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## ARTICLE

# 'Slow Motion Cucumber Decay in Fridge': Ecology, Materiality and Recycling in Peter Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest*

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This article examines links and affordances between new materialist theory in ecocriticism and formal and linguistic experimentation in Peter Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest*. As Robert Sheppard suggests, linguistically innovative poets often foreground 'the artificiality of the forms and discourses they employ', making familiar things seem strange and suspending 'the inevitable process of naturalization'; that is, emphasising the artificiality of dominant cultural and social discourse. When viewed through ecocritical lenses, Manson's *Adjunct* provides opportunities to reconsider a range of seemingly stable binaries and the discourses that underpin them: including nature/culture, human/non-human, organic/inorganic, and inside/outside. Ecocritical thinking has long been concerned with denaturalising cultural constructions of nature and destabilising binaries by emphasising, for example, the vibrancy of seemingly inert materials like metal, and the ways in which material flows between bodies disrupt fantasies of discrete personhood and divisions between inside and out. In place of hierarchical binaries, various ecological approaches foreground the interconnected, transcorporeal and transformative nature of the material world and human-environment continuities. In regards to poetry, the question becomes not how do poems describe how ecology works, but how can experimental poetics stimulate or realise ecological thought? Whether or not the text treats of 'nature' or the more-than-human world, Manson's *Adjunct* brings together seemingly disparate elements in ways that foreground form, materiality, and the unexpected interrelatedness of the 'assemblage'.

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**Keywords:** experimental poetry; ecocriticism; new materialism; transcorporeality; Peter Manson

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Late-modernist poetics have long asserted that text is material. Calligrammes, Dadaist cut-ups, concrete 'sculptures' and text-based art have been sliced, glued, carved and printed on the assumption that text is an aesthetic, physical, and dimensional entity rather than a purely transparent and representational medium. As well

as re-materialising the text (for example, through experimental typeface or inking techniques) poets have foregrounded the material on which they write, making the blank page a tangible presence (as in open field poetics) or writing on growing, degrading, or otherwise lively substances (for example, in Camilla Nelson's apple-writing projects). At the current moment, in the adjacent fields of environmental philosophy and ecocriticism, new-materialist approaches are nurturing distinctive stances on the materiality of the text and the textuality of the material world. Built on but distinguishable from older historical materialisms, new materialism is concerned with material exchanges taking place in lively ecosystems beyond the control and ken of human agencies, though influenced by and entangled with them. In this article, I explore the resonances between poetic and philosophical approaches to text as matter and matter as text through analysis of Peter Manson's long poem, *Adjunct: An Undigest* (2005). *Adjunct* is an experimental poem which foregrounds its own textuality. At the same time, the material agencies behind its creation – the bodies, foodstuffs, stimulants and sedatives – seep through into the language of the text, if not literally the page. For these reasons, *Adjunct* seems to be uniquely suited to catalysing an exchange between new materialism and experimental poetics.

As its title suggests, Peter Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest* is an unassimilated register of things. Each page presents a dense, mostly undifferentiated block of text composed of phrases, sentences and words generated and collected in Glasgow between 1993 and 2000. These fragments of textual detritus have been compiled and rearranged using a text muddling procedure, the details of which are left suggestively vague. A brief excerpt from *Adjunct* gives a sense of the tone, content and concerns of the text, whilst also revealing the random qualities of its arrangement:

The game of life played on the surface of a torus. Guilt. Concept album about garlic. Some verbs allow clitic climbing and others do not. 'Mice-Vite'. Pause in the middle of writing two 'm's. Suck as through teeth of air into bean can. Runny candle won't last. British Telecom answering machine brochure stuck by an unidentified odourless liquid to back of *Adjunct*.<sup>1</sup>

Offering a box of tricks to the literary critic, the text is impervious to a reading that seeks to reveal one coherent underlying meaning or message. Instead, it produces interpretations and possible readings which teem in many directions at once. Already though, this excerpt reveals an interest in materiality and the stickiness of the world. From the '[c]oncept album about garlic' to the scent of air sucked (or is that blown?) into a bean can, the statements toy with the problem of movement across physical and conceptual boundaries, whether that is turning matter into text, concept, or scent or gas. In the excerpt's final line, the text reflects on its own existence as physical object in the world: the *mise en abyme* of Adjunct-as-book contained within Adjunct-as-text. More than just a textual entity drawing attention to its own textuality, this cameo appearance is a reminder that *Adjunct* is also a material entity, a stack of paper with its own price tag and carbon footprint, subject to material processes including despoilation and decay.

