

DIGITIZING THE 'SOUND EXPLOSIONS' OF ANGLOPHONIC CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE POETRY

FONT: MONTELETTENS

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THE INTERNET OFFERS NEW PERFORMANCE PLATFORMS FOR CARIBBEAN POETS WHO PRIORITIZE ORAL EXPRESSION. ONE GROUP REALIZING THIS POTENTIAL IS THE YOUTH-LED ARTIST COLLECTIVE THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT, BASED OUT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, WHO CIRCULATE THEIR VIDEO POEMS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES. THROUGH THEIR DIY APPROACH, THEY ARE BUILDING A BROADER YOUTH AUDIENCE FOR THEIR WORK. MORE GENERALLY, CARIBBEAN POETS ARE OFTEN UNDERREPRESENTED IN ONLINE POETRY RESOURCES, PARTICULARLY IN INSTITUTION-BASED INTERNET AUDIO ARCHIVES. THIS ARTICLE USES THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT AS A PRELIMINARY MODEL TO UNDERSTAND HOW INTERNET AUDIO ARCHIVES CAN BE REDESIGNED TO AMPLIFY THE TOTAL EXPRESSION OF CARIBBEAN POETRY. HOWEVER, THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT OFFERS A PARTIAL SOLUTION TO A MUCH BIGGER PROBLEM; HOWEVER, THIS ARTICLE DEMONSTRATES THE VALUE OF EXAMINING POETS' ENGAGEMENTS WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO DEVELOP BETTER ARCHIVAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES IN SYNC WITH THE POLITICS OF THE WORK.

INTRODUCTION

IF LORICE BENNETT, THE PROMINENT JAMAICAN ARTIST, WERE STILL ALIVE AND PERFORMING TODAY, HOW WOULD THE INTERNET FIT INTO HER CREATIVE PRACTICES? WOULD SHE POST POETRY RECORDINGS ON FACEBOOK? WOULD CHILDREN PLAY WITH A MISS LOU APP? WOULD RUSHTT ROBERTS DELIVER MUDOO VIA TWITTER? SINCE SHE EMBRACED EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES TO REACH HER AUDIENCE ABOUT THE VALUE OF THE JAMAICAN LANGUAGE,

social media likely would have played a prominent role in her education activism. She turned to performance early in her career to build an inclusive audience, and her media projects for the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation—her children’s television show *King Ding* (1976–82) and her radio program *Miss Lou’s Views* (1986–88)—gave her an expanded terrain to develop her call-and-response poetics. Unfortunately, searching for Louise Bennett online today yields few actual sound recordings of her poetry. Bennett’s underrepresentation online—or, more aptly, her silence, since her words can be found but rarely her voice—is characteristic of Caribbean poetry more generally. This article stems from concern about who has the power to define poetry in virtual spaces and whose voices receive notice. As Kamau Brathwaite established in his groundbreaking lecture *History of the Voice*, Anglophone Caribbean poetry should be celebrated for its “sound explosions,” yet it has remained relatively quiet online.¹

Internet audio archives for poetry have flourished in recent years. Websites such as PennSound, The Poetry Archive, the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets, and PoetNet have provided excellent resources for contemporary poetics. These twenty-first-century open-access collections offer both live and studio recordings, notable discussions of poetry, lectures, and taped interviews. While these digital platforms promote democratization, they often repeat the exclusions of print archives. Many of these collections, which now determine the content of poetry syllabi in university classrooms, reinforce the United States as the dominant center of Anglophone poetry in the Americas.² For example, the Poetry Foundation has also author pages, almost half of which are devoted to US poets. The site features only eleven poets from the Caribbean region, excluding many major voices from the region, including Louise Bennett. Of the eleven Caribbean poet pages, none include audio forms and only seven of them include actual poetry texts; the other four just feature short author bios. Not only are Caribbean poets underrepresented in these curated collections but their online presence is often sparse, limited to random YouTube videos.³

¹ See Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), 10.

² See “PennSound Transforms How Poetry Is Taught the World Over,” *Penn News*, 26 June 2011, <http://www.penn.edu/pennnews/news/pennsound-transforms-how-poetry-taught-world-over>.

³ For a discussion of race in digital canons, see Amy E. Bennett, “Can Information Be Unraveled? Race and the New Digital Humanities Canon,” in *Mayhem*

DESPITE THEIR UNDERREPRESENTATION IN WEB-BASED AUDIO COLLECTIONS, MANY CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE POETS HAVE EMBRACED DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO REACH THEIR AUDIENCES. THESE NEW DIGITAL POETRIES OFFER A SOLUTION TO WHAT LAWRENCE A. GREENER HAS CHARACTERIZED AS THE "HALF-LIFE" OF CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE POETRY.¹ ACCORDING TO HIM, READERS UNABLE TO ATTEND A POET'S LIVE RECITATION ARE ALWAYS AT A DISADVANTAGE, BECAUSE THINGS LIKE TONE, GESTURE, AND THE POET'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HER AUDIENCE ALSO DETERMINE MEANING. IN TERMS OF DISTRIBUTION, DIGITIZED POETRY RECORDINGS, UNIMPEDED BY SHIPPING FEES AND TRADE BARRIERS, OUTPACE PRINT BOOKS IN THEIR INTERNATIONAL PORTABILITY, MAKING THEM MORE ACCESSIBLE TO CARIBBEAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES.



FIGURE 1 2 CENTS MOVEMENT POET

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE DIGITAL POETRY IN THE CARIBBEAN: THE YOUTH-LED ARTIST COLLECTIVE THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT, BASED OUT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, WHO

1. GOLD, ed., *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), Open Access Edition, <http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu>. GREENER argues that "we need to examine the canon that we, as digital humanists, are constructing, a canon that trends toward traditional texts and excludes critical work by women, people of color, and the GLBTQ community."

² LAWRENCE A. GREENER, "The Half-Life of Performance Poetry," *Journal of New British Literature* 3, no. 1 (2006): 20.

use social networking sites to circulate their video poems. Students at the University of the Southern Caribbean started the movement in 2010, and their activities have strengthened youth enthusiasm for spoken-word poetry. Some of their activities include island-wide school tours, open-air nights, slam contests, television and radio broadcasts, video production of poems, and student poetry workshops. They present themselves as a movement to align their poetry with social change. Their digital recordings become modes of promotion, publication, distribution, preservation, and community activation. Their populist approach builds on the vernacular pedagogical dynamics of performance established by figures like Louise Bennett. By using these technologies to integrate creative and political practices, The 2 Cents Movement realizes Brathwaite's theory of nation language and his argument that sound reproduction technologies can be used to reinscribe Afro-centric oral traditions.⁵

Brathwaite identifies how nation language poets challenge the way that paper records were used to discredit oral ways of knowing and uphold institutional power during colonization. When a poet like Linton Kwesi Johnson recites definitive works such as "Reggae Common," lines such as "foot-drop time down, blood story / and history is a nothing / is a nothing black story" attack print-centric forms of knowledge.⁶ He builds on a history of Caribbean people using performance to circumvent the print archive to produce, record, and transmit knowledge through embodied acts.⁷ Such knowledge depends on the interaction between the performer and her audience. The format of Bennett's *King Ding*, where she would invite children from the studio audience to join her on stage to recite poetry with her, exemplifies this well. Such communal pedagogies also extend to adult audiences. For example, Oen Osona defines the goal of her poetry as consciousness-raising: "It also mean to use our the ions and actions and to use consciousness into the people-own head."⁸ Performance creates what Brathwaite characterizes as "total expression," encompassing

⁵ Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, 22.

⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson, *An Unrehearsed Speech* (Knox, NY: Archipelago Press, 2006), 26.

⁷ Here I build on Diana Taylor's analysis of how she claims the performance to characterize how performance acts create cultural memory in the Americas. See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁸ Quoted in Henry Horro, *To Engage We Speak: and Other Poems* (Burlington: Ash Grove Publishers, 2009), 26.

A SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE, POLITICIZED VERBALEARN CONSCIOUSNESS TO TAKE SHAPE:

THE OTHER THING ABOUT NATION LANGUAGE IS THAT IT IS PART OF WHAT MAY BE CALLED TOTAL EXPRESSION. . . . READING IS AN ISOLATED, INDIVIDUALISTIC EXPRESSION. THE ORAL TRADITION ON THE OTHER HAND DEMANDS NOT ONLY THE CRIOT BUT THE AUDIENCE TO COMPLETE THE COMMUNITY: THE NOISE AND SOUNDS THAT THE NAKED NAKES ARE RESPONDED TO BY THE AUDIENCE AND ARE RETURNED TO HIM. HENCE WE HAVE THE CREATION OF A CONTINUUM WHERE READING TRULY RESIDES.⁹

ALTHOUGH BRATHWAITE SEEMS TO BE ARGUING HERE THAT THE FULL EXPERIENCE OF THE SONIC CONTINUUM DEPENDS ON LIVE INTERACTION, HE ACTUALLY EMPOWERED THE OPPOSITE. A CENTRAL POINT OF HIS TEXT, ORIGINALLY TITLED "AN ELECTRONIC LECTURE" FOR HIS 1970 MARSHALL PRESENTATION, HARNESSES THE POTENTIAL OF SOUND REPRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES TO CREATE NEW PATTERNS FOR TOTAL EXPRESSION. FOR HIM, THEY INTERJECT "THE DETONATIONS WITHIN CARIBBEAN SOUND-POETRY [THAT] HAVE INFUSED US INTO NEW SHAPES AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF OURSELVES."¹⁰ BRATHWAITE'S COMBINATION METAPHORS OF "DETONATIONS" AND "EXPLOSIONS" REVEAL HIS PRIORITIZING OF ELECTRONIC SOUND. AS JONATHAN STERN ESTABLISHES, "ALL SOUND-REPRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES WORK THROUGH THE USE OF TRANSDUCERS" THAT CONVERT ACOUSTIC WAVES INTO ELECTRONIC IMPULSES.¹¹ BRATHWAITE SUGGESTS THAT THESE ENERGY CONVERSIONS AMPLIFY TOTAL EXPRESSION RATHER THAN WEAKEN IT, WHICH THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT SUBSTANTIATES.

SO MUCH SCHOLARSHIP FOCUSES ON WRITTEN DOCUMENTS AND TECHNIQUES FROM THE PAST, YET MANY DIGITAL HUMANIISTS ARE EARLY ADOPTERS. THEY EMBRACE THE UNFINISHED, THEY INVITE COLLABORATION, THEY MOVE US OFF THE PAGE, AND THEY AIM TO BUILD THINGS FOR THE FUTURE. INSPIRED BY THIS APPROACH, THIS ARTICLE USES THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT AS A PRELIMINARY MODEL TO UNDERSTAND HOW INTERNET AUDIO ARCHIVES CAN BE REDESIGNED TO AMPLIFY THE TOTAL EXPRESSION OF CARIBBEAN POETRY. ADMITTEDLY, THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT OFFERS AN INCOMPLETE SOLUTION TO A MUCH LARGER PROBLEM: HOWEVER, I ARGUE THAT WE NEED TO BEGIN BY EXAMINING POETRY'S ENGAGEMENTS WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO DEVELOP BETTER ARCHIVAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES IN SYNC WITH THE POLITICS OF THE WORK. IN THIS COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT, I ALSO INVITE READERS TO CLICK ON THE LINKS AS THEY READ THIS ARTICLE, TO INTERJECT THEMSELVES IN WHAT'S ALREADY

⁹ BRATHWAITE, *HISTORY OF THE VOICE*, 16-19 (ITALICS IN ORIGINAL).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ JONATHAN STERN, *THE ACOUSTIC FACT: CULTURAL ORIGINS OF SOUND REPRODUCTION* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 22.

online, and to think about how we can build on this virtual world of Caribbean poetics.

Part of what makes Bratman's *History of the Voice* an important catalyst for building digital archives is that he avoids the tendency in oral scholarship to fixate on the live event. For example, John Hodge stresses the difficulty of studying performance poetry, lamenting that we typically examine only "the textualized trace of it."⁸⁸ He considers sound and video recordings as texts, because he argues that the total expression of the live event does not get captured on them. Similarly, Peter Phelan claims that what one calls "liveness" disappears in recordings of a performance.⁸⁹ As Sterne puts it, this attitude renders "face-to-face communication and bodily presence" as "the paradigms by which to measure all communicative activity" and "define[s] sound reproduction negatively, as negating or substituting an undamaged interpersonal or face-to-face experience."⁹⁰ Bratman takes a more innovative approach to sound reproduction technologies by highlighting their capacity to challenge print-centric aesthetics. The *A Genre Movement* demonstrates how digital technologies provide even more opportunities for this through their use of audio videography and microblogging. However, what Bratman emphasizes over so years ago through "recording tape[s]," sheet tracks, and LPs has yet to be fully realized in the broader terrain of our research methodologies and poetry resources.⁹¹

Critical approaches to performance poetry have been slow to develop because of the Western assumption that "the text of a poem—that is, the written document—is primary and that the recitation or performance of a poem by the poet is secondary and fundamentally inconsequential to the poem itself."⁹² While the digital should free us from our obsession with a text-based

⁸⁸ John Hodge, "Poetry and Overturned Cars: Why Performance Poetry Can't Be Studied, (and Why We Should Study It Anyway)," in Susan McClam and Henry Ray, eds., *Listening Up, Writing Down, and Looking Beyond: Interferences of the Oral, Written, and Visual* (Morgantown, OH: Western Kentucky University Press, 2004), 66.

⁸⁹ As Phelan describes, "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." Peter Phelan, *The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 106.

⁹⁰ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 20.

⁹¹ Bratman, *History of the Voice*, 20.

⁹² Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.



