English Studies in Canada

The Afterlife of Performance

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THE AFTERLIFE OF PERFORMANCE is riddled with assumptions about life, death, and time. One major assumption is the possibility of distinction between liveness and something else—not so much death as the "after-lifeness" of various theorizations of media in the age of the zombie (Žižek, Parikka and Hertz, Sconce). Philip Auslander is particularly helpful on the subject of liveness when he identifies it as a historically contingent and relational concept "used to distinguish among cultural forms and experiences," and then, on the matter of method, remarks that "the values attributed to live performance must be discussed from the perspective of particular cultural contexts" (63). While we agree with Auslander that any attempt to generalize assertions about a live performance are bound to be flawed, in this article we are not really interested in how particular instantiations of liveness or presence are produced (Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence* xiii–xvi). Rather, we are concerned with the particulars of how the *afterlife* of performance is produced, managed, and maintained by the application of various cultural techniques, in Bernhard Siegert's sense. Cultural techniques incite "a more or less complex actor network that comprises technological objects as well as the operative chains they are part of and that configure and constitute them" (Siegert 11). In our case,

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we want to consider how a network of particular people using particular hardware to capture a performance in a particular space on particular kinds of storage media combines with specific techniques such as mastering, editing, filing, labeling, holding (that is, long periods of neglecting), digitizing, remastering, and circulating in order to produce our sense of the relative worth of a recording of another group of particular people chanting, talking, and reading. What we can see in this assemblage, if we examine it closely, is the inner workings of a mechanism that produces literary value.

The afterlife of performance begins with an understanding of the infrastructure that supports its birth and lives on in our critical accounts of its circulation. Our particular object of study is a recording of Allen Ginsberg's 1969 reading as part of the "Poetry 4" series at Sir George Williams University (SGWU) in Montreal. This 1969–1970 iteration of the decade-long reading series was mostly organized by George Bowering. Ginsberg was the third reader in a series that included Jerome Rothenberg, bill bissett, Milton Kessler, Gladys Hindmarch, Stan Persky, Diane Wakoski, Frank Davey, Robert Hogg, Ron Loewinsen, David Ball, Tom Raworth, Al Purdy, and Joel Oppenheimer. A digitized version of this recording is available as part of the SpokenWeb project (Ginsberg). This recording was never designed to circulate as a final product; it is documentary in nature. We describe it as a material *trace* of a performance—it provides a sense that something has taken place, probably something important, but it is not a finished object in the way that even a live album is finished. The status of this object is never very clear-cut, and our collective sense of it can and does change as the recording circulates.

The Ginsberg recording is an excellent example of how close reading methodology fails when confronted with the afterlife of performance. Infamously, Ginsberg brought members of the Montreal Hare Krishna sect to the performance with him, and they chanted for an indeterminate amount of time before Ginsberg began to read and sing himself. Rather than an instrumental communication act that strives to convey some vital piece of information, chant itself is a form of what James Carey would call "ritual communication." From a ritual perspective, "communication is linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith' … A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (15). Through the creation of a specific type of temporal experience, ritual communication builds a

sense of belonging, and the exchange that occurs is affective rather than semantic. It is impossible to record the significance of ritual communication like chanting, because the significance of the communicative act is not in the content but in the participation at a specific time and place, by a particular group of people. The reciprocal ritual action of taping poetry readings (will anyone ever listen?) is equally difficult to pin down. As a result, the transcript of the recording continually gestures elsewhere for its sense of meaning.

This is interesting because acts of memorializing events very often focus on content that signifies with memorable meaning: a saying, a last word, a statement that summarizes in synecdoche a larger event of which only a semantic trace remains. Carey's concept of ritual communication and the argument we are developing from it suggests we must look elsewhere than in semantic content alone for the trace of event in this performance. Along with theories of cultural technique and ritual communication, we are also interested in the circulation of cultural forms (Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli, and Will Straw). Part of our argument is that scholars need to pay much more careful attention to circulation in general (academics are pretty good at talking about production and consumption but are less adept at describing what comes in between). As this Ginsberg recording has moved through culture, it has been transfigured in a number of ways. The reel-to-reel magnetic tape itself has been edited for a variety of reasons, some apparently arbitrary. And, of course, the recording has been digitized and placed online in a networked digital milieu.

All these transfigurations occurred, and continue to occur, within models of data description and management that are based on the established practices of institutional libraries and archives. In the case of the sgwu recordings, one of the key justifications for making recordings of literary events in the first place was to create content that could then be circulated through the Central Institutional Technology unit, the Language Laboratories Instructional Media Unit and, in duplicated copies, the library's non-print media unit at sgwu (Schofield, Tyrell). The tape machines were there to capture content, and the library was there to make those recorded events accessible for teaching or other uses. There is not much evidence that the reel-to-reel tapes were used very much after they were made, but the material production of these event tapes found some of their first forms of institutional justification in the unit stamps, call numbers, and other metadata that the recordists and librarians applied to them, operations which made them—at least in principle—findable and circulable (Tyrell).

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Situating the material production and circulation of technological objects like the SGWU Poetry Series tapes within disciplinary history, and institutional imperatives, as well as cultural policy formation, allows us to recount a metahistory of the event through attention to the material manifestations of afterlife. Here are some of the questions that arise when conducting such a metahistory of the event:

· What does the specific materiality and circulatory history of these tapes tell us about changing scholarly priorities?

· What kinds of institutional actors leave a trace on the object, and what can we glean about their priorities from their interventions?

· What kinds of operations do English literary scholars habitually perform? What kinds of techniques are they expected to know, and are they at all useful when confronting an object like a reel-to-reel poetry recording?

· What counts as a literary object, and how is it studied?

· What counts as an archival artifact, and how is it processed?

