the lithography of Echo's bony remains merely points to the risk of response... It is the catachresis of response as such.<sup>234</sup>

Here, Echo personified is written into its existence as a natural auditory phenomenon. As a verb the word echo refers to an exchange, a reflection of varying symmetry and consciousness, but to take echo only as response highlights the limits of communication. Like lithography, where some areas attract the ink and others repel it, an echo is an imperfect reproduction of some of its source. In *Screed #13*, 'the lithography of Echo's bony remains' reverberates through its plurality and its capacity for transmission through various channels, such as its documentation and sources (including VHS tapes,<sup>235</sup> printed transcripts and Hearst's cassette tapes) and the bodies and memories of those involved (such as Hayes, the audience, Hearst and the SLA). Spivak rewrote the punishment, observing voice where at first there seemed none. Sharon Hayes's stuttering verbatim performance calls upon 'the lithography of Echo's bony remains' via orality in motion, repetition, variation, unfixed origins. Presenting the procession of both oral culture and the written, Hayes echoes Hearst, and Hayes echoes the audience who echo Hearst who echoes the SLA. The SLA desires to be Ovid, to be written about in the press, where the 'greater responsibility beckons in the instantiation of the possibility that history is in all respects larger than personal goodwill.'<sup>236</sup> Governed by a text, the audience embody the authoritative power of writing and form a citational chain with lines passed (or perhaps, parsed) to Hayes. The audience makes this into a process of exacting-language, drawing it out of Hayes, precisely. In Hearst's tapes this process is absent, or more likely recorded over, highlighting the complications in ascertaining authenticity in the speech and language of Hearst, or of Reagan, for example. Is Hearst the origin or the echo? Or is she Ovid, the narrator, in telling us, 'I'm stopping and

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<sup>234</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 27.

<sup>235</sup> The body of work, *Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds 13, 16, 20 & 29*, was first exhibited in 2003 as a stack of VHS tapes available for the audience to take away. It was adapted into a 4-channel video installation in 2012. See Hayes, 'Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20 & 29'.

<sup>236</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 41.

starting this tape myself, that's why there are so many stops in it'. We hear Hearst through Hayes, but we forget her too, our focus on Hayes's recital, her straining to memory and the audience's frequent interruptions. It is a jolted replication where something is changed and something is the same. The myth did not annihilate us ready to start again. Here we are, reconfiguring, as the suffix '-ie' replaces '-ia': From aponia – silent damage – to *aphonie* – the ghost in the machine, fallibility, slipping paths and pushing back, 'a radical counterfactual future anterior... Echo...' <sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Spivak, 'Echo', 25.

# There is, In Retrospect

In Martine Syms's *Notes on Gesture* (2015), Diamond Stingily appears onscreen from the waist up, with the camera closely and variously cropped around parts of her body, such as her face, neck, shoulders, arms and hands. Stingily moves and speaks, often looking at the camera, in a series of short clips that Syms, as editor, has arranged in such a way that they appear as fragments of phrases, facial expressions and gestures. Some of the clips display a series of phrases represented in white, uppercase text, and sometimes music can be heard.<sup>238</sup>

Speaking in an interview with Amy Kazzymerchyk about her initial research process, Syms describes finding similarities between John Bulwer's *Chirologia: or The naturall language of the hand* (1644) and emoji icons of today.<sup>239</sup> In *Chirologia*, Bulwer presents diagrams of hand gestures and corresponding descriptions. For example, referencing an illustration of hands depicting said movement, is the note:

Invito. Geftus XXI. To shew forth the hand, and so forthwith to call backe as it were and bring it againe unto us with a waving

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<sup>238</sup> Martine Syms, *Notes on Gesture*, 2015, video, 00:10:27, <https://www.martinesy.ms>.

<sup>239</sup> Syms, 'Borrowed Lady', 12.

motion, is a naturall Gesticure, and a vulgar compellation, which we significantly use in calling for men whom we bid to come neere and approach unto us, which alluring habit in this matter is very naturall, ready, and commodious to explaine our minde and will, wherein there is a certain kind of forme or semblance of the thing signified. For wee seee by this gesticure to draw them to us.<sup>240</sup>

I am watching *Notes on Gesture* and counting the repetitions. There are 45 moving image clips and 46 audio clips and all but two appear more than once. White text appears in the form of ten separate phrases, with each word appearing individually on the screen, marking out each phrase in sequence:

WHEN THE WEED HITS

OMELET IT SLIDE

UOENO

WHEN THE BONNET IS ON

DON'T JUDGE

WHEN DEY GOT YOU FUCKED UP

WHEN YOU CAN TURN HOOD REAL QUICK

WHEN IT AIN'T ABOUT THE MONEY.

Inferring some semblance of Bulwer's format, Syms's white text anticipates the viewer's methods for interpretation as tending towards simplicity and logic, where one can make sense of what is presented by applying a phrase to the gestures that follow it. But, cut apart, the phrases are torn

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<sup>240</sup> John Bulwer, *Chirologia: or The Naturall Language of the Hand* (London: Printed by Tho. Harper for H. Twyford and are to be sold by R. Whitaker, 1644), 55-56 and 150-151, Internet Archive.



into individual words onscreen. As readers we find ourselves in the middle of the text, in the middle of Stingily's reperformed gestures, in the middle of Syms's and Stingily's artistic relationship, and in the middle of the further citations explored in the work.<sup>241</sup>

While researching the term *citation* in connection with contemporary art, I find Edward George's 2021 article, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance'. Here, George analyses the rationale informing *The Last Angel of History* (dir. John Akomfrah, 1995), a film that George acted in, in the role of the data thief, as well as co-wrote and co-produced with Akomfrah and further members of Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC). Contextualising the film's production in 'a moment in cultural studies marked by a valorisation of black popular culture', George explores how the film attempted to address what BAFC thought was unaccounted for 'in [Stuart] Hall's 'What is this "black" in black popular culture?' (1993), and [Mark] Dery's theory of Afrofuturism.'<sup>242</sup> Arguing that Hall's text did not practice the conjunctive thinking technique that the writer had marked out, George, on the other hand, maintains that '[t]his cohering, a bringing of marginal presences and practices into diegetic proximity, was our founding intent [for making the film].'<sup>243</sup> He writes of having personally 'read, watched and listened to' a range of sources in preparation for making the film and of the collective's desire that the numerous interviewees featured in the final edit 'reflect on each other and each other's work.'<sup>244</sup> The multiplicity of conjunctive thinking, of citations informed by citations, is further conceptualised by George, as a strategy to close the distance between Africa and its diaspora, and between Africa as social reality and optical illusion.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> This phrasing follows Edward George's conceptualisation, after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, of 'the significance of the middle for improvisation and repetition,' ideas which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 224.

<sup>242</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 216.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-217.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 208 and 218.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-215.