Figure 2 Audience Interaction

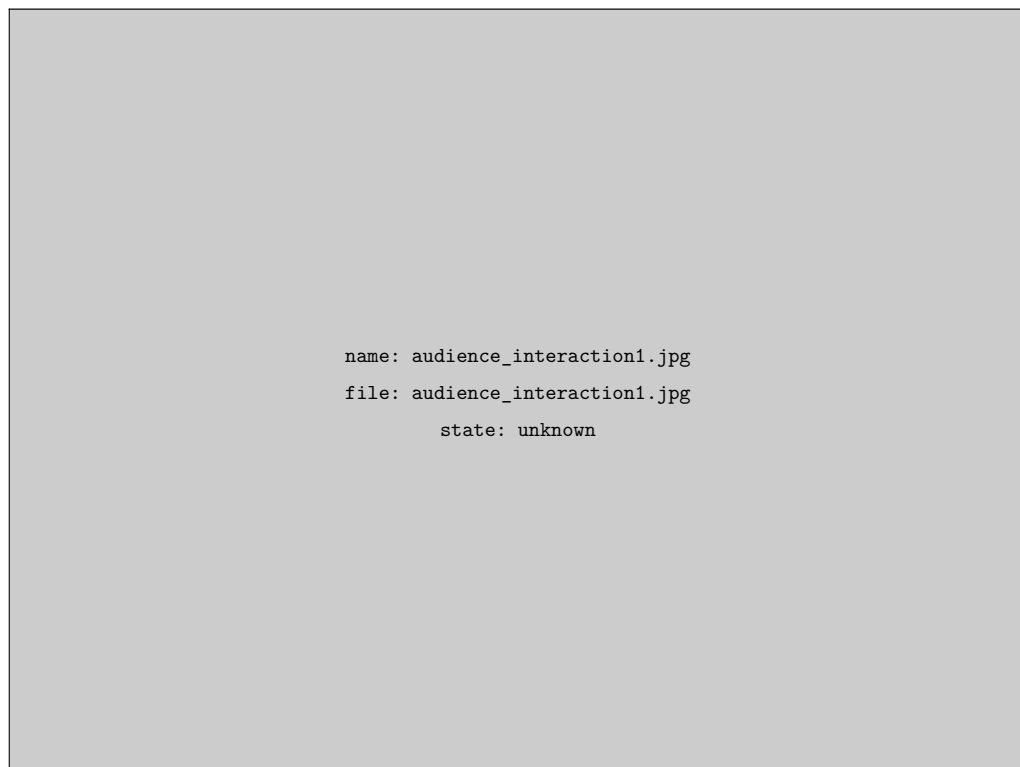
young audience.”²⁰ Their best-known projects are the *Intercol* and *Verdes* national slam competitions, held annually as part of the *Bocas Lit Festival* (*Verdes* has recently renamed the *First City-zens National Poetry Slam*). The two different slams—*Intercol* features high school teams, and *Verdes* features prominent poets who compete individually—reflect their mentorship structure. The 2015 winner of the *Intercol* slam, Michael Locke, got to pick a 2 Cents Movement poet as a mentor to work with him for a year to help him develop his poetry.”²¹ The 2 Cents Movement has also collaborated with the *Trinidad and Tobago Radio Network* on the *Free Speech Project*, where young artists recite their poems weekly on the radio. These poems are also produced as videos and uploaded on the network’s YouTube channel. The majority of the movement’s activities are coordinated and advertised online, and major events like the slam contests can be live-streamed. They exist solely through freely accessible sites and do not have their own server or domain name, which suggests that a lack of

²⁰ Quotes in Bonnie-Lee Dixon, “Not afraid to put in their ‘a cents,’” *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 16 July 2016, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/entertainment/2016-07-16/not-afraid-put-their-a-cents>.

²¹ “Locke Picks Schools’ Winner for ‘Intercol,’” *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 2 April 2016, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/lifestyle/2016-04-01/locke-picks-schools-winner-intercol>.

resources does not need to be an obstacle to building an online presence for Caribbean poetry. In addition to reaching youth in Trinidad and Tobago, they have gained an international following by circulating their poetry on social media.

Their Twitter and Facebook updates for their 2014-2015 Courts Social Speak Out Tour of more than fifty secondary schools demonstrated their use of these platforms to enhance audience interaction. During this tour, some of the nation's best performing poets mentored high school students as they wrote and performed their own works through performances and workshops. These school visits provided a way for The e Courts Movement to promote the Intercol Asia competition. Photo live-tweets of their tour performances often focused on the students actively participating in the audience rather than on the poet performing. In these shots, the camera points at the audience, often catching only the performer's back or the corner of her shoulder.²⁴



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FIGURE 3 Audience interaction

²⁴ See their Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/eCourtsMovement>. See also their individual updates on their Facebook page, where some of their school tour photos are collected. For example, see the album "Five Rivers Org - Speak Out Tour 2014 - Day 27": <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.61066666736666.1076766666.12332>



FIGURE 1 POET PERFORMER

THE ONLINE VIEWER GETS TO STARE OUT AT THE AUDITORIUM FILLED WITH STUDENTS, WHICH ALLOWS HER TO OCCUPY THE PERFORMER'S GAZE BUT ALSO VIEW A STUDENT'S FACE AS A MIRROR, INVITING HER TO IDENTIFY WITH BOTH THE PERFORMER AND THE AUDIENCE. THIS ELABORATES ON THE PEDAGOGY OFFERED DURING THE TOUR, WHERE THE POETS' PERFORMANCES PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH A MODEL FOR THEIR OWN POETRY ASPIRATIONS. VISUALLY, TWITTER AND FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS BECOME SITUATED IN THE CONTINUUM OF TOTAL EXPRESSION-IN THE RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN PERFORMER AND AUDIENCE.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED A 2 GENTS MOVEMENT PERFORMANCE AT THEIR OWN SCHOOL COULD THEN FOLLOW THEM ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK AND CONNECT THESE IMAGES TO THEIR OWN PARTICIPATION IN THE LIVE EVENT. THE PHOTOS (AND THE MOVEMENT AS A WHOLE) DOMESTICATE ADDITIONAL AUTHOR CREATIVITY IN FAVOR OF BUILDING A STUDENT-FOCUSED COLLECTIVITY. THE 2 GENTS MOVEMENT USES TWITTER AND FACEBOOK TO CREATE "A CONSTATMENT OF PRESENCE" TO LINK TOGETHER DIFFERENT HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITIES IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO."⁵⁵

ALTHOUGH THESE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS GOVERNED BY THE COMMERCIAL NEEDS OF US-BASED MULTINATIONALS CERTAINLY HOLD LIMITATIONS, RHETORIC SCHOLAR KEVIN HOOPER-GREENE STRESSSES THE POSSIBILITY FOR SUBVERSIVE ADAPTATION. EXAMINING CARIBBEAN INTERNET USERS'

⁵⁵ DERRICK JOHNSON, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age* (Cambridge, UK: Poetry Press, 2015), 25.

