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(im)Material Geographies: From Poetics of Terraforming to Earth Scripts

Abstract: The article explores the work of two contemporary poets, Alice Oswald and J.R. Carpenter, with reference to the material and immaterial aspects of their poetic projects. It is argued that although disparate in their form, both artists' works are linked by their interest in the environmental forces as (im)material manifestations of more-than-human agency. In this sense they can be seen as belonging to a longer and broader strain of poetic endeavours (like concrete poetry and land art) that struggle to problematise the relationship between form and meaning. The article also employs the notion of earth scripts which allows to see such poetic and artistic practices as forms of descriptions of the earth characterized by differing degrees of sensitivity to the environmental challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

Keywords: materiality, Anthropocene, climate crisis, contemporary poetry, digital literature, Alice Oswald, J.R. Carpenter

1. Introduction

The ecological crisis might be a crisis of imagination, as Lawrence Buell (1995) put it, but it also has a very tangible, material aspect. It is, as we now know, manifested in phenomena like failing crops, global warming, or unexpected weather conditions on an unprecedented planetary scale. However, this emerging critical physicality does not only concern the devastation of ecosystems but is also deeply entwined with another, immaterial dimension, inseparable from the material one. Thus, the ecological crisis as a crisis of imagination emphasizes the link between the material and the immaterial; between the domain of physicality and that language and representation. Recognising such a connection encourages us to think about its specificities (of form, function, and possible outcomes) and urges to

consider questions regarding the way they might be helpful in gesturing towards a somewhat different language – one capable of describing, reacting to, and helping us, at least to a degree, to live through these hard times. Perhaps such language is that of poetry?

During her Oxford poetry lectures, Alice Oswald rightly observes the intertwined nature of materiality when she points to metaphor as a device for trying to “detect something immaterial”; just like matter implies metaphysics, materiality, paradoxically, is an argument for the existence of immateriality (2022). Viewing it as a node to representation, a junction between physicality and language (or the verbal stand-in for what is absent), allows to see materiality at the same time as the domain of the immaterial and semantic. Likewise, poetry as a multimodal discourse – one which makes use of sound, body or memory – calls out to much more than a ‘mere’ practice of linguistic inscription, located well beyond its written form. Recalling the ‘active’ element in its antique etymology, *poiesis* may well stand for practice: an act of doing (something) and performing actions. To a certain extent, a similar logic could be found at play in Paul Crutzen’s and Eugene F. Strommer’s (2000) proposition to recognize the Anthropocene as a new geological era. Much as it reflects the devastating impact of human actions on the materiality of the planet, the notion also points to the existence of an agent (or, in fact, agents) further linked in to a composition of causes (actions) provoking particular material results – action affects matter, matter shapes representation, cultural representation affects ‘things that matter.’

As a result, numerous recent theoretical perspectives have been preoccupied with recognizing new forms of entanglements between diverse agents that we as humans share the living space with. Noticeable across various disciplines, this tendency already for some time now has resulted in what some call the post-anthropocentric turn.¹ While offering to rethink material realities or ontology of objects, the theoretical discourses attempting to breach the disciplinary gap necessarily have to rely on rather hermetic parlance (e.g. of philosophy or science). Therefore, what seems pertinent to literary studies right now is reflection on how these new perspectives, together with the mutual disciplinary criss-crossing they advocate, can enrich the study of literature, including a critical summary of what vantage points on matter and ‘things’ they suggest. In this context it makes sense to ask some of the questions outlined above to the imaginative discursive and linguistic practices of poetry.

While trying to approach these issues, what follows looks at the selected works of two notable contemporary poets: Alice Oswald and J.R. Carpenter. Special attention is devoted here to the way in which their respective lyrical sensibilities struggle to probe the limits of language as a medium of communication, with particular respect to its materiality and how it attempts to evoke the planetary elements. Although disparate in form, both artists’ respective works are linked by their interest in the environmental forces perceived as (im)material manifestations

of more-than-human agency. Their work can be seen as belonging to a longer and much broader strain of poetic endeavours that struggle to problematise the relationship between form and meaning. Yet, perhaps because of a heightened planetary and climate awareness the endeavours of these present-day artists might tell us something about the future heading for poetry, especially that their literary practices seem to offer a less intrusive form of lyrical language and verse than many of their artistic forerunners (e.g. concrete poetry).

