

Sexting the Billions: On Post-Internet Sonnets – Maria Sledmere

In [‘Billions’](#), Caroline Polachek’s oversaturated vocals deliver the irresistible verse: *‘Sexting, sonnets / Under the tables / Tangled in cables, oh, oh / Billions’*. Polachek, one of pop’s brightest stars, has variously explained her trip-hop inspired single with a gesture to excess: ‘The overabundance of this world overwhelms me’, she tells [Stereogum](#). Sonnets as sexts: sexually explicit messages exchanged below tables, perfectly rhyming with the cables connecting them. For centuries, the sonnet has served as a form of vicarious and capacious sexting, offering coded expressions for lovers, landscapes, historical moments. There’s something alluring about the image of cables: a glimpse of the circuitry which carries our music, our language, our pheromones transcribed as data. Every cable a line of a sonnet: that neat little form, famous for its declarations of love and desire, pulsing in bundles. One sonnet, one sext; the tangled promise of a billion others, glowing out there on the internet.

Introducing a ground-breaking anthology of contemporary sonnets, *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* (2008), Jeff Hilson suggests that ‘certain forms [...] become illegible through their very legibility’: because the sonnet is so easy to spot, ‘it is overdetermined and its very recognisability makes it impossible to read’. Their very distinctiveness becomes opacity: as though the fourteen-line form was a black box of illegible inner meaning. Even this computational metaphor wagers the risk of what Veronica Forrest-Thompson, in *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (1978), would call *bad Naturalisation*: ‘an attempt to reduce the strangeness of poetic language and poetic organisation by making it intelligible, by translating it into a statement about the non-verbal external world, by making the Artifice appear natural’. Staying with the strangeness of the sonnet, its illegibility, doesn’t mean bringing to light or transparency some hidden, discernible truth. Rather, to take seriously the impossibility Hilson flags as entangled with the proliferating structures, enclosures and desire economies of Web 2.0.

Poets are still writing sonnets with the appetite of Polachek’s ‘Billions’, summoning images of techné: sexting, cables, billions. The internet. How does the information superhighway, the Cloud, the Web, the aplauds of nothing and plenty, change our relationship to the sonnet? To say something is post-internet is to recognise how the internet is no longer a *place* but rather that which structures our existence. As Mau Baiocco succinctly [puts it](#): ‘At some point in our lifetime a transition occurred between accessing a resource and living through its infrastructure’. Contemporary sonnets offer a mushrooming textual economy capable of metabolising our deep, mycelial experience of post-internet (il)legibility and exchange. What forms of identity, desire, attention, turn, and excess are found coiled in the sonnet? Taking in a selection of contemporary poets, this piece is not a comprehensive essaying towards something called ‘the post-internet sonnet’ but rather an experiment in post-internet ways of reading the ‘overdetermined’ form through its proliferating feeds, scrolls and voltaic refreshes. Taking its cue from Craig Dworkin’s *Reading the Illegible* (2003), the strategies of this essay follow a ‘Smithsonian criticism’, encompassing the internet’s noise economies of desire, attention and knowledge. This requires venturing in ‘the illusory babels of language

[...] specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate [...] in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes' (Robert Smithson, 'A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art', 1968).

Deeply associated with love of the courtly variety, the traditional sonnet is overcharged with the desire of an 'I' and bound in strict form. 'If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd', writes John Keats in a sonnet on sonnets, 'if we may not let the Muse be free, / She will be bound with garlands of her own'. The struggle with bondage in sonnets is integral to the form, typified by fourteen lines of iambic pentameter tethered by tight rhymes. How to help the Muse discover her own garlands? For Keats, we must beautify the Muse's chains; make elegant her cables. In *Poetry and Bondage* (2021), Andrea Brady writes of the double tension of Keats' constraint: 'Our experience of being constrained [...] motivates our constraining of the feminised and fettered figure of Poesy. She is bound because we are'. In that bondage the reader is both bound and eager to be woven tighter within its pulsing prosodic cables. With ideas weighted in pentameters and stanzas, sonnets are often set up to intensify or expel the contradictions of social bonds, including gender. What does this mean for an era where so many of these bonds run along undersea cables, or through the archival electricity of the Cloud? A time where the Muse is herself one of Polachek's 'Billions': a kind of angelic figure of metrical intensity, bearing untold realms of data. Keats' 'naked foot of Poesy' runs against the binary pulse of ghostly iambic feet, the 1s and 0s manifesting presence and absence.