Syms's rough editing and use of repetition in *Notes on Gesture* echoes the various degrees of artificiality, awkwardness and playing-to-the-camera that Stingily embodies in her performance. Bodily contact can be heard outside of our viewpoint, the sound of Stingily's hands clapping for example is amplified and moved out of sync with the footage. Vocal fragments are heard, where sometimes it is clearly Stingily speaking and at other times the voice is elsewhere, cut and moved forwards or backwards in time. There is a sense that the actor is not alone. In one clip, the ninth gesture, with her arm outstretched and shoulders dancing with the music, Stingily looks off camera, catching someone's eye. This repeats ten times. They look at one another eleven times. Stingily looks back into the camera and seems to say:

I know that I broke the illusion, but it is OK because the illusion is not the most interesting bit.

I pause the video at 00:09:12. In the moment before, Stingily's right hand appears from the lower right corner and, open palm and outstretched fingers, moves in a diagonal line towards the centre before pushing forwards and pulling backwards mid-air. Instead of dropping out of view ready to start the entire gesture once more, the clip is cut short and her hand disappears. There is just the purple background. No part of Stingily can be seen and I am reminded that she exists in the middle of something elsewhere, away from my screen.

In April 2022, I attended an online writing workshop titled 'Ideas From Moving Water', led by the writer Yaniya Lee.<sup>246</sup> Oriented towards the artist Lorraine O'Grady's work, the session and its preparation materials focused on Black contemporary art and its discourse. During the live session, which took the form of a discussion group with roughly ten participants, Lee articulated

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<sup>246</sup> Yaniya Lee, 'Ideas From Moving Water', April 14, 2022, virtual workshop, presented in conjunction with the research programme *Season 8: Lorraine O'Grady is on our mind*, cur. Kim Nguyen and Jeanne Gerrity, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, California, September 21, 2021 – August 26, 2022.

that while in the past five years or so Black artists were beginning to be featured in art programmes in more substantial and authentic ways, the surrounding discourse was slow to reflect this. She proposed that writing by and about Black contemporary art and artists could work to consolidate this context through documenting and discussing what was happening in the present moment, as was currently taking place in the happening of the workshop itself. Opening the session, encouraging the participants to introduce themselves and share writing interests, Lee asked:

Who do you keep coming back to? Whose work do you love?<sup>247</sup>

Earlier, in a pre-recorded conversation shared privately with participants prior to the workshop, the writer Leticia Cosbert Miller declared:

Normalise having a muse.<sup>248</sup>

Like *Last Angel*, in both its essay and film iterations, these citations strive towards evidencing the existence of a context and articulate multifaceted desires to rectify what has been miscommunicated, to reveal what has been ignored and covered up, to connect disparate points and to disseminate information.<sup>249</sup> Following Derrida's idea of discovery as the instance of 'finding something for the first time', George states that *The Last Angel* (F) cites genre as context:

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<sup>247</sup> Lee, 'Ideas From Moving Water', virtual workshop.

<sup>248</sup> Cosbert-Miller and Lee, 'Ideas From Moving Water: Leticia Cosbert-Miller in conversation with Yaniya Lee', video.

<sup>249</sup> For a discussion of the term *evidencing* as a strategy adopted by Black contemporary artists responding to the implications of universalist legal and administrative discourse, see Albert Stabler, 'The Contractual Aesthetics of Sharecropping in Black Conceptualism,' *Critical Arts* 34, no. 6 (2020): 41–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2020.1829668>.

...citation as that which can be the object of a fracturing with its context of production and thereby serve to open and operate in new contexts...<sup>250</sup>

He describes working through a physical process, of finding his body and gestures, in his role as the data thief, and similarly outlines his research methods in embodied terms:

George ...at which I stand and which I narrativise<sup>251</sup> ...I read, watched, listened to<sup>252</sup> ...I follow<sup>253</sup> ...I follow...I relax. I get into<sup>254</sup> ...I follow Akomfrah's advice: I relax. I get into a groove, a rhythm of moving, of wandering... and a rhythm of being still<sup>255</sup> ...I read Dery with an eye for a tear in the text, described by Derrida as the irreparable 'snag' in writing that dissemination, the ceaseless proliferation of meaning, tears even further.<sup>256</sup>

George's body evoked in both the 'I' and 'eye' in his critical reading of Dery and Derrida, I am fallen with language again, ripped apart, crying, cut up with meanings of 'tear' and the melancholia associated with the figure of Robert Johnson, an early and hugely influential Blues musician who is said, by many of Johnson's relatives, friends and researchers, of whom are subsequently cited by George, to have sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads in order to play so exceptionally.<sup>257</sup> In the body of George's essay is, written over three pages, a list of people

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<sup>250</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 224 and 209.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207 and 209-210.

involved in producing and providing material for the film and another list of materials used as resources.<sup>258</sup> As readers, of ‘Last Angel’ (A), *The Last Angel* (F) and *Notes on Gesture*, we find ourselves in the middle, at a crossroads, of nowhere, in the middle of a story retold as literary device, among citations of text, music, film, theory, pop culture and art.

In a consideration of prompts for writers to drive their writing, within and beyond the scope of the workshop, Lee shared a short clip of an interview with the writer and activist James Baldwin, who is reflecting upon the discourse surrounding his own identity:

Baldwin   I was ashamed of my background and the stereotypes –  
white people’s image of me. Had to find out what I was like at the  
beginning. How I spoke was about rhythm and cadence. And  
Bessie Smith helped me figure it out.<sup>259</sup>

Watching *Notes on Gesture*, I count each repetition of each video clip. I count each repetition of each uttered phrase. I count each repetition of each music clip. Some of the sounds and visuals overlap one another making it hard to distinguish between them. I make a screen recording from the video presented on Syms’s website so I can pause it and slow it down. Still, I lose track when I watch, listen and count at the same time, and I cannot make accurate marks on the page. I varyingly stare at the player controls, close my eyes or mute the volume, keeping numbers in my head, tracking Stingily’s movements peripherally, counting to fourteen.

Through finding his ‘location-based gestures’, his ‘groove’, George highlights the relationship between thinking, embodiment and improvisation. The body of the data thief is not alone in the

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<sup>258</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 206-208.

<sup>259</sup> Paraphrased from a video shared by Lee in her virtual workshop, ‘Ideas From Moving Water’.

landscape, in the body of the landscape, of the essay, of the film, in the body of the textual figure, structured by citation as skeleton, and we too wander among the ruins compelled by one source to another, wondering how citation came to its catachrestic form, a compass pretending towards a single direction. I move their words into *Notes on Gesture*:

Stingily

I follow Syms's advice: I relax. I get into a groove, a rhythm of moving, of borrowing... and a rhythm of being still.