· What does the study of such artifacts say about changing scholarly priorities in terms of critical paradigms and pedagogical methods?

· What new kinds of operations and techniques, ones that are not habitual or familiar to English literary scholars, must such scholars learn in order for them to perform research with such artifacts? And how do they go about learning such techniques, and on whose dime, and with what time?

·What sort of research is considered fundable and why?

· More specifically, how do recordings (analog and digital, separately) function as occasions for the launching of research trajectories and funding applications?

· How do national research policies change and adapt to the availability of old media collections over time?

Historical context

The context in which the Sir George Williams University Ginsberg recording appears—that is, an online collection of digitized recordings within an academic digital humanities project—requires thinking about more than

the author-function. It requires thinking about methods of like artifacts, such as other Ginsberg recordings in other partner collections or the new collection of digitized Ginsberg cassettes now online (Willard). We need to look at the changing disciplinary discourse of literary studies, and, to make sense of it, we will need to consider infrastructural issues, protocols, description and metadata standards, formats, and cultural policy issues. As the still centre around which various grants rotate, recordings developed through the SpokenWeb network, including this one, now have importance as an occasion for the development of research models by others, and even for cultural policy formation. All this arguably exceed their value as literary "texts."

We will not go into great detail about historical context surrounding the SGWU Poetry Series because one of us has written about it elsewhere (Camlot, "The Sound of Canadian Modernisms"), but here is a brief summary: the series was established by members of a self-named "Poetry Committee" consisting of English Department and Fine Arts faculty members at a time before the Canada Council had an established program for funding poetry reading events. As Cameron Anstee has shown, the series benefited from the Canada Council's new interest in experimenting with funding such events, and they received money for their proposals (between 1965 and 1974) through the already-established Opera, Ballet, and Other grants program (Anstee). One of the primary arguments the Poetry Committee used to secure federal funding for its events was framed in terms of the discourse of cultural legitimation and maturity. According to this logic, by 1965 Canadian poetry had "matured" enough to appear on stage alongside American and British poetry read by American and British poets. Accordingly, the SGWU Poetry Series program regularly consisted of American and Canadian poets appearing either in alternating succession throughout the year or sometimes as a "comparative" double bill on the same night. The Faculty of Arts at SGWU also supported the program and its arguments for the importance of having Canadian poets read alongside poets from abroad (Camlot, "Sound of Canadian Modernisms" 30). There may not have been anything more Canadian in Montreal in 1969 than to have a famous American poet read in a Canadian university space.

Each and every one of these poetry events was recorded by the Instructional Media Office (IMO) at Sir George Williams University. Caught up in the whirlwind of increasing public and institutional interest in media technology, progressive cultural policy, and the flowering of media art practice that Michael Century describes as characteristic of Canadian culture from the mid-1960s to the 1990s (1), SGWU had recently poured

a significant amount of money into the construction and wiring of a new "state of the art" Henry F. Hall building (Schofield), whose ribbon was cut in October 1966 on the same day that Montreal inaugurated its first Metro lines (Records Management and Archives). Classrooms in the Hall Building were fitted with closed-circuit televisions, and many lecture halls and classrooms were wired for the recording and transmission of audio and video from the central media technology unit. The built space of the new brutalist Hall Building, and the new media vision of pedagogy that it housed and supported, were the first among many subsequent material and institutional structures that gave shape to the afterlife of Ginsberg's 1969 SGWU performance.

"Vision" is key here, because we are talking as much about the institutional imaginary—SGWU's desire in the 1960s to be seen as on the technological cutting edge—as we are about empirical fact. The imperative to put money into audiovisual (AV) equipment in the university in the 1960s was part of a larger cultural moment (Schofield; Oberfield), but it created an interesting problem in that the university then needed something to point all of that equipment toward for AV capture, regardless of whether anyone would ever look at the content again. To this purpose, talking poets would serve as well as anything else. As Christine Mitchell's interview with AV technician Mark Schofield suggests, despite our contemporary impulse to prioritize the value of network infrastructure, in the 1960s, universities had not quite realized what it was worth or how to produce it well. As Schofield, coordinator of technical operations at SGWU in the 1960s, explained:

> [T]he remarkable thing about the Hall Building was that every single classroom was wired …The installation was done during Expo and anybody who could operate a pair of screwdrivers and wire cutters got a job. The project with the university was pretty low priority. So in fact, we discovered pretty soon on in the 1960s that nothing worked.

Despite the gap between aspiration and actuality, the recordings were made and housed in the IMO, and later some were duplicated on open reel tape and housed in the library. At some point, these tapes (a mixture of originals and duplicates) were deaccessioned and given back to the Department of English. They were then stored in the department chair's office and sat forgotten for decades on an upper shelf. They sat untouched as a series of chairs passed through that office. Then, in the early 2000s, when the English department moved from the fifth to the sixth floor of

"Vision" is key here.

the Library Building (due to the expansion of the university library), they were deposited with the University Archives by the department chair at that time, in the English Department fonds. They might have been trashed with so much else that was thrown out during that move. But the department chair took the time to bring those tapes in for deposit (Camlot and Mitchell).

In the University Archives, they were given a new set of ID numbers and sat for another decade or so until a faculty member (Jason Camlot, one of the authors of this paper), recalling seeing those tapes during his first meeting with his department chair about a decade earlier, decided to find out where the tapes were and what they contained. What followed were a series of increasingly collaborative experiments exploring ways to engage with the recordings and the writing of grant applications, lots of them, designed to scale up the endeavour and expand the range of methods we might use to process, describe, curate, analyze, create, and teach with digitized collections of recordings that documented literary events from the 1960s to the present. The methods we worked to integrate into this research and development program included those of librarians and archivists, linguists and computer scientists, oral historians and media historians, designers and computational artists, systems developers and electroacousticians, digital publishers, lit profs, and poets.