2. The (Terra)formings of Poetry

What readily comes to mind when thinking about the terrain of poetry and its links with the (im)materiality of language is the tradition of concrete poetry. Rooted in the older but equally multifaceted experimental strains of writing, like the early 20th century avant-gardes and indirectly even in earlier fascination with typographical verse, this literary-artistic current is often associated more with the probing of material limits of signification than with questions of the environment. In this sense, the key issues it is usually paired with (e.g. the conceptual problematization of the artistic object, questioning of the institutional confines or of representation itself) are ones which focus on the way it is connected with the ‘spatial’ revolutions 1960s and 1970s. This includes what Lucy Lippard (together with John Chandler) famously called “The Dematerialization of Art” (1971), as well as the visual, modernism-derived impulses to make form synonymous with content. However, such a reading of many of the conceptualism-fuelled works, together with their disparate attempts at taking writing and signification beyond the printed page, may overshadow these projects’ individual reliance on the physical surroundings. This additionally obliterates the actual physical intrusion in the earth some of the concrete works constitute.

On a closer inspection, there certainly is a lot of examples to be found across numerous projects within the broadly understood concrete poetry tradition which allows us to see them as anthropocentric interventions in the structure, fabric and formation of landscape and the environment at large. In fact, artistic ways of shaping the material surroundings as exhibited, for instance, by authors like Ian Hamilton Finlay, Robert Smithson or Richard Long, can be seen as practices akin to writing and inscription, or, to a degree, versions of one of Anthropocene’s staples – terraformation.² By getting rid of paper and putting words and letters into the physical spaces of a landscape, and through altering the physical surroundings (the environment), site-specific art (including concrete poetry) in many ways constitutes a version of specifically understood practice of writing – an act of inscription that penetrates the land. Even if we envisage this process perhaps somewhat differently to Jacques Derrida, who describes writing at the opening of *Spurs* as a violent practice – an activity in which “some pointed object [...] a quill or a stylus [...], stiletto,

or even a rapier” (37) scrapes the material surface of paper – concrete poetry still, in many ways, embodies an intervention in the physical surroundings. Given the reliance on minimalism and conceptualism of experimental concrete poetics, it is interesting to ask to what kind of an account of environment, or, more narrowly, of place they produce. Is it radically different from, say, more traditional accounts of the earth or place? In his *Anthropocene Lyric*, Tom Brislow (2015) offers a helpful perspective by pointing to how geography, etymologically standing for “earth description,” may function as “writing of place” but argues for an alternative mode of representing place and environment, which he terms “literary geo-graphies, or earth scripts” (8). In contrast to the anthropocentrically generated accounts where localities are filtered through human interests, tradition or language, earth scripts offer something else. As Brislow claims, “earth-scripts – made by humans who are part of the earth – are therefore inherently self-conscious writerly descriptions of our spaces fleshed out by the more-than-human world” (8). Consequently, earth scripts may be a useful term for the types of literary (and undoubtedly all sorts of artistic) descriptions of places which, even though articulated by and in a human language, include an awareness of being partly influenced or shaped by the more-than-human forces. Obviously, not all of literary/poetic descriptions of places qualify to be earth scripts, especially that the category also prompts us to consider notions of subjectivity, agency and power. Yet, it nevertheless parallels significant present day critical interests as seen in various ecological perspectives at disparate spatial and temporal levels, differing scales, or even at the level of particular elements themselves (cf. Cohen and Duckert).

