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The Owners' World  
By Bunny Rogers

My story, "The Owners' World" was published in the Neopian Times as a four-part series in early 2002. I had just turned twelve years old. I began playing Neopets under the username catnip4 on April 25, 2000, six months after the site's initial launch. My active years on Neopets inspired heavy creative production: personal and guild-affiliated websites, two LiveJournals, short stories, comics, poetry, and drawing. Most of the work I did was about my four pets, Snowflake462, IceCrystal462, Icedrop462, and SnowIce462. Snowflake became my star and favorite and was featured on Pet Spotlight (p. 96). He narrates "The Owners' World," which was written a year and a half after my family made a major move from Houston, Texas to Long Island, New York. "The Owners' World" can be seen as a reflection on the barrier between two worlds (real and virtual). This is something I struggled with as a young girl. The amount of time I spent online and specifically on Neopets.com resulted in a family-held intervention which, ultimately, proved ineffective. I would make one last literary contribution to the Times before falling off into obscurity—my masterpiece, "Kau Seer's Revenge" (weeks 55, 56). I would

Towards the Choice of This Color  
By Jimmy Chen

I imagined a chalkboard, or dense algae overtaking an abandoned swimming pool, or the color of a sweater my girlfriend would let me borrow—but only to gather its redolence during her absence, not to wear. So I created a new file at 430px by 250px in Photoshop, and "paint bucketed" it the green before you, spilled it over the entire floor to its sublime conceptual corners, the way Jackson Pollock might have if he were high, rather than merely drunk. Short of a soul, I saved the file and called it "green.png."

The pixel size is not arbitrary. I viewed the "image info" of other header images accompanying pieces which this website [Pool] had published, and exerted said dimensions; and yes, this very conceit is somewhat presumptuous, though, if you are reading this then perhaps life has once again worked itself out.

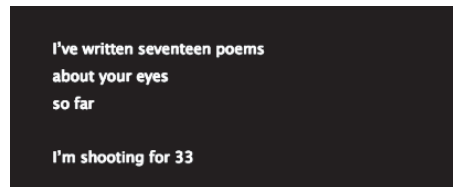
This is the territory of dreams, not just this article, or website, but the very internet through which you are browsing. To invoke the word "surf" is to imagine an ocean which seems to go on forever, the beautiful waterfalls at the edge

The Never Forgotten House  
By Joanne McNeil

Several weeks ago, I was leaving a party in Park Slope. As I waited to cross the street, I recognized two places across the way and realized I had eaten meals at both. I had brunch with a friend in the café at the corner last year. I met another friend for dinner two years earlier at the Thai restaurant at the address next. I remembered two separate phone calls with each friend explaining how to get there from the 7th Ave station. The second call, and the second walk from the stop didn't remind me of the first. It took a third visit to that intersection, and from that vantage point—across the street—to discover the venues were neighbors. Two pleasant but very different conversations came back to me at once.

I had a decade's worth of weekends in New York City before I finally made the move last year. Chinatown buses from Washington, DC and Boston; cheap flights out of Chicago Midway that left Friday evening and arrived before work on Monday. Sometimes I visited as often as twice a month, for special events or a guy or no reason. With the insouciance of an out-of-towner, I never bothered to follow how a

"Unlike": Forms of Refusal in Poetry on the Internet  
By Sam Riviere



xTx From Your Eyes<sup>1</sup>

In his novel *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), Herman Hesse imagines a future in which art, music and literature as we understand them have ceased: culture is regarded as somehow "complete", and the creation of new art is effectively forbidden. Instead, the players of the titular game draw on the vast repository of shared culture to construct a kind of meta discourse, answering each other's "moves" with referential improvisations. So a quote from Aristotle, for example, might be continued in a piece of mediaeval music in which some formal or thematic similarity is recognised. Hesse's vision seems both charmingly antiquated, as it is not

U MAD BRO? Direct Action in the Meme Pool  
By Wyatt Niehaus

*This essay focuses on the internet-meme as it is commonly understood—bearing a fairly rigid formal structure of appropriated imagery rooted in humor or absurdity as a method of cultural transmission and ultimately, cultural survival.*

A memetic structure is any cultural institution, space, or community in which cultural products and communication survive based on Darwinian principles, similar to that of genetics. Memes adapt, evolve, and replicate based on their strength relative to the environment they exist within. A memetic structure can be a physical space like a shopping mall or a school campus but more recently, popular culture has defined memetic structures predominantly as virtual spaces—none more infamously than the website 4chan, and in particular, its popular /b/ image board. But as the internet becomes an increasingly political entity, in the advent of the Pirate Party, Wikileaks, and Anonymous, what happens to the content of these memetic structures? What role might memetics play in this radicalization of online space? The internet has always been a place for political action in small

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retire from Neopets a 9x Neopian Times Champion. Below is "The Owners' World," presented for the first time in its entirety.

The Owners' World  
By Catnip4

Every once in a while I remember something. It's not the kind of thing that makes you fuzzy all over and makes you feel better when you're sad, but actually the kind of something that lurks deep inside you, and you try to block it out.

I've always known owners aren't Neopian. Sure. But up until just a few months ago, I never really thought about answering my question. If owners aren't born in Neopia.... then... where are they from?

Maybe I should've never asked. Maybe I should have tried forgetting about it. But being the type of thing that eats away at you until you finally find out the answer, it's not as easy as it sounds.

Catnip was working at her desk, a calculator by her hand and her discount card. She wasn't in the best mood, I could tell.

of the world which no one has taken pictures of. I once made a joke that 404 Not Found was God's address (404 the street number of Not Found Street) but I'm terrified of that day coming. I think we all are. Existentially, I wonder if the direct URL of this article will outlive the IRL me. Humans have always been obsessed with asserting their immortality within the constraints of their very mortality. When I am dead, I want your children and their children to see my little green.png that I so endearingly made. I want them to imagine a depressed bald Asian in his mid-thirties ignoring his office work in order to write this. Feel the weight on his shoulders, the twitch under his left eyelid, the strain of his carpal tunnel nerves. Feel his loneliness.

I was given a little circle to pick my color. I was feeling green, but a subtle one, almost grey. There was a conceptual painter—I'm sorry I'm not very good with names—who estimated the amount of each color Monet used in each of his Rouen Cathedral series, and blended all those colors together to create one perfectly flat muted color, not dissimilar to the color I have presented you. I saw the exhibition about ten years ago in a gallery, those sterile white boxes full of severe and silent beautiful receptionists, and have thought about them, the paintings, ever since. This is

taxi gets from one point to another or which direction the subway train was headed when we got to the stop. Now that the city is my home, I'm constantly uncovering another fragmentary long forgotten memory.

I will never know if some of the places I remember from these early New York trips have been torn down or exist on streets I haven't walked by again yet. I refuse to google one cafe in particular with the fear that the top result will come from Yelp and say "CLOSED." I want to believe in the possibility that some rainy night in the East Village, I will open a door and take shelter in the same place that once with someone very special to me, I escaped a prior storm. Several times, at several different places I have experienced just that. Odd clues like the uncommon shape of a bathroom faucet or the sound of a door slamming bring about memories of a holiday, birthday party, or another magical evening gone by. But even closed venues and forgotten spaces grant me with a keen intuitive sense. Lost in seemingly unfamiliar streets, I might have a hunch which way to go without consulting Google Maps on my phone.

Watching the sun set from the rooftop of a friend's condo on the Williamsburg waterfront recently, I thought the

really interested in how technology would come to function as the storeroom of culture, but also prescient in its awareness that this horizon of unoriginality has come to be an anxiety and fixation for many twenty-first century writers and artists, a starting point for their own self-aware works of resistance and influence.