Still, for a moment, I write and rewrite George's text and citations:

The citation of a genre. The citation of a context. The citation of genre as context. The encounter as discovery (repeated). The citation as causing a fracturing and then functioning in the new context as citation again. The citation as cause and effect in the scenario of the making of the film as 'the object of a fracturing'. Sci-fi is the object of a fracturing. Africa is the object of a fracturing. Martine Syms's great-aunt Burnetta is the object of a fracturing through a chain of 'borrowing', where a discrete item of movement, such as speech, gesture or expression is passed on for future use, through photographs, through Syms, through Syms's father, through Stingily, through Echo.<sup>260</sup>

George

The movement and place of my performance is thus no place or time to think, even when I am, in the act of standing, dancing, sitting, doing nothing at all, and by my not having

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<sup>260</sup> Syms, 'Borrowed Lady', 12-13.

thought beforehand about even this most foundational aspect of acting, named as such in Stanislavsky. Thinking, for example, in my third presentation, breaks the flow of thought. We stop and start again: what makes it to the final cut is marked by an absence of forethought about my body, voice and performance.<sup>261</sup>

Son House [Johnson] sold his soul to the devil in exchange for learning to play like that.<sup>262</sup>

Donna Haraway ...the line between social reality and science fiction is an optical illusion...<sup>263</sup>

Arendt and Benjamin ...two grains of wheat could contain the entire Shema Israel, the very essence of Judaism, the tiniest essence appearing on the tiniest entity.<sup>264</sup>

George The data thief wanders through the ruins, the detritus, the wastelands of our late twentieth century, and he comes across a little piece of stone, a fragment. Written on it is a strange phrase: 'the line between social reality and science fiction is an optical illusion.'<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 221.

<sup>262</sup> Son House, quoted in Pete Welding, 'Hellhound on His Trail: Robert Johnson', *Dowbeat Music '66*, 11<sup>th</sup> Yearbook (Chicago: Maher Publications, 1966), 76, quoted in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 209-210.

<sup>263</sup> Donna J Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist- Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), 149, quoted in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 214.

<sup>264</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction – Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940', in ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, third edition (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1979), 12, quoted in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 214.

<sup>265</sup> George, in *The Last Angel of History*, 00:14:21–00:14:42, quoted in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 217.

- Unknown                      The Devil came there [the backcountry crossroads] ... and gave Robert his talent and told him he had eight more years to live on earth.<sup>266</sup>
- The Narrator                I think of the data thief wandering around the citations as ruins, text and speech as physical objects, as inscriptions on physical objects, elevating the scripture above the physicalness of the objects, as language first, before the objectness is observed... And he comes across a strange phrase littering the landscape, not inscribed on surfaces, just the text is there, being somehow with no support, no scripture nor echoed voices as indents on rocks from some earlier time...
- The Muse                    The Narrator is rambling again. If they do not get it together, I shall find myself obscure. While they write themselves out, watch *Stimming [live] pathologising [ifitfits] and restaged made, in a staged setting, repeat non - eye - contact – contact.* [Click here.](#)<sup>267</sup>
- George                      I follow Stingily's advice: I relax. I get into a groove, a rhythm of moving, of borrowing... and a rhythm of being still.

Finding his body 'still', not moving and still being, still there, George finds his body 'multiplied', still, in the film and in Africa,<sup>268</sup> finds Africa still there, finds Ghana still there, finds his body through Ghana, through 'places of becoming (African, then European) property and becoming

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<sup>266</sup> Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues*, (London: MacMillan, 1989), 113.

<sup>267</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862132>.

<sup>268</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 221.



(pan-) African and European’,<sup>269</sup> through the body of Bernard Harris, an astronaut, who took into space ‘a flag composed of the flags of the nations of Africa’<sup>270</sup> and declared ‘I know’.<sup>271</sup>

What stood out most to me from Yaniya Lee’s workshop was the value the speakers placed upon finding their motivation through the artists and artworks that continue to captivate them, that ultimately drive them from thinking to writing. In another pre-recorded conversation shared by Lee, the curator and writer Lillian O’Brien Davis cited artists dressing as someone else as a vehicle for their criticism, including Lorraine O’Grady who performed in the role of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire, and Maud Sulter who made work as Jeanne Duval.<sup>272</sup> I think about the relationship between the actor (Stingily) and the director (Syms) both in and outside of *Notes on Gesture*. To me, it looks like they are friends. Stingily, while performing her gestures, is often laughing and smiling. The phrasing of the white text is casual, echoing nostalgic recollections shared between friends and family – those moments when we articulate relational points of reference for the sake of it, both on and offline – and the proclivity for sharing these kinds of colloquial expressions in online chat spaces. The phrases are self-aware, familiar and ironic:

WHEN THE WEED HITS

OMELET IT SLIDE

UOENO

WHEN THE BONNET IS ON

DON’T JUDGE

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<sup>269</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 219.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>271</sup> Bernard Harris, in *The Last Angel of History*, 00:19:43-00:19:59, quoted in George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 221.

<sup>272</sup> Lillian O’Brien Davis and Yaniya Lee, ‘Ideas From Moving Water: Lillian O’Brien Davis in conversation with Yaniya Lee’. Video, April 2022. Presented in conjunction with the research programme *Season 8: Lorraine O’Grady is on our mind*, cur. Kim Nguyen and Jeanne Gerrity, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, California, September 21, 2021 – August 26, 2022, <https://wattis.org/calendar/thursday-april-14-2022>.

WHEN DEY GOT YOU FUCKED UP  
WHEN YOU CAN TURN HOOD REAL QUICK  
WHEN IT AIN'T ABOUT THE MONEY.

Speaking with Lee, Cosbert-Miller expanded her thoughts on artists' and writers' muses, stressing the significance of conversations taking place during projects, over focusing on an exhibition as inevitable finale. She asked, 'How can we [curators, artists and critics] be more symbiotic?'<sup>273</sup> This, I think, forms part of how the relationship manifests between Syms and Stingily, who, in *Notes on Gesture*, work within their separate roles but in close proximity to one another:

Syms

Initially, I developed a character who was loosely based on my great-aunt, as well as other women in my family. I worked with an actor named Diamond Stingily to perform some of those gestures and to physically think with me about everyday performance, the performance of identity and the kinds of movements and gestures that connect people in a group. We talked about women in our families and I asked her to do impressions of them. I also had her improvise from photographs of my great-aunt, as well as pop-culture images, films and memes.<sup>274</sup>

O'Brien Davis describes a similar writerly impulse in 'looking for moments of recognition from family as well as authors',<sup>275</sup> and Lee sees it embodied in Lorraine O'Grady's photographic diptych, *Sisters*, where images of the artist's sister and Nefertiti reconfigure, as sisters of O'Grady

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<sup>273</sup> Cosbert-Miller, 'Ideas From Moving Water: Leticia Cosbert-Miller in conversation with Yaniya Lee', video.

<sup>274</sup> Syms, 'Borrowed Lady', 12.