Critical descriptions of sonnets are often spatial. In *Kinds of Literature* (1982), Alistair Fowler invokes a metaphor of scaffold or office space when it comes to the 'positive support' of genre: '[genres] offer a room, as one might say, for [the poet] to write in—a habitation of mediated definiteness, a proportioned mental space; a literary matrix by which to order his [sic] experience during composition'. In Late Middle English, 'Matrix' comes from the Latin 'breeding female', later 'womb'. In Fowler's rendition, the sonnet takes place in this humble literary receptacle; form offers domestic, hospitable and reproductive labour. Form 'orders [...] experience' the way a housewife might arrange flowers or cutlery. As John Donne affirms (with tidy iambs) in ['The Canonization'](#), 'We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms'. Early metaphors for virtual architectures followed suit, with *chatrooms* and *websites* occupying the user's attention. In the age of Web 2.0, we are never in a single room at once but rather in the dense, enmeshed tabular matrices of many. What does this do to identity? 'I think I am in danger / of becoming someone else' muses Ian Heames in one of his many anonymised pamphlets of *Sonnets* (where the lack of authorial signature retains the incognito quality of the early internet, further deferring questions of presence, originary meaning or legibility), published by Face Press. Where Keats' sonnet intervenes in the distinction between Petrarchan and Italian traditions, Heames' sonnets read almost like instructions or descriptions from a video game, scraped from the rich textbeds of 2000s forum culture.

In a pamphlet from 2019, Heames' speaker is an investor, a player, a deep observer, the melancholy time traveller afloat like 'scum', 'without agency':

The game is to document
the phenomena of the world
and to insist on new.

Riffing on the Poundian quest to ‘make it new’, novelty becomes the insistent force of what we do on the internet: ‘document / the phenomena of the world’ through the compulsory novelty of timelines, the ceaseless refresh of the feed. As Keats’ sonnet is a play at bondage, here the sonnet is also a ‘game’ with certain rules and intentions. How to sift newness from tradition, the sonnet asks? ‘[O]nce the “pretty room” has been built, how does one live in it? Are there constraints upon the sorts of thing one can think, or say, or be in it?’ asks Michael Spiller in *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (1992). These are the kinds of questions you might ask of the internet in its 1990s heyday. Can we really say anything here? What do we do in the bizarre, obsessive spaces we’re building? Who is really behind the code (the poem)? Taking a post-internet lens to sonnets comes from a desire to spatialise the Web again; to find traces of that spacing in a literary form whose careful embroidery of thought seems *on the surface* far more sophisticated than our brute, daily encounters with platform capitalism. Digital dualism, according to [Nathan Jurgenson](#), is the claim that the internet’s ‘virtual’ world is distinct from the ‘real’ of life in-person. With the pandemic’s accelerated Zoomlands of intimacy, work and other relations, that distinction seems evermore untenable. Sonnets, as formally intensified virtual spaces, play out that impossible rift between text and world, the ‘I’ and self. Everything is entangled under the table of whatever game is being played in the room of the poem, inside the room of the game.

Is this getting too meta? ‘Some poems’, says the speaker in another of Heames’ elliptical sonnets, ‘want flesh / to replace them / mine just want somebody to come round / to the accident of their being’. The entire courtly history of the sonnet (where desire for the actual fleshy beloved is supplemented by horny poesy), is summoned only to be shunned in favour of a mystical realisation of the arbitrary nature of existence. Here, the sonnet doesn’t fluster for the want of sex, for contact with the ‘flesh’ of encounter; rather, it offers a casual and cheeky invitation: ‘come round’ and find something out. There could be many exits and entrances, beginnings and endings to being. [David Grundy](#) suggests that the ‘process of desired replacement attributed to “some poems” here (rather than, as one might expect, “some people”’) allows a dance between poem and person which relies both on craft and “accident”. The limitations of form facilitate those happy accidents. Rhyme and metre as the deep dream equivalent of ‘I’m Feeling Lucky’, connecting readers to the catacombs of ancient language. That insistent ‘new’ might only be whatever reading, whatever line is landed on next.