Form such a vantage point, a brief look at some of the staple works of Ian Hamilton Finlay – one of the genre’s heavyweights – reveals an intriguing relationship between concrete poetry and the environment. Designed together with his wife Sue and located around fifty miles from Edinburgh, the famous poetic neoclassical garden *Little Sparta*, is profoundly steeped in the classical tradition of antiquity. In many ways, it thematizes the notion of conflict, including the one between culture and nature, while being a collection of disparate material artistic items: statues, pillars, or sundials and stony inscriptions. With the passing of time many of them have become integrated into the landscape and now constitute part and parcel of the environmental context in which they were initially placed. Commenting on this process, the Polish poet-scholar Jerzy Jarniewicz elegantly points to how Finlay’s poems first depart from linearity and get free from the confines of the syntax (such is the sense of his one word poems). Then they leave the book and turn on to three-dimensional artifacts. And finally, they *melt into* the landscape, becoming almost indistinguishable from its natural elements. (Jarniewicz 277; emphasis mine).

The reason why the key verb (“melt”) is so interesting here is obviously not because there is something wrong with it, but precisely because it adequately describes how the artistic objects now fits into their context. One of the effects of

such a tight integration stems from the ways in which almost everywhere around this artist's garden we can find ways in which 'nature' subsumes cultural artifacts, which thus complicates the possibility of any clear differentiation between these two elements (Jarniewicz 278). This quality of Finlay's work, intended to tell an anthropocentric story of a clash between nature and culture – at the same time connecting it more to earth description rather than earth scripts, can be taken to illustrate something opposite: a lively and benevolent cooperation at a material, organic level, additionally masking the original dimension of physical intrusion in the landscape. In other words, this does not mean that the artistic items are now devoid of their intended anthropocentric meaning, but their enmeshing testifies to how, on an organic–material level, the environment seems to be an active part in meaning making.

In this sense, concrete poetry, as exemplified by Finlay's *Little Sparta* garden demonstrates how poetic and artistic projects may manage to actually invalidate the difference between artifacts and 'natural' environment – very much in the same way it is interested in bridging the divide between words and things (Jarniewicz 277). Correspondingly, other forms of art coterminous with the rising popularity of concrete poetics registered impulses intent on bringing together an art object as something sealed-off from the context (i.e. its environment) and the way this object is embedded in the environment. Robert Smithson's land-art projects are a good case in point. His weirdly poetic, yet to some extent also concrete, *Spiral Jetty* (1970) bears affinity to Finlay's works not only because of being a large-scale earthwork, but perhaps even more so due to a benevolent ambiance which permeates the whole site of the project. Ultimately integrating human intervention within the natural surroundings, the monument works as an argument for the type of contemporary participatory and immersive conceptual art, which, despite being made of the land and in it, testifies to the engagement with site specificity, especially by cutting across several modes of representation and media which Smithson employed to represent his project: earthwork, essay, and film (Prinz 329). Despite their formal features, one of the many axes around which the verbal and visual materials of both *Spiral Jetty* and *Little Sparta* accumulate or even grow, is language. In this sense, apart from the possible authorial intention included in such projects, earthworks like these also register the processes which Timothy Morton calls "enmeshing" – the way in which humans are embedded in organisms which gesture towards forces hitherto unnoticed by anthropocentric thinking (2018). By allowing more-than-human actants to work on the artistic interventions of land art or concrete works, such artistic projects also enact environment's propensity to incorporate and welcome virtually everything, including unexpected creative partnerships (at an organic level) as well as terraforming interventions.

Interestingly, what stands out from artistic engagements with the earth during the heights of the concrete/land art era is the work of Richard Long (b. 1945). His attempts to take writing and inscription out into the open spaces is particularly

important, especially because of these processes' deliberate preoccupation with immateriality and permanence. Employing the seemingly straightforward activity of walking, Long uses footprints to create provisional drawings on the earth's surface. Located somewhere between performance and ritual, his artistic activity can be also seen as "a way of marking his body's relationship to place and time" (Renshaw 363). Such practices gesture towards the kinaesthetic dimensions of art making, with his projects recording intriguing aspects of the physical, human intrusion in the landscape, albeit ones that problematises the permanence that usually comes with writing. *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), for example, was created by photographing effects of the artist stopping in a field in Wiltshire and trotting to and fro. Similarly, *Walking a Line in Peru* (1972), intended as an homage to the pre-Columbian Nazca culture which echoes the Medieval tradition of pilgrimages or prehistoric migrations, consists in Long walking "a perfectly straight line that stretched for several miles from the foothills of the Andes across a dry riverbed using aligned notches made by Indians" (Renshaw 363). The active use of footprint as his tool offers insight into thinking about the materiality of artistic processes. On this note Ben Tufnell aptly points out that a footprint is not only one of the basic units of human measurement – it constitutes a powerful symbol for connectivity, rootedness (with plenty of phrases and expressions found in the language to give us 'firm footing') and, above all evokes the idea of physical contact of – the "idea of an artist 'touching the earth'" (26). Although Long's works also rely on a physical intrusion in the materiality of place, the ephemeral quality of his work makes it much more sensitive to the marks and traces left after possible artistic practices are completed. The awareness of the consequences of human activities makes such interventions much closer to earth scripts, perhaps already heralding a less materially intrusive heading for the artistic practices to come.