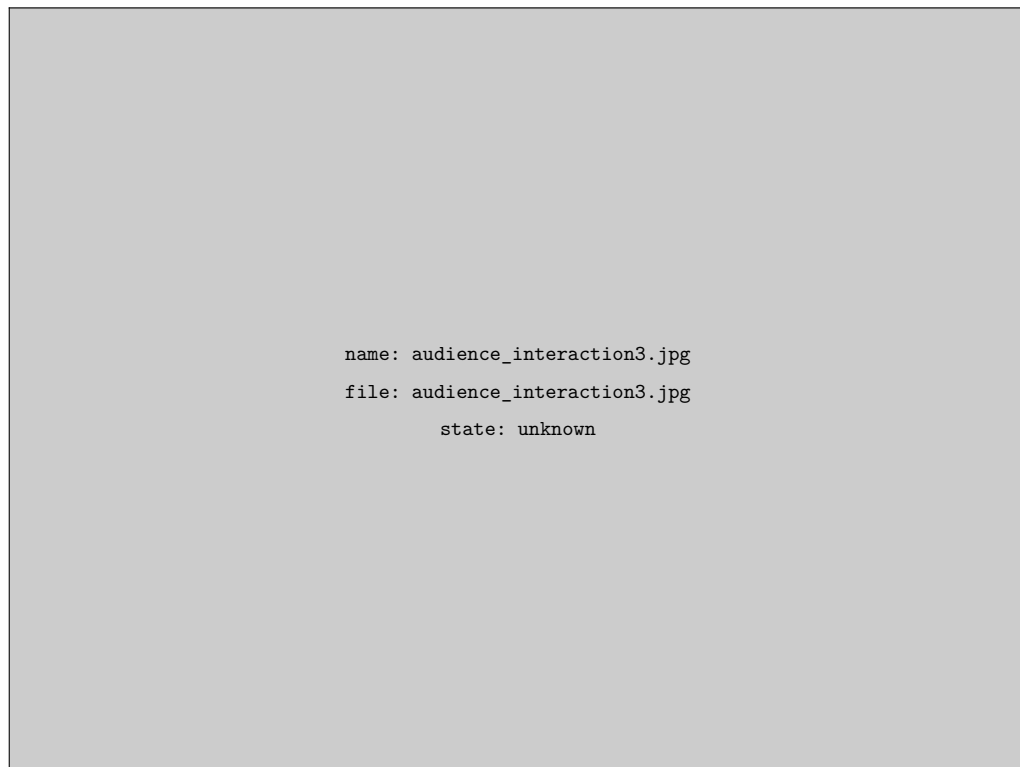


FIGURE 3 Audience interaction

chatting, blogging, and video-sharing practices, he illustrated how users adapt everyday vernacular practices to assert their presence in digital public spaces that often render them invisible. While his argument relates to individuals' everyday encounters online rather than large-scale digital projects, the parallels he establishes between "a carnivalesque imperative" and the Internet lend insight into The 2 Gent's Movement's adoption of social media to expand on the power of total expression in online environments.⁴⁴ Rather than view Caribbean folk cultures in opposition to digital forms, Brown views the intertextuality of both as part of what makes them compatible. He demonstrates how communal vernacular practices easily translate to an online environment because they emerge out of "a history of adaptability" necessary for "those who have had to find a way or make one when none seemed available."⁴⁵ For example, in the colonial era, storytellers' invented oral pan drumming to get around the ban on using actual drums and managed to make noise in a colonial environment that aimed

⁴⁴ Kevin Aboulin Brown, *Tropic Vernaculars: Rhetoric, Popular Culture, and the Anticolonial Caribbean* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 120.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

to silence them. Corporate social media platforms also contain creative expression through their circumscribed structures. Such restrictions often reinforce the majority voice, yet Facebook and Twitter have also proven themselves useful for the growth of subcultures and movements.

Media scholars have identified how Facebook's interface encourages users to adopt neoliberal values. The anthropologist Alex Fattal draws a connection between a user's desire to call as many likes and friends as possible and Facebook's corporate desire to become the most dominant social network in the world, characterizing this as "the unspoken logic of accumulation and curiosity that undergirds" the platform.⁸⁶ To what extent can this "logic of accumulation and curiosity," which sounds eerily similar to older imperial impulses, be disrupted? By using social media to augment their performance events, The a Gents Movement intersects this logic of accumulation by bringing users into the dynamic of total expression. While scholars often criticize Facebook for weakening face-to-face sociality, The a Gents Movement reveals how it can be used to deepen social connections.⁸⁷

Through social media, they also make their performances part of everyday life. People browse Facebook as they ride the bus to work, or as they wait in line at the grocery store. The a Gents Movement often depicts the performance dynamics of such quotidian spaces in their studio-produced video poems available on YouTube. For example, their most popular video poem "Make Man Teaching School Gay" (originally titled "Teacher's Glee"), by Crystal Greene, takes place on a subway street and on a bus. Greene addresses her concern about LGBT allies secretly fretting on underage schoolchildren by writing a poem in the voice of a teenage girl who refuses their advances. Similar to earlier women poets like Alice Low and Jean "Binta" Greene, she uses the dramatic monologue to give voice to women who are denied respect in the public sphere. Through social media her video becomes even more impactful because a viewer might be in that particular social space as she watches the poem and even be witnessing what Greene

⁸⁶ Alex Fattal, "Facebook: Corporate Masters, a Million Users, and the Geopolitics of the 'Social Graph,'" *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2010): 501. See also Anna Carson, "Go-Friends My Heart: Facebook, Promiscuity, and Neoliberalism in a Neoliberal Age," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2010): 503-04.

⁸⁷ For a critique of Facebook as a community building force, see Jon Haidich, *Facebook Democracy: The Architecture of Disclosure and the Threat to Public Life* (Middletown, Ohio, UK: Algorite, 2012).

describes. This restores an important aspect of Caribbean oral traditions, where oral performances blend into everyday practices rather than become isolated special events. Miss Lou had a singular and in her manner women poets, yet her ability to connect her audience to her settings was often restrained by the artifice of the theater stage. By creating a tangible bond between their real-life voices and the mediated voices in their poems, The 2 Cento Movement invited users to do more than merely live their status updates and continue scrolling.



Figure 3. Instagram video. YouTube url: <https://youtu.be/0bAa6Lo2TnI>

In addition to microblogging their performances, The 2 Cento Movement's video poems, like Shreeta's "Class Man," demonstrate how audiovisual recording technologies can be used to enhance the communal dynamics of total expression. Their videos challenge the idea that poetry depends on print publication, since many of their well-known poems are available only in this format. By getting us off the page, their videography expands the possibilities for how we might edit and archive performance poetry. Released in 2011, Shreeta's video went viral on social media and received more than 35,000 views on YouTube.⁵⁵ Her poem exemplified the 2 Cento Movement's approach, in that she initially attended one of their workshops as a medical student and she is now a leading poet in the movement. She won the 2011 Verses Poetry Slam with her performance of this poem; however, the popular version on The 2

⁵⁵ Shreeta Shreeta, "Class Man Teaching School Girl," YouTube video, 1:27, posted by The 2 Cento Movement, 25 June 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bAa6Lo2TnI>.

Gente Movement's YouTube channel is a studio recording made by Heatoven Productions with videography by Dentist. Rather than aim to recreate the experience of the live performance event, the video invites a viewer to feel included in the street scene being depicted. Through their synthesis of the dramatic monologue form and the music video genre, Gente and the 2 Gente Movement team cultivate a sense of audience connection and encourage dialogue beyond the space of the poem.