The first goal was to make the collection of the SGWU Poetry Series recordings less useless than they had been as reel-to-reel tapes in a university archive. That entailed developing a catalogue of sorts, identifying some basic metadata about the recordings, some informative data about this audio data: who was reading, who was introducing the reader, where did the reading take place, when did the reading take place? We also needed some more granular kinds of metadata: what works were read, what words were said in between the readings, where/when on the tape reel was this poem read or this thing mentioned? In other words, we began to develop a full-fledged time-stamped transcript of each of the readings, along with as much information to situate the readings as we could find. What started out as a text-based catalogue quickly became data that could be integrated into an interface for listening to and navigating the collection of recordings. The continuum between raw data and metadata was fluid, as was the relationship between our critical concerns in analysis and curation. It was, and continues to be, productively difficult to draw the line between such categories—in the broadest sense, between research about collections and collections development—because our research and historical concerns are not exclusively content-based; because our approach to our artifacts

and collections have aimed to accommodate (if not always merge) a wide range of disciplinary interests; and because the institutions (universities and funding agencies) that have supported our work have come to identify cultural value and methodological innovation in the humanities with large-scale collaboration and wide-ranging interdisciplinarity. This initial phase in the afterlife of Ginsberg's SGWU performance entailed acts of migrating across media formats, listening to, describing, and situating sounds that held a trace of the event, and organizing those descriptions, filled with content identifiable as relevant to a field like literary studies (such as names of authors, readers, and literary works read and mentioned), in a manner that made them more useful than they had been before they were digitized, described, and contextualized, for something that might be recognizable as literary research. One might think of this phase as one of structuring data for possible use and circulation—or, in a word, management.

Management

The present occasion of research and digital development originates in the recording event. Allen Ginsberg chanted and read into a microphone in the late 1960s. That performance was transduced into electrical pulses via the condenser microphone and was captured as patterns of iron oxide on tape. Those tape-recorded signals sat on the shelves of institutional offices for a few decades, were converted into a form of audible digital data, and consequently required some form of networked management.

If the recording event is the instant in which performance moves from life to afterlife, management is a condition of the afterlife of performance. The equipment, electrical signals, and spooling tape capturing traces of those signals are a mechanical process of afterlife preservation taking place as the live event unfolds. The event of the recording recedes as a focus of research output, while at the same time the demand for project descriptions, process documents, and white papers about rights management, research data management, preservation management, digital asset management, project management, budget management, space management, and the management of highly qualified personnel grows.

Once the recordings had been assigned an initial order and structure, they required new kinds of management as data, including the management of file naming (for sharing and use in research and teaching); management to ensure their ongoing preservation; the management of a server to host the files. But beyond the material management of data in particular locations at particular times, there are also policy questions pertaining to

the management of the rights and permissions that ensure their accessibility, circulation, and use in different contexts.

The question of intellectual and legal ownership of the recording complicates the pragmatic considerations surrounding recorded poetry performance. In the Canadian copyright context, the rights holder of a recording is the individual or the organization that made or fixed the performance. Therefore, the poet who makes her own recordings is the rights holder for that recorded manifestation of their work. Consider a draft poem written on the comparatively solid medium of paper in Ginsberg's hand, on Ginsberg's paper, signed by Ginsberg. It is clear who authored this handwritten manifestation of the poem, and it is clear that the paper will last a relatively long time, provided it is not highly acidic or kept in poor archival housing or environmental conditions. But when a poet appears in a venue such as the Sir George Williams University series and is recorded by an individual from the university, the university is the rights holder for that instantiation of poetry. Consequently, recordings—because of their opaqueness as readable and ownable and shareable technological and legal entities—are often fraught to administer, preserve, and circulate, requiring a correspondingly greater number of knowledgeable teamworkers to manage.

What we are outlining here is not a new process. In *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, Friedrich Kittler describes in exhaustive detail how the author-function of the Romantic poet ceded its exalted status and privilege to office workers during the age of electromechanical media at the close of the nineteenth century (327). Walter Benjamin noted something similar, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility": after electromechanical media became common, anyone at all could lay claim to being recorded, and the act of playing back recordings for consumption of their contents makes us all into quasi-experts (33). As a collaborator with and subject of the recordings of Andy Warhol and William S. Burroughs, and a user of tape recorders in the production of his own work during the same period as the Montreal performance (see Lytle Shaw's "Third Personism: The FBI's Poetics of Immediacy in the 1960s"), Ginsberg was acutely aware of this phenomenon. Bringing the Hare Krishnas with him, and letting them chant for such a lengthy period before beginning his own performance, suggests a willingness to relativize his own status as celebrity poet. The corresponding relativization of the role of the scholar interpreting great works of literature to the status of knowledge manager circulating data and records has also received sustained attention in the pages of Alan Liu's *Laws of Cool* (36, 45 *et passim*).

In sum, then, the passage from performed poem to poetic recording transfigures not only the object, but the people, institutions, and apparatuses it comes into contact with as it circulates. There is a sustained body of theory that can help us make sense of this process.