Conceived and executed with a particular location in mind, site-specific artworks like the ones just mentioned certainly rely on a mixture of geo-specificity that comes from the tradition of earth description (even if the intention of many artists might have been to break away from it). In this sense, concrete poetry and land art can be seen as artistic practices that followed a specifically understood poetics ultimately altering the physicality of landscape they interacted with. However, these projects also demonstrate that the meanings intended by their designers are necessarily accompanied by the workings of more-than-human agents and processes taking place within the environment. While the dominant aspects of such works might be connected with the observer's experience or the political, social, or geographic aspects of the location that contribute to these texts' (often immaterial) message, they remain entangled in environmental contexts, in a way illustrating the claim Morton (2021) articulates throughout one of his works, aptly entitled *All Art is Ecological*.

3. Towards Earth-Scripts

Let us now turn from the poetics of terraforming to less invasive modes of producing earth scripts. Among such more recent efforts Alice Oswald's lyrical practice stands out as particularly successful in this respect. It testifies to the fact that such writing needs not to intrude heavily into the physicality of the land to achieve its poetic goal of providing artistic descriptions of various spaces or particular localities. Although her lyric does stem from physical human presence in the landscape – excursions on foot or gardening – these are rather poetic workings within the language which, even if they do engage with earth's physicality, they do so mostly through exploring the paradoxical materiality that comes with the medium of language. Furthermore, these poetic descriptions result from a specific understanding of the overlap between (im)material realities of language – from a physical dimension both within writing and within the land. Articulated with the awareness of non-anthropocentric otherness and with respect to the scale-breaking vastness connoted by the environment, they can be regarded as attempts at making room for more-than-human perspectives.

Oswald, an acclaimed poet, who holds awards and numerous prizes for her work (including Ted Hughes Award or T.S. Eliot Prize), shares affinity with some of the concrete poets and land artists in various ways: with Finlay, in terms of being devoted to a particular locality (Oswald lives in Devon) and in probing the importance of the mythic antiquity in human history (she is trained in classic languages); just like him, she is also a garden lover but her process is perhaps closer to that of Richard Long, as she is also an avid walker. Her poems are equally frequently composed while working in the garden, in accordance with the open air or 'just' during walks. Correspondingly, her artistic process intends to echo the seemingly immaterial or sometimes barely perceptible rhythms of changes in the light and density or humidity of air. Importantly, she does not write down her poems immediately so as not to destroy the creative moment, which, as she believes, needs to engage corporeality and memory. That is why she usually performs her poetry without the aid of a printed page, in a way further echoing artists like Edwin Morgan, especially when it comes to the role of sound in poetry. The material aspects of her writing thus include a particular attention and affection towards the sounds and music of language and nature (cf. Martindale). While this may be simply conceptualized as a procedure to amplify silences, Oswald is in fact committed to giving voice to that "what speaks when no-one speaks," as stated in "Severed Head Floating Downriver" (2018a, 24). This is also visible, for example, in the auditory quality of her verse which frequently serves as aural earth descriptions or sound maps.