Figure 7. Class and cast

Gente dresses in a government school uniform to play her character in the video. Her embodiment of the character created a dialogic relationship between her persona and her words because her recitation critiqued the behavior that she acts out. The dramatic monologue's implied addressee is another high school girl who is swayed by a classmate's advances. The speaker warns her that "these free rides are going to end in horror / trust me / with that nine-month sentence things does go down."²⁹ Gente's conversational utter, enhanced by the video editing and camera angles, encourage the viewer to feel as though Gente is speaking directly to her. Standing in the middle of the street, Gente begins with the lines, "Rolling on every street corner / this is

²⁹ Gente, "Class Cast" (hereafter cited in text). Since I transcribed the quotations from a recording, any inaccuracies are mine.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF 'JEAN AND DINAH'... NO FANTASIES WERE / ONLY JEAN WAS CONDUCTOR." REFERENCING NIGHTY STARROW'S CLEVERLY BUT "JEAN AND DINAH," ABOUT HOW THE PRESENCE OF A WORLD WAR II US ARMY BASE LED TO PROSTITUTION IN TRINIDAD, SHE DRAWS ATTENTION TO HOW GIRLS GETTING FREE BUS RIDES FROM JEAN WERE FOR SEXUAL FAVORS RECREATED A SIMILAR DYNAMIC. THROUGH AN INTERGENERATIONAL CALL AND RESPONSE, SHE SITUATES HER VOICE IN THE TRINIDADIAN ORAL TRADITION. GREETE'S VOICE EXEMPLIFIES HOW THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT AIMS TO CULTIVATE A SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS FORM OF LEARNING THAT VALUES VERNACULAR LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE.

SIMILAR TO MUSIC VIDEOS, GREETE'S RECITATION ALTERNATES BETWEEN A VOICEOVER AND HER CHARACTER SPEAKING ONSCREEN. BY PLAYING WITH THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN DISCRETE AND NON-DISCRETE SOUND, THE EDITING CAPITALIZES ON SOUND'S PERMEABILITY, ENCOURAGING HER VIRTUAL AUDIENCE TO FEEL A CLOSER CONNECTION TO HER WORDS. GREETE'S VOICE EXTENDS BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE VIDEO AND ILLUSTRATES THE LISTENING SPACE, COLLAPSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE ONSCREEN PERFORMANCE AND THE AUDIENCE'S EXPERIENCE OF IT, ESPECIALLY IF THEY HAD TO BE IN A SIMILAR SETTING.

IN THE NARRATIVE THAT UNFOLDS, THE CAMERA ANGLES ACCENTUATE GREETE'S ENSOULLED PERFORMANCE. WHILE CONVENTIONAL MUSIC VIDEOS OFTEN SEXUALLY OBJECTIFY WOMEN'S BODIES, THE JUMP CUTS BETWEEN MEDIUM SHOTS, MEDIUM LONG SHOTS, AND CLOSE-UPS (OFTEN FROM A SLIGHT LOW ANGLE) EMPHASIZE GREETE'S POWER AS SHE DRAMATIZES HER CHARACTER'S SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND ENCOURAGES OTHER GIRLS TO DO THE SAME. GREETE'S WORDS COMBINED WITH THE CAMERA WORK CHALLENGE THE MALE GAZE TO CREATE A VIRTUAL SPACE OF FEMALE COMMUNITY. THIS REACHES ITS PEAK WHEN THE SPEAKER STEPS IN THE BACK OF THE VAN RECITING HER CRITIQUE AND A REVERSE SHOT CAPTURES THE MALE MAN GLARING AT HER IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR. HIS GAZE IS LITERALLY REFLECTED BACK AT HIM, WHILE THE SPEAKER VERBALLY REFUSES HIS OBJECTIFICATION. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE VAN, A GIRL FLIRTS WITH ANOTHER MALE MAN. THROUGHOUT THE POEM, THE SPEAKER SEEMS TO COMPLETELY CONDEMN THIS BEHAVIOR; HOWEVER, THE POEM ENDS WITH A SURPRISE TWIST. AS SHE GETS OUT OF THE MALE MAN'S VAN, SHE TELLS THE AUDIENCE, "THIS BROWN-SKINNED CYCL / COMING HOME AND ALSO SHE CALLED," INDICATING THAT HER ADVICE IS BASED ON HER OWN MISTAKES WITH A MALE MAN (GREETE). THIS SURPRISE ENDING UNDERMINES THE SPEAKER'S AUTHORITY (NOT BY SEPARATING HER FROM HER COMMUNITY BUT BY UNDERSCORING HER PARTICIPATION IN IT) AND ENCOURAGES SCHOOLGIRLS WATCHING THE POEM TO TRUST HER ADVICE.

IN THE LIVE PERFORMANCE OF "MALE MAN TRACKING SCHOOL CYCL," GREETE'S CRITIQUE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS LIKELY POWERFUL; HOWEVER, THE VIDEO FORMAT ALLOWS A VIEWER TO EXPERIENCE WITH GREATER

CLARIFY THE ENSUED EXPERIENCE OF RESISTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE STREET. FOR FEMALE VIEWERS WHO WENT THROUGH SOMETHING SIMILAR, THE RECREATION OF THE SCENE AND ITS PROVOCATIVE ENDING DEEPENS THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SPEAKER. LIKE A CRYOT, GREASE SPEAKS FOR A COMMUNITY OF YOUNG GIRLS, OR RATHER SPEAKS WITH THEM, AS HER PERFORMANCE ENCOURAGES THEM TO BRING THEIR EXPERIENCES INTO THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM.

UNLIKE MANY POETRY RECORDINGS AVAILABLE ONLINE, WHICH ARE TAKEN AT LIVE EVENTS, THE *a Genre Movement* engages technologies as PART OF THE ARTISTIC COMPOSITION OF THE POEM THROUGH THEIR STUDIO-PRODUCED FORMS. BY BORROWING FROM MUSIC VIDEOGRAPHY, THEY INVITE US TO SEE PERFORMANCE ARCHIVES AS SOMETHING MORE ESTIMATIVE THAN AS A PLACE TO SIMPLY STORE COPIES OF "ORIGINAL" LIVE EVENTS. THIS MOVES US MOVE BEYOND WHAT STERNE CHARACTERIZES AS THE PROSECUTION WITH FIDELITY, WHICH ADVERTISERS ESTABLISHED EARLY ON IN SOUND REPRODUCTION HISTORY. STERNE REVEALS HOW "SOUND FIDELITY IS A STORY THAT WE TELL OURSELVES TO STAPLE SEPARATE SONIC REALITIES TOGETHER."⁵⁵ IT MAINTAINS THE ILLUSION OF "REPRODUCED SOUND AS A MEDIATION OF 'LIVE' SOUND;" HOWEVER, "THE 'MEDIUM' DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEDIATE, AUTHENTICATE, DEBATE, OR EXTEND A PREEXISTING SOCIAL RELATION."⁵⁶ RATHER THAN ONLY VIEW AN ARCHIVE AS A SPACE TO PRESERVE FORMER INSTANCES OF TOTAL EXPRESSION, WE SHOULD ALSO VIEW THEM AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENGENDER NEW FORMS OF IT. RATHER THAN USE RECORDING TECHNOLOGIES TO RECOVER OR PRESERVE A LOST HISTORY OF THE VOICE, THEY CAN BE USED TO ACTIVELY CONSTRUCT A HISTORY OF THE VOICE-TO CREATE A SONIC REALITY WHERE NEW SOCIAL RELATIONS CAN TAKE SHAPE.