Let’s trip on the cables. Love! It’s the transactional and calorific substance of all sonnets, whether we mean courtly, political, familial, platonic or sexual. In Nick Ines Ward’s *A Devotion of Sonnets* (2021), love is pushed beyond courtly romance to a communal, redistributed form of devotion. In ‘orbital decay’, the speaker muses:

i’ve been thinking of

love as a colony of dead spacecrafts
deferred in useless orbit around your head
like a kind of stupid halo.

The Muse as angel here dissolves into ‘a kind of stupid halo’, the courtly declaration of ‘useless orbit’ which never settles into the candy matter of the brain itself. Returning to spatial metaphors, here we have defunct spacecrafts ‘deferred’ from their original transit, floating ‘around your head’ in the sonnet’s suspended time. Here love is not singular but part of a space ‘colony’, implying some interconnected community, occupying a hostile locale. Love is viral, spore-like, defying gravity — unknowable, requiring a culture medium to grow upon. This ‘colony of dead spacecrafts’ is an image of entropy: space travel’s spent exhaustion resulting in the ‘decay’ of their orbit. To pass through that ellipsis would be to access the ‘dead spacecrafts’ of centuries of other sonnets, leaking the dark matter of love. But where space itself implies terrifying expansion, the sonnet is a vessel, and for what identity?

Who is the thinking ‘i’ in ‘orbital decay’? The *in medias res* of ‘i’ve been thinking’, is reminiscent of somebody live tweeting a thought in process, debris circling celestial bodies like abandoned candy. By way of the swerve, we can turn here to Kay Gabriel’s book of ‘Candy sonnets’ (after the transgender icon Candy Darling), *ElegyDepartmentSpring* (2017). In his brilliant epistolary introduction to the book, Kevin Killian writes of how a Gabriel poem brings the deceased performer of Darling, ‘back to me, criminous and vivid [...] a presence in your chamber’. Sonnets are a kind of chamber music of the lost and founds of love, its blinking identity endlessly deferred through the spacetimes of literature. Why not add the internet as one or more matrices at play in the sonnet’s tangled cables? What’s candy? The crystallised treat made through repeated boiling and slow evaporation; something coated, saturated in sugar syrup. The sonnet as a form boiled down and coated, lustrously, for binge consumption. Crunch/click/volta/spit. So good and familiar.

We can have at once the tangible *mise en scene*, ‘Dust in lilac’ and ‘a therapy of form’ (Heames), something like the sonnet’s disclosure (who’s listening?), opening the chamber doors to say:

The computer feels
like the coming night
I want suddenly to fall through. Wish away an appeal
for my clothes at last. This is the only shirt I have.
(Heames, *Sonnets*)

The computer is a kind of setting, as nightfall or this thing with feelings, a place of descent. Code to scroll in freefall longing: ‘I want suddenly to fall through’. Can it be parsed? The line break performs that fall which is also a stitch, binding the seams of clothing. In *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (2003), Lisa Robertson talks of garments as ‘lyric structures’. The folds, creases and cascades of social

space, worn by a self. For Heames' speaker, there is an austerity to the decorative. This poem 'is the only shirt I have'. The blank space around the poem feels part of the night that clothes them. In Gabriel's sonnets, we have 'piles of shirts to come on / spontaneous': garments as structures for sexual expenditure in great abundance. People are knots, 'aporia of a pleasant body' and 'connection' is 'langorous & delicate' as 'girltalk' afloat 'in the monologue surf' of performative confession. Girltalk here is a fizzy and referential gendered vernacular, embedded in everything from 'a salon confessional, a CfP' to 'livejournal' and 'Verso Books'. High'n'low culture are more or less cut from the same breezy interface. But surf recalls Heames' 'scum': there's something about densities of self-matter clogging the poetic arteries, or pulling a wave/a turn.