Such is the case, for instance, of *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (2009), which, just like *Dart* (2002) before it, is drawn from Oswald's treks along both of the important British rivers. Offering a lyrical focus on the landscape, the approach to mapping the material and sonic landscapes in both cases is thoroughly non-invasive

and multifaceted. Employing intriguing means to address particular localities and the specificities of their environments they also manage to reveal numerous more-than-human entanglements. If *Dart* attempt to render the ontology of the river as a hypoerobject (cf. Morton 2013) – radically larger than human beings and exerting effects on them – *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* takes moonrise (happening in various stages) as its subject and contains it within a book-length “poem in several registers, set at night on the River Severn Estuary” (2018b, 1). Characteristically for the poet, different entities populate these spaces described: “some living, some dead, all based on real people from the Severn catchment,” with the intention of registering the influence exerted by more-than-human actants; “to record what happens when *the moon moves over us* - its effect on water and its effect on voices” (2018b, 1; emphasis mine). Significantly, she is interested in the non-human agency as manifested in other interactions, e.g. when the moon “chooses to push/ the river right over without caring” (2018b, 45), and amplifies the sound and voices of entities like wind, moon, or trees. More importantly, sounds and melodies in her diction are not only linguistic onomatopoeia but places where language is made to attune to others while maintaining a mode of conversation, even if earth-others “speak out with shadows in their voices” (2018b, 24). Full of other non-human entities and agents, her poetry additionally includes the moon, a poet figure (called the “Dream Secretary”), to name just a few from *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*, as well as flies, cockerels, clouds, flowers, a badger, or even a dried-up river Dunt, all of which can be read/heard in her volume called *Falling Awake* (2019).

Listening to these voices allows us to notice a particular affective dimension of such lyrical practice. That is why Tom Brislow identifies an “emotional framework” at play in Oswald’s poetic diction: while it “might look like a series of anthropocentric projections of states upon the world – although not coterminous with anthropogenic impact on the environment – [yet] the overall feeling of the poem is an ability to acknowledge multiple senses of nature’s life, character, and mood” (85). As she says herself, “I have to force myself to look out from the flower’s point of view at these great walloping humans coming down the path, and try, just try, and feel it from their point of view because it’s a different world to them, a fascinating hard one” (qtd. in Brislow 84). Such emphasis on feeling signals Oswald’s continuous preoccupation with the affective register, which “heightens our respect for processes, powers, and things of ‘nature’; but also turns the emotionally inanimate beings into an affective autobiographical animate one, placing fresh light on the ways in which we conceive of our agency in the more-than-human world” (Brislow 85).

Just as *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* promotes considerations of natural environment as agency particularly apt in demonstrating affect, Oswald’s other works gesture, too, at the interlacing of materiality and immateriality within poetry and language. This conceptualization of the environment is noticeable in her versions of earth scripts as an attempt to tackle the immaterial (meaning) and articulate it

in poetic verse. Significantly, this practice is also an overtly inclusive one: the idiosyncratic conception of language, like in the case of *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*, consists in much more than merely a recording human experience contextualized within a significant environmental background (additionally giving rise to human affects). Instead, it successfully evokes experiences of more-than-human inhabitants of the spaces that the poet represents.

In *Falling Awake* (2016), for example, similarly to the way walking becomes a form of engagement with the land which avoids unnecessary terraforming, the seemingly simple practice of weeding – an act of “scrabbling at the earth” – becomes a powerful metaphor for the process of writing at large (2018a, 58). That is why, in her succinct translator’s afterword to the volume, Magda Heydel aptly identifies this as largely true for Oswald’s writing philosophy: language becomes the earth, a soil which only our meticulous scrabbling can save from being overgrown with weeds (2018a, 179). Connected with interventions in the land, this practice is however one which does not need to rely on physical and material intrusions (as it was the case with concrete poetry or land art, to a certain extent). Such ‘writing-as-weeding’ might also take the form of excavations, just as it happened in the case of the aptly subtitled *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (2012), where Homer’s text becomes the linguistic and cultural soil that Oswald digs into. A text (and language) thus becomes a material-like space for paradoxically immaterial investigations – a practice which she actually manages to turn to poetry’s favour with *Memorial* effectively becoming “a translation of the *Iliad*’s atmosphere, not its story” (2012, 6–8).