Perhaps the most obvious analogue for Hesse's model is the rise of blogging culture, with its practice of primarily sharing rather than creating content, its infectious and mutating memes which breed increasingly referential combinations. There is a surface resemblance here, but we can go further and see this model expose how much creativity has a closer association with curatorial practice (as opposed to a Romantic notion of inspiration or genius) than it has ever liked to admit. Many poems we encounter can be quickly classified according to their precursors, their models and objectives—appearing almost like pre-existing formal contraptions for personal or imaginative content (the sourcing of which also has its well-tested methods). What interests me as someone who wants to read and write poems in late 2011 are the implications of poetry's choice of continuing established traditions or of refusing them, in light of a new strand of internet-based poetry that has emerged over the past half-decade or so.

subsets and factions, but lately the "popular internet" is being retooled for political and ideological discourse by using highly accessible contemporary systems of online communication (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube). If we look at the most famous meme pool on the internet, 4chan—we now find a growing militarization and politicization of this structure; the internet-meme as a political weapon.

Generally, websites like 4chan have held a fairly benevolent role in popular culture. We see them as a kind of factory for bizarre trends, photoshopped images, and various other in-jokes unique to the vernacular of the web. But most of the memes that arise from this website act on or adapt previously held tropes and stereotypes within other areas of popular culture. However, as our cultural dialogue intermingles with political discourse and activism, so do our cultural products. Political activism is often relegated to a specific subset of people as a means of marginalizing dissent and keeping a movement from becoming relatable to the general public. But political discourse in the meme pool allows dissent to go viral, making it accessible to a broad audience. The mere existence of this kind of structure is an encouraging circumstance. The transmutations that happen within these spaces lack any substantial form of hierarchy.

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Usually I would wait to tell her what I wanted to tell her, because... well... no one wants to make Catnip mad. I shuddered, but tapped Catnip on the back.

She immediately lifted her head, and was surprised to see me, almost shocked. A long uncomfortable silence passed, and I tried to break it.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Calculating bills," she scoffed.

I stared at my feet, and could feel the sweat start to form at my forehead.

"Ummm.... uhhh... Catnip?"

She sat, slumped, with her face against her hand, ready to slip out of her chair.

"Mmmm hmmm?"

I ran into my question, hoping I wouldn't get caught on a word.

either the power of art, or boredom. Monet kept intricate records of the exact day of the year and time of day for each painting, returning to them year after year in hopes that the setting—the light, its shadows, the angles and shapes created—would be exactly the same. For all the hope happening inside the church, there was a lot of it happening outside as well.

I am fond of #88a27d, it is the PIN# of arbitrariness, the color of my girlfriend's sweater. She likes to snuggle. I have a confession to make.

I don't have a girlfriend. Last weekend I streamed *Pollock* via Netflix "instant," though it was far from instantaneous. It took me over two hours to watch. I laid on my couch, either a bowl of chili, or chips and salsa, or snifter of scotch, or sorry I can't remember balanced on my chest while Ed Harris cried like a baby. In the final scene of both the film and Jackson Pollock's life, a drunk man, with his girlfriend and her friend in the passenger and back seat, respectively, drove into some trees one quiet night except for the screaming and the crash, killing the drunk man and the girlfriend's friend. The girlfriend survived the crash and went on to live the same life granted or imposed (depending on your atti-

tower must have been constructed on the ashes of an old building where a friend of mine lived back in 2003. The view of the skyline was the same. That friend I haven't seen for about as many years. There is no Street View archive I can look up to double check. An advanced search on Flickr of photos before 2005 doesn't yield much of anything. All I've got is a strange hazy feeling of familiarity that this wasn't the first time I looked across the East River from that spot.

There are just over 2,000 Flickr results for "chrysler building" before 1/1/2005. Now there are over 47,000 images, and that doesn't include the photo sharing that now takes place on Instagram, Facebook, and elsewhere. There haven't been more tourists in several years to gaze upon that particular site. What has changed is the way we look. We are more accustomed to seeing the world through a viewfinder. Photographing is a thoughtless gesture. We document in case we ever need a reminder.

I rarely hear anyone boast about photographic memory anymore. It's less impressive today as we can all supplement our own brains with an algorithmic search and the internet's seemingly infinite archival capacity. But this is still a period of transition. Google Street View and the iPhone

Historically, any significant shift in poetry has been a shift "down"—to the demotic, the current vernacular as experienced by readers, who depending on their disposition will find it refreshing or exasperating in a poem. We can look most obviously in recent history perhaps to O' Hara or the Beats, but the moment is replicated with poets like Coleridge ("I would like to write poetry that affects not to be poetry") or, going way back, to Dante's *Dolce Stil Nuovo* (the 'Sweet New Style'), as are, predictably, the reactions of the critics in office. Such a shift usually involves taking the cues for writing directly from life, rather than from the canon of poetry with which the poet may be attempting to ingratiate himself. Perhaps it's mystifying how accepted and encouraged the latter approach is, when a surer tactic for writing innovative poetry is one of irreverence rather than imitation. Something in our awareness of poetry knows that its "job" is not to slavishly follow established trends; we realise instinctively it is by its nature a subversive practice, connected with a kind of ideal spirit of honest perception, resistance and dissent. Probably this is partly why the people who are drawn to poetry are drawn to it in the first place. In the moments when it becomes culturally relevant or emblematic, poetry *interrupts*, derails, shifts; it does not reinforce. Yet the world one becomes familiar with if

Moderation is not imposed, it happens in generations as content is subject only to the scrutiny of populism.

This structure in itself is reminiscent of prefigurative politics<sup>1</sup>; it is a "temporary autonomous zone", a term coined by anarchist philosopher Hakim Bey, described as an ephemeral utopia site which eludes traditional dynamics of law and hierarchy. Like Bey's idea of a temporary autonomous zone, 4chan has no imposing will (short of rules against child pornography) and participants act without regulation or dictation from a command-hierarchy. It is unlikely that there was such a precise ideological motivation behind the creation of 4chan, rather this is an evolving potential that it holds in a broader, highly politicized meme pool. We find proof of this in the adaptation of traditional internet-meme formats to explore political consciousness- conveying a broad group position on an ideological or political topic. The most apt (and most timely) example of this phenomenon is "pepper spray cop". This meme stems from a photograph circulated of Lieutenant John Pike, a UC Davis police officer casually pepper-spraying a group of protestors. The subsequent memetic exchange involved Lt. Pike photoshopped into iconic photographs and paintings, casually pepper-spraying the subject of the images.

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"Where do you come from?"

Catnip's eyes suddenly grew into saucers, and that made me feel like I really should have forgotten about ever asking.

But then she smiled, and she had that strange look on her face as if she were half asleep but happy.

Catnip started to laugh.

"I'll show you, Snowflake!"

The chair skidded back as Catnip stood up and started to run upstairs to her closet. She threw open the cabinet doors. I chased behind her, and watched closely as she pulled out a small, wooden box. The hinges of the box creaked when Catnip started to lift up the top of the box, and she gently lifted a package wrapped in a cloth.

It was like a mystery present. You waited in awe until the final layer was unwrapped, and then marveled at the site. And boy, did I marvel! There pictures of a strange place, and Catnip along with some other owners were in them. One was where she was standing by a huge NeoHome along with another owner,

tude) on all of us. "I don't have a girlfriend," Pollock thought from heaven, flicking down grey tendrils of paint in a violent web of nonsense. You will never think of bird shit the same.

I place my nose against the screen and smell the green sweater, the bands of pixels as tiny well-organized threads of yarn hovering over your warm body on a cold day. I will not be alone tonight, we in this the territory of dreams whatever your name is girl I'm sorry I'm not very good with names.

both launched in 2007. Lost now is any ceremony to the act of adding an image to the ether. We batch upload our photographs; which are also unencumbered by the scarcity a roll of film created a decade earlier.

Someday soon, the internet will fulfill its promise as a time machine. It will provide images for every space and moment so we can fact check our memories. Flickr and Facebook albums will only accumulate. Google rephotographs streets and has the potential to build a Street View archive with which we may one day rewind to see the buildings that existed on our streets before we got there. Until this happens, Street View is commonly used to show us what has changed about the places we remember. Old homes, former schools. Is that old coffee shop still around?