How does a sonnet hold streamtime from rippling desire? By its glitches:

Presence at odds with I love you from
 a shambles, jumpsuit season, can we break
 lank straight hair some bitches
 have the volta already

(Gabriel, 'Pastoral')

For a glitch to occur, the environment must be familiar: we know how the sonnet works, where the volta is supposed to occur. Elsewhere in *ElegyDepartmentSpring*, the speaker wryly concludes a sonnet, 'well it's pastoral for dinner again'. Pastoral evokes the idealised no-time of seasonal return, love and seduction. To dwell in pastoral might be to eat the same thing every day, like sheep at the cud of the lawns of sonnetry. But Gabriel looks for a sassier, more eclectic and biodiverse poetry diet, channel-hopping with the movie star muse of another era. The seasons are measured by fashion trends (garments again) and the line can 'break' like 'lank straight hair', ironed of all life's frizz and pizazz, into static. That trochaic opener, 'Presence', emphasises the entrance of life into the poem, in tension with 'I love you': that speech act cascading as 'shambles'. To speak 'from / a shambles' is to be shuffling and awkward; breaking over the line, breaking the 'Presence' of the assuring 'I' in 'I love you'. What does it mean to 'have the volta already', to be at that turn before its designated coming? There's something ecstatic about jumping the gun: where in the sonnet should you look for the turn, if it's coming sooner than the 9th or 12th line? Perhaps the clue is in that opener. Presence is itself at odds with the ceaseless deferral of 'I love you', so who would come sooner in the poem's fashionable shambles would first ask 'can we break' — the line or time, as if by accident to come upon 'the volta already', 'the accident of their being' (Heames). Chris Championini, author of *The Internet is for Real* (2019) — take that digital dualism — suggests 'the productive accident, the error' can be 'a signpost'. Sometimes it is 'the hiccup in a stream of code that doesn't break the algorithm but tries to retrain or teach that algorithm'. Every sonnet written is retraining the source code of what we take the sonnet to be — glitching the form by twisting conventions, deferred or premature in its turns — and by extension, how we code presence and love. That is its radical potential.

The source code overruns. For Ted Berrigan, who played with collage, aleatory and remix in his seminal collection, *The Sonnets* (1964), that sticky declaration of linguistic materiality (words of love) is connected to the iterative afterlives of form: ‘they say “I LOVE YOU” / and the sonnet is not dead’. Death invoked by refusal still implies a cultural shelf-life defied in the work. Just as vaporwave was declared dead, *long live vaporwave*, yet persists with healthy profusion in hypnagogic afterlife, poets remain hot for the sonnet despite its dusty associations. To read sonnets through a post-internet lens is to recognise their brimming potential for excess; somehow the endless innovation of the sonnet propels its generic economy, in a delicate, swoony balance of love over death. Rosie Stockton’s recent collection, *Permanent Volta* (2021), is a case in point. In an interview with Olivia Durif for the [LARB](#), Stockton says of their sonnet experiments: ‘I was interested in leakiness and excess and felt I was always overflowing the forms I was meant to be contained in [...] But I think I wanted to exceed the forms without fully understanding them’. In pursuit of the accident, as in to come up against an error or exception in code. Looping back to Hilson’s point about the sonnet’s overdeterminacy as a source of its illegibility, Stockton wants to explode the form not to grasp it but rather to stage the desirous possibilities of flooding that chamber, loosening the vine-like bonds of prosody:

my curse is how I gag on my every demand I spit up ghosts
to make my genre perceptible
(‘Before the Sentence Begins’)

The title of this sonnet holds an erotics of coiled potential: that moment of writing before we actually write, fingers hovering over keys, the Joycean paring of fingernails. With its shuffling indents, enjambment and spacing, Stockton’s poem performs a liquid discourse distinct from John Donne’s ‘well-wrought urn’. I imagine that gag in response to a clotted substance, lyric froth (scum again) gathered at the lip of the speaker. The ‘demand’ could be political, romantic, linguistic. The undigest of genre’s inherent citationality is vomited as ‘the ghosts’ whose promise isn’t legibility but the ‘perceptible’ as such. Again, that kind of noticing, the accidental, the property of a thing which isn’t essential. Here ‘news scrolls through our hands like water’ (Stockton) and the poem transmutes those stories to clots, pushed awkwardly along by ‘caesura’ and ‘stumbling angelus novus’ caught between past and future, beginning and end, ‘the event’ of a turn (‘Before the Sentence Begins’). *Permanent Volta*, as a title, implies all turns, infinities of reading. Like waiting for someone to reply, in the ineluctable lust of the typing indicator [...], the spacing of Stockton’s porous sonnets is more like a weepy receptacle than what Spiller describes as the ‘highly finished [...] concentrated form’ of a traditional sonnet, promising the containment of ‘almost all that is human’. What is important here is a post-internet consciousness that is not dematerialised but rather channels the ghostmatter that fleshes the sonnet’s infrastructures of desire, plugged into those of capital: ‘something rugged / makes fatty my emotion & it will only be a matter of time’ (Stockton, ‘I Work’). The poem’s thickening emotional arteries are part of that osmosis that occurs where expression bloats or drains, where the sonnet’s present-tense is another breath, fold, turn before beginning again. ‘I Work’ ends with ‘before the sentence