All of this is obviously not to say that Oswald as a poet is unaware of the materialities of writing. To the contrary, her writing frequently operates with a particular attention to dimensions of physical space, especially those of the page (typography, use of columns, marginalia, or grey-scale type, etc.) relating her work to aspects of concrete poetry and typographical verse, among others. However, rather than merely provide an anthropocentric description, her poetic procedures intend to problematise diverse textual dimensions in relation to both form and content, as well as to the very experience of reading and representing place, landscape, or the environment’s otherness. Thus, they constitute a specific version of earth scripts – a poetics which employs affective and sensory qualities that affect the reader’s perception of the world and of the environment

4. Digitalised Elements

In many respects a similar engagement with the relationship between material dimensions of the environment and its artistic representations as seen in the works of Alice Oswald’s can be found in another example in the lyric after the new millennium – the mixed-media projects of the Canadian-British artist J.R. Carpenter.

A writer, poet and a researcher with a practical bent, she produces groundbreaking works of digital literature, much to a critical acclaim as well as to a welcoming response from international audiences at festivals or institutions (libraries and museums) where she performs her pieces. Stretching over various platforms – print, performance, and digital media – her works offer intriguing insights into immateriality and tap into intricacies of representing how natural elements may function as agents and become material parameters of earth scripts. Associated with the seemingly immaterial dimension of virtual spaces witnessed on the computer screen or during performance, these texts eventually find their way to a classic, physical book form – yet another format, by no means an ultimate version of a particular project. While a comparison between both incarnations (the printed codex versus the ever-changing digital one) is a tempting perspective, my interest here lies more in the way in which Carpenter’s poetics serve as an instrument for thinking about less materially invasive alternatives to anthropocentric accounts of environment and how they may serve to record the agency of elements.

Several of the artist’s compositions explore limits of language, form and ways of meaning making, also with respect to particular localities. Such for instance is the case of attempts to accommodate hyperobjects like the weather – omnipresent, experienced intimately by individuals, yet transcending human scales of perception – or natural elements (storms, tides, large bodies of water) within language, which builds on pieces like, e.g., *Once Upon a Tide* (2015), *The Gathering Cloud* (2017), or *The Pleasure of the Coast* (2019). Additionally, Carpenter’s works often results from commissions from particular organizations tying them to specific places. While this points to affinities with other poetic projects, like the aforementioned Oswald’s *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*, her understanding of the notion of place is somewhat different. In many respects, it is much closer to regarding it as a multi-modal space: one which can be approached from various (artistic) angles, yet never completely exhausting the potentialities of description. Such perception of the text – as an artistic merger of materiality, immateriality and other forces – seems to bring her work close to Roland Barthes understanding of text as “a *multi-dimensional space* in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes, 146; emphasis mine). This claim from the seminal *Death of the Author* essay does not only refer to privileging the reader – e.g. urging them to notice something about the world or its historical representations – but also evokes, renders or creates spaces in the digital world which explore questions of agency that Barthes was already driving at (while on the road to the reader’s birth).

More importantly for the present discussion however, the question of place receives an interesting treatment in a project like *...and by Islands I mean paragraphs*, where Carpenter (2013) fuses print books and digital spaces from a topographical perspective. The project makes use of a visual stylistics of a map that in a hyperobject-like way goes beyond the confines of the web browser window only to cast the readers into the seemingly uncharted space where, as the title

suggests, the islands are made up of quotes from various literary, historical and theoretical texts on the subject of islands. The necessity to navigate through these digital-textual space revises the tradition of geographic earth description, especially through questioning the modes of charting the uncharted territories. Other projects like *The Gathering Cloud* exists across media: as digital web-based piece, poetic performance accompanied by collage-like graphics and a print book (Carpenter, 2017). The latter actively corresponds to what Jussi Parikka calls “a condensation of media history and [constitutes] a comment on the current environmental weight of clouds” (9) with an important part of the whole endeavour consisting in probing the limits of the medium. Reliant on the interplay of textual and graphic archival texts, Carpenter’s “hypertextual hendecasyllabic verse” (2017, 103), registers several impulses, including a search for new forms of representing the way in which “clouds resist ontology” (57) and insistence on making us aware of the, paradoxically, culturally conditioned notion of ‘nature’ by pointing out how “the term *The Cloud* refers to a cultural fantasy” (83), perhaps to raise awareness of the costs of data storage. In the light of Carpenter’s mixed-media digital works, it is interesting to observe that this ‘natural’ space perhaps should be understood not so much as the possibility to immerse oneself in the poststructuralist fantasy of a borderless textuality, but more as a project involving aspects of non-human agency.