Last summer, Arcade Fire's interactive video "The Wilderness Downtown" (directed by Chris Milk) rendered mainstream the practice of looking up a childhood address on Google Maps. With your personal input, the video customizes rolling shots of Google Earth satellite aeriels and Street View images showing the neighborhood near your old house. This plays along with multiple screen windows featuring animations of things like birds migrating and a

you aspire to write poems is quite different from anything these notions might suggest: a liberal establishment firmly in control of publishing channels, made up of bodies with decades of personal and professional investment in the type of poetry they write and write about. This would seem to explain the continuation in poetry of styles that have long outlived their reasonable lifespan. It's not I think overstating it to say that an interruption or disregarding of tradition is simply not in any of these body's interests. The normal defence one encounters here is that *all* poetry is "revolutionary" or "experimental", that publishers simply represent the foremost practitioners, and the change in register or tactics engendered by, for example, conceptual, flarf, or internet-based poetry, simply doesn't offer enough in the way of rewards for the poetry reader. But it's probably more accurate to say that it doesn't chime with the perceived expectations of a "poetry reader", who/what-ever that is in theory. When a magazine or publisher that survives almost entirely on arts funding is unable to generate enough interest to support its own programme, the efforts of many internet zines/publishing houses/poets, operating almost entirely outside that framework of support, yet receiving an enviable quantity of traffic and attention, should at least be acknowledged.



Figure A "Pepper Spray Cop" example

Though this meme is primarily intended to be humorous, it also serves some subtle political functions. Most obviously, it reduces the officer's actions to absurdity as an indirect reprimand on authority gone unchecked. It offers up a kind of lasting stigma in lieu of appropriate institutional punishment. Another byproduct of this meme is the transmission of a political dialogue through media that would otherwise not allow for it. If one person, motivated politically shares a "pepper spray cop" image with another person who has no political motivation—this second person might still share the image for comedic effect. This kind of encryption allows

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and there were these weird Neopets that I've never seen before. They looked a little bit like aishas, but without the stalks. They had big strings coming out the sides of their cheeks, and a small pink thing in the middle of their face.

There was another picture with Catnip in a yard, and there was a huge thing in the background, smaller than a NeoHome, but still large. It had windows and wheels.

I could hear Catnip sniffing, although she tried to hide it, and I put my paws around her neck and hugged her.

"Let's take a trip to this place," I finally offered.

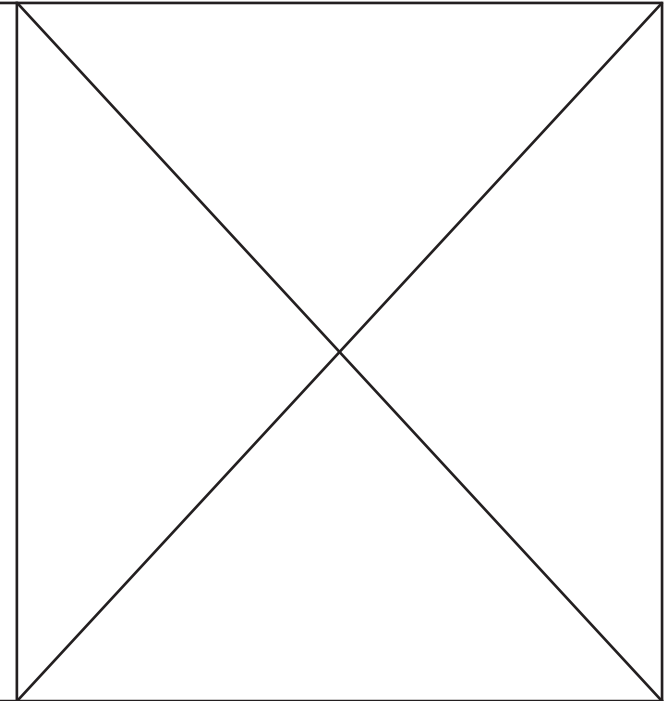
Catnip turned around, with a bright red nose, and shook her head.

"It's not easy to get into or out of Neopia."

"It may not be easy, but it's not impossible," I said.

Catnip gave me a smile, and she nodded.

"Okay," she whispered.



child running. The screen activity grows more frantic as the chorus cries, "We used to wait!"

Who doesn't wait? Who doesn't hate it? Waiting for a check to come in, for a text from a boyfriend, to grow up, for the post office queue to hurry up. We are all waiting for something. Like the lyrics—so easily relatable—the video's gimmick feels a touch exploitative.

"Poetry gives not so much a nostalgia for youth, which would be vulgar, as a nostalgia for the expression of youth," Gaston Bachelard wrote in the classic phenomenology text on memory and homes, *The Poetics of Space*. Clever as it is, *The Wilderness Downtown* plays more like a "vulgar" nostalgia rather than an "expression of youth." The mashup of images is literal rather than evocative. The interactive film might show you the exterior of your childhood home, but it is nothing like a bite in a madeleine.

We could accumulate hundreds of thousands of images throughout our lives but they will never taste like anything. An image represents and verifies a memory but the rest is left to imagination. Every essential moment of a child's life is documented if he was born in the West. With digital

A glance at the traditions of publishing reveals that poetry only really exists to the extent there is technology available to produce it. It is entirely indebted to this technology for its presence in culture. Since printing became possible, poetry has been tied into an economic situation, and its presence as a material object is a direct result of this. People have never not needed money to write poetry (firstly in terms of time and education), and in publishing the schooling of a "market" is largely dictated by the tastes of those in charge of the modes of production. The audience is in a real way a creation of these publishing channels, via printing and distribution technology. These channels absolutely dictate what constitutes the art form: rather than publishing models evolving as a convenient way to distribute already-existing literature, it is more the inverse: that literature evolves to meet the opportunities for capitalism presented by printing technology. Poetry has been regarded as a product for a long time, although it usually tries to distance itself from any formal similarity to such. Now superimpose this argument onto the present situation. The opportunity for creating and nourishing an audience for new poetry like this has never existed before.

Again it seems to be a case of what the "totally liquid"<sup>2</sup>

for continued potency of a political message despite the fact that viewers may be sharing it for a myriad of different reasons. Though this is a more common circumstance of political action within the meme pool, in its current state, it is not the most effective. But as political engagement coincides more and more with internet culture, memes that bear an ideological motive will require less cryptography to have their message travel and subsequently, will become more potent and useful over time. Just as the most ardent watchdog of police and military force is now viral video—the same principle might hold true for the replication and transmutation of political discourse—populism will find its root in a decentralized form of memetic exchange. A public voice can be found in this kind of humorous dialogue—and in many ways, it might carry a more immediate reaction than any of its institutional alternatives.



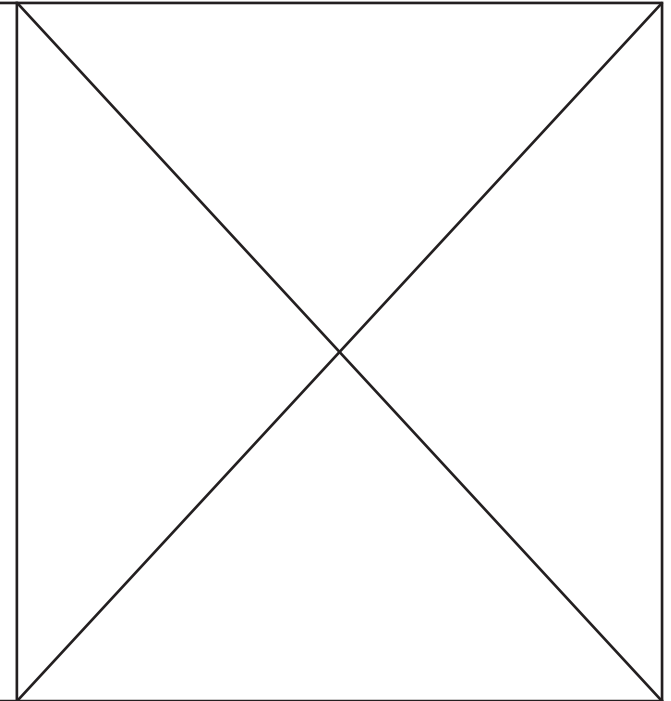
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Catnip and I walked into her room and she pulled out a big carpet bag. She quickly stuffed it with some clothes and essentials, and she was ready to start. Let me tell you, Catnip wastes no time.