<sup>275</sup> O'Brien Davis, 'Ideas From Moving Water: Lillian O'Brien Davis in conversation with Yaniya Lee', video.

and of each other.<sup>276</sup> The artist, writer and curator Mason Leaver-Yap categorises their co-produced projects under the term *Affinities*.<sup>277</sup> I read Syms and Stingily through George’s phrase, ‘acting from the comfort of a textual practice’, informed by art-oriented, familial and social affinities.<sup>278</sup> Affinities, sisters, communities... Do we not always start in the middle – in a family, a community, a context – and become within an existing framework? The reorienting of familial connections outside of the traditional family structure, *Deep in the social field with all my friends, where all my friends are*. [Click here](#).<sup>279</sup>

Stingily’s eleventh gesture is played eighteen times, from 00:02:37 to 00:02:57. Her expression changes from smiling to slightly the other side of neutral as she flicks her braids 360 degrees from one shoulder to the other, turning her head away from the camera and looking down into her left shoulder. Syms’s edit makes it a circular movement, eighteen revolutions:

Stingily                                So... so... so... so... so... so... so... so... so... so... so...  
so... so... so... so... so... so... so... so...<sup>280</sup>

Elsewhere, the end of a clip is played first, or we arrive in the middle of the gesture. Some seem choreographed, others less so. At 00:03:16, appearing less self-conscious, able to fill the choreography more naturally, Stingily stretches out her elbows and pulls her hair back from her face and neck. I notice the wetness of her tongue, its tastebuds and the small indent in the centre. Stingily’s pose, with her arms up and behind her head, echoes the power stances Syms

<sup>276</sup> Lee, ‘Ideas From Moving Water’, virtual workshop. O’Grady’s diptych appeared in various formats including a performance in 1980, a quadriptych in 1988 and a photo-installation in 1994. Lorraine O’Grady, ‘Miscegenated Family Album’, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://lorraineogrady.com/art/miscegenated-family-album/>.

<sup>277</sup> Leaver-Yap, ‘Affinities’.

<sup>278</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 222.

<sup>279</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17968349>.

<sup>280</sup> Syms, *Notes on Gesture*, 00:02:37-00:02:57.

describes and demonstrates elsewhere in her performative lecture, *Misdirected Kiss*.<sup>281</sup> Later, Stingily adopts a kind of textual power stance, writing ‘Pilgrimages to Nowhere’ (2019) in response to ‘Heine Dying in Paris’ (1980) by the artist and writer Kathy Acker.<sup>282</sup> ‘Pilgrimages to Nowhere’ was Stingily’s contribution to a month-long curatorial programme dedicated to Acker curated at Performance Space New York. At an event, while introducing her text, Stingily suggests:

I don’t think I’d be friends with [Acker] – if she were around today and we were the same age.<sup>283</sup>

I think about the difficulty of maintaining friendships and relationships as networks, how beyond a single person, I get confused by the politics and exhausted by drama and where do I fit in all of it anyway? Connections read clearer at a distance, avoiding spotlights, competition and mob rule. I always found Kathy Acker too traumatic to read at length, finding myself cut off from the world and suspicious of everybody, uncomfortable with William Burroughs’s implication that ‘Acker gives her work the power to mirror the reader’s soul’.<sup>284</sup> Almost forty years later, Stingily revises Acker’s ‘Heine Dying in Paris’, echoing its plot, but now the narrator speaks kindly to homeless people they meet while out walking, ends toxic friendships with conviction and certainty, and reframes a violent incident as an assault. Acker appears in Stingily’s text in several ways: as a friend; as someone only known of and from a distance by their full name, Kathy Acker; and as Kathy, Kathy called out.

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<sup>281</sup> Syms, ‘Martine Syms at the Center for Experimental Lectures’, 00:31:45-00:33:38.

<sup>282</sup> Both texts are presented at Diamond Stingily, ‘Diamond Stingily responds to an archival Kathy Acker piece’, *Dazed Digital* Spring/Summer, May 9, 2019, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/44366/1/diamond-stingily-responds-to-an-archival-kathy-acker-piece>.

<sup>283</sup> Ingrid Dudek, ‘After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography’, *Brooklyn Rail*, June 2018, [https://brooklynrail.org/2018/06/art\\_books/After-Kathy-Acker-A-Literary-Biography-Semiotexte-2017](https://brooklynrail.org/2018/06/art_books/After-Kathy-Acker-A-Literary-Biography-Semiotexte-2017).

<sup>284</sup> William Burroughs, quoted in Chris Kraus, ‘Sex, tattle and soul: How Kathy Acker shocked and seduced the literary world’, *The Guardian*, August 19, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/19/sex-tattle-and-soul-how-kathy-acker-shocked-and-seduced-the-literary-world>.

I know Syms and Stingily only at a distance, through watching recordings of them online and through their works that I have seen and read about. This knowing at a distance is like when a part of Stingily's body is isolated in the shot in *Notes on Gesture*, when a particular detail, gesture or technique stands out. It is fragmentary but drives me to find it again in another work, and then to reconstruct it for myself, and to become obsessed with my own process of writing, thinking or making about their work, with them present somehow. A muse as much as a muse can be without meeting the person. In July, I went to my friend's flat – friend, colleague, a muse, of sorts. She was having to vacate, and in the transition had moved all her belongings outside, stacked them up against the house, and staged an exhibition, titled 'Come and Go', in the newly empty property. I told the friend whose slide projector it was – having loaned it for the duration of the show – which button to press to move to the next photograph. I arm wrestled Maximilian von Sauer and when unclasping our hands with a line of blue body paint marking my right forearm, I wondered if this was deliberate, like an entry stamp marking those who had gained admission already. On my way out, I talked to Genie El Starz and we laughed at the circumstances of meeting new people while performing, and Joël Bartolomeo filmed me on their iPhone. The photographs I clicked through on the slide projector in the kitchen captured the temporary scene in the garden. I saw the dog, the mattress, the artists, their friends, a performative exhibition cultivated through its relationships, through intimacy between artists and friends, through tacit exchanges in quantifiable and relational forms, what Leaver-Yap terms 'offerings' and 'sacrifices'.<sup>285</sup> Syms's dad liked a post I put up on Instagram about her work, and after reading Stingily's letter to Acker, I write a note to them both, Stingily and Syms, imagining them as the readers of this project. I revisit sometime later and PH tells me that my naming of

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<sup>285</sup> Mason Leaver-Yap, 'Offerings', in *From the sky to the centre*, eds. Dena Yago and Fatima Helberg (London: Cubitt Gallery, 2014), 3-6.

Joël Bartolomeo is incorrect, a case of mistaken identity. *And these seven words which define it have another value.* [Click here.](#)<sup>286</sup>

In my early viewings of *Notes on Gesture*, I thought it was about Stingily, about her natural gestures and ways of moving, with Syms, as director, controlling the shot.