REDESIGNING INTERNET AUDIO ARCHIVES FOR CARIBBEAN POETRY

THE *a Genre Movement*'S DIY APPROACH TO DIGITIZING POETRY ILLUSTRATES THAT A LOT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY ADAPTING EXISTING PLATFORMS AND WITH LIMITED RESOURCES; HOWEVER, THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF CARIBBEAN POETRY ONLINE WILL NOT BE SOLVED SOLELY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE "FREE CULTURE" OF THE INTERNET. MERELY UPLOADING MORE POEMS TO YOUTUBE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THE STRUCTURAL BIASES THAT SILENCE (AND DROWN OUT) CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE POETRY ONLINE. AS NICK FREELINGER COINED, YOUTUBE HAS BECOME "IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC, THE DEFAULT

⁵⁵ STERNE, *THE AMERICAN FACT*, 210, 216, 226.

online moving-image archive.”⁸¹ Yet it lacks many of the defining characteristics of archives that make them valuable, such as a focus on long-term preservation and “strictly codified lines of conduct” that have been carefully developed through academic practice and intellectual debate.⁸² The underrepresentation of Caribbean poetry in Internet audio archives is also symptomatic of the global digital divide, which is especially acute for Africa-descended populations.⁸³ However, Carmen Best points out that “the flip side to the notion of the digital divide is therefore the formation of strategic space. It is this strategic space that opens up an area and arena of knowledge about evolving technologies.”⁸⁴ To take advantage of “this strategic space,” this section of the article evaluates the standards and practices that have been established by existing Internet audio archives and considers how a Caribbean poetry collection could be organized to realize total expression.

A discussion about archiving poetry recordings would be incomplete without a consideration of the achievements of PennSound. As the leading US collection, it has quickly become the standard for how to create a web-based poetry audio archive. University of Pennsylvania professors Charles Bernstein and Al Filreis started the collection in 2001 primarily for classroom use. It now has over 25,000 poetry recordings available for free streaming and download. Their files are downloaded roughly four million times a month.⁸⁵ For poetry, this number is astounding when one considers the limited print runs and book sales for contemporary poetry. Although US poets and avant-garde aesthetics tend to predominate, the site includes author pages for some prominent Caribbean poets, including Brathwaite, and A. Nourzadeh Pinder. They also hold some

⁸¹ Nick Felschner, “The Appearance of Archives,” in Peter Gammel and Catherine Tompkins, eds., *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 269.

⁸² Frank Webster and Niko Tobias Jensen, “Archiving YouTube: Constituting a Digital Information Management System,” in Gammel and Tompkins, *The YouTube Reader*, 277.

⁸³ Mary E. Kibingo, “The New Data: Black Agency in Cyberpace,” *National History Review* 37 (Fall 2005): 96. For a discussion of the global digital divide, see Peter Nordin, *Digital Divide: Civil Exclusionary, Information Poverty, and the Internet Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ Carmen Best, *The Politics of Caribbean Structures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

⁸⁵ Talia Garbino, “Penn’s New Poetry Legacy,” *Penn Current*, 20 May 2010, <http://www.penn.edu/pennnews/current/2010-05-20/features/penns-new-poetry-legacy>.

of the few Bennett recordings available online. The site uses the following archival taxonomies: authors, series, anthologies, collections, groups, and classes, which provide the user with a variety of ways to study a poet's work. The PennSound Manifesto is worth examining because it has set the precedent for student-run Internet poetry collections. They provide the following criteria for poetry audio: "It must be free and downloadable;" "It must be MP3 or better;" "It must be singles;" "It must be named;" "It must embed biobibliographic information in the file;" and "It must be indexed."⁸⁶ These criteria have proved successful in terms of encouraging widespread use, particularly on college campuses. They archive each poem individually (rather than entire events), because this makes them easier to find, access, and download, and it allows listeners to create their own playlists. In their own words, they adopt "a consumer-oriented MP3 file exchange approach" for a non-profit library.⁸⁷ By embedding biobibliographic information in the file and naming each one, they uphold archival standards and ensure that future researchers will have access to information about the context for the recording, something a social media platform like YouTube does not always provide. Their straightforward interface, which lets users select from an alphabetized list of authors, also evokes implicit hierarchies that come from the emphasis on accumulation in social media sites where voices are forced to compete with each other for likes and views.

While Penn Sound's open access model poses a lot of potential for Caribbean performance poetry, their prioritizing of free resources may not be as easy to achieve for Caribbean poetry. An extreme example of this free culture ethos is represented by Kenneth Surin, the founder of *UbuWeb*, who for awhile maintained a page on the site called the "Wall of Shame," where he would publicly condemn any artist who asked for her work to be removed from the site by writing her name on the wall.⁸⁸ Unlike Surin, PennSound strives to ensure that all of their recordings are "cleared for copyright to be distributed free for noncommercial and educational purposes."⁸⁹ While this democratic and anti-capitalistic approach may seem appealing for Caribbean

⁸⁶ Charles Bennett, "PennSound Manifesto," PennSound, 2000, <http://www.pennsound.org/pennsound/manifesto.htm>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Anna Taton, *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Freedom, 2014), 120.

⁸⁹ Bennett, "PennSound Manifesto."

POETRY, IN PRACTICE IT MAY BE MORE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT, PARTICULARLY FOR POETS WHO VIEW PERFORMANCE AS A CENTRAL PART OF THEIR ARTISTIC PRODUCTION. IN THE MANIFESTO, BERNSTEIN STATES THAT THE DEBATES ABOUT FEE SHARING IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY DO NOT APPLY TO POETRY: "ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES OF WORKING WITH POETRY SOUND FILES IS THAT WE DON'T ANTICIPATE A PROBLEM WITH RIGHTS. AT PRESENT AND IN THE CONCEIVABLE FUTURE, THERE IS NO PROFIT TO BE GAINED BY THE SALE OF RECORDED POETRY."¹⁵ YET CARIBBEAN POETS SUCH AS NOTABLY AND LINTON KEST JONASON built their careers THROUGH THEIR AFFILIATION WITH THE REGGAE RECORDING INDUSTRY AND MAKE MONEY OFF OF THEIR ALBUMS. THE 2 CENTS MOVEMENT OFFERS THEIR RECORDINGS FOR FREE; HOWEVER, AS A GROUP OF YOUNGER POETS, THEY MAY BE MORE WILLING TO SHARE THEIR WORK ONLINE TO BUILD THEIR REPUTATION.

THE SUBJECT OF COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE FOR CARIBBEAN PERFORMANCE POETRY IS A COMPLEX ISSUE, WHICH DESERVES ITS OWN TREATMENT IN A SEPARATE ARTICLE. IN TERMS OF THE CURRENT DISCUSSION, IT OFFERS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE PERSISTENCE OF PRINT-CENTRISM IN POETRY SCHOLARSHIP. THE ARGUMENTS ON FREE RECORDINGS IMPLICITLY REINFORCE THE IDEA THAT THE ARTISTIC LABOR OF POETRY IS MORE WORTHY OF PAYMENT WHEN IT IS PRINT-BASED. MOREOVER, IT DEMONSTRATES HOW WE DEFINE POEMS AS TEXTS RATHER THAN AS PERFORMANCES. THE POETRY FOUNDATION'S CODE FOR BEST PRACTICES IN FAIR USE FOR POETRY UNDERSCORES THIS POINT. A GROUP OF POETS, EDITORS, AND PUBLISHERS MET AT THE POETRY FOUNDATION'S HANNEY MONROE POETRY INSTITUTE AND COLLABORATED WITH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY'S CENTER FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW IN 2011 TO CREATE THE GUIDE. ALTHOUGH THEY OUTLINE THEIR PURPOSE AS "IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES PREVENTING POETRY FROM COMING FULLY INTO NEW MEDIA AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, IMAGINING HOW TO REMOVE OR MITIGATE THESE OBSTACLES," ALMOST NONE OF THEIR EXAMPLES INVOLVE POETRY AUDIO.¹⁶ YET FOR CARIBBEAN POETS A MAJOR STUNNING BLOCK TO "COMING FULLY INTO NEW MEDIA" IS A LACK OF FAIR USE PRACTICES FOR PERFORMANCE-BASED WORK. IN THE "POETRY ONLINE" SECTION, THEIR EXAMPLES PERTAIN TO THE APPEARANCE OF TEXT ON WEBSITES. THE DOCUMENT CONCLUDES WITH A SECTION ON "LITERARY PERFORMANCE;" HOWEVER, IT ONLY ADDRESSES POETS WHO INCORPORATE POEMS BY OTHER ARTISTS INTO THEIR RECORDINGS. THIS DOCUMENT BECOMES COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT FOR GROUPS LIKE THE