We were off in minutes. We stopped a Uni on the road, which was, of course, vacant. We hopped upon the Uni's back, loaded the carpet bag around her neck. She gracefully took two steps back and started to sprint. We were off, flying among the clouds. I couldn't have transportation any other way.

I woke up to see the beautiful, magnificent door to the Queen's castle. Catnip slid me off the Uni's back and held me over her shoulder. The Uni's head bowed along with her bright, sparkling mane, and Catnip slipped the carpet bag, up, over the Uni's face. She waved to the Uni, and just before leaving, stuffed a few Neopoints in the Uni's velvet red sack slung across her shoulder. The Uni flew away, and we walked up to the gigantic door.

The door opened immediately before us. We were facing a long, cascading purple carpet, leading to a highly set, golden throne. Fire faeries dressed in tattered dresses with belts across their wastes holding sharp knives stood beside the throne, stand-



album after album for every birthday, every Christmas, he will never struggle to remember what his childhood home looked like. That reaching, that vague warm feeling for a place one remembers but cannot see; that is a sense now growing extinct.

A child today grows up in a never forgotten house.

audience/poet relationship enabled by the Internet exposes about traditional publishing models. It can appear that "gatekeeping" authorities artificially perpetuate a tradition of poetry simply because it is easy to do so, and within that define a comfortable notion of "quality", to the point that it results in a genuine repression of what kind of poetry is *being written*. It is not an exaggeration to say, in the UK at least, that aspiring poets not only learn to write in accordance with a broadly accepted style, but also share broadly accepted aims, in order to increase their chances of publication. This seems to be a very effective way of strangling an art form, ensuring a certain tradition is bought into by emerging writers and remains the dominant one.

The possibilities for reversing this situation afforded by the Internet are obvious and probably do not need restating. If we can say that in poetry the genuine tradition is anti-tradition, and that continual overthrowing of entrenched styles is desirable, then it is worth looking at exactly what form of interruption this new strand of poetry proliferating on the internet takes, and how valid it is in it positing itself as alternative writing.



Figure B "Obese American"

The popular internet-meme is a vessel with any number of purposes, and by definition, accessible enough to engage a wide variety of audiences. This alone is not enough to curry any kind of substantive political or social change, but it sets up a structure that allows for immediate input and dialogue on matters normally outside the reach of an empowered public—it offers the chance for political commentary to transfer to political progress. In organizing ideas and dialogues in this method, we allow for a more open approach to social change and lay out a framework with which we might potentially shape cultural nuances through

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ing each with a crimson, blazing stick, topped with an orb. We looked to the right, and one Water Faerie sat on a gray stone in the middle of a great fountain, water sprouting out of the statue of a fish drenched the faerie's hair. She lay with all sorts of bottles decorating the rocks and the water.

Suddenly, before I could find all the other faeries, loud trumpets sounded by a group of faerie Lupes, wearing tall pointed lavender caps. A Light Faerie fluttered over to us, and motioned her hands to go forward. We were confused, but we took a step forward at a time. Catnip tapped me on the back. She was kneeling before the throne, and quickly I did the same. Two Air Faeries entered a great entrance from the ceiling, each holding one hand of the Faerie Queen's. The Faerie Queen was gorgeous. Almost so fragile and delicate that if you touched her, she would break. She was wearing a flowing purple gown with a silver crown topped with the rare gems of Neopia. Light was shooting out of her, and you had to shield your eyes from the brightness. She was gently put into the seat of her throne. She stood.

"Get up!" she yelled.

Catnip pulled me up, and we both bowed before the queen.

• The Commercial Aspect

**I MAY GO INTO  
ADVERTISING  
BUT I DON'T  
LIKE THE  
COMMERCIAL  
ASPECT**

Steve Roggenbuck, From Download Helvetica For Free.com<sup>3</sup>

More than any other form of literature, poetry (even outside the type I'm describing here) has proved itself to be highly adaptable to an online environment. It would be naïve to assume that this doesn't have something to do with the absence of economic benefits on offer in poetry publishing generally. Other writers are perhaps less used to the idea of making their work available for nothing, and are more reluctant to give it up to the vicissitudes of online culture, effectively relinquishing control over the poem's availability and context. Poets seem more okay about embracing this. Poetry really has nothing to lose by abandon-

the web. The tools are accessible, and the content survives based on merit and relevancy. There is an ever-broadening arsenal of political engagement but few methods of immediate popular commentary permeate through our culture as effortlessly as the internet meme.

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1. Prefigurative politics as described by Wini Breines: "may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics. Participatory democracy was central to prefigurative politics. ... The crux of prefigurative politics imposed substantial tasks, the central one being to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that "prefigured" and embodied the desired society." (Community and Organization in the New Left, 1989, p.6)

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"What have you come for? It's not everyday ordinary Neopians and shone before the queen!"

Catnip tried to answer, but tripped on her own words. "Well... w-w'errr..."

I interrupted. "My owner and I would like to go to her home planet."

The Faerie Queen stared at us. "Ha! Who in their right mind would want to ever leave such a grand place, created by the Faerie Queen herself?!"

My face grew tight, my fists clenched, but I tried to remain calm.

"Well, haven't you ever been homesick?"

The Faerie Queen smirked. "Why should I be? I've never left this place!"

Although the Faerie Queen had shaped Neopia, I wasn't pleased with her attitude.

ing established publishing methods, in doing so gaining freedom to multiply and attach itself to other "host" art forms like videos or songs. This is connected in Internet poetry practice to a not un-ambivalent taking-on of tactics from marketing and advertising in order to promote and locate the work. Here we see a focusing-in on something the "poetry world" (if such a thing can be said to exist) actively represses in its own representations. Poetry has become used to positioning itself as an "anti-commercial" mode of culture, a somehow economically untainted art form. Poetry casts itself as almost the opposite of advertising, its "good twin", and exhibits nothing but distaste for the tactics of branding or commodification given a good deal of attention by most other contemporary art forms. Of course, no poetry publisher would actively discourage people from buying its books, and would be delighted to sell more than the few thousand they can reasonably hope for—but in a way non-engagement with a commercial outlook, or lack or success there, does not exempt poetry publishing from having those concerns—it still operates with a structure of production and capital. If anything it is more obliged to consider them, as secretly (shamefully) they are at the heart of what it does. The lack of financial imperatives to remain within a traditional publishing format suggests that poetry



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"Well homesickness isn't the best feeling, I hope you know! So we'd like to leave... if you please!!!"

The Faeries gasped and started to argue, but the Faerie Queen sat.

"I like your boldness, Aisha. What is your name?"

I came forward and bowed again.

"Snowflake, your highness."

"Soooo..." The Faerie Queen began. "You want to go with your owner to this... Earth?"

Catnip finally brought up enough bravery to come forward.

"Queen, we'll--"

"Don't speak for the Aisha!" The Faerie Queen yelled.

I was enraged. I have a certain problem with my mouth when I get mad, and this was definitely NOT the time to have this problem.

is not only at liberty to define itself outside such structures, it is obliged to do so.