The attempt at devising a different mode of telling the story of climate change and elemental activity that might correspond more to aspects of earth scripts is particularly pronounced in the case of *This is a Picture of Wind* (2020). Employing an internet form, it consists in producing algorithmically generated verse which makes use of live weather data to represent ephemeral textual images and immaterial variants of verse authored by the wind. Seemingly detached from the physicality of the natural environment – the poems, after all, are enacted in the digital medium and appear on the screen just for a brief moment – the project successfully manifests the overlap of matter and immateriality of natural phenomena. It stems from a poetic response to an encounter with the effects of violent weather phenomena – winter storms of 2014 which affected several areas in South West England causing floods and drastic alterations to the landscape. As she says, “[f]ollowing the news in the months after these storms, I was struck by the paradox presented by attempts to evoke through the materiality of language a force such as wind which we can only perceive indirectly through its affect” (2020, 124). In this sense, Carpenter shares a similar perception of the weather to Alice Oswald’s, especially in seeing it as a continuous interruption as “patterns and forces, things that are invisible, ephemeral, sudden, catastrophic, seasonal and endless” (Oswald and Keegan xiii). Her element in this case is also language (cf. Cohen and Duckert). That is why Johanna Drucker rightly observes how this project consists in calling up and activating several modes of representing natural phenomena, all of which include a broad range of sources: the artist’s notebooks as well as archival works found in “diaries held at various archives, such as the National Meteorological Library and Archive

in Exeter, searching the writings of 18th century poet John Clare, and the work of his contemporary, Francis Beaufort, who codified the scale we still use for measuring wind today” (11–12). Such a collection of source texts provides a rich and lexical varied base for generating poetry. The traditional, printed version makes use of Beaufort’s vocabulary to produce typographical verse arranged vertically on the page which grows in font size so as to correspond to wind force descriptions: from “still” through “heavy” to “broken”, or from “quiet” through “rough” to “violence” (Carpenter 2020, 27–29). In the web-based reiteration, based on a broader verbal lexicon, an algorithm connected to a data stream of real-time readings of wind speed in South-West England makes the choices of expressions. The resulting phrases which can be seen on screen – poem-like constructs, reactions to live weather data, are also an attempt at a visual rendering of linguistic and verbal intrusions to the language (and particular localities in England) resulting from the agency of wind as a natural element. Needless to say, these leftovers from the element’s activity are also different with each new visit (see the ongoing process at Carpenter’s website at <http://luckysoap.com/apictureofwind/>).

The work offers a seamless interlacing of often poetic phrases and a chance-based selection of observing the dealings of the natural elements. As Drucker asserts,

every instance of observation of the wind is particular, but no algorithm or model or poetic projection can forecast the next event with precise accuracy. As the wind changes speed, it alters the data to which Carpenter’s inventory of phrases is linked. New snippets of text are displayed on screen, textual windsocks, fleeting indices of on-going events. (12–13)

Taking advantage of intimately personal yet digital spaces of our electronic devices, the phone or computer screens this picture also relies on visual elements. Poetic lines of observation are rendered in larger blue text, while the changing poem-like constructs that correspond to wind speeds are made visible below. They are arranged into calendar like squares, each individual box standing for a given month of the year, represented on the backdrop of a map of South West England peppered with data numerals indicating ocean depths. Despite a vast reservoir of words and phrases to render the ever-changing weather conditions, the main quality this ‘textual picture’ manages to record is the fluctuating nature of wind’s creativity. They need to be observed quickly and attentively, as the compositions may be soon, literally, gone with the wind. This registers the ephemeral dealings of the element illustrating not only how the elements simply act upon the language, but also act *as* language in itself.³