As this example of *Adjunct's* textual-material self-referentiality suggests, the poem is acutely alert to the interchanges between bodies, material agencies, and texts. On a purely historical level, *Adjunct* reveals the profusion of waste, objects, entities, affect, matter and commodities cluttering a flat and a life in the lead up to the millennium. More than this, *Adjunct* can be seen as a form of literary processing, a kind of recycling which treats language not just as a construction to be manipulated, but as emanating from matter, and matter itself. Accordingly, *Adjunct* emerges as an 'ecopoetic' text, revealing interfaces and entanglements between human and more-than-human agencies, and potentially affecting a change in perception of those entanglements. As the term 'ecopoetry' develops from its point of origin in traditional lyric and post-Romantic modes and comes to embrace innovative and avant garde texts, *Adjunct* offers distinctive opportunities for reflection on how techniques like collage, disrupted fragmented lyric and intertextuality might help reimagine the place of the human in a post-human and more-than-human world.

### **Linguistic Innovation and Ecopoesis**

In diverse experimental traditions, techniques such as montage, collage, found text, syntactic disruption, language processing and visual interruptions have produced

multi-voice, non-linear, hybrid and temporally distorted poetics. These poetics are distinctly capable of evoking multi-sensory, multi-dimensional experience, and of enabling a numberless assortment of voices and agencies to find articulation. However, the literary field devoted to human-nature entanglements, ecocriticism, has traditionally marginalised experimental poetry in its ecopoetic canon. Joshua Corey reflects on how '[t]he avant-garde techniques associated with postmodernism, which include collage, fragmentation, and intertextuality, are seen as foreign to the spirit of a poetry intended to provide the least obstructive possible mediation between human beings and nature'.<sup>2</sup> The 'spirit' of ecopoetry that Corey refers to was established by the ecocritic Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth* (2000). Here, Bate addresses the Romantic paradox of a 'mute dialogue', in which language and *poesis* introduces the gap between humanity and nature. Responding to the premise that 'the writer's image of nature is always refracted through language', Bate asks whether language really does intervene between humanity and the natural world, or if poetry can connect us through language to non-human nature.<sup>3</sup> His understanding of ecopoesis is derived from Wordsworthian metre, and he cites the capacity of blank verse to simulate rhythms of body, breath, tides, and other 'regular', 'natural' flows. Ecopoetry therefore strives for what Morton calls ecomimesis: the simulation and stimulation of nature presence and nature appreciation, making language a semi-transparent membrane giving us an authentic, or heightened access, to the 'real thing'.<sup>4</sup>

With Bate's 'earth song' as the *de facto* definition of ecopoesis, linguistically experimental writing was inevitably sidelined. Writing in 2007, Harriet Tarlo noted a tendency towards both Romantic lyric and realist non-fiction in ecological criticism, as well as a 'general resistance to post-structuralism and all its relatives' which precluded avant-garde work concerned with the gap between word and world, and suspicious 'of the referential element of language'.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, more work has been done to assert the value of experimental, innovative and avant-garde poetics for ecocriticism. In the UK, this is largely thanks to the work of Tarlo in bringing traditions such as open field and concrete to ecocritical attention, and in highlighting how

it is 'that very sense of the gap between our language and our world that preserves respect for the non-linguistic world', and the otherness of what we call 'nature'.<sup>6</sup> As Robert Sheppard suggests, linguistically innovative poetry often foregrounds 'the artificiality of the forms and discourses they employ', making familiar things seem strange and suspending 'the inevitable process of naturalization'; that is, emphasising the artificiality of dominant cultural and social discourse and the signifier itself.<sup>7</sup> In an experimental ecological poetics, the same may be true: rather than striving for ecomimesis, the poem addresses parallels between the constructedness of language and form and the constructedness of ideologies of nature, relations of capital, colonial structures and so on. Ecological ethics demands that we *denaturalise*, whilst preserving respect for the material, non-linguistic, living world which, like the text, slips away from a reader, evading a totalising grasp.