So maybe this poetry should be more like the best kind of advertising. A poet in many senses is already the same—"marketing ideas, marketing feelings, marketing a vision."<sup>4</sup> Internet poetry practice zeros-in on such areas of anxiety and discomfort in its dominant other, and uses them for its own gains. It harnesses poetry's own unpopularity against it. Tactics from branding and advertising are deployed to promote poetry zines and events, and inform the language and construction of the poems themselves. I would argue that these strategies of appropriation and internalisation of commercial culture orientate the poems both as antagonists of the dominant tradition (in poetry), and as self-aware artistic "brands" within culture more generally, able to appeal to an online readership directly rather than just via a poetry audience and their disillusionment. This ambivalence, the simultaneous enjoyment of and anxiety about our complicity in mass culture, seems central to Internet practice, and is replicated on every level of its production.

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"Don't you dare talk to Catnip like that! Have you noticed she's been polite and tried to be helpful in answering questions? Well, you sure haven't! I think you're trying to ignore her!"

I breathed harshly through my nose.

"You know Aisha," The Faerie Queen started to reply. "You're very bold. I like that in a NeoPet."

Hold on a second—was she actually not getting mad at me?

"Thank you."

"Aisha! Did you just hear what I said? That deserves more than a thank you!"

I stared down as I shuffled my feet and played with my hands. Boy, do I wish I had fingers. Then I could twiddle my thumbs!

I looked up as the Faerie Queen stepped down carefully from her golden throne. I was blinded by the light she gave off. I turned away as she came towards me.

• The Brevity Thing

**simpsons**

Jasmin Whalen  
To: Zachary Whalen

i started crying one time  
while watching the simpsons

i mean it was an emotional episode

but still

Zachary Whalen, From Bruce Frisko<sup>5</sup>

As blogging culture can highlight the curatorial choices at the root of writing, so the tropes of Internet poetry practice can reveal what is lazy or dishonest, or simply no longer appropriate in "normal" poetry. As in other markets, "it is frustration with existing things that produces innovation."<sup>6</sup>Poems that do well on the Internet seem to incorporate a few attributes, which appear as amplifications of the characteristics we might expect to find in an "ordinary" poem.

The first of these is the appearance, the image-work of form which announces to readers that they are looking at a poem, albeit with a difference—brevity here is taken to

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Catnip held onto my shoulder and was turned away along with me.

I felt warm, delicate, soft fingers slip into my paw.

“Come with me,” I heard the Faerie Queen say.

It was a high voice, like sleigh bells.

My eyes squinted; I used the Faerie Queen as my guide. I didn’t know where Catnip was at the time, but the Faerie Queen suddenly let go of her grasp and I was free standing. I opened one eye.

Looked okay.

I opened the other eye, and I gasped.

Nothing was there! It was just a blank, white wall.

I suddenly felt a light push, and I was slammed into the white wall. At least that’s what I had expected to happen. I squinted my eyes again and put my arms in front of my face, but when I was supposed to hit the wall, I didn’t.

a kind of extreme, and feels like an immediate statement about surface and expectation. We are startled or amused by the writing initially *because* it asks that we treat it as something labelled “poem”. Arguments that happened around conceptual art a century ago can be rehearsed here. We can also identify a flattening of tone, drollery, and an almost total absence of metaphor or “poetically” constructed images. This refusal, the insistence on reduction and resistance, expresses fairly direct hostility to the values of preceding poetry or literary fiction. This is reinforced by subject matter—the poems’ reliance on references that exclude an older/uninitiated audience, just as younger poets are excluded from an ownership of history and told they have “nothing to write about”; the embracing or documenting of a culture of brand names and commodities that literary culture regards as “shallow” and without interest for writers. Another impulse in the poems is the suddenly change of subject when things look like they’re getting too predictably in line with “poetic development”: non-sequiturs regularly intrude, and are anyway only a click away. It may be possible to draw this line of development alongside a generational rejection of the “affluence” of older poetry, both in terms of its language and history, and as the actual recipient of financial support that seems unlikely to be extended to a

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I opened my eyes. Tons of NeoHomes. And the roads were filled with the big things with wheels I had seen in the photographs.

"This, Snow," Catnip said, coming by my side, "is Texas!"

She was talking in a weird way, not like I had ever heard her talk before. She threw up her arms and spun around. The workers at the bank were very confused when we tried to exchange Neo-points for American money. They thought it was "fraud" money, or whatever that means. We had to leave the bank.

Catnip said she was going to take me to her "ranch" and let me ride in the "tractor." I remember she had said "I'll let you see the kittens!" Those are the things I want to see!

It was okay we didn't have any money, and since no Unis we around, we had to walk to the ranch. It was a good thing it wasn't very far off, or I would've needed some food. It was a big, red, wooden NeoHome on a large piece of land. Carrots and cabbage must have been growing. Yuck!

Catnip stuffed me in her carpet bag just before knocking loudly on the door. I managed to peak my head through, though. Ai-

descendent tradition. This rationale of "austerity" in writing also mirrors the economic downturn, almost as a literal, self-inflicted condition of deprivation within the forms of poetry itself. These refusals result in striking, pared-back poems, often seemingly autobiographical (eschewing even imagination), in which the denial of metaphor or the reluctance to strain for poignancy in the way we might expect at a poem's close, causes personal experience in fact to become more open, metaphorical, and grandly *impersonal*. This is echoed in the imagistic quality the text takes on when imagery is abandoned, and in the strategy of claiming techniques the establishment deems "not unsexy enough"<sup>7</sup> to be trusted in poetry. The result is a kind of seduction through renunciation, a desire felt through its obstacles, a fascination made obvious through the determined detachment of the writing. It "gains heat by looking cold"<sup>8</sup>, "reminds us our laptops are warm"<sup>9</sup>, and that not expressing emotion is not the same as not having feelings.

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shas have that skill to get through any small space. A tall owner with long brown hair opened the door. She covered her hand with her mouth and ran upstairs.

"John! John! Come downstairs! She's here!"

A tough, big man came to the door.

"Where have you been!?" The lady asked.

Catnip tried to answer quickly.

"I was... on a business trip... to... to... Japan!"

"Ha!" I thought to myself. "Japan?"

"I... it... was a long business deal."

"A two year business trip?" the lady began.

"Yeah!" I thought. "A two year business trip!?! That's a laugh." I didn't exactly know what I was talking about, but I didn't know why Catnip was lying.

• Touch my ass if you qualify

### suddenly susan laugh track

Audun Mortensen



i can't remember how  
or when it happened  
but at some point  
i started speaking like  
an american girl

NEXT >

Audun Mortensen, From Pop Serial<sup>10</sup>

I have a friend who uses a lot of Internet dating sites, and we were talking about how confident he was in some of the "facts" he was learning about his prospective dates. "It's the internet," he said, "you can't be sure of anything".<sup>11</sup> This ambiguity inherent in language is something poets have always known about and exploited as a kind of "negative capability"<sup>12</sup>, but awareness of this seems intensified online to the point of a fixation. Constant ambivalence, anxiety about how "serious" someone intends to be, is experienced through the continuous use of qualifiers, non-sequiturs and other non-literary traits, such as misspellings and scare quotes. The internet is a "mall-like" environment, an "infinite interior"<sup>13</sup>, and along with the unquivering light, its

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"Yeah..." Catnip continued, "it was a big deal."

I guess the lady let it go, because she said, "Okay, let's all go inside. Have a nice dinner. You like steak, don't you?"

"Actually mum, I'm a vegetarian, remember?" Catnip reminded the lady.

"Um... I don't know..."

"It's okay mom," Catnip cut in, "I brought a couple of sandwiches. I'll be fine."

Mum?

"Pahhh..." the father complained. "You're in the south! And any ways, you need some meat on yer, kid!"

"Sandwiches are fine, dad." Catnip said with a tint of anger in her voice. "I'm going upstairs, all right?"

Dad?