begins' and follows with a sonnet titled 'Before the Sentence Begins'. Stockton reimagines the sonnet sequence as a hormonal circuitry of simultaneous time.

Simultaneity is time's thickening surface. In a Penguin edition of Ted Berrigan's sonnets, published in 2000, Alice Notley writes:

Ted always used to say that *The Sonnets* has a plot very like Shakespeare's Sonnets involving friendships and triangular love relationships; but where Shakespeare's plot is patterned chronologically Ted's is patterned simultaneously, and where Shakespeare's story is overt Ted's is buried beneath a surface of names, repetitions, and fragmented experience that in this age seem more like life than a bald story does.

Simultaneity (you might have noticed) is the time of the internet. Everything all at once. As Jonathan Crary points out in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013) any 'act of viewing is layered with options of simultaneous and interruptive actions, choices, and feedback' and technological acceleration is 'a continuous process of distension and expansion, occurring simultaneously on different levels and in different locations, a process in which there is a multiplication of the areas of time and experience that are annexed to new machinic tasks and demands'. The phenomenology of the scroll, feed, the opening and closing of apps, the notification, the dialogue box, pop-up, the cookie economy, the cache refresh, the password entry, the save as, the drag and drop: these are all part of the parcel that is post-internet consciousness, structured by enclosures and interfaces designed by remote corporate agents. Shakespeare's chronological patterning was already at odds with the age of broadcast media and magazine culture in which Berrigan was writing his 1960s sonnet collages. The love conceit doesn't so much triangulate as disperse rhizomatically across interchangeable cables of lines, images, affects. The reader must work out what connects where; which lines and pronouns might be compatible; what happens when you plug, say, 'old prophets' into 'my zest' or the 'un-melodic' (Berrigan, 'LX').

I go looking for more examples of post-internet cables, which is to say, the excessive and simultaneous possibilities of sonnetry. I find something coiled up in the carbonated dreamscape which is Dana Ward's 'My Diamond': a sprawling epistle to Cedar Sigo, found inside *The Crisis of Infinite Worlds* (2013).

This sonnet is going to initiate an addiction narrative
inside an evolving vacuum. The gratingly explicit affirmation
that its flowering distributes into governmental mindedness
demonstrates
accelerated reaching for my own death inside me

Candy is addictive. Sonnets are too. Oh, and the internet. The sonnet, like a line of code, is a running form of commencement, a method signature. Tucked into the poem, Ward's speech act — 'This sonnet is going to initiate' — stirs something into action, honeying straight to the brain. I'm already hooked. These lines perform their biosemiotic effects, with 'gratingly

explicit affirmation’, like a list of medical side effects. Ward’s ‘evolving vacuum’ resonates with Nick Ines Ward’s ‘orbital decay’. In a swelling void, the sonnet’s ineluctable ‘flowering’ (here we are with Keats’ kinky Poesy again) ‘demonstrates’, as in scientific phenomena’, an ‘accelerated reaching’ for that iconic sonnet conceit, ‘my own death’, crystallised in everything from Shakespeare’s ‘No longer mourn for me when I am dead’, or indeed [‘Desire is death’](#), to Keats’ syncope of denouement in ‘Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art’: ‘And so live ever—or else swoon to death’. It is as if the poem coils deep inside its speaker to reach that telos, death, *hyphen*, that is its condition for lyric performance — flowering and affirming, binge and purge, self-grotesquery, a turn.