*Adjunct* asserts the lively presence of matter in its composition and arrangement. At the same time, it foregrounds the artificiality of discourses used to describe and capture the living world, denaturalising them in the process. Often, textual fragments reveal absurdities inherent in cultural constructions of nature and the marketing and exploitation of natural products. For example, the line 'Bottled at source from a borehole, at a site recorded in the Domesday Book' is gleefully absurd.<sup>8</sup> By linking a borehole's cultural heritage with the quality of water flowing from it, the bottled-water's marketing puff evades the material reality of the ecological and economic processes it alludes to. The Domesday Book was the crowning achievement of medieval accountancy and a definitive textual display of royal power. Here, it is translated, sloppily, into lucrative capitalist product, while the historical relations between people and water is exploited to naturalise capitalism's appropriation of nature as raw matter and commodity. This also disguises the absurdity that in areas in which clean tap water is available, there is no compelling reason to bottle water. A sentence captured a few lines above in *Adjunct* and associated by proximity and theme, links satisfyingly with the 'bottled' line: 'Inefficient capitalism is literally mad'.<sup>9</sup> Does this make the availability of such products a sign of capitalism's inefficiency, or its efficiency? Either way, capitalism is a resolutely ecocidal form of

economic organisation, and its trash language, once reclaimed and denaturalised, becomes a fruitful resource for revealing the intricacies of its failing systems.

*Adjunct* is the product of compulsive, critical and comic language reclamation. Built on older collage traditions, its specific processes of textual recycling may itself be seen as an ecological act. In the *How2* special edition on 'Ecopoetics', Harriet Tarlo describes the ethical implications of recycling text which, though it differs from 'recycling cans, bottles and plastics', is also about preserving and conserving interrelations: 'The recycling of texts is about preservation of the valued resources of previous writing as well as being about acknowledgement of a world beyond the self, somewhat akin to the collaborative process'. Engagement with both a textual world and a world of things reaches beyond the 'inclusive self-referentiality' of which avant-garde poetics have often been accused, though the 'best' poetries, as she puts it, 'have always done this'.<sup>10</sup> As well as achieving more recognised ends such as parody, estrangement and critique, found poetics treats language as salvageable resource. As Irene Gammel and John Wrighton state: 'Within the ecology of recycling and sustainability, language itself is a cultural litter to be recycled and renewed, while culture as a rich compost for poetry is subject to the ecological laws of decomposition and recomposition'.<sup>11</sup> Art repurposed from waste evokes the Dadaist 'trash aesthetic' that Gammel and Wrighton locate in the poetry and junk-cluttered apartment of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who would 'systematically scour the streets, recycling the city's refuse for her poetry and visual art, so that her litter poetics advance a sustainable ecology that communicates an awareness of the value of waste when recycled and repurposed'.<sup>12</sup>

Read as an example of textual recycling in a Dadaist tradition, *Adjunct* stands as a record of material detritus and consumption in the late twentieth century global north. It also reveals an enmeshment of lives, processes and cultural products, and repurposes those products both to denaturalise relations, and to make something new. In its blurb, it is described as a 'compost of found and appropriated language'. As compost, *Adjunct* prompts an engagement with the text as stuff. This moves away from a more obvious, available reading of the poem as a collection of fragments, in keeping with critical commonplaces concerning modernist poetics' obsession

with the fragment. According to Sheppard, late-modernist poetics has involved the 'development of collage into ... techniques of creative linkage', and the use of 'connectives' which act as an invitation to readers to participate in the meaning creation of the text. In *Adjunct*, connectives understood as creative linkages—premised on the model of the text as web or flow chart—is replaced by text as compost: as mass and matter, decay and enrichment, newness and interrelations which produce new life.

These readings hover between the tendency to read a text as a modelling of an ecological process, and as an ecological process itself. Both present challenges and opportunities for writers and theorists, and have distinct critical legacies. Ursula Heise, notably, has criticised ecocritics for importing metaphors from the sciences into scholarship, for example in describing a work of nature poetry as an 'ecology' in microcosm. These metaphorical transfers, she states, tend to 'revive the obsolete metaphor of the literary text as biological organism', and to promote unhelpful and unscientific fantasies about both nature and the text as a harmonious, integrated whole.<sup>13</sup> Heise is responding to a tendency in readings of more classically 'ecopoetic' texts (after Bate's model) to celebrate the referential capacities of nature poetry, and to erase disjunctions between the (perceived) integrity, stability and beauty of the world and the words used to evoke it. 'Pollution', she notes, is rarely imported into critical discourse with such gusto. In this article's ensuing reading of *Adjunct*, Heise's critique will act as a limit on carrying the metaphor of compost, organism or ecology over too far. At the same time, *Adjunct's* fascination with revealing the disjunctive, the polluted, gross, and curiously interactive messiness of the material entanglements it peers into, acts as an inherent check on a misguided reading of the text as a stable or beautiful ecological system.