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ CODE FOR BEST PRACTICES IN FAIR USE FOR POETRY (CENTER FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POETRY FOUNDATION, 2011), <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/bestpractices>.

a Genre Movement who directly produce text versions of their poems.

This print-centricity also extends to the design of audio collections. I agree with Kate Eichhorn, who argues that most poetry sound archives (both digital and analog) have yet to realize the potential of archiving sound due to "the widely held assumption [in literary studies] that the archive is necessarily a space of writing and, hence, opposed to speech and other performative acts."⁴² Eichhorn proposes that we need "to create a sound archive designed to recover and preserve the embodied, interactive, and present nature of the performed word."⁴³ In her assessment, archived poetry recordings too often become "flat and lifeless artifacts."⁴⁴ Although Eichhorn focuses on avant-garde poets, her arguments apply to Caribbean poets who foreground sound as an integral part of the poem's meaning. Such work accessible in an archive designed to distort our text-based conceptions of archival knowledge would undoubtedly lead us more adventurously into other forms of knowing rather than allow the digital to reconcile print paradigms.

One notable exception to the underrepresentation of Anglophone Caribbean poets in Internet audio collections is The Poetry Archive, supported by the Arts Council of England. This site features more Caribbean poets than most, because the Caribbean Poetry Project—a group of scholars and poets from the Cambridge University Faculty of Education, the Centre for Commonwealth Education, and the University of the West Indies—collaborated with The Poetry Archive to improve access. Out of one poets, twenty-three are from the Caribbean region. While this is not a huge percentage, it is considerably more than most sites, and every Caribbean poet page has sound recordings that can be streamed for free or downloaded for a fee of 0.99. The Poetry Archive, like many Internet audio archives, specializes in classroom resources. They have a special page for teaching Caribbean poetry with a selection of sound recordings and "A Guide to the Language of Caribbean Poetry." The Caribbean Poetry Project's work with The Poetry Archive demonstrates how cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional collaborations help to break down Anglo-centricity.

Yet analyzing the design of the Poetry Archive author pages reveals that we need to do more than add voices to existing

⁴² Kate Eichhorn, "Flat Performance, Present Design: A Poetics of Archiving Sound," *Poetics* 42 (2014): 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

archival. As Amy Eganham cautions, for digital recovery projects for writers of color to be successful, we also must "theorize the technological with the same rigor as we theorize the content."¹⁵ If one compares the recording of Linton Kwesi Johnson reciting "Di Great Inconceivable" on The Poetry Archive with a YouTube recording of him performing it at an outdoor festival in Venezuela in 2006, the total expression feels much more resonant in the YouTube version than on the Poetry Archive site.¹⁶ I make this comparison to illustrate how the design of the Poetry Archive page notes the inarticulate tone of Johnson's poem about the Brixton Riots, not to demonstrate that the YouTube platform is inherently better at representing total expression. Obviously, the YouTube video allows one to see Johnson's body and facial expressions, which one cannot get from the Poetry Archive audio recording, but it is not as simple as video versus audio. Although the sound quality lacks the clarity of the Poetry Archive recording, the uneven audio levels provide a more authentic experience of what hearing this poem in a large crowd at an outdoor festival would have felt like. The spontaneity of live performances, including sound glitches and background noises, becomes part of what Gephart characterizes as the "sonority contrasts" of total expression.¹⁷ As Eganham points out, "these intrusions are precisely what sound technicians often seek to filter out as they prepare recordings for the archive."¹⁸ The Poetry Archive version of "Di Great Inconceivable" follows the predominant sound-editing style for internet audio archives. Martin Gephart describes this style as "the seamless edit," designed to highlight the poet's voice and minimize all other distractions, including the recording scene (whether live or in-studio) and the "material elements of their production."¹⁹

¹⁵ Eganham, "Can Information be Untheorized?"

¹⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Di Great Inconceivable," YouTube video, 2:00, posted by Ocean David De Barros, 25 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUN6GtPw0c4>.

¹⁷ Gephart, *History of the Voice*, 16.

¹⁸ Eganham, "Poet Performance, Present Absence," 100.

¹⁹ Martin Gephart, "Analog Remains: A Poetics of Digital Audio Editing," *Object as: Cyberpoetics* (2009): 16, *Visible Fictions*, 16 May 2007, http://www.mel.com/fictions/object/06_gephart.pdf. Gephart criticizes poetry sound editing for being too influenced by traditional audio theory, questioning why poetry recordings present sound as though it were a linear stream of words "the seamless, invisible, untheorized edit which obscures nothing, which intervenes nothing, which is in fact deployed to remove interruption, to remove distraction and to clarify" (16).

In addition to using conventional sound-editing, Johnson's author page follows the standard visual design that can be found on The Poetry Archive as well as other online poetry collections such as PennSound. His page features an author portrait (rather than a performance action shot), a biography, and links to individual poem tracks. Beneath the poem title and author name, one can click the play button and listen to the recording. The Poetry Archive uses a simple audio player that allows a listener to start, pause, and stop the track. Johnson's author biography explains that his poems on the site were recorded from live performances and come from his CD *And a Carpenter Live*. Despite the claim that "the energy of his live recitals gives the recordings a unique electricity, interwoven with the laughter and applause of audiences around Europe," the seamless editing of "On Great Incomprehension" allows one to listen to Johnson's entire recitation before realizing that it is a live performance.⁸⁸ Once the poem ends, the only audible audience noises are a cough and polite applause that slowly fades out. Rather than convey "a unique electricity," the cough suggests a nervous audience who tried to remain silent until the end of the performance. The page provides no information about the specifics of the event or who the European audience was, although it sounds like it might be a poetry reading in an academic setting. The track certainly holds no trace of a communal "one consciousness."⁸⁹ By not clearly identifying the track as a single performance, the archive presents it as the authoritative audio version. In the left-hand margin, under the heading "About the Poem," it lists the themes as "social, unrest, race, and Caribbean" but provides no information about the Brixton Riots.

Derek Funn notes that while online poetry collections devote attention to different aesthetics, what unites them is the idea that hearing a poet voice her own work is critical to understanding the poem. Yet despite the interest in vocalization, collections tend to downplay the setting of the poet's performance by providing little information about when and where the reading occurred and why this particular event was recorded.⁹⁰ While certain sites, such as PennSound, make sure that all of the biographical info is embedded in the single file with accurate metadata, often all

⁸⁸ Linton Kwesi Johnson Author Page, The Poetry Archive, accessed 25 July 2016, <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/linton-kwesi-johnson>.