Syms [Borrowing] has an ephemeral quality to it – like you’re just going to take it for a second and it’s going to lead to something else.<sup>287</sup>

Stingily’s tattoos, on her fingers, wrists, arms and shoulder, merge in my mind with Bulwer’s diagrams and labels for hands. They become familiar to me and yet remain symbols and words that I do not wholly understand. In one clip there is a tattoo on her left shoulder, moving to her right shoulder in the following clip. This happens a few times, a mirroring that is undramatic and both artificial and responsive, a mirroring that is ‘analogous to the way that identities are created’.<sup>288</sup> Cropping body parts, changing her hair, subtle alterations, rotating the image like navigating a map, a diagram for being, flipped across the

Syms line... That slipperiness is a good sign... the character is read as being or becoming different people.<sup>289</sup>

This ‘fracture’, the ‘snag’ or ‘tear in the text’, is its remaking, its echo. At 00:05:20, Stingily loudly catches her breath and the gesture does not cut immediately but, like a person who is real, she

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<sup>286</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17877250>.

<sup>287</sup> Syms, ‘Borrowed Lady’, 12.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

just remains, is quietly, and I notice again that she is acting. Still, I remember to breathe deeply instead of shallow, while perhaps she reaches for ‘a tall bottle of water to drink’.<sup>290</sup>

The version of *Notes on Gesture* uploaded to Syms’s website is 00:10:27 in length, while my screencast reproduction is 00:10:28:09. I have gained an extra second or so but I cannot identify how or where this has happened in my recording. Looking back, I am still uncertain about the accuracy of my counting the iterations of sounds and movements, whether I counted the number of times a clip played through or the number of cuts between its repetitions. From 00:09:56 I did not blink until the gesture ended. With my eyes strained and drying up, the video stopped, and I recorded the number seventeen.

Each sound clip generally coincides with a visual clip, however clips twenty-eight through thirty-one overlap and spill into neighbouring visuals. Audio clips twenty-nine and thirty play through visual clip twenty-nine, which pushes the remaining clips out of sync with the numbers I assigned for tracking. Now, audio clip thirty-one plays over visual clip thirty, thirty-two plays over thirty-one, and so on. Lost in the sound clips, their objects, language and meanings, my pencil squeaked on the page, got stuck and cut into the surface. The pages did not tear out so smoothly. My head began sinking. I was falling asleep. I forced my eyes open until the gesture moved on. The time was 23:35.

In ‘Last Angel’ (A), George writes with the past, emphasising the presence of knowing and not knowing:

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<sup>290</sup> Stingily, ‘Pilgrimages to Nowhere’.

George                                      How far did I depart from my framework? Far enough to begin... But retrospectively, with a middle... finding something for the first time.<sup>291</sup>  
...  
He Didn't Know<sup>292</sup> ...I Know... There is, in retrospect<sup>293</sup> ...I could not have foreseen...<sup>294</sup>

Through an insertion of uncertainty, placed into the reader's thinking, I become attached to the opening phrasing of George's sentence:

There is, in retrospect, a Deleuzian temporality, informed by Bergson, at work, in my interview script for *Last Angel*.<sup>295</sup>

He is thinking back, and it is unclear if this is a genuine moment of reflection, occurring first at the later date of writing the essay, after the film, or if George did in fact observe this 'Deleuzian temporality, informed by Bergson, at work, in [his] interview script' at the time of his writing the script. The phrasing, 'There is, in retrospect', signals the relevance of time to the narrative of the film, to the genre as context, and to the essay itself, written some twenty years after its eponymic film. 'There is' summons the present, 'in retrospect' the past. The parts of this phrase, combined as they are, exemplify George's analysis of Deleuze after Bergson, whereby 'past and present co-exist', with the present viewed as either a consequence of the past (thus the past is the dominant condition of being), or as a fleeting present, a now-now-now-*ad infinitum* (thus the present prevails). A consequential present moves interminably away from us. Alternatively, a fleeting

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<sup>291</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 224.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.



presence may seem like it is with us, holding us carefully, but it is always moving to the past, for it is 'only ever present, even as such, but for the past'.<sup>296</sup> Still, with Deleuze and Bergson, George connects time with sensation:

George	The present comprises and is inseparable from the past precisely because of the service it renders to perception, of functioning as the medium of the past through which all presents pass. <sup>297</sup>
Deleuze	The present comprises and is inseparable from the past precisely because of the service it renders to perception, of functioning as the medium of the past through which all presents pass.
Bergson	The present comprises and is inseparable from the past precisely because of the service it renders to perception, of functioning as the medium of the past through which all presents pass.

Perception is how we know that time is happening, that it is existent. If faculties for perception are impeded, it becomes harder to feel and think one's sense of self (as mind and body) in relation to anything else. We perceive the passing of time in, for example, the sun setting, our hair greying, the weather changing.

I am watching a live stream of a watering hole in the Namib Desert, Namibia.<sup>298</sup> The time is 10:34:12, one hour ahead of my location in Reading, England. Small birds of various species fly in gradually. They settle at the water's edge, hundreds of them lining the pools of water, and

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<sup>296</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 220-221.

<sup>297</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 59, cited in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 220.

<sup>298</sup> 'Namibia: Live stream in the Namib Desert', NamibiaCam, screened live since November 30, 2021, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://youtu.be/ydYDqZQpim8>.

then, perhaps disturbed, fly out of view, quickly and *en masse*.<sup>299</sup> And then again, they fly in, a few at a time, stay a moment by the water, before leaving at once and altogether. Struggling to keep up with the now-now-now-now-ness of live stream transmission, the movements are not entirely smooth, and the birds appear to buffer their way to and from the water hole. This rhythmic vignette repeats over and over.

It is 16:11:23 in the Namib Desert and the shadow of the camera rig has moved since this morning from the right to the left side of the shot. It will disappear soon.

In her lecture *Misdirected Kiss*, to some extent a companion piece to *Notes on Gesture*, Syms elaborates her thoughts on gesture. I am reading a copy of the transcript produced by the Center for Experimental Lectures, who hosted Syms's first presentation of the lecture at Storm King, New York.<sup>300</sup> An exact record of what was said, the transcript reads as not overly rehearsed. Conjunctions remain and occasional additions have been made. It is not structured in the style of an academic lecture, with a formally rigid introduction and conclusion. Though Syms's mode of address is informal, the links between references are precise, understated and meditative, and they move us through her thinking process.

Syms                      Tonight I'm just gonna talk through some ideas that I've been thinking a lot about and working with Gordon [Hall] for the last couple months, planning this but also just as friends, and kind of in response, actually, to something [they had] written last year, or so.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> I learn later that this is a survival tactic: "The "roaring" you hear is the sound of flapping wings when many birds fly off in noisy groups because they are startled or to detract from predators." Nightbot, August 2, 2022, 11:14 a.m., live chat comment on NamibiaCam, 'Namibia: Live stream in the Namib Desert'.