### **New Materialism and the Literary Text**

Recently, new materialist approaches in ecocriticism have pushed further in examining the relationship between text and the material world. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett proposes a materialist reading of her own writing, exposing the ways in which it emerges from and enters into matter:



The sentences of this book also emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from 'my' memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power.<sup>14</sup>

Primarily, and most obviously, the print and paper of the book is physical matter and material commodity, subject to its own laws of decomposition and reconstitution. Secondly, Bennett foregrounds the interconnected material processes that have made the text's production possible, in every imaginable way. The page, she explains, should properly be seen as 'an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster'. The text itself is both a record and a product of matter and material relations, in which the human is the leading actant, but still only one part. The production of her text is dependent not only on human agency and status as a political and social actant, but on the under-acknowledged agency of elements contributing to her own perceived mood, values and intentions.

New materialist approaches to literary scholarship, inspired by approaches like Bennett's have become increasingly fashionable over the last decade, influenced by the publication of landmark studies in the field.<sup>15</sup> Ecocritical journals, conferences and edited collections now routinely feature new materialist readings of all literature from all genres and periods, including those written before the development of the sciences (including modern ecology and quantum physics) which made the theory itself possible. Whilst there is cause to be skeptical about the value of new materialist approaches applied to any text *per se*, the structural, linguistically-experimental and procedural features of *Adjunct* seem to invite a new materialist reading. In particular, its self-characterisation as a compost of heterogeneous elements, and its preservation of nature/ecology's otherness through its reflection on the gap between word and world. *Adjunct* also offers itself up as a springboard for thinking through some of the possibilities opened up by new materialisms, most keenly in experimental

formations of the lyric. So, what further aspects of the new materialism make it particularly well-suited to be used as a toolkit for reading *Adjunct*?

Current ecocritical approaches take for granted the interconnection, entanglement, enmeshment and intra-action of human (cultural, economic, social) and natural (climactic, geological, bacterial, and other material) processes. In discipline-expanding works of environmental philosophy and cultural criticism, writers like Donna Haraway, Stacy Alaimo, Gayatri Spivak and Timothy Morton have adopted and co-opted ways of thinking about human-nature interdependencies inherent in multiple indigenous, pre-modern and non-Western thought systems, exploring the relationship between the findings of modern Western science and marginalised, non-Cartesian epistemologies. For example, Donna Haraway's suggestion that we come to inhabit not the Anthropocene but the 'Chthulucene', rests on an animistic understanding of the relationship between multiple living processes, materials and forms of action and agency. The Chthulucene, she states, 'entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as humus'.<sup>16</sup>

The specifics of this intra/relation varies slightly across the work of major scholars. Gayatri Spivak's notion of 'planetarity' gestures to the interconnectedness of human and natural history—specifically colonialism, ecocide and labour exploitation—thereby resisting the dematerialising tendencies of globalisation discourse and contemporary cosmopolitanism. Timothy Morton's 'ecological thinking' resists the romantic construction of nature, instead proposing the 'mesh' as a way of describing how bodies, cultures, living entities, matter, processes and ideas coexist and are brought into complex and indeterminate interrelation across time and space. The 'mesh' is an immeasurably vast interrelation of things, in which '[n]othing exists by itself, so nothing is fully "itself"'.<sup>17</sup> This notion of category-disrupting enmeshment challenges anthropocentric and lyrical approaches in ecopoetry: how can one write from the perspective of the human subject without reducing the natural world to just a backdrop for the exploration of existential problems? How can one attempt to write in ways that acknowledge that we exist not in isolation but ecologically, in a world with which we are complexly interrelated, which shapes, influences and affects

us, and which we affect too? Disturbing hierarchical binaries of self and environment, human and other, and inside and outside, thinking of ecology in terms of enmeshment also demands a change in attitude to things 'present' and things that are 'gone': 'All life forms are in the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and non-living beings'.<sup>18</sup> A test of an experimental ecopoetics may be how well it accommodates these dead-presences, and imagines the multiple interlocking and overlapping timescales, time-experiences and cross-temporal affects revealed through ecological science and ecological thought.