5. Conclusion

In the terrain of poetry, the struggle to represent the overlap between materiality and immateriality remains a lasting field of interest. Viewing such past traditions like concrete poetry and associated land art as meaning-making practices that additionally constitute forms of earth descriptions allows to regard them as terraforming practices. The artistic engagement with the environment is expanded by the contemporary lyrical voices of Alice Oswald and J.R. Carpenter, which, while being less intrusive into their material surroundings, also problematises the overlap between matter and immateriality. Oswald's is a poetry, exhibiting great intensity and rooted in an intrinsic, deep-level entanglement between the natural environments. It engages the materialities of poetic language (like sound, body, and writing) which aid in efforts to make present the immaterial qualities coming with material spaces. These are additionally seen as spaces for the affect that might be helpful in achieving some empathy towards what Val Plumwood (2002) has so adequately called "Earth's others." While also seeming from emotional reactions to violent weather events, J.R. Carpenter's digital projects likewise attempt to map out the material spaces of entanglement between writing and the immaterial, between language and the weather. And it is not only the case that speaking of the weather articulates a continuum between humans and the environment (Parikka 2017), but Carpenter manages to employ the digital form of creativity and writing to express the material effects of seemingly immaterial natural elements. The gusts of wind that are partly the subject of *This is a Picture of Wind* can certainly be felt and recorded, even though they resist representation. The employment of media technology that led to the creation of the digital literature, and resulted in a subsequent book publication, earned Carpenter a label of (co-)author a "poetic media meteorology" that records "series of material transformations" made visible in media texts (Parikka 2017).

By way of conclusion, we might think not only about how poetic activity, broadly conceived, offers reiterations of the mutual enfolding of materiality and immateriality, so that language and environment ground each other in terms of theme, register, and the production of affect. In this context, such perspectives like material ecocriticism or notions of earth scripts allow us to see how poetry, including the generative one, poses questions about authorship, and also how the potential withdrawal of authorship may hint possibly at a new heading for the future of artistic engagements with the hyperobject scales of global warming or environmental elements. Perhaps a new strategy for language and poetry after the turn of the millennium is to obliterate human authorship altogether or to opt for cooperation, especially that practically all of the works discussed in the essay, more or less acutely, make us notice the multiplicity of cooperative (im)material agents at work in the world and in our environment.

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Notes

1. This includes but is not limited to such positions as new materialisms, speculative realism, or object-oriented ontology, all of which highlight different aspects of a planetary awareness and various entanglements between organisms, cf. Iovino, Serenella and Oppermann, Serpil 2014. *Material Ecocriticism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in literary studies cf. S. Pultz Moslund et al., 2021, *How Literature Comes to Matter: Post-Anthropocentric Approaches to Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; and in the areas connected with poetry, e.g. J. Fiedorczuk, G. Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka/Edipoética/Edipoetics. Ekologiczna obrona poezji/Una defensa ecológica de la poesía/An ecological "defense of poetry,"* Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, Warszawa 2015.
2. Although of the three artists mentioned only Long is an Englishman, the choice of such figures is dictated by their involvement in forms of land art which, as I argue, can be read as practices closely linked to concrete poetry as they are associated with taking textual meaning beyond the confines of the printed page. Smithson's "masterwork, the *Spiral Jetty*, is not a singular thing but might be considered *network*; it exists not only as monumental earthwork jutting into the Great Salt Lake in Utah but also as an extraordinary piece of a quasi-explanatory *poses* and meditation (first published in *Artforum* in 1972) and also as film, part documentary, part hallucinatory road trip, part dream," cf. B. Tufnell, *In Land: Writings around Land Art and Its Legacies* (2019), Winchester, UK: Zero Books; Finlay is mentioned here as the most recognizable artist within the concrete current but there are obviously too many other Anglophone poets to mention all of them, cf. Greg, Thomas. 2019. *Borders Blur: Concrete Poetry in England and Scotland*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
3. Compare the interesting use of Hugh Sykes Davies' term "ecolect" which can be taken to "denote a language that arises from extended human habitation in a particular place" (McKusick 234).

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