Digitizing the Sound Explosions of Anglophone Caribbean Performance Poetry

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The Internet offers new performance platforms for Caribbean poets who prioritize oral expression. One group realizing this potential is the youthled 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. Admittedly, 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 Louise Bennett, the prolific Jamaican artist, were still alive and performing today, how would the Internet fit into her creative practice Would she post poetry recordings on Facebook Would children play with a Miss Lou app Would Aunty Roachy deliver wisdom via Twitter Since she embraced emerging technologies to teach 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 Corporationher childrens television show Ring Ding 197082 and her radio program Miss Lous Views 196682gave her an expanded terrain to develop her callandresponse poetics. Unfortunately, searching for Louise Bennett online today yields few actual sound recordings of her poetry. Bennetts underrepresentation onlineor, more aptly, her silence, since her words can be found but rarely her voiceis 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 airtime. As Kamau Brathwaite establishes 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 UbuWeb have provided excellent resources for contemporary poetics. These twentyfirstcentury openaccess collections offer both live and studio recordings, roundtable discussions of poetry, lectures, and taped interviews. While these digital platforms

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[1] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, History of the Voice The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry London New Beacon Books, 1984, 13.

promise democratization, they often repeat the exclusions of print archives. Many of these col lections, which now determine the content of po etry syllabi in university classrooms, reinforce the United States as the dominant center of An glophone poetry in the Americas.[2] For example, the Poetry Foundation has 3,649 author pages, al most half of which are devoted to US poets. The site features only eleven poets from the Caribbean region, excluding many major voices from the re gion, including Louise Bennett. Of the eleven Caribbean poet pages, none include audio poems 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 pres ence is often sparse, limited to random YouTube videos.[3]

Despite their underrepresentation in web based audio collections, many contemporary Caribbean performance poets have embraced digital tech nologies to build their audiences. These new dig ital poetries offer a solution to what Laurence A. Breiner has characterized as the halflife of Caribbean performance poems.[4] According to him, readers unable to attend a poems live recitation are always at a disadvantage, because things like tone, gesture, and the poets relationship with

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[2] See PennSound Transforms How Poetry Is Taught the World Over, Penn News, 26 June 2014, http//www.upenn.edu/pennnews/news/pennsoundtransformshowpoetrytaughtworldover.

[3] For a discussion of race in digital canons, see Amy E. Earhart, Can Information be Unfettered Race and the New Digital Humanities Canon, in Mathew K. Gold, ed., Debates in the Digital Humanities Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2012, Open Access Edition, http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu. Earhart urges that we need to examine the canon that we, as digital humanists, are constructing, a canon that skews toward traditional texts and excludes crucial work by women, people of color, and the GLBTQ community.

[4] Laurence A. Breiner, The HalfLife of Performance Poetry, Journal of West Indian Literature 8, no. 1 1998 20.

her audience also determine meaning. In terms of distribution, digitized poetry recordings, un hindered by shipping fees and trade tariffs, sur pass print books in their international portabil ity, 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 youthled artist collective The 2 Cents Movement, based out of Trinidad and Tobago, who use social networking sites to circulate their video poems. Students at the University of the Southern Caribbean started the movement in 2010, and their activi ties have strengthened youth enthusiasm for spoken word poetry. Some of their activities include island wide school tours, openmic nights, slam contests, television and radio broadcasts, video produc tion of poems, and student poetry workshops. They present themselves as a movement to align their poetry with social change. Their digital record ings become modes of production, publication,

distribution, preservation, and community ac
tivism. Their populist approach builds on the ver
nacular pedagogical dynamics of performance
established by figures like Louise Bennett. By us
ing these technologies to integrate creative and
political praxes, The 2 Cents Movement realizes
Brathwaites theory of nation language and his
argument that sound reproduction technologies
can be used to reinvigorate Afrocentric oral tra
ditions.[5]

Brathwaite identifies how nation language po
ets challenge the way that paper records were
used to discredit oral ways of knowing and up
hold institutional power during colonization. When
a dub poet like Linton Kwesi Johnson recites de
finitive works such as Reggae Sounds, lines such
as footdrop find drum, blood story / bass history
is a moving / is a hurting black story attack print
centric forms of knowledge.[6] He builds on a his
tory 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 be
tween the performer and her audience. The for
mat of Bennetts Ring Ding, where she would in
vite children from the studio audience to join
her on stage to recite poetry with her, exempli
fies this well. Such communal pedagogies also
extend to adult audiences. For example, Oku On
uora defines the goal of dub poetry as consciousness
raising It also mean to dub out the isms and schisms
and to dub consciousness into the peopledem head.[8]

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[5] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 13.