What is meant by ‘governmental mindedness’? Perhaps that meta-consciousness of linguistic, state surveillance which skirts every keystroke of the internet. Cookies: they are also addictive – will I take one, accept them – and follow you everywhere. Does the poet assume a governing role, shaping amorphous desire into sonnets? ‘A sonnet’, Ward writes later in ‘My Diamond’, ‘is just like a paragraph anyway / by which I mean another obligation’. In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet* (2011), A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth claim the sonnet ‘always had aspirational connotations: hoping to woo a lover, to form inchoate feelings into something more resolved, to impress a courtly master, or to show the nation that your kind of people feel and think in just as sophisticated a way as the elite’. Here, the sonnet is ‘another obligation’: a chore of sorts, something we are bound to like a debt. But the poem quickly unravels the ‘like a paragraph’ simile by comparison: ‘A passion is just / unlike anything else’. The internet binds us unceasingly into a crisis of infinite desire economies. In *Late Capitalist Freud in Literary, Cultural, and Political Theory* (2020), Maria Daniella-Dick and Robbie McLaughlan capture this with regard to social media:

each click or tap continues to produce desire: it becomes clear that such a repetition establishes a development in desire, where it is no longer the wish to access a picture, an update, a rumour—to access the specific *object* of desire—but desire itself that is the object, where the visual supplies merely a scaffolding. With social networks, the human subject is learning to take pleasure *in desire itself* [...].

What’s addictive about sonnets, especially in the accelerated time of social media, is the infinite, diamond-like refraction of desire that the multifaceted form promises. Also the idea that you could crystallise desire into the sonnet’s sculptured miniature, its candy dissolve. Hold me up to the light! And the sonnet as perfectly capturable in the square-shaped frame of your Instagram grid. But Dana Ward’s sonnet, so-called, sprawls far beyond fourteen lines; it may be many sonnets entwined. If the classic sonnet formula, [‘My love is as \[...\]’](#) or [‘How do I love thee?’](#) sets up the question or comparison that would bring metaphorical presence to love, the post-internet sonnet performs the excess or impossibility of holding that desire within the bounds of its chamber. Instead we have overrunning cables, echoes, leaks and spills: the billions, brilliance.

To write under constraint is also to write in a political condition, and part of that unravelling takes place in the hyper-arousal of being online, transposing divergent attentions to what a

sonnet is: little song. The title of Nikki Wallschlaeger's *Crawlspace* (2017) points to constricted spaces from which to speak: often those built within houses to provide access for structural repairs. Of the book, Wallschlaeger [says](#):

Form is everywhere & it's useless to deny it, so I like to play with the illusion of having control. This is from a series of sonnets that I've placed into small buildings, but since the bank owns the buildings that I move in, I am only paying mortgage. We have an understanding. The sonnet has agreed to the task of my subversions, that the security guard is on a permanent lunch break so we can get inside.

To play with the illusory here is a form of critique, and occupation. Wallschlaeger's sonnets inhabit the form perhaps most associated with constraint to perform 'Writing under the constraints of your oppressors, whoever they are' ('Sonnet (15)'). In the company of writers such as Jericho Brown and Sonnet L'Abbé, Wallschlaeger writes in sonnet form not simply to push against its association with white, cis-male desire but to remake sonnet space altogether as a forum for sounding the cognitive intensity of ongoing racial, gender and class oppression, overlapping with folds of history. These are sonnets that gradually build through the collection, with longer and longer lines which eventually spread into multi-page sequences, and shorter rhyming poems dramatizing the blunt racial inequality and binaries that scaffold daily life: 'Everywhere brown people / are sad everywhere white / people are good' ('Sonnet (50)'). The slant consonant chime of 'sad' and 'good' marks the slide between affect and value held in tension, and 'good' proliferates in the poem like a virus infecting everything, as whiteness does, with its universal economies of approval. 'Good' haunts the internet's simplified likeability culture, that needy heartthrob in every tweet. Would you like this sonnet, the sonnet seems to ask; is it performing for you, is it 'good'?