<sup>300</sup> Syms, 'Misdirected Kiss', 1-6.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

I imagine Syms preparing the lecture, embodied in the time preceding, when she may have been drafting a script for herself. I think about her writing process and about my own. As an artist I started some projects that I could not occupy comfortably and initiated relationships that I could not maintain. I can list them, but I will not. About two-thirds of the way through, Syms describes keeping an ongoing list of rules for herself, self-addressed, everyday instructions titled as she says under ‘presentation’.<sup>302</sup> One rule stands out – ‘Retain a California accent, certain mispronunciations, and a casual way of speaking.’ – where Syms’s adherence is evidenced in the way that she articulates the lecture.<sup>303</sup> I think of my own rules, except they are not so much rules but reminders, about myself, a reminder of who I am when I cannot feel it:

Feeling cold makes you anxious and irritable. Wear layers. Wear more layers.

Your head clouds over as soon as you wake up in the morning and it gets heavier throughout the day. Exercise helps.

Looking confused is ok. Frowning into space invites attention.

You want things to be fair.

Talking to people one-on-one is more interesting. You do not like it in the group chat.

Conjunctions rush time. Speaking makes your thinking slower.

This slowness makes your speaking better.

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<sup>302</sup> Syms, ‘Misdirected Kiss’, 3-5.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

To read Syms's lecture closer, I divide it chronologically into sections, themes I have identified and imagined as her starting points for writing:

Prosthetic memory  
Movement in pictures  
Black movement in pictures  
Black women's bodies  
Personal movement  
Personal body  
Political movement  
Politics and aesthetics  
GIF economy.

I categorise these themes:

Abstract (ideas)  
Image  
Image  
Life  
Society  
Art.

I locate her writing styles in bodies:

Personal (biography)  
Community  
Culture  
Personal (biography).

And I write the names of the people she references:

Gordon Hall

Queen Latifah

Alison Landsberg

Her aunt, Burnetta

Her family

Her dad

James Taylor

George Harrison and The Beatles

Fred Moten

Arthur Jafa

Jacqueline Stewart

Giorgio Agamben

Tyra Banks

T-Zone girls/friends

Her two brothers and her half-brother

Claudia Rankine

Serena Williams

Trayvon Martin

Sandra Bland

Janet Jackson

Oprah Winfrey

Jason Epping

Hito Steyerl.

Syms is a self-described collector of photographs of people she knows and those she does not.<sup>304</sup> She drags images one-by-one onto her screen, which we see projected behind her, while continuing to talk through her presentation. In *Notes on Gesture*, photographs are supplanted with bodily movements and expressions. This tendency towards accumulation is not unlike that of George and the data thief, a ‘bad boy scavenger poet-figure’ in *The Last Angel (F)*.<sup>305</sup> However, after reading Syms’s ‘The Mundane Afrofuturism Manifesto’,<sup>306</sup> and hearing her speak of erroneous framing within Afrofuturist art programmes in an interview with the writer Laura U. Marks,<sup>307</sup> the static purple background of *Notes on Gesture* persists in my mind, its bright flatness echoing a green screen, contrarily signalling an absence of effects, an absence of the technological, futuristic, interstellar wandering that is so crucial to *The Last Angel’s (F)* conception.

To refer again to ‘Ideas From Moving Water’, Lee describes the gatekept socio-economic space of contemporary art as an abstracted space of real-world implications, while George focuses on non-specialist locations for cultural production to achieve recognition for what is already in existence and already influencing these major locations (pop culture, Africa, the world). Both are driven to writing not to establish a context but to document, present evidence and to strengthen a pre-existing context, one that is and has always been informing cultural trajectories. In ‘Last Angel’ (A), describing the extent to which oppression and marginalisation can have on self-knowledge, George quotes Mark Dery’s writing about Samuel R. Delany:

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<sup>304</sup> Syms, ‘Misdirected Kiss’, 1-2.

<sup>305</sup> George, in *The Last Angel of History*, 00:00:46-00:00:47, quoted in George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 206.

<sup>306</sup> Martine Syms, ‘The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto’, Rhizome, December 13, 2017, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/dec/17/mundane-afrofuturist-manifesto/>.

<sup>307</sup> Martine Syms, ‘Conversation | Martine Syms with Laura U. Marks’, SFU Galleries, June 27, 2018. Video, 00:28:16-00:29:31, <https://youtu.be/IkQLbRMAFoY>.

[to] talk about [his] roots in Africa is a hopeless task. He [Delaney's grandfather, born a slave] didn't know. His parents – born here, in this country [America], didn't know. They were not allowed to.<sup>308</sup>

Here, the reality of those enslaved and their descendants is in their describing their not knowing, of an Africa present only as absence in their memory. For George, this absence marks the reverberating legacies of bondage, enforced by the American plantation complex, as a diminishing presence of Africa in the lives of those enslaved – through, for example, an enforced forgetting through drumming bans, an abstraction of reality and memory of the enslaver, viewed by those enslaved as the Devil, and the reimagining of Africa as elsewhere, unknown and unfamiliar, as 'a science-fictionalised Africa' – an absence that is experienced as 'an unconscious knowledge of the African diasporic condition of slavery.'<sup>309</sup> George argues for a rewriting of the beginning of Africa that was and still is there, not new, but starting in the middle, via a critical recognition, where Blues music serves as evidence of the unconscious knowledge reverberating within those enslaved and their descendants 'against the catastrophes of history by which loss takes place.'<sup>310</sup> As for Djébar, whose Isma, a character who knows her own name as a blank, stands as that which cannot be said, for George, Ghana is a 'synecdoche'<sup>311</sup> for Africa, an Africa that is the locus of a diasporic African futurism that ultimately embraces African American cultural expression, where those of different times and places are alive at the same time. George and BAFC write, visualise and perform them into being, through a naming process, through a speech act:

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<sup>308</sup> Mark Dery, 'Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose', in *Flame Wars: the Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 191, quoted in George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 219.

<sup>309</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 215-216.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

George                      Martin Luther King is no less alive in the 1960s than is Kwame Nkrumah, who is no less alive than a group of World War II-era female African American welders, who fleetingly catch the data thief’s gaze before fading into whiteness.<sup>312</sup>

...

[B]y articulating this affective quality of [Mathison’s] musical voice in my speaking voice and, in retrospect, producing a creative reordering of Barthes’s experience of hearing voices within voices.<sup>313</sup>

Harris                      I know.

Etymological research shows ‘to cite’ as ‘to summon’ or ‘to call’, a figure of speech evoking Spivak’s analysis of Ovid’s Echo, as she who ‘calls the calling one, voices the voicer’.<sup>314</sup> Discussing its meanings and origins with AR, he says ‘to cite is to cut’, invoking citation’s latent violence.<sup>315</sup> I find this exact phrase in an afterword titled ‘Necessary-Impossible and Responsible-Irresponsible Reading’, written by Paul K. Saint Amour, who defines a process where all else besides a selected quotation is disregarded, where the non-cited material is, in a sense, erased.<sup>316</sup> In this way citation is systemically influenced and the erasure of text extends into the sociopolitical realm, manifesting as an element of epistemic violence:

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<sup>312</sup> George, ‘Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance’, 218.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>314</sup> Spivak, ‘Echo’, 41.