New materialist approaches have been built upon and formed in dialogue with these entangled schools of thought. They are distinguished in their pursuit of theories of matter's agency which extend the propositions of both neovitalism and animism. Bennett's 'vital materiality', for example, demands that matter be recognised not just 'passive' stuff awaiting human manipulation, but as a potential agent or actant, 'lively and self-organising'. Instead of characterising an 'enmeshed' world as a network of discrete objects and entities, matter is both always changing in processes of becoming, or forming larger 'assemblages'. After Deleuze and Guattari, Bennett defines assemblages as 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts'.<sup>19</sup> The electric power system, she explains, exemplifies the assemblage—a grouping of electricity, metals, capital, human and animal bodies, atmospheric, water, and on—in which a major disaster can be caused by material behaviours and manifestations not-fully knowable to or controllable by human agents.

As Bennett suggests, any text is an assemblage, but *Adjunct* wears the traces of its existence as an 'animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster' more on its sleeve than most. It foregrounds the processes of textual collection and the records of visceral experiences that constitute it, describing assemblages in processes of becoming. A line like 'Slow motion cucumber decay in fridge', for example, describes an assemblage of a cucumber; the bacteria digesting the cucumber; the quality of temperature; the metals and gases making up the fridge; electricity; the human paying for the electricity; the power generator which operates it; the employer or state support funding the purchase; the fridge production industry, and so on. The insinuated

fridge-owning person is just one of many actants—human and non-human—in this exchange. More than this, the sentence's formation is tricky and ungrammatical. A noun phrase with the cucumber as lead actant, but no clear entity in the subject position, the missing 's' at the end of 'decay' seems to extend the action beyond the present tense, making it last forever. 'Decay' also succeeds in framing the cucumber as a plural or corporate entity, in keeping with the new materialist recognition that organisms are not individuated sacs of matter, closed off from the world, but co-constituted by and continuous with other entities (such as bacteria) and with processes and environmental factors like light, water and nutrients.

### **Agency and the Experimental Lyric**

New materialism departs from older materialisms by asserting that non-human entities and elements have a form of agency, and can therefore be considered as historical, political and ethical actants. An integral quality of new materialism's radicalism, it also invites criticism. Suggesting that matter has agency involves a reconceptualisation of the 'self' who controls action and the notion of 'agency' itself. Decoupled from anthropocentric notions of consciousness and intentionality, the meaning of new materialist 'agency' can seem disturbingly vague. In the context of wider conversations about the humanist shibboleth of 'free will', and also empowerment and rights in the context of misogyny, racism, labour-oppression, and colonialism, it can seem ironic, and reveal a deeply entrenched privilege on the part of the theorist, that matter is accorded agency at the same time as so many people are denied it. According matter a kind of will in its various manifestations may also let the powerful sources of pollutants—conglomerates, governments, research institutes etc.—off the hook. New materialist thinkers are not, however, wholly oblivious to these contradictions. Stacy's Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality, for example, is highly alert to the politics and oppressions of material flows, such as toxins, pollutants, poisons and capital.<sup>20</sup> These approaches are inherently concerned with the ways in which the body meets the world, and the kinds of self/selves which may thrive, or be denied expression, in that encounter.

The question of the self, and of the lyric 'I' at the centre of Romantic and late-Romantic poetics, has been a running theme in modernist and late-modernist poetics. The postmodern lyric 'I' is generally understood in terms of its implication and fabrication through textual fragments and commodities. Manson's long poem is indebted to this late/post-modernist tradition of writing around and against the self, and yet *Adjunct* is a kind of autobiography. It constructs an experiencing subject – a 'Peter' – as a slippery, self-effacing and often suffering self in a process of textual and material becoming. This figure is a lively entity, producing expressive articulations and being produced by the language and matter that circulates around and through him. The part of the title which this article has used for brevity, *Adjunct*, communicates precisely this sense of being an appendage and accessory to something/s beyond the self, of which the self is a non-decisive part. So much, so postmodern. But how might a new materialist reading further the long-modernist project of disrupting and destabilising the lyric 'I'? What might a new materialism reading reveal about *Adjunct* as a 'transcorporeal' text, and its central experiencing subject as an evasive lyric-assemblage?