A little theory

The sense of temporality in this recording is odd, but, before we can describe it in a helpful way, it is worth unpacking the theory we feel relevant to this case, a little bit more at this point. Writing about media is not like writing about literature, even if we are considering a poetry recording as our object. One of the throughlines in German media theory from Friedrich Kittler to Sybille Krämer to Wolfgang Ernst to Bernhard Siegert is the idea that analog audio recordings capture not the symbolic content of an utterance—that is, the semantic meaning—but the Real (ambient noise, breathing sounds, timbre, and all of the other things that fall away from the written signifier). This already creates a major challenge for literary scholars, who by and large concern themselves with the study of signs, because semiotics largely fails as a tool for describing technological procedures. In her writing on Kittler's notion of time-criticality, Krämer makes the full extent of the scandal visible. She notes that while writing about media form is not opposed to meaning per se, it still requires developing a writing practice that proceeds as though "distinctions such as 'understanding,' 'interpretation,' 'meaning,' 'referent,' or 'representation'" —all key actions and concepts in literary studies—are not relevant (94). The Hare Krishna chant points us directly to this challenge, because, to paraphrase Kittler, the poetry here is "nothing but the inside of its outside" ("Gramophone" 81). If we want to be able to address these recordings, we not only have to change our writing practice; we also have to learn to listen differently. The relevant media theory here is Jonathan Sterne's work on "audile technique" which he defines as "a concrete set of limited and related practices of listening and practical orientations toward listening" (57). Wolfgang Ernst would add that we also need to account for "the nonhuman agencies of listening" ("The Sonic Computer" 45), that is to say, "technical devices of observation, measuring, and recording like the gramophone and oscilloscope (among others)" (Young 11). The observation that Ernst and other posthumanist theorists of media are making here is that the technological devices we use when we produce, manipulate, and analyze recordings of any sort have been imbued with powerful kinds of agency; they are far from being neutral extensions of our will. As such, we need to acknowledge the analytical work that they do, which in many

circumstances may be equal to or greater than the work we do ourselves in recording and calculating. In the most practical terms, how do we listen to this recording (meaning, in part, with what devices), and why? What other ways of listening does this listening resemble? And what do we do with the results?

After all of that, *then* we can start thinking about temporality. In his work on the gramophone, Kittler famously argued that analog audio playback literally reproduces the same sound vibrations that were stored on the recording substrate ("Gramophone" 60); playback is thus a kind of "time axis manipulation" (34). Wolfgang Ernst extends this contention to digital audio as well, going so far as to state in the more polemical, earlier version of his argument that "there is a media-archaeological short circuit between otherwise historically clearly separated times" ("Media Archaeography" 57). Later writings soften this contention, arguing, rather, that audio playback creates a double bind between "the historic and the ahistoric sensation, between cognitive understanding and affective listening. Thereby it is possible to experience sonic artifacts from the past both in their difference to the present and as presence" ("History or Resonance?" 98). But Ernst is quite clear on this point: "at any technologically given moment of phonetic reproduction we are dealing with media, not humans; that we are not speaking with the dead, but that an apparatus is operating in an undead mode" ("History or Resonance?" 86). From a posthuman perspective, the epistemic message here is that the difference between death and life is less significant than we imagine, and machines have more agency that we typically think ("History or Resonance?" 85).

For this phonetic reproduction, and the presence of the past it evokes in the present, to occur, the recordings must be discoverable and playable. Creating conditions of discoverability for such artifacts falls within the expertise of librarians and archivists and pretty quickly leads us from this portal of transport between the present and a past presence to questions of context for the human agents who were present at the time they created an audible record and who now may or may not be alive in body but may remain alive in this kind of afterlife we are talking about. Some of those deceased poets will only continue to resonate in the present if their recordings can be found and played. Some of the tapes may emit sounds that will help us discover individuals previously unknown to the historical record. Some of the surviving poets may have information that will help us discover recorded historical happenings and presences that would otherwise have been lost. None of them can be discovered or heard

without some basic metadata, and the fields of context of which such data about the recordings is comprised.

What the relevant theory suggests is that what we want to know about the Ginsberg tape will not be apparent if we employ conventional methods of literary analysis. Accordingly, the remainder of this article discusses three of the methods we use when thinking about objects like this tape: oral literary history, material media forensics, and archival research. The result is not anything like a close reading or interpretation; rather, what it provides is a contextual, material-discursive analysis of the relative position and importance of the tape, and the sounds it holds, for any interested scholars.

Methods: Oral literary history

As we work with literary archives, we wonder about the material traces of literary output and events and how those traces eventually surface or do not surface in the archival record: the things we will know, and the things we will never know. When working with archives of literary sound, the audible artifacts they contain often raise more questions than they answer. Even as a documentary sound recording seems to open a portal to the Real, to give a listener, via media, a sense of eavesdropping access to an actual event that occurred in the past, the historical eavesdropper is often left as much perplexed as satisfied by what she hears. Documentary literary sound recordings talk a lot, but they don't necessarily explain themselves.

To help satisfy our curiosity about the *material traces of literary output and events* and especially about the significance of these traces (from different perspectives) we have pursued research methods that diverge from close attention to content to focus instead on context. One method that has proven useful is oral history (even though, and perhaps because, it comes from an inherently interdisciplinary and somewhat marginalized historical field). Speak to surviving participants and attendees of the documented events and you may begin to understand the sources, and the social and symbolic significance, of the signals in a recording. Questions we thought were unanswerable about the sonic trace of event get answered in matter-of-fact ways by asking someone who was there at the source of the recorded signal to try to remember what the sounds represent. We have come to call our practice of this contextualizing approach "oral literary history" (see Aubin and Fong, "What Makes Oral Literary History Different?"). This method draws on ideas of oral history as richly subjective, interactive, and narrative in orientation, suggesting the historical event as persistently emergent through the mediating factors of time,

memory, language, affect, and a mitigated authority over the past that is shared between (ear)witness and historian (Portelli, Frisch).