Catnip pushed her parents out of the way as if they were doors,

discourse is its backdrop—a tone generated to compensate for a particular unease, the combination of immediacy and distance we experience in online conversation. In a way, communication here always freights itself with the possibility of alternative readings, purely as a method of making interaction more flexible and less formal than it might be. Online discourse opts for deferral every time, and its poetry acts out the same reluctance to commit to anything completely, to demonstrate certainty about one's knowledge or opinions. Undermining every statement with excessive qualifiers, abruptly switching scene or subject, presenting received phrases as quotes, are all ways of saying "These words don't stand for me"<sup>14</sup>. This position of continual deferral coincides with a media backdrop which emphasises multiple-ness and relativity, and deploys irony reflexively in aid of its objectives—we can't ever know what the "right" action is, on the level of a society, so being resolutely uncertain can be understood as a desperate effort to occupy a sincere position. "Uncertainty is the only emotion that does not deceive"<sup>15</sup>, so the only time one can be sure of being sincere is while demonstrating ambivalence. Ambivalence is also a state of potential—for movement, action, meaning, or identification. The poems' reluctance to settle on a meaning or approach a larger type of sense can be read



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and suddenly you could smell the delicious aroma of hearty steak stew.

"I'd like some of that!" I whispered to Catnip as she quickly climbed the dark and creaky steps.

Catnip turned the corner in the hallway to a small room. It had a cozy feel. A bright red quilt had been thrown over a cot, and the light seeped through the window. A tiny stool stood next to the bed, topped with a dim lamp.

Catnip jumped onto the bed, and dust flew up, and we both started to cough hysterically.

"This was my old bed," she yelled, as if the dust was a wall.

"Really?" I said, hopping out of the carpet bag.

The dust started to settle.

"It probably hasn't been used for years."

Catnip leaned over on the bed and reached for the side table. She pulled open a small drawer, and gasped.

as an attempt to be as honest as it's possible to be while knowing what we know.

- Next-level Authorship

*If every blog is a confusing portrait  
Of some anxious geek, then how can a poem  
Not be confessional, similar to Bruce Lee  
In a house of mirrors?<sup>16</sup>*

The ideal of sincerity is centred in these poems through their admission that selection and negation are the fundamental binary in language. Their assertion is their flat refusal to be emotionally directive, to attempt to manipulate the reader's feelings or attachments, and instead to provide the coordinates of experience without the cues for interpretation. Combined with the selection of what is ostensibly autobiographical material, this challenges a reader to reconcile the poems' prioritising of surface with their own "depth"; the apparent comfort with transience with their own desire for continuity. Although these texts obsessively take note of the various signs, brand names and many other instances of commodified language that prompt us to incorporate their meanings into our lives (and contribute ours to theirs), we

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"Ohhh!" She cried. She picked up a book and started to flip through it.

"What's that?" I leaped onto the bed and crept up behind her. The bed was stiff, like a wooden board, but the quilt was warm and comforting from the sunlight that had been absorbed.

Catnip didn't answer my question. She stuffed the book in the carpet bag and brushed her hands across the wall. She was savouring every last bit of her old room. She suddenly dropped to her knees and searched under the bed. When she stood up, she was wearing a beautiful but worn, black cowboy hat.

"This, Snow," Catnip fitted the hat over her head, "is something that you can't get in Neopia."

Okay, it was interesting and all, but an Aisha has those certain... weaknesses. I tuned out the rest of the world as Catnip rambled on about her cowboy hat, and I peered out of the hallway as if I were crossing the street. I tiptoed down the stairs and into the kitchen.

What can I say, I was hungry, and nobody wants to let good food

are confronted in these reductions with what is perhaps the *least materialistic* writing possible. The choices made in the writing seem to infer a shared set of assumptions, a hierarchy of knowledge tilted towards the immediate experience rather than the layerings of history or memory. The intercepted commands from advertising and other media are the most significant intrusions into our experience of narrative, directing the paths we take through our cities and online. In a strange way, I am reminded of the "guides for blind" you can opt to have playing during a film, which announce flat descriptions of the characters' behaviour without any glimpse of their appearances or into their subjective interiors, and force us to in some way inhabit or surround that blank at the centre of another person. Here we can sense this work's questioning of poetry's other great taboo or "blind spot"—that of informing a poem with biography.

Online, a poet assumes the role of publisher and "author" of their public image. When any name can yield a wealth of information, these poets seem to encourage a conflation of their creative output with extra-literary content. A central project such as a blog might be the main work, with poems and other texts incorporated into an image-complex orientated around the personality of the poet. The catch here

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go to waste, do they?

I leaped onto the countertop and went straight towards the stew. I poked my head into the pot and lapped up some of the broth. I stuck my paws into the broth and pulled out some of the chunks of meat and vegetables. Suddenly, while feasting, someone grabbed hold of me under my arms and turned me around. It was Catnip's mom.

"Whoa! Now what do we have here, eatin' at my dinner?"

"John!! C'mere a second."

John came running into the kitchen, and his eyes bulged.

"Is it a deformed cat or something?"

"How dare you!" I thought. "I'm an Aisha! That's a-i-s-h-a!!"

"Well, I've never seen a striped cat with four ears before." Catnip's mom remarked.

"I'll take it down to the animal shelter," John started. "Poor feller, forced to feed off other people's food!"

of course is that there is "no" personality. All we have access to is a series of texts attributed to the same individual. We "see" the poet, but via a confusion of angled surfaces. The line between what can be considered extra-textual and what is creative work "proper" no longer seems relevant: all information asks to be considered at the same distance. In a way this strikes at the heart of the practice of poetry reading. When I began studying poems the first thing you learnt was to view the text as a kind of sovereign object, existing in a vacuum or Matrix-like white space. No-one who reads poems can doubt that this approach does allow for more involved or perceptive readings than those from more journalistic angles, dragging in details from the poet's personal history to provide a "definitive" interpretation. Internet poetry practice asks something like the opposite, though, and seems to take Barthes' well-known point with all its implications. This second-level awareness and control of the poet's presence beyond their poems, incorporating biography, blogging, social networking and so on, demands that we read all of this content in terms of the poems and vice versa, and challenges the difference. The image of the poet that begins to emerge here is one quite different from what we might ordinarily imagine: a curatorial figure inscribing their presence through their social involvement with language; in

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"WHAT!?" I screamed in my head. "NO! NO!"

John picked me up and held me like a baby.

I flew out my claws and dug them into his shoulder.

"Whoa! Lil' feller, don't go gettin' frisky on me, okay?"

I couldn't think correctly. I let out a large cry of help. I wanted to talk, but I didn't want to get Catnip exposed.

John took me outside by the tractor and hopped in the driver's seat.

I kept crying and yelling out the window. I could see Catnip at her bedroom window. She saw me, and she seemed to scream, although I couldn't hear her.

John started the engine, and rolled away.

Catnip raced down the stairs. "Mom! Mom!" Catnip's heart was beating rapidly. "Did you see a striped ai-um... thing with four ears?"

a sense treating themselves as text, and inversely accepting that these choices continually restructure the self. But the poet's personality as image-complex would not suffice without the counterpart of the poems themselves. Going back to the analogy of advertising, the extra-literary text here functions as advertisement for the poems, which function as advertisements for the author-brand: both are secondary content for a final product that is endlessly deferred, and that need never materialise. The commodification on display here has no final agreed value or meaning, as it is used to sell "products" (poems) which are hard to place value on and are not "sold" online in the traditional sense. The "price" and the "product" are the viewer's time and engagement with the work. The destination of productivity in capitalism is always profit, so to deploy its most avid and remorseless tactics in the aid of poems implies both an uneasy celebration of commodification's seductive but ultimately mortifying processes, and a critique of the same through applying such values to what is in practical terms an economically valueless object: a poem. This practice is, in the absence of fiscal results, a nihilistic act of aggression towards the "sanctity" of poetry, an anti-commercial statement of capitalist impotence, and conversely, an earnest attempt to "popularise" poetry using tested methods.

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"You saw it too?" Catnip's mom began.

"Yeah, yeah, where is it?!"

"Oh, John took it to the animal shelter. We figured it was a rare type of cat."

Catnip rolled her eyes and slammed the palm of her hand into her forehead.

"That's no cat! Do you have a car?"