<sup>315</sup> AR, conversation with the author, 2022.

<sup>316</sup> Paul K. Saint Amour, ‘Necessary-Impossible and Responsible-Irresponsible Reading’, in *Modernism, Theory and Responsible Reading: A Critical Conversation*, ed. Stephen Ross (London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2022), 225-233, Google Books.



Spivak

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity.<sup>317</sup>

What is cited is counted, while everything else undergoes a kind of dis-contextualisation involving varying degrees of suppression, dislocation and omission. Spivak did not claim that the subaltern cannot speak, a point she makes explicitly clear in 2021, in her epilogue to the edited reader, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Rather, the subaltern subject, her context and experiences, are neither affirmed nor acknowledged within the world, defined as it is through colonial heterogeneity.<sup>318</sup>

There is another, more outwardly violent aspect to citing, one that has puzzled me for a while. In earlier conversations, GK, like AR, hinted at violent citations and PK shared thoughts on the presence of transgression in art, reconsidered in our contemporary context.<sup>319</sup> AR described a process of slicing around a phrase, lifting it out, placing it and stitching it somewhere else. I spend a long time thinking about this meaning, trying to get to cutting through citing, to a term that acknowledges its deleting of origin and its movement of the selected text. I finally get there by reversing my search, now beginning with ‘cut’, as a verb:

OED

III. To separate or detach with an edged tool.

14.

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<sup>317</sup> Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, 76.

<sup>318</sup> Spivak, ‘In Response: Looking Back, Looking Forward’.

<sup>319</sup> GK and PK, conversations with the author, 2022.

a. *transitive*. To separate or remove by cutting; to sever from the main body; to lop off...

V. To shorten or reduce by cutting.

20. *transitive*. To shorten or reduce by cutting off a portion; to trim, clip, shear; to prune.

21.

a. *figurative*. To curtail, abridge, shorten, reduce; to shorten (a play, etc.) by omitting portions...<sup>320</sup>

Citation rewritten as cutting, where:

To cite is to summon, to call.

To cut is to separate, to shorten.

To cite is to summon, to cut.

‘To shorten’ reads significantly, where citation as example, model or stereotype, bears the weight of its origins while simultaneously cut off from it. Here, ‘to cut’ names its action upon its selection together with what is left out. At the same time, the cited and non-cited text feel the cut as it happens, the tearing apart of a word, sentence or page. Similarly, ‘to appropriate’ is to cut, to detach from and delete a context, and to transplant elsewhere. ‘To cite’ demands we call the context back.

Stingily’s opening gesture in *Notes on Gesture* is cut so neatly that it is difficult to read when the clip ends, if the same clip is played nine times or if she repeats the movement live to the camera.

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<sup>320</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. ‘cut, *v.*’, accessed August 2, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46341?result=4&rskey=iQoIzB>.

Repeating the same movements over and over and at 00:03:16 she stretches and yawns and you yawn back. At 00:05:03 Stingily sticks out her tongue and she is smiling. Her exclamatory ‘Aah!’ has been tampered with and the audio runs fast and high-pitched. At 00:05:35, she playfully exclaims ‘What are you doing!?’ directly to the camera, to you, and you feel conspicuous, sitting there, headphones on, at a desk that is not your own, reading about yourself again. At 00:05:50, she calls out, ‘Stop!’, as in, ‘Stop playing around’, and is smiling again. ‘What are you doing!?’ is repeated at 00:08:54, but the voice is impatient now. What Stingily perceives you as doing is no longer funny.

In a later conversation, talking about the writer Sianne Ngai’s work on aesthetic categories, particularly the concept of cuteness, AR summed up, ‘What if [art’s] effect/affect is something you are not aware of?’<sup>321</sup> Ngai’s ongoing project defines minor aesthetic categories, such as the interesting, the cute and the zany, as alternative frames of reference for interpretation, as much, if not more important than traditional and markedly grandiose concepts of beauty and sublimity.<sup>322</sup> In the tradition of a ‘long-standing intellectual project... tied to thoughts of the personal variety and to theorizing’, Ngai, in the introduction to her book *Ugly Feelings*, explores the relevance of aesthetic categories through feelings as “‘aesthetic emotions,” ...a concept whose oldest and best known example is Aristotle’s discussion of catharsis in *Poetics*.”<sup>323</sup> She argues that feelings arise in the body in our encounters with art as well as with cultural production in a broader sense. It is through feelings, through categories of feelings, as vehicles for recognition, that we comprehend and process the existence of an artwork and through which we can articulate our response. Acknowledging ‘...how feeling slips in and out of subjective

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<sup>321</sup> AR, conversation with the author, 2022.

<sup>322</sup> See Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2020), *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2012) and *Ugly Feelings* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>323</sup> Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 6.

boundaries’,<sup>324</sup> Ngai ‘attempts to demonstrate how emotion might be recuperated for critical praxis in general’.<sup>325</sup> Within these minor categories, Ngai traverses affects such as disgust, anxiety, envy and cuteness, that are for the most part characterised as undesirable, mundane and irritating. These ugly feelings get in the way, whether we are aware of it or not.<sup>326</sup>

Like hearing and sight, interoception is a sensory biological system. In his book, *Visceral Sensory Neuroscience: Interoception*, Oliver G. Cameron defines the term interoception as taking place whenever any ‘visceral sensory nervous system impulses [have] occurred, irrespective of any effect on either awareness or behavior.’<sup>327</sup> On a physiological level, reactions happen within a body, and interoception refers to the way in which this is felt by said body. This feeling the body inside the body can be categorised further, into proprioception – the feeling of the body in space – and visceroreception – the feeling of the body’s organs, through events such as one’s heartbeat, breathing and digestion.<sup>328</sup> Tracing precursory terms for interoception, Cameron cites the nineteenth-century physician Ivan Sechanov, who wrote of “dim feelings,” “faint sensations,” and an “obscure muscular sense” at the border of consciousness.<sup>329</sup> I find recognition in Sechanov’s ‘dim feelings’ in my day-to-day experience, as sensations that I may not notice, that seem far away and unconnected to anything going on around me, variously unrecognisable and unnameable as physiological or emotional sensations.

Sechanov

How do you feel?

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<sup>324</sup> Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 31.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>327</sup> Oliver G. Cameron, *Visceral Sensory Neuroscience: Interoception* (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated), ProQuest Ebook Central, 5.

<sup>328</sup> See also Pollatos et al’s definition, referenced in Rosemary Klich, ‘Visceral Dramaturgies: Curating Sensation in Visual Art’, *Body, Space & Technology* 1, vol. 18, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.16995/bst.319>, 176-177.

<sup>329</sup> Ivan Sechanov, in Cameron, *Visceral Sensory Neuroscience: Interoception*, 4.