The first oral history interviews conducted around the recordings of the SGWU Poetry Series were with surviving organizers (Howard Fink 2012, George Bowering 2012), poets who read in the series (David McFadden 2012, Frank Davey 2013, Diane Wakoski and Daphne Marlatt 2014), technicians who worked as recordists of the series (Mark Schofield 2013), and individuals who had attended readings in the series as audience members (Stephen Morrissey 2013, Endre Farkas 2015). These interviews provided information from a variety of perspectives about the rationale underlying the planning and organization of the series and what it felt like to read at an event, to listen to an event, and to record an event (Camlot, "Oral Literary History"). Since the time of this first cluster of oral literary interviews, Mathieu Aubin and Deanna Fong have developed the "SpokenWeb Oral Literary History Protocol" that "envisages multiple types of interviews that position the interviewee in different relation to events and their documentary recordings" and anatomizes them for oral historians interested in using interview methods for the contextualization of literary sound recordings. They list and define provenance interviews, informational interviews, performance interviews, participant interviews, life story interviews, memory space (in situ) interviews, and other types as the most relevant for this kind of oral literary history. Both have pursued these and other modes in recent published work that reveals more focused, issue- and concept-oriented approaches to the pursuit and collection of oral histories around literary events and activities. For Fong (with Karis Shearer), the method was deployed to situate the collected works of Gladys Hindmarch within a contextualizing, cross-generational dialogue (Fong and Shearer, eds.), and it will be used to this dialogic end again in her forthcoming collection, *Concern and Commitment: Seven Oral Histories with Innovative Vancouver Women*, which mixes the poetry, prose, photography, and painting of seven Vancouver-based artists with a suite of interviews she has conducted with each of them (Fong). Oral literary history, in this mode, aims to situate writing and audible records of literary events within a kind of historical storytelling that recalls and at times enacts the dynamics of literary communities and the tones and interactions that define them. Fong and Shearer's work in this mode has revealed much hidden knowledge about the important roles and work that women played in literary contexts during the 1960s, and after (see, for example, Fong and Shearer, "Gender, Affective Labour, and Community-Building"). Aubin has taken a more concept and method-focused approach

Oral literary history, in this mode, aims to situate writing and audible records of literary events within a kind of historical storytelling.

to his use of oral history as a mode of literary history, for example, in the article that appears in this special issue, where he develops the concept of "queer listening" as a method of engaging with historical literary audio captured in the sgwu Poetry series recordings, calibrating his idea of "listening for sound affected by queerness as it is expressed through a person's discussions of intimacy, friendship, politics, sexuality, and culture" in relation to interviews he conducts with poets whose voices are heard in the recordings he is studying or who were present at the event when the tape was rolling (Aubin).

One may shape an oral literary history protocol though the development of a range of individual or group interview techniques, to achieve a diverse range of goals both in the gathering of specific kinds of information, and in experimenting with the narrative forms through which that information takes shape as a kind of historical knowledge. In the earliest interviews conducted around the series, the goal was to understand what was happening *around* the event, the sounds of which could be heard on tape.

For example, by talking to George Bowering about the Allen Ginsberg reading, we learned that a large group of faculty and writers had taken Ginsberg out for a fancy ten-course dinner at a Chinese restaurant; that readings scheduled for 8 p.m. usually began late but Ginsberg insisted on starting his reading on time; that the first main course, a giant fish, had just arrived at the table when Ginsberg said he had to go because he had promised a group of Hare Krishnas that he would chant with them before the reading; and that Ginsberg had been chanting with them for over an hour, first outside the building where the reading had taken place, and then, as of 8 p.m., the official start time of the reading, inside the building, for about an hour, before the reading began. The rest of the faculty arrived in the hall at 9 p.m., when Ginsberg stopped chanting and pursued the rest of his reading following an introduction by George Bowering. The tape recording of this event thus begins, *in medias res*, with chanting, tabla drums, cymbals, etc., lasting sixteen minutes and thirty-eight seconds before a tape edit moves us suddenly from chanting to Bowering's introduction (Bowering).

As rich and self-contained as an individual poetry reading performance like Ginsberg's may be, the set of performances from the 1969–70 series (Rothenberg, bissett, Kesler, and others) offers several perspectives on performed and written literature at the time. The larger roster raises questions about where we might locate poetic and political networked connections with this one event: in the selection of poets for that year's

series; in the nationalities and stylistic and political affiliations of the poets; in the trajectories of their printed and spoken work across time and space; in the archival afterlives of each poet's trajectory.

Another mode of contextualization would entail thinking about this Ginsberg performance at SGWU in relation to all the other readings performed by Ginsberg around the same the time. Was the Montreal performance similar to other readings done that year? Was there a certain placeness about the SGWU performance that distinguishes it from others of the time? Did Ginsberg have a canned show, or did it vary according to place, context, or poetic objective or mood? Other recordings from that time period could reveal how Ginsberg organized and improvised his performances.

One thing the SGWU recording does tell us (specifically, the recording of Bowering speaking in his introduction) is that the night before Ginsberg's reading at Sir George Williams University in Montreal on 9 November 1969, Ginsberg had read at York University in Toronto, and that the night after, he was scheduled to read in Ottawa (probably at Carleton, where Bowering's friend Robert Hogg was teaching). We do not yet know if there are traces of those adjacent events lost somewhere in the faculty offices or archives of York and Carleton. There are no indications of extant tapes in the Library and Special Collections records of either university. Even if they are not there in the university special collections, it is possible that those tapes are sitting somewhere, in a closet, or in the basement of a used bookstore. The circulation of poets along the vectors of a reading tour is an underexamined aspect of literary history. Stan Dragland's 1976 collage book *Wilson Macdonald's Western Tour* is one of the few Canadian examples of a prolonged study.