Catnip's mother sadly shook her head.

"I'm sorry, dear. You'll just have to wait 'till John gets home."

"But, but..." Catnip began, as she sat down at the table. She gave up. She wouldn't be able to walk to the shelter, because everything was out of reach. She slumped over and lay down her face onto the warm, aged wood. It reminded her of happiness and everyone sitting at the table enjoying a nice meal. It reminded her of home. She didn't want to leave, but all of her pets were back in Neopia. They belonged there. She couldn't

Of course, there is another level of reality occurring here: the vast economic infrastructure on which the Internet is built, and many of these works do celebrate unquestioningly the opportunities afforded by social networking etc. But there is nearly always an attendant anxiety, an awareness of an individual as a conduit for capital, via Google ads for example, and a suspicion of why these companies are so keen for us to interact with them. There is also a sense of experienced fragility of the self in this environment, its paralysis, its uncomfortable visibility in language, the sort of claustrophobic stupor arising from the same cycle of scenes that appear endlessly on our monitors. It's probably easier to be pessimistic about the scale of this participation and investment in online culture, but at the same time user/brand relationships are still being defined, and seem fluid enough to allow certain opportunities. The final value of these encounters is yet to be determined, and with effort could become ultimately humanising, and, as has been seen over the past few years, include methods of disrupting many kinds of dominant cultural narrative. The power and innovation of this poetry stems from this moment of ambivalence occurring on all levels of its practice—it feels something like a pause, a hesitation hanging in the air after a voice is interrupted.

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force them to live on earth. It wouldn't be right.

The sun was shining outside. It was the kind of day where you didn't want to go outside. Catnip around the once-grassy fields. It was once again not raining very much, and the land was dried and withered. It was a golden wheat-yellow. Catnip slid down the wall and sat herself on the ground. She heard soft mewing. A kitten sneaked out of the tool shed. It was a glimpse of other life. Everything seemed so new to her.

But while Catnip paid attention to a kitten, not all was well with me. John whistled a strange tune while I hollered out the windows for Catnip. It seemed like the longest ride I had ever had, especially since it was in a "tractor." Where were the Unis?

But I noticed something as John popped a strange object into the tractor. Suddenly, funny music started playing. It wasn't any of the songs I knew from Neopia, but hey, this was earth, wasn't it? The singer sounded a lot like John and Catnip's mother and Catnip's changed voice. It was annoying at first, but then relaxing.

When we finally stopped, John grabbed hold of me and hopped down from the driver's seat. I held onto him by his shirt, and

• Interrupting Yrslef

*because I prayed  
this word:  
I want<sup>17</sup>*

The world of *The Glass Bead Game* is one in which innovation is limited to the tracing of traditions with total fidelity their development and context. There are rigorous criteria which must be gone through to admit additional subjects to the game's repository of culture. The parallel I'm looking for here is with the type of interruption that Internet poetry practice makes in its larger tradition. The deliberate turning away from history and memory, the territories that literature normally wishes to claim, ensures it freedom from any obligation to that narrative: it owes nothing to that set of priorities. It insists instead on the authority of the personal, the immediate, intensely subjective experiences that are shared by millions.

Hesse's society is also one in which the "cult of personality" has been relegated to history—players are not known by their biographies or even their names, but by the record of their contribution to the game. Internet writing insists



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wasn't planning on letting go anytime soon. He opened the door and looked at a lady at a counter.

"May I help you?" She said, before we even made our way to her.

"Yes, m'am. I've got a strange sorta cat here. It's purple and blue and has four ears. Can that still be a cat?" John held me up to the lady. She had orange hair that was reaching towards the ceiling.

"Eh, sure," she snapped white gum loudly in her mouth.

She grabbed me uncomfortably under the arms and stuck me in a cage. I remember this place when we were looking for a new sister or brother in Neopia, but I wasn't getting abandoned. It was even worse than Neopia. There were large weird NeoPets that kind of looked like Gelerts but without the bent tail or nice bright colours. They made terrible noises. There were also the things that I saw in the photographs.

Even if they looked different, I could tell they were depressed and scared. We all were. I looked to the next cage and almost jumped out of my skin. There was one of those things next to me.

on personality to entertain a wider textual project, a more encompassing writing practice—it takes control of an audience by anticipating their interpretation, and "reconstitutes" their expectations accordingly. To publish poems on the Internet means being alert to the paradox of ownership that a "text artist" negotiates. A poem is not like other types of artwork, especially in the post-internet world. A poem is never really the original object. It is a construction in language, infinitely and easily reproducible. It cannot be fetishised in the way a piece of conceptual art can be, or ascribed an abstract financial value. Its loyalties are in some ways older and truer than that.

The world of *The Glass Bead Game* is also an entirely male world: in my edition of the book, no female presence is even mentioned until page 76. This is perhaps the most tendentious part of my argument, but if we are to "imagine an alternative lineage"<sup>18</sup> for this practice, it makes sense to look briefly at the birth of the lyric poem. Anne Carson has written convincingly about Sappho's lyrics as the origin of not only lyric poems as we know them, but as the remnant of emergent literate culture, the language first used to articulate something absent. In "fragment 31", Sappho speaks from an occluded position, observing the woman

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"H... hello," I tried to say.

It stared at me for a second, not blinking. "Mm." Its head turned but then struck back. It stood up and went into the corner of their cage.

"Wh-what are you!?" It cried. "You're not a cat!"

"It's a long story," I began. I was glad I had someone that talked. "But I won't eat you. I hate this place. How long have you been in?"

It sighed. "I'm Tom. You're not the only one who doesn't like it. Get used to it. I've been in here for weeks."

My eyes grew wide, and I lay down. I didn't want to think about anything in here. I wanted to be back home.

\*\*\*

My eyelids were squinted. I wanted to think about Neopia. I tried to imagine I was there, but imagination isn't that great when you can hear sounds of earth NeoPets in the background.

she desires talking to a man, who does not speak. The poem's impetus is this sense of being barred from the desired thing: the poem exists to cover that distance imaginatively. The interesting thing about Sappho's femininity here is the way her prototype for the articulation of desire has been taken on many times since, mainly by male poets, across the intervening centuries. In a sense Sappho is always "quoted" in these poems of distance and longing—we feel her interruption to the wider male dialogues of desire and ownership. The type of linguistic interruption in Internet writing also seems gendered: characterised by sassy rebuttal, the progenitor of which is a kind of brutally enhanced high school dialect: "I started speaking like an american girl". Perhaps the sympathy between these short fragments that have survived thousands of years, and new pieces of text being typed into word processors is not only an aesthetic one: they both encapsulate the same sense of intermittency and immediacy, of being a person only so long as you desire something and speak, before falling back into silence.

Poetry always fronts a lack. What's written is assumed to be about something missing, or there would be no reason for writing it. Sometimes what's missing is simply closeness to a person. Writing creates a field between wishing and

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"Wow! I've never seen this cat before!" I heard a lady say.

I opened one eye. I was staring at a pale lady with fat lips who needed an appointment at the dentist. She was smiling, which wasn't a pretty sight to look at, and was holding her hands together.

"M'am!" she cried.

"Is this dah-lin' cutie good for trainin'?"

"What the heck is trainin'?" I asked myself.

"Um..." the lady with tall hair began. "He sure is!"

"Oh yes! I'll take him!"

She looked at me through the bars of the cage and took something out of her pocket. It flipped open. Many gold medals and blue ribbons were pinned into the fabric of this lady's wallet-like thing.

"Ya see here little cat? I've won first place in every National Cat Awards. You get to be my new cat to enter!"

acting, a place to act out and modify the fantasies that structure the way we experience our lives. These fantasies regulate and distribute desire, including the desire for knowledge. But what if this fantasy is precisely of life without its fantasised dimension? A world of actions and thoughts terminally divorced from each other, without the knowledge that draws them together. This is a vision that admits it requires the presence of a human to experience the links between actions and thought. This enforced absence in much Internet literature, of the feelings that connect actions and people, is the manifestation of a "third thing", the obstacle between us and the other, in this case between poet and reader. We can know Sappho's work (what remains), but we can't know her, just as we can't know a person from the selected fragments of language we hear or read from them. This poetry advertises lack, and celebrates the means we have to try and compensate for it, even if it knows it can never cover the deficit.