Echo

At the edge of the water, head in hand, fingers in hair and  
cupping the top of the head, temple resting on the fleshy bit of  
the palm between thumb and wrist and tongue pressed behind  
teeth, both feet on the verge, knee laid flat pointing over the edge,  
over the water, other knee bent upwards, unsupported, left heel  
into right arch, left temple against palm, into eye socket with the  
base of the palm... How do you feel?

Sechanov's vague estimates – dim, faint and obscure feelings – bring to mind Bulwer's pictograms, and I think about how one's own bodily feelings are not entirely separate from the bodies of others. There is somehow an unwritten relation, a shared interoception, which comes into view when we recognise feelings in the bodies of others. Feelings catch and spread, with varying degrees of awareness and consideration. If art's affect is something we are not always aware of, then this something is arguably dim in terms of feeling. But this is not to say that it does not matter. When one does recognise an unmonumental something in art, and finds recognition of the self, of others or other art, the experience transforms into something all the more intriguing and embodied. For example, when reading Ngai's citation of Nella Larson's phrase, 'obscene sore',<sup>330</sup> I read in the same moment Shahryar Nashat's artwork commission of 2017, titled *Present Sore*, along with Mason Leaver-Yap's text, 'Figure and Wound: The Human Body in Shahryar Nashat's *Present Sore*', printed in the publication, *Question the Wall Itself*.<sup>331</sup> Like how the workings of friendships are often beyond our capacities of articulation, whether through either qualitative or quantitative means – where we are not always aware of why some

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<sup>330</sup> Nella Larson, *Quicksand & Passing*. ed. Deborah McDowell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) 21, 77, 29, quoted in Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 36.

<sup>331</sup> Mason Leaver-Yap, 'Figure and Wound: The Human Body in Shahryar Nashat's *Present Sore*', in *Question the Wall Itself*, eds. Fionn Meade with Jordan Carter (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2017), 154-159. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organised by and presented at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, November 20, 2016 – May 21, 2017.

relationships work out and others do not, and we cannot always account for what is really going on between people – dim feelings bear the weight of the unnameable, read in Djébar’s naming of Isma and *aphonie*, in George’s rewriting through the ‘tear in the text’ and through Africa, operating viscerally, critically and quietly, ‘on a heartbeat-to-heartbeat basis’.<sup>332</sup>

The Writer

I have just written the word ‘infinite’.<sup>333</sup> It is to my best knowledge and opinions, finished, when you, dear Reader, find *The Address*. [Click here](#).<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> S.N. Garfinkel and H. D. Critchley, ‘Threat and the body: How the heart supports fear processing’, *Trends in Cognitive Science* (2016), 34-46, quoted in Gary G. Berntson, et al, ‘Interoception and the autonomic nervous system: Bottom-up meets top-down’, in *The Interoceptive Mind: From Homeostasis to Awareness*, eds. Manos Tsakiris and Helena De Preester (Oxford Scholarship Online, November 2018), DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198811930.001.0001.

<sup>333</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Library of Babel’, in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 85.

<sup>334</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/block/17862142>.

# Conclusion

Intended as record and reference tool, this thesis documents an inquiry into echoing as a method for the production, staging and interpretation of art and its writing. Echoing is not a formula accounting for personal preference, subjective identity or offering answers to ‘Why?’ questions. Rather, it describes a way of working. I argue that echoes and citations are untidy and never singular events nor identical reproductions but give rise to multiple reverberations and citations upon citations, messages varying in texture, tone, depth and resonance.

In retrospect, I cannot be certain that I captured and accurately cited all the details, each flicker of an idea emerging out of or put forward in conversations with my supervisors and colleagues, or even with friends and strangers. It is an impossible task to cite every single source, every influence, every thought connected to something else. It is evident that not every source can be articulated so clearly in written language, as in my transcriptions of Syms’s *Notes on Gesture*, Hayes’s *Screed #13* and Holt and Serra’s *Boomerang*, where each translation of even a simple movement by a human body is dependent on clunky descriptors, awkward numbering and personal speculations. This thesis then exists in testament to the endeavour of citation. Its gaps and details presage the future, or simply other works, where a citation might be seen as a question, an ‘irreparable “snag” in writing that dissemination, the ceaseless proliferation of

meaning, tears even further.<sup>335</sup> A close reading approach supports this endeavour while challenging the conventional distinctions drawn between written and oral retellings.

In conceptualising this thesis performatively and in combining essay and script formats of writing I have intended to challenge the expectations of academic research and its conventions for presentation. My methods for transcribing a source, made evident in stopping, starting, and stopping again to check and fixate on details and uncertainties, are extended to the reader's moment of reading through the use of block quotations and directions to engage with other media outside of the text. The presence of multiple citations within sentences hopefully underlines my argument – and if irritating serves to underline it even more – of echoes as interruptive, repetitive events moving and turning your thoughts to be 'stim-u-lated, in a new direction'.<sup>336</sup>

Emerging from this thesis is an unformulated question concerning the friendships and antagonisms connecting artworks, texts and artists. Leticia Cosbert-Miller asked, 'How can we [curators, artists and critics] be more symbiotic?'<sup>337</sup> and Mason Leaver-Yap describes their working 'with artists to produce texts, exhibitions, and events' as 'Affinities'.<sup>338</sup> The process of engaging with antagonistic subjects and objects is raised by Cosbert-Miller in her consideration of the 'problematic fave', as well as in Diamond Stingily's profoundly contemporary 'Pilgrimages to Nowhere' where she sharply concludes, 'Kathy Acker is whining about dick and I go on long walks'.<sup>339</sup> These relationships, positive and negative, are made more compelling through considering Cosbert-Miller's interest in reorienting the figure of the muse as a contemporary

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<sup>335</sup> George, 'Last Angel of History: Research, Writing, Performance', 218.

<sup>336</sup> Holt, *Boomerang*, 00:08:20-00:08:31.

<sup>337</sup> Cosbert-Miller, 'Ideas From Moving Water: Leticia Cosbert-Miller in conversation with Yaniya Lee', video.

<sup>338</sup> My emphasis. Leaver-Yap, 'About', accessed September 14, 2022, <https://leaveryap.com/about/> and Leaver-Yap, 'Affinities'.

<sup>339</sup> Stingily, 'Pilgrimages to Nowhere'.



tool, one that is particularly generative for the art writer and through which they might also challenge its colonial legacies.<sup>340</sup> More than biographical intrigue, I am interested in exploring friendships and antagonisms in ways of working, how they manifest in work produced, staged or interpreted, and how these intangible relations might be closely read. A collection of research material gathered from and produced in response to artworks, exhibitions, books, articles, websites and internet searches is presented as an Are.na channel titled *Friendships and Antagonisms*.

[Click here](#).<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Cosbert-Miller, 'Ideas From Moving Water: Leticia Cosbert-Miller in conversation with Yaniya Lee', video.

<sup>341</sup> Alternatively, copy and paste this link into your browser, <https://www.are.na/lisa-barnard/friendships-and-antagonisms>.

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