A brief explanation of transcorporeality and its relevance to theories of agency and subjecthood is necessary. Transcorporeality, as mentioned, is a term coined by Stacy Alaimo. It describes the movement of matter between and through bodies, revealing the materiality of the human and our continuity with the physical world. Transcorporeality, as Alaimo puts it, reveals how 'Humans are vulnerable because they are not in fact 'human' in some transcendent, contained sense, but are flesh, substance, matter'.<sup>21</sup> Carried by water, air, food and other means of influx, 'matter flows through bodies, substantially recomposing them in the process'.<sup>22</sup> Transcorporeality is a transgressive theory of material selfhood, Alaimo asserts, because it challenges subject/object relations and binaries of self/other, human/environment and inside/outside. It is on these binaries that modern individualistic classifications of personhood and the human rest. So much for the immaterial, detached self of Descartes—'public enemy number one', as the philosopher Timothy Morton calls him.<sup>23</sup> Phenomenologically, we may know ourselves to be centres of experiencing

personhood, but chemically, physically and ecologically, we are bodies of water, gases, bacteria, viscera and nutrients, subject to processes of continuous becoming and interactivity. Under such pressure, the reflective self which underpins the lyric 'I' is dispersed across the material relations and moments of becoming which make consciousness and creative articulation possible. The text becomes both an unwitting record, and material product, of those metabolic, industrial, cultural and social processes.

What *Adjunct* brings to the problem of the lyric 'I' is an awareness of the transcorporeal self's production through assemblages, and through lively materiality. This self-production is not always understandable to the subject, and is generally outside the limits of individual control. In *Adjunct*, bodies experience discomforts including 'mystery bruises', insomnia and constipation. They are described as both getting fatter and 'supple and erect like an aquatic plant', and engage with a range of edibles and prosthesis, such as coffee, butter, and the disturbingly phrased 'electrical domestic appliances for use with the human body'.<sup>24</sup> These descriptions of the body-as-assemblage and as assemblaged is compost-ist, according to the ecological feminist philosopher, Donna Haraway. In her recent work, Haraway has rejected the earlier promises of posthumanism, asserting that we are 'all compost, not posthuman'.<sup>25</sup> Becoming compost means becoming aware of one's full embodiment and materiality, one's fate to die and to decay, but also to be part of a process of creating something new, a process of dispersal and interaction leading to newness and enrichment, a lively and living reconstitution of parts.

The book's classification as an 'undigest' further alludes to the dyspeptic qualities of the bodies described in its fragments. It also detourns the promise of popular publications like *Reader's Digest* to assimilate diverse cultural and textual material into an easily consumable whole. The text's undigestible quality is highlighted by the manner in which Manson often reads the poem aloud.<sup>26</sup> In a stark counterpart to Bate's notion of ecopoetry as flowing, cyclical, and harmonious, the affect of *Adjunct* live is mesmerically absurd: the polyvocal and fragmentary variation of the sentences is flattened by Manson's energetic but unvaried, dead-pan delivery. The text on the

page appears as a block of undifferentiated elements, while aloud they amass relentlessly, refusing to progress, build narrative, accrue meaning, or synthesise into any meaningful whole. A reading might as well begin at page 37 as page 1, and can stop at any point when the reading slot is over. The challenge in reading and analysing *Adjunct* is not to *digest* it into a meaningful and intelligible textual whole, but to accept its *particle-r* nature. No one story or sense of a self can be derived from the sentences as they assemble, and yet to read it as a random collection of fragments would be to ignore the kinds of interrelations built up across its sprawling mass. This might seem to run counter to the premise of text-as-compost and text-as-semblage: a compost begins as a heap of differentiated matter and ends as a smooth and fertile manure, while the heterogeneous elements of the assemblage work together—whether by design or not—to produce effects and phenomenon. However, *Adjunct* can be compared to both compost and assemblage. Compost, firstly, is not smooth and undifferentiated matter, but a lively assemblage of mineral deposits and organisms, bacteria and water, gases and organic matter, milling together in complex and fertile systems and gestating new life. Assemblages are not simply anthropogenic systems designed with specific functions in mind, but *ad hoc* clusterings whose entanglements and affects may never be spotted or unraveled. In looking to a chunk of text within *Adjunct*, these notions of assemblage and compost invite a reading in which heterogeneous elements need not be forced into a smooth, fantastical totalising reading, and in which the found-text sourcing activities which generated the poem are seen as traces of the poet-as-semblage, a cluster whose specific coordinates and elements will never be fully revealed.