In the case of Ginsberg, we recently discovered, quite by accident, that in addition to readings in Toronto and Ottawa the nights immediately before and after the 7 November 1969 reading at SGWU in Montreal, Ginsberg had appeared in Montreal just one week before, for an evening press conference on 31 October 1969 at the McGill University Hillel House and to give a reading the next night on 1 November, at the McGill University Student Centre. These events were produced in arrangement with Montreal's Jewish Public Library, the Hillel Students Organization, and the McGill Debating Club (Levine). Camlot had been checking in with a local used bookseller to see if any new poetry records had come in when the bookseller presented him with a single reel-to-reel tape in a black plastic tape box with a simple embossing tape label reading "Ginsberg." Inside the box was a newspaper clipping from the *Montreal Star* newspaper of

an article by John Richmond. The article described the reading and press conference, reporting that over five thousand people were in attendance, that the event opened with Hari Krishna chanting, followed by a poetry reading and Ginsberg "singing a number of Balke's *Song of Innocence and Experience* [*sic*] and playing a small portable harmonium-like musical instrument" (Richmond). The bookseller asked Camlot how much the tape might be worth and allowed Camlot to take it to The AMPLab for Literature and Sound studies at Concordia where he could play the tape on one of the lab's reel-to-reel machines and discover what was on it. Before doing that, Camlot performed an online search for more information about Richmond and about the reading described in the article. He discovered that the entire reading and press conference of the night before were already available online (and could be downloaded as an MP3 file) at the Yiddish Book Centre website and on the Internet Archive ("Allen Ginsberg Poetry Reading"). From his listening, Camlot was able to determine that the reel found at the bookstore held audio of the press conference and to speculate that it may have been Richmond's own recording of the hour-long scrum interview with Ginsberg, taken away and used to write the article that was found in the tape box.

In capturing a specific, instrumental trace of a portion of an event, this until-recently fugitive recording also captures the conditions that inform the afterlife of performance. It manifests the fragmentary nature by which events live in the afterlife; how an event can seem to live on through an individual's instrumental recording of it (as in a reporter's recording of an interview with a writer for the purpose of producing a news story). It manifests how common, and to some extent formulaic, an event that seems unique due to the accident of documentation may have been: in this case, how formulaic Ginsberg's performances at universities in Canada were during this period, the McGill and Sir George Williams both consisting of opening chanting with Hare Krishna's accompanying, the reading of poems from books, and ending with Ginsberg performing his sung versions of Blake's songs. The main differences between the two readings which took place in the same city a week apart have less to do with the content of the performances themselves but with the institutional and social structures that enabled (funded) their enactment. In the case of the McGill event, it was an unlikely collaboration between the McGill Debating Society and the student Hillel society. In the case of the Sir George Williams reading, it was a connection between Ginsberg and a faculty member (George Bowering) and funding from the Canada Council and the university's Faculty of Arts. The content of the event was

shaped to some small extent by these institutional and social structures. For example, Ginsberg opens the McGill reading stating, "Since I was invited here partly by Hillel, I would like to go back in time, to 1961, and read a piece of *Kaddish* written in '58, actually … written ten years ago" ("Allen Ginsberg Poetry Reading"). But even these changes in the audio-textual form and content of the documentary recordings bring us back to questions of the informing context and invite us to reflect on the nature of an archival recording's relationship as surrogate entity to the event it seems to have captured and preserved. It brings us to necessary reflection on the methods we use in archival preservation and research.

Methods: Archival research

To what extent can an archive faithfully describe, codify, or preserve an event or events? Most archives are a house of cards, with so many gaps and weaknesses that no reconstruction of event is really possible—or even desirable. Nonetheless we can consider the traces and the possibilities they might suggest. Making meaning from an archive is forensic and creative work, and we often narrate very incorrectly based on our own wishes about the subject under consideration. The biographer or the critic can easily only see what they want to see when they conduct archival research. Nonetheless, we can have some faith in the material and digital traces of poetry in the late 1960s and in what we might do with them as archival researchers. First, we would need to determine which archives and what servers hold the traces of the 1969–70 readings that constitute "Poetry 4." If we were to map the analog and digital reach of the various journeys taken by members of this group of poets in 1969 and 1970, what might we learn about how they related to each other at the time and how they have come to relate to each other in their afterlife? Documentation and preservation of poetry archives can be a systematic, professionalized, and institutional affair, or a deeply private and focused one. Neither is better or worse. All the poets in this set of readings have established personal literary fonds or manuscript or paper collections in an institutional setting. And in all cases, the formal archival collection contains sound recordings. There are thus ample archival records that could be studied for traces to integrate into a contextualizing narrative about Ginsberg's sGWU performance. This would entail thinking across the archival structures that already situate those traces and working through the challenges posed by audiovisual content in archival collections.

Some elements of audio recordings trouble the notion of a seamless or complete archive. Audio recordings are tricky because their data depends

on mediating technologies to be listened to and understood. While analog recording methods are still fresh enough in our memories or practices, their results as media artifacts have become vulnerable entities in an archive, as they are subject to what Mike Casey from the Media Digitization and Preservation Initiative at the University of Indiana Bloomington calls "degra-lescence"—the double threat to preservation consisting of the chemical and physical breakdown or *degradation* of the tape itself and the *obsolescence* of reliable and safe playback equipment to access them (Casey).

One way of considering the multiple afterlives of poetic ephemera and materials is the exploration of the concept of the archival multiverse. The notion of the archival multiverse came about in 2009, at the first meeting of the Archival Education and Research Institute, where Allison Krebs introduced the idea (Yeo 249–50). The definition of this term put forward by the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) and Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG) in 2011 in *American Archivist* was: "the pluralism of evidentiary texts, memory-keeping practices and institutions, bureaucratic and personal motivations, community perspectives and needs, and cultural and legal constructs with which archival professionals and scholars must be prepared, through graduate education, to engage" (AERI, PACG). Thus, the archival multiverse invites us to engage in an inclusive, continuum-based view of the archive. In 2013, Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott published the article "Toward the Archival Multiverse: Challenging the Binary Opposition of the Personal and Corporate Archive in Modern Archival Theory and Practice," in which they highlight, among other things, "emergent thinking on co-creation" and "the multiple simultaneous provenance of records" (115). For our purposes, the article's recognition of "the plurality or personal or corporate record-keeping behaviours and cultures in the context of the complex interrelationships between 'evidence of me' and 'evidence of us' in the continuum and in the online cultures and shared spaces of our digital worlds" are particularly useful (112, 137).