One of these means is the invitation to read "upwards", to the poet's biography, their life, as if the emotive material absent in the text could find its missing part there. This works almost magnetically, and indeed can be engineered by the poet, who can choose to what extent they furnish

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My eyes bulged. So... was this lady actually taking me home? I screamed inside my head.

The lady with tall hair came over with a key of keys, and flipped through each one. She stuck the key in my cage's lock and the door swung open. I didn't want to be somebody's else's pet!

The fatlipped lady started to put her big hands to get me from my cage, and I backed away. I finally made up my mind. I hopped over her arms and I practically flew out the cage. I ran as fast as those legs could run, straight up to the door. I waited for five seconds, although what seemed like forever, because I could see those ladies coming closer and closer. A man with big cowboy boots walked in, and I felt like telling him he was me here. No time.

I sprinted across the hot paw-burning parking lot and headed for the bushes. The ladies weren't exactly as quick as I was at the time, and the fat-lipped lady stopped in the middle of the parking lot.

She stomped her feet on the ground with her fists clutched. They walked, slouching and sweating, back into the glass doors of the Adoption Centre.

their pieces with extra-literary text. They can even engineer a further refusal. Take the work of Frank Hinton, who seems like an appropriate exit point for this piece

Frank Hinton lives in Halifax, Canada and edits the daily fiction litzine metazen.ca. Frank has had fiction published in Lamination Colony, PANK, > Kill Author, Wigleaf and a bunch of other great literary magazines. Frank has almost 2000 followers on twitter and is highly photogenic.

Frank Hinton's "Biography",  
From *I Don't Respect Female Expression*

A Material That Doesn't Exist

I put in a cherry tomato and took it out. I put a baby carrot up there and took it out. I put an egg up there and pushed it out and the eggshell didn't break. I put a small cucumber up there and pushed it in and out and in and out. I put my fingers up there and typed. I let someone else put their fingers up there and type. I didn't put anything up there for a really long time. I imagined some object made of a material that didn't exist: it wasn't stone or wood or bone. It wasn't plastic or metal. I imagined flesh.

Poem By Frank Hinton, From *I Don't Respect Female Expression*<sup>19</sup>

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I was in between two dried-up bushes and panting when a tractor pulled up. I didn't think I'd ever be so happy as I was then to see the tractor. Catnip hopped out and began to run to the door, as did the other ladies.

"Catnip!" I cried, jumping out of my hiding place. She turned, but didn't see me.

I ran towards the centre of the parking lot. Catnip was overwhelmed. She was smiling so much she was ready to cry, and she put down her arms.

I hopped into those well-known warm hands. She was ready to squeeze me to death, except she noticed I wasn't a plushie and loosened up a bit.

She whispered something that made me smile.

"Let's go home."

Catnip slipped me in her carpetbag, stopping at her parents' house. With a few hugs and kisses and floating handkerchiefs, Catnip was walking again towards the house where we started

This publication features first person speakers that alternate gender between pieces, and omits the author's gender from the biography. This occluded spot of information is probably enough to send some to Google, where the lack within the text is replicated, with interviews attributed sometimes to a man, sometimes to a woman named Frank, which is "not her real name". "Is Frank Hinton fucking with me?"<sup>20</sup> might be the first response, but this should be replaced with what this reveals about our involvement in the texts: the way we always seek meaning elsewhere to negotiate this obstacle, and that reading is precisely this act of reaching. The name of the author of the above text is a kind of puppet, a glove: "I let someone else put their fingers up there and type", which signals a lack however you look at it.

Whether these refusals are as extreme a renunciation as repressing poetry altogether, or manifested in the exclusion of emotion, the obvious lack present in these texts generally works to attract other kinds of text or experience to fill in for its absence. Because we don't know what precisely is absent, we can't assign it a single meaning, just as the unconsummated status of both commercialisation and poetry means we cannot assign intention to either objective. Inevitably this work countenances failure—but it does so

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at. I had no idea how she had remembered exactly where we had entered Earth. She stood and thought for a second, putting her fingers into different shapes and staring through them. I had no idea what she was doing!

Catnip ran like mad into the air, and I was scared we would hit the upcoming fence to the back yard. I squinted my eyes, yelling, but before I knew it, we had stopped. Catnip panted, gasping for breath as I, terrified, opened one of my eyelids.

It was the same sight as before. The beautiful and delicate faeries, the adored Faerie Queen at the throne. Our Uni from before raced through the doors and skidded to a halt before us.

Catnip and I slid onto the back of the Uni, turning our heads to have a last glance as the Uni once again flew gracefully through the doors.

I awoke to the cosy and comfortably glowing home I had once taken for granted. I sprinted to the door, reaching my paws out towards the door knob.

Catnip came walking up beside me and she stuck in a golden key through the door knob's keyhole.

generously, courageously even, appreciating its high-risk strategy and the odds against it. If we find the violence of its refusals and evasions moving, this is surely partly in the recognition of our own impulses and doubts there, in its desperation to connect, knowing simultaneously that it is beyond anyone's means to ensure this.

There is something both extremely personal and totally universal in poems that enact this moment of uncertainty: we see ourselves in their missing part, in their loneliness. The obstacle between us and meaning is somehow an internal deficit as well. These moments in language that we are able to inhabit are beyond any single identity. Perhaps what this strand of poetry is really engaged with is creating such sites under contemporary conditions, united by a rejection of any type of speech that rings false through its very assertiveness. What unites participants is this shared unfixeness, they are part of a kind of interchangeability. In terms of a tradition in poetry, if we can imagine a disruption to the liberal male narrative of refinement and smoothness, our own expectations of how meanings should be ordered and prioritised, Frank Hinton is basically that fantasy. And if the spirit of the work persists, avoiding compliance with what we expect from poems, generating its own apprecia-



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I plopped down on the couch and switched on the TV as if nothing had ever happened.

This was the place where I belonged.

The End

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tion and audience, it may arrive at forms we find it increasingly hard to call poetry, in which case its point might be to ask what it is we're looking at.

- [1] <http://www.pangurbanparty.com/>
- [2] Jon Leon <http://www.thehothole.com/forever/rightnow.html>
- [3] <http://www.steveroggenbuck.com/>
- [4] Adrian Urmanov <http://www.maintenant.co.uk/>
- [5] <http://zacharywhalen.blogspot.com/>
- [6] Charles Bernstein
- [7] Dan Hoy <http://www.montevidayo.com/?p=793>
- [8] George Szirtes <http://georgeszirtes.blogspot.com/2011/09/sincere-austerities-3b.html>
- [9] Sofia Leiby <http://pooool.info/uncategorized/i-am-such-a-failure-poetry-on-around-and-about-the-internet/>
- [10] <http://www.audunmortensen.com/>
- [11] Edmund Gillingwater <https://twitter.com/#!/EGillingwater>
- [12] John Keats [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative\\_capability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative_capability)
- [13] Blaise Larmee <http://blaiselarmee.com/texts/>
- [14] Megan Boyle <http://matadornetwork.com/notebook/interview-with-megan-boyles-poetry/>
- [15] Slavoj Zizek <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhDuYfZa5dE>
- [16] Linh Dinh <http://www.sonneteighteen.com.blogspot.com/>
- [17] Sappho, transl. Anne Carson <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/random042/2001050247.html>
- [18] Charles Bernstein
- [19] <http://safetythirdenterprises.com/>
- [20] Stephen Tully Dierks <http://htmlgiant.com/reviews/there-are-no-entities-only-processes-re-frank-hintons-i-dont-respect-female-expression/>

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Rasmus Svensson