As the sonnet is personified in the passage above, so these sonnets have a kind of authority the speaker tussles and runs with, their own mindedness, in the prolonged suspension of a break where it's possible to write without the guard watching (like browsing in Private Mode, no cookies). The longest sonnet in the book, 'Sonnet (55)', moves between speculative imaginaries (a world where 'restaurants / should disappear. They could be replaced with / community spaces that have food'), histories of prison construction in California, the 'right now' of 'eating frozen food' and 'writing / about restaurants and rich people' towards the future continuous of 'I will eat more food today and tomorrow'. As the speaker fantasises about 'grow[ing] herbs / and tomatoes in my yard', the poem itself grows longer and longer, extending into the future's margin like plant stems escaping the window where attention is held, stammering, in 'the images of the / of the megastar couple'. As food is often a banal yet ineluctable subject of the everyday journaling of social media, Wallschlaeger metabolises what Ward calls flowering distribution into the life force of poetic accumulation, distinct from 'the megastar couple' who 'will accumulate more / wealth and exclusivity' in the enclosed futures of capitalist white supremacy. The fractal litany of 'That' insists on a bundling conjunction of future and present happenings in the coiling disclosures of the internet, where each sentence eats the last and we end, humming, with the speaker's temporary satisfaction. A kind of soft moment built into the poem.

As with many of Bernadette Mayer's sonnets, which conclude with the illusion of discursive closure in couplet form, what we actually have is open-ended, no period. The poem wants to loop, repeat, spread. This viral impulse, in Nick Ines Ward's work, metabolises abjection in the face of trauma:

i have spent a year waking up
in someone else's stomach like it was
nothing

but it was resurrection, all of it.
(‘a devotion of sonnets’)

Resurrection is the poem's claim to agency: the ‘it’ proliferates queer, pronominal joy. These sonnets are continuously resurrecting a form, absorbing and acting upon the enzymes of the ‘I’ and its claim to presence and speech. Many of these sonnets catalyse in the toxic belly of the internet a series of new and strange arousals. The internet changes how sonnets are written, and how we read sonnets. Performing a post-internet critique, in the spirit of Robert Smithson's intoxicated and disoriented criticism, I have looked at sonnets whose economies of citation, desire, subjectivity, attention, temporality, tradition and the Muse bear traces of Web 2.0's ‘governmental mindedness’ (Dana Ward), its cookiescapes of recorded, if illegible histories, its addictive tendencies towards repetition, fractal alacrity, affective intensity, binge and purge. As we move towards the transaction economies of Web 3.0, where the poem could be a non-fungible token, performing quite literally exchange value in thumbnail economies of net art and crypto vernacular, I want sonnets that retain their sultry plenitude: a way of carving the open secret, traded under the communal table, generous and in their own way ineffable with love's bloody-mindedness of the now, then and when. ‘Tonight I'm waiting for you’ (Mayer, [‘Incandescent War Poem Sonnet’](#)).

Amidst content saturation and digital enclosures, the lightspeed of capital, sonnets still seem so free, disorienting the bounds of their form. In their concision, there's always more to come. The post-internet sonnet coils and uncoils in the epistolary erotics of ‘this being lost’, which Lisa Robertson describes as ‘the most commodious sensation I can imagine’ (*Nilling*, 2011). At the end of Nick Ines Ward's vernal flirtation, ‘april, pick up the phone’, we have an uneasy couplet: ‘sorry, there isn't great signal here / please wait for my message to send’. The speaker talks through a medial device – the poem, the phone – to an addressee poised literally at the end of the line. Post-internet sonnets exist in Walter Benjamin's *jetztzeit* (*now-time*): ‘time at a standstill, poised, filled with energy, and ready to take what Benjamin called the ‘tiger's leap’ into the future’; it needs, as [Ian Buchanan puts it](#), ‘the intervention of the artist or revolutionary to produce it by “blasting” it free from the ceaseless flow in which it would otherwise be trapped’. Whether the tiger's leap is Nick Ines Ward's self-resurrection in the luscious *towards* of writing, Wallschlaeger's gardening against the rich, Dana Ward's swoony, impossible diamond or Gabriel's voltaic cycles of gender, politics as love's knotted tension, these poems take the temporal suspension of the sonnet, its intimate lyric frame of

you and I or them, as a way of exploring flight paths of relation in and beyond the internet's ceaseless simultaneity. Constructing new worlds as they go, bumping lines against the old.

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