Only some of the materials that provide evidence of poetic practice in the late 1960s have (sometimes) crossed the formal archival threshold; others are ignored, lost, or destroyed. Some, like the SGWU series, only become a formal institutional record after a chance "discovery" followed by validation through concerted scholarly and institutional effort.

We should also consider how the web plays a key role in locating, identifying, retrieving, and re-scattering just as it brings together the traces of archival afterlives. As more archival records are digitized and made

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available online, once-analog entities take on a digital afterlife in distributed networks of physical and digital archives, and the proliferation of copies and sites deepens and complicates the notion of an archive as being a place-based home of original materials. In the case of the poets who read in the 1969–70 series, archival materials related to the poet's work have spread to institutional archives, often in college and university special collections departments, YouTube, PennSound, Ubuweb, The Poetry Foundation, the personal website or blog of the poet, the Internet Archive, the social media accounts of poets, and other locales. The materials are consequently structured and governed either formally or haphazardly. We do not devalue informal methods of record-keeping or dissemination of content. Many great formal archival repositories are shaped by informally or idiosyncratically compiled archives. And an archive need not be formal to have meaning or appeal. Our case for formally crossing the archival threshold is that institutions *may* have resources to support preservation and dissemination of recordings.

A multiverse reading of this poetry reading series recognizes the plurality of personal and institutional record creators and keepers who manage and preserve the legacy of twentieth-century poetic practice and performance. Being attuned to the concept of the archival multiverse helps rationalize the messiness, expanse, duplication, and "incompleteness" of literary legacy, especially of the eventful kind. And, finally, we can see the role the web plays in making archival content both ubiquitous and messy. Thinking in a multiverse way can allow us to layer and intersect poetic events, poets, and their literary and geographical movements, as well as the movement and proliferation of the evidentiary traces of their work. It invites us to gain comfort with a decentralized model of both preservation and dissemination.

Methods: Historicist audio forensics

What can the physical tape reels themselves tell us about the nature of the event, or the nature of our desire to know the nature of the event? A few years ago, we wrote about the reel-to-reel tapes on which the Ginsberg SGWU Poetry Series event was recorded, using the term audiography: an audiotextual form of bibliography, related to the sociology of texts. The approach considered how the observable material elements of these tapes incited historiographical questions, aiming to ask how many rabbit holes might be revealed by pointing to the physical medium: the material reel-to-reel "tapes themselves may ultimately provide … insight into basic questions around production and use" (Camlot and Mitchell).

This Ginsberg recording shows two kinds of editing, one that involves stopping and restarting recording during the event itself, and one that actually removes audio from the event in postproduction and leaves it somewhere, possibly and quite literally on the editing-room floor. If you examine the transcript of Tape 1 of the Ginsberg recording on the SpokenWeb site, or listen to the audio file, you will encounter four (audible) instances of cutting or editing at the following timestamps: 00:16:38, 00:18:55, 00:41:37, and 00:49:28. Were the edits made on site during the reading or after the fact in postproduction? The original tape includes lengths of white splicing tape between segments of brown recording tape … but there are exactly three splicing-tape interruptions (not counting the leader tape at the start and end of the spool). Thus, three of the cuts were made by splicing the tape after the recording; the fourth, less conspicuous edit was made by pausing the tape, either during the reading itself or during a dubbing reproduction process. The first postproduction splice comes after the nearly seventeen minutes of Hare Krishna chanting, probably cutting out audio at the start of the chanting because the recordist did not understand that an event (worthy of recording) had begun and cutting audio of shuffling, noise, muttering, and transition that recorded the Krishna devotees' departure from the stage in preparation for the (actual, expected) poetry reading to begin. Of the two remaining spliced edits, one came after the reading of "Angkor Wat," a fairly long poem, and another just prior to Ginsberg's singing of Blake's songs, most likely omitting the dead time of an intermission and accounting for the time necessary to set up and mic the poet's harmonium.

According to information gathered through interviews with Howard Fink and George Bowering (series organizers), we know that the Ginsberg event lasted over three hours (Fink, Bowering). This fact alone may provide one plausible rationale for all the cutting. Interviews with technicians (Marc Schofield and Roger Tyrell) who worked in the Centre for Instructional Technology (CIT) that made the recordings confirm that all edits were made by the CIT staff members (some of whom were student trainees) (Schofield, Tyrell). Investigating the reasons for the edits implies a desire for evidence of a historical rationale for reality capture. It suggests we want to know that this or that stretch of time was cut because they (*they* being some historical agent to whom we might refer to find reasons behind the nature of our historical artifact) felt such aspects of the event were not important, valuable, worth keeping. But the answers of the technicians suggest, instead, how radically arbitrary the nature and shape of the documentary historical audiotext may be.

A technician may have been busy on another job and so started a recording later than they were supposed to or have had to leave a job to do something else. They may have had to go to the bathroom, so waited just long enough to hear applause before pressing pause, because otherwise the reel might have finished before they returned. They may have had to free up a larger tape reel spool for another project and so cut out stuff that did not seem necessary in order to transfer the recording of an event to an available, smaller-sized spool. Or, given that, at SGWU, recordings were often made remotely from a control room elsewhere in the building and were wired and monitored via inputs connected to the room where the event was being held, they may have had to pause or later cut a section because there was feedback or some other technical matter that they had to attend to on site, where the reading was happening. These are just some of the arbitrary forces at work in an institutionally mandated, professional recording scenario. The range of arbitrary accidents informing the nature of the historical audiotext increase in the ubiquitous scenario of amateur recordings of literary events made during this same period. It is bemusing to think how an artifact so arbitrary has incited so much action of serious structural protocol in the name of literary history.