What, then, can be achieved from paying close attention to a chunk of *Adjunct* as if it were a shovelful of compost, or sketchy map of a larger assemblage? This section, chosen partly at random, provides a text case:

Moby the whale's carcass declared an environmental hazard. Powdered milk goes like iron filings on hitting the steam. Just imagine what you could do with £5.859375. John Tilbury has a tape recorder inside the piano which plays, sometimes, an interview with Stockhausen about Cardew. Rise at

10.30 p.m., which is a record. That couple think I'm writing down every word they say. Too much coffee; write 15 poems. Lower right eyelid swells up. Marks & Spencer's own-brand Bounty. Ill-defined immortals. 2.14 BENEFITS OF BOTANY. As rain falls it erodes the soil, the rain water transports this material, due to sedimentation the soil deposit which becomes more fertile.<sup>27</sup>

The section includes a mixture of first-person diary-style entries; fragments of found text from scientific works; banal observations of material processes; and descriptions of products and media. The notational writing style and suppression of the 'I' contribute to the impression of the speaker's limited agency, so that the swelling up of the right eyelid is confronted as a material fact disengaged from the agency of the self, but limiting to it. Materials affect the human body, producing the poet and poem as assemblages in which an excess of coffee plays an active role in the production of poetry: as active, perhaps, as the poet, who is seemingly passive during the prolific spell, parodying classical creative dependence on the agency of the muse.

The active role played by food in shaping consciousness, matter and action has been addressed directly in new materialist writing. Bennett says of the 'eating encounter' that 'all bodies are shown to be but temporary congealments of a materiality that is a process of becoming, is hustle and flow punctuated by sedimentation and substance'.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Manson combines the olfactory and the scatological, as food co-produces the body and consciousness. On the previous page of *Adjunct* there are the lines: 'Diarrhoea smells of Lilt. Consciousness expanding again. May contain nut traces. Skin tightens on face'.<sup>29</sup> The digestive process is supposed to ensure that the intermingling of the body with elements from outside it is controlled, and that what is rejected by the body is expelled as waste. The persistent aroma of Lilt (a tropical fruit soft drink) in faeces demonstrates an incomplete process: the body and food do not commingle, or perhaps Lilt is not really food, but a chemical agent that the body can do without? This is reminiscent of an anecdote quoted in Alaimo's *Bodily Natures*, from the writer Ladelle McWhorter, who was about to chuck the crumbs from her bag of Doritos into her compost trench, but pulls back when she realises that her soil was too good for 'that crap'. The soil was too good for it, but her body



wasn't? How might recognition of the fact that we are soil-in-waiting change our relationship with processed foodstuffs, chemicals, and other bodily inputs, Alaimo is led to ask.<sup>30</sup>

*Adjunct* provides ample fodder for reflection on multiple stages of material transformation, deterioration and co-becoming. The passage quoted above revels in the clash of elements and things and the unruly and unexpected behaviour of materials. It opens with the line: 'Moby the whale declared an environmental hazard', then goes on to reference the processes of the water cycle, soil fertility and the behaviour of powdered milk interacting with steam. 'Moby the whale' is an appropriately comical, disruptive introduction to a sequence that betrays a fascination with denaturalising natural processes, and revealing the visceral materiality often obscured by languages of nature. While Melville's *Moby Dick* whale represents the challenge of nature posed to humanity, 'Moby the whale' diminishes the creature to an anthropomorphic chum. The movement from plaything to carcass offers a light, irresistibly comic shock, which accompanies the shift from the whale as Romantic cultural construction to legally determined biohazard. In her ecocritical analysis of Evelyn Reilly's sequence of experimental poetry on oceanic pollution, *Styrofoam*, Lynn Keller proposes that '[t]he understanding of Nature as the realm not only for human spiritual and physical test/quest but also for market profit prevalent in Melville's time' is still with us, 'undergird[ing] the despoiling' of the sea.<sup>31</sup> This evocation of the whale as dematerialised symbol clashes, in fertile (or 'fertil') ways, with the vibrant materiality of the whale, or what was the whale, and its participation in the assemblage formed by bacteria, water, salt, oxygen, birds, fish, sand and other material agencies conspiring on the beach. Although those agencies are only obliquely evoked, the following line, 'Powdered milk goes like iron filings on hitting the steam', returns attention to the material, producing a disjunction between symbol and minute interrelations of matter. Moby the whale's hazardous disintegration attests to the disruption that a whale carcass poses when washed up on a populated beach, and more pointedly to a structural failure to determine and address real interactions of matter in the oceans, contributing to these environmental hazards: sea plastics, water pollution, commercial whaling and overfishing.