⁸⁹ Quoted quoted in Derrida, "In English He Speaks," 25.

⁹⁰ Derek Funn, *Recorded Poetry and Poetic Reception from Ezra Pound to the Streets of Robert Lowell* (New York: Plagiat Press, 2010), 5.

that this provides is the date and physical location of the reading. By divorcing the poem from its contextual setting, this approach erases the reciprocal relationship between the poet and her audience. Furr proposes that poetry recordings (both live and in-studio) become valuable because "when we close listen, we hear not only the sounds of the poem and the poet's voicing of them, but also the echoes of previous scenes of reading and listening."⁵⁵ Through message design and sound editing, *The Poetry Archive* duplicates the previous audiences of "On Great Inconsequence" so that the online user feels as though one is the only person in the audience. While *The 2 Cents Movement* illustrates how cinematic approaches can be used to deepen total expression, the Johnson example illustrates the value of preserving the ephemeral qualities of a live performance in a recording to enrich the listening experience. Furr borrows Charles Bernstein's term close listening to characterize how a user should engage with audio recordings. Based on his experience with PennSound, Bernstein proposes close listening as an alternative to close reading, where one prioritizes the materiality of sound and the aural experience.⁵⁶ Yet, in practice, how much does close listening actually deviate from close reading on Internet audio archives?

Anne Murray and James Marchese, curators of *SpokenWeb*, a collection of recordings of a Montreal poetry reading series from 1966 to 1977, point out that while most Internet audio archives make listening the focus, their structure makes them multimedial. Accordingly, they stress that the visual elements of online poetry archives need careful consideration. They explore "what kinds of site navigation, audio visualization, design elements and functionalities could be offered by a Web-based spoken word interface, and how these might enhance the listening process and, ultimately, the scholarly endeavor."⁵⁷ Because very little scholarship exists on how people engage with soundscapes, they acknowledge that their suggestions for "a sound archive 'recipe' that other cultural heritage institutions can follow" are based on established reading practices.⁵⁸ They make some

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁶ See Bernstein, *Close Listening*, 3-26.

⁵⁷ Anne Murray and James Marchese, "Looking at Archival Sound: Enhancing the Listening Experience in a Spoken Word Archive," *First Monday* 17, no. 3 (2012), <http://firstmonday.org/036/issue2.22/murray/article.php/2012/0303/1007>.

⁵⁸ Anne Murray and James Marchese, "A Design Methodology for Web-based Sound Archives," *DIG: Digital Humanities Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2014), <http://dihq.digitallhumanities.org/2014/02/000076/000076.html>.

different suggestions, including using a waveform display for sound visualization, and providing listeners with a media player that allows them more control over the playback. They also suggest incorporating any available images and videos of the performance event, such like The 2 Cento Movement's photo documentation on Twitter and Facebook. However, other suggestions such as tethering audio playback with a written transcript keep the primary focus on reading rather than listening.⁸⁷ For example, on the Poetry Archive site, beneath the link to play "Di Great Inconceivable," one can also click on a "Read this Poem" link. This encourages scholars to engage in what is, for many, the more familiar interpretive practice rather than to develop new modes of analysis based on sound. In digital archives, Benbowen suggests that "poems, set apart from their visual grounding in alphabetic texts, might begin to reverse the bonds from which, for so long, they have been divided."⁸⁸ However, to achieve this we need to 1) be wary of a one-size-fits-all approach, and 2) carefully design visual elements to encourage sonic engagement rather than to resist a visual economy of text. Such a divide between song and poem has never existed for Anselmone Caribbean performance poets, yet colonial legacies continue to dictate that we read rather than listen to this work.

Even when one is only listening, Internet audio archives often recreate the feeling of reading alone. Clicking on the link and listening to the poem while one looks at the author portrait (similar to the style found on book jackets) mimics the experience of solitary reading, where one feels in private conversation with the author. Simple audio players that have only a linear time-lapse bar (rather than a more complex waveform display) encourage the eyes to move from right to left, as they do in the act of reading. When a poem is presented as a decontextualized single track, a listener is encouraged to adopt a new critical approach and treat the poem as a self-contained object. Listening, like reading, becomes "an isolated, individualistic expression" rather than a communal endeavor.⁸⁹ Sound reproduction technologies have also encouraged our hearing to become more individualistic. Using headphones as an example, Sterne argues that such devices

⁸⁷ For a summary of their specific suggestions for visual design, see Murray and Wetherstone, "Looking at Auditory Sound."

⁸⁸ Charles Benbowen, "Making Audio Visible: The Lessons of Visual Language for the Representation of Sound," *Textual Practice* 21, no. 6 (2007): 999, doi:10.1080/08907310600600000.

⁸⁹ Benbowen, *History of the Voice*, 22.

ENCOURAGE LISTENING TO BE "MORE ORIENTATED TOWARD CONSTRUCTS OF PRIVATE SPACE AND PRIVATE PROPERTY," WHICH ENCOURAGES "SOUND TO BECOME A COMMODITY."⁶⁵

IN CONTRAST, *The 2 Cents Movement* RECREATES THE COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING TO A POEM, WHICH IS A KEY PART OF TOTAL EXPRESSION. THEIR PHOTO TEXTS AND POETRY VIDEOS MAKE ONLINE MEMBERS A PART OF THEIR PARTICIPATORY AUDIENCE. WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BUILD INTERNET AUDIO ARCHIVES THAT RECREATE THIS COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING. EVERYTHING—INCLUDING SOUND EDITING, INTERFACE, DATABASE DESIGN, NAVIGATION SYSTEM AND COPYRIGHT ISSUES—NEEDS CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO REALIZE THE DIGITAL POTENTIAL OF TOTAL EXPRESSION. TO ENSURE ON THIS WORK, IT IS CRUCIAL THAT WE TURN TO THE POETS THEMSELVES AND BUILD ON THEIR EDUCATION RESEARCH.

SO MUCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE VOICE HAS ALREADY BEEN LOST, OR LOST, BY THE ONGOING COLONIAL BIAS TOWARD NATIVE LANGUAGE, AS WELL AS LIMITED RESOURCES AND FUNDING. CARIBBEAN POETRY RECORDINGS THAT SURVIVE BURIED IN DUSTY BOXES IN ATTICS AND LIBRARY STORAGE ROOMS BUT SILENTLY WAITING FOR NEW AUDIENCES TO RETURN TO THEM "THE NOISE AND SOUNDS THAT THE NARRER MAKES."⁶⁶ SINCE THESE REEL-TO-REEL TAPES, CASSETTES, EIGHT-TRACKS, CDS, AND LPS ARE FRAGILE MEDIA, THREATENED BY TECHNOLOGICAL OBSOLESCENCE AND (SOMETIMES) THE TROPICAL CARIBBEAN CLIMATE, WE MUST MAKE PRESERVING THIS VITAL RECORD OF CARIBBEAN POETRY HISTORY A PRIORITY.

⁶⁵ STEVENS, *The American Part*, 22.

⁶⁶ BRATHWAITE, *HISTORY OF THE VOICE*, 16–19.