The actions performed on these artifacts aim to give discernible shape and attribute value to them—to secure their status as tangibly relevant artifacts of literary substance. This aim is pursued in great part according to the affordances granted by digital environments. A paradox encountered through such work that aims to fix and secure the significance of the digitized artifact is that "to approach texts and objects in the digital environment is to encounter the destabilizing material element inherent in all cultural artifacts" (Camlot, "Historicist Audio Forensics"). The event in afterlife persists in a differentially mediated existence that we archivists and scholars aim to abstract, grade, and polish through descriptive structures and historical narratives about their informing contexts.

Conclusions

Most of what is important to literary scholars about the ongoing circulation of the Ginsberg recording and the other Spokenweb recordings is incidental to their content. As we have noted, conventional literary methodology deals primarily with the interpretation of symbolic content. Understanding media objects—even those with literary content—requires attention to factors that hermeneutic methods cannot address because those factors are external to the object: materiality; the circulation and transfiguration of objects and forms; the role of institutions and their

archives; the role of interpretive communities; and the use of cultural techniques like recording and editing reel-to-reel tapes, and collection and cataloguing protocols.

As one possible confluence of these factors, practices like poetry readings matter. Even readings that occur on a local level produce authors, careers, local scenes, material artifacts like publications and recordings, memories, and cultural myths. Some of them, like the Sir George Williams Poetry Series, can end up having a significant impact on municipal, provincial, and national culture, with visible effects on cultural policy. We need to understand institutional histories, but we also need to think about them as much from the unofficial accounts of people who were there—not just artists but audience members, students, technicians—as we do from official institutional narratives.

Material media substrates like AV equipment also matter, because they are part of the infrastructure that enables cultural events like poetry readings to occur. Then as now, one of the rationales for an institutional investment in media technology is to bolster the reputation of the university on a national level. The content of the recordings themselves, if we are being honest, is often an afterthought, at least during certain phases of collections development. When processing a collection, we listen in ways that vary from sporadic and information-driven, to closely (as when we are transcribing). But the close listening of transcription and timestamping is not the equivalent of interpretive close reading as the discipline of literary studies (criticism) has developed it over many decades in its engagement with the visual, printed page.

Listening to a collection for the first time may involve surprise, delight, and discovery, but it will also involve identifying a lot of basic questions that need to be answered later. One might say that during this first engagement with a recording, we are listing to identify the content and are not quite yet listening for the content's critically interesting qualities. We may, in this first pass of listening, be engaged in reflection on our own positionality in relation to the positionalities assumed by the speakers heard on tape; these reflections are oriented more toward social and ethical questions than formal and narratological ones, in the first instance. As our processing of a collection matures, we may find ourselves more concerned with questions of methodology: how do I go about listening to the qualities of this particular recording, either by listening closely to it on its own (with the use of a digital audio workstation software, perhaps) or listening to it in relation to a large set of other recordings (with the use of algorithms designed to reveal patterns in the frequency data of

the larger data set). Content, in this sense, is the focus, but is not one of interpreting content in terms of its thematics, imagery, or tropes. We do not listen to a recording of Ginsberg singing Blake's "The Lamb" with the aim of unpacking the imagery of innocence. We listen and wonder what exactly this performance might have meant while it was happening. We listen wondering what the heck he was doing and what that doing meant at the time. What we mean by "content" changes when discussing this kind of artifact.

Tapes of poetry readings serve more ritual functions than they do documentary functions. They existed as a kind of sacred object, circulated from one generation of writers to the next until the moment for digitization appeared, as a function of porting research funding models like the Canada Research Chairs from hard sciences to the humanities. With this new influx of funding, humanities projects needed to scale up, and they needed new, implicitly technical objects of study. In many cases, old analog recordings became the occasion for digitization and the production of scores of "digital archives," with little regard, at first, to the sustainability or use of these archives. This in turn generated a wave of cultural activity: grant applications, research projects, and the creation of new funding programs to reflect the sudden "need" to digitize analog media. It also generated new modes of student training, often under the infamous rubric of producing HQPs, or "Highly Qualified Personnel" (an unfortunate bit of bureaucratese that seems to have been absorbed whole into academic discourse), new forms of capacity building for the university, new kinds of expertise, and new forms of cultural capital (like national innovation strategies and world university rankings).

The creation of reams of new digital objects also required the creation of protocols for identifying, sorting, and searching them. Assigning metadata to objects is about investing them with value in terms of international commodities infrastructures. What kind of metadata an entity is assigned and how thorough is the cataloging of that entity reflects a bolstering of the institutional metadata network as well as the object's value. The position of one recording in a massive sea of recordings of Ginsberg is valuable to us for a whole range of reasons, but would anyone else care? Is ours even discoverable? How would one map Ginsberg's web presence (a question similar to, but methodologically different from, the older scholarly task of mapping an author's significance through a comprehensive bibliography or through a bibliography of secondary sources [see, for example, Morgan])?

The circulation of scholars across provincial and national boundaries to participate in research activities like those surrounding our research

Tapes of poetry readings serve more ritual functions than they do documentary functions.

on this tape over quite a few years is also a ritual that follows the contemporary bureaucratic imperatives of research communication and "impact." What we do at conferences and other scholarly events helps to consolidate and maintain cultural power at various levels (department, faculty, discipline, university, municipality, province, nation). One pressing question is whether or not we can invigorate well-established research rituals with the new perspectives, tools, and methods we have been describing, in order to transform our institutions in progressive and durable ways, even as various internal and external forces compete to quantize and monetize every aspect of academic practice. Our consideration of the afterlife of performance and the numerous cultural techniques surrounding its material trace (a tape recording) has aimed to highlight some of the methods that are in play.

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