## Conclusion

An ecological analysis is one means of answering the 'invitation' to the reader 'to enter into the artwork to complete it' which Sheppard deems essential to poetic practices of collage.<sup>32</sup> An already richly abundant and enticing work, *Adjunct* flourishes under an ecocritical and new materialist lens. Manson's refusal to adopt a coherent lyric voice demonstrates the mythic status of the nature-human split, presenting instead a mode of selfhood assembled from textual, cultural and more-than-human materiality. The body and creative mind are materially—as well as culturally, socially, economically and textually—co-produced and continuous with their 'environment', a transcorporeal realisation which also disrupts the self/environmental division as well. Interwoven with the language play and absurd humour of *Adjunct* are visceral, uncontrollable, occasionally incontinent and weird bodies: humans dead and alive, plants, snails, whales and fungi. By generating an autobiography of linguistic detritus, Manson plots out the shape of an assemblage-as-lyric 'I'. Revealing, in part, the enmeshment of the human in 'an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster', it also provides space to reflect on the natures of the associations and entanglements which hold these parts and particles together.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Peter Manson, *Adjunct: An Undigest*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Review, 2005. p.7.
- <sup>2</sup> Joshua Corey, "'Tansy City": Charles Olson and the Prospects for Avant-Pastoral' *Comparative American Studies*. 7.2 (June, 2009) 111–127, pp.113–4.
- <sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*. London, Picador, 2000. p.75.
- <sup>4</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. p.32.
- <sup>5</sup> Harriet Tarlo, 'Radical Landscapes: Experimental and Environment in Contemporary Poetry' *Jacket* 32 (April 2007) <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml>.
- <sup>6</sup> Tarlo, 'Radical Landscapes'.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950–2000*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005. p.4.
- <sup>8</sup> Manson, p.26.
- <sup>9</sup> Manson, p.26.
- <sup>10</sup> Harriet Tarlo, 'Woman and Eco-poetics: An Introduction in Context.' *How2* 3.2 (2007) Web. [https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/vol\\_3\\_no\\_2/ecopoetics/introstatements/tarlo\\_intro.html](https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/ecopoetics/introstatements/tarlo_intro.html).
- <sup>11</sup> Irene Gammel and John Wrighton, "'Arabesque Grotesque": Toward a Theory of Dada Eco-poetics' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20.4 (Autumn 2013) 795–816, p.804.
- <sup>12</sup> Gammel and Wrighton, p.802.

- <sup>13</sup> Ursula Heise, 'Science and Ecocriticism', *ASLE* (1997) Web. [http://www.asle.org/wp-content/uploads/ASLE\\_Primer\\_Heise.pdf](http://www.asle.org/wp-content/uploads/ASLE_Primer_Heise.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. p.23.
- <sup>15</sup> Including Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002; Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman eds., *Material Feminisms*. Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 2008; Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010; Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann eds. *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- <sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014. p.160.
- <sup>17</sup> Morton, 2010. p.15.
- <sup>18</sup> Morton, 2010. p.19.
- <sup>19</sup> Bennett, p.23.
- <sup>20</sup> Jennifer Beth Spiegel, 'Subterranean Flows: Water Contamination and the Politics of Visibility after the Bhopal Disaster' in Cecelia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis eds. *Thinking with Water*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013. 84–103; Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong eds. *Downstream: Reimagining Water*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Stacy Alaimo, "The Naked Word: The Trans-corporeal Ethics of the Protesting Body." *Women and Performance* 20.1, (2010) 15–36, p.15.
- <sup>22</sup> Spiegel, p.86.
- <sup>23</sup> Morton, 2010. pp.7–8.
- <sup>24</sup> Manson, pp.26–7.
- <sup>25</sup> Haraway, p.160.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Manson, Reading at Poetry 1A Lecture, University of Glasgow. 21st November 2013. See also Peter Manson, *Adjunct: An Undigest* (CD). Stem Recordings, 2004.
- <sup>27</sup> Manson, p.37.
- <sup>28</sup> Bennett, p.49.
- <sup>29</sup> Manson, p.36.
- <sup>30</sup> Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.12.
- <sup>31</sup> Lynn Keller, 'The Eco-poetry of Hyperobjects: Evelyn Reilly's *Styrofoam*'. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Literature* 22.4 (Autumn 2015) 846–871, p.856.
- <sup>32</sup> Sheppard, p.3.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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