[6] Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mi Revalueshanary Fren Keene, NY
Ausable Press, 2006, 15.

[7] Here I draw on Diana Taylors analysis of what she calls
the repertoire to characterize how performance acts cre
ate cultural memory in the Americas. See Diana Taylor,
The Archive and the Repertoire Performing Cultural Mem
ory in the Americas Durham, NC Duke University Press,
2003.

[8] Quoted in Mervyn Morris, Is English We Speaking and Other
Essays Kingston Ian Randle Publishers, 1999, 38.

Performance creates what Brathwaite character izes as total expression, engendering a space for collective, politicized vernacular 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 ex pression. The oral tradition on the other hand demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the au dience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides.[9]

Although Brathwaite seems to be arguing here that the full experience of the sonic continuum depends on live interaction, he actually empha sizes the opposite. A central point of his text, originally titled an electronic lecture for his 1979 Harvard presentation, harnesses the potential of sound reproduction technologies to create new pathways for total expression. For him, they in tensify the detonations within Caribbean sound poetry that have imploded us into new shapes and consciousness of ourselves.[10] Brathwaites com bustion metaphors of detonations and explosions reveal his prioritizing of electronic sound. As Jonathan Sterne establishes, All sound reproduction technologies work through the use of transducers that convert acoustic waves into electronic im pulses.[11] Brathwaite suggests that these energy conversions amplify total expression rather than weaken it, which The 2 Cents Movement substan tiates.

So much scholarship focuses on written docu ments and techniques from the past, yet many digital humanists are early adopters. They em brace the unfinished, they invite collaboration, they move us off the page, and they aim to build

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[9] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 1819 italics in original.

[10] Ibid., 49.

[11] Jonathan Sterne, The Audible Past Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction Durham, NC Duke University Press, 2003, 22.

things for the future. Inspired by this approach, this article uses The 2 Cents Movement as a pre liminary model to understand how Internet au dio archives can be redesigned to amplify the to tal expression of Caribbean poetry. Admittedly, The 2 Cents Movement offers an incomplete solu tion to a much larger problem however, I argue that *we need to begin by examining poets engage ments 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 immerse themselves in whats already online, and to think about how *we can build on this virtual world of Caribbean poetics.*

Part of what makes Brathwaites 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 ex ample, Hugh Hodges stresses the difficulty of studying performance poetry, lamenting that *we typically examine only the textualized trace of it.*[12] He considers sound and video recordings as texts, because he argues that the total expres sion of the live event does not get captured on them. Similarly, Peggy Phelan claims that what she calls liveness disappears in recordings of a performance.[13] As Sterne puts it, this attitude upholds facetoface communication and bodily presence as the yardsticks by which to measure

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[12] Hugh Hodges, Poetry and Overturned Cars Why Performance Poetry Cant Be Studied, and *Why We Should Study It Any way,* in Susan Gingell and Wendy Roy, eds., Listening Up, *Writing Down, and Looking Beyond Interfaces of the Oral, Written, and Visual* Waterloo, ON Wilfrid Laurier Univer sity Press, 2012, 98.

[13] As Phelan describes, Performances 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. Peggy Phelan, Unmarked The Pol itics of Performance New York Routledge, 1993, 146.

all communicative activity and defines sound reproduction negatively, as negating or modifying an undamaged interpersonal or facetoface co presence.[14] Brathwaite takes a more innovative approach to sound reproduction technologies by highlighting their capacity to challenge print centric aesthetics. The 2 Cents Movement demonstrates how digital technologies provide even more opportunities for this through their use of music videography and microblogging. However, what Brathwaite envisioned over 30 years ago through resonating tapes, eight tracks, and LPs has yet to be fully realized in the broader terrain of our research methodologies and poetry resources.[15]

Critical approaches to performance poetry have been slow to develop because of the Western assumption that the text of a poemthat is, the written documentis primary and that the recitation or performance of a poem by the poet is secondary and fundamentally inconsequential to the poem itself.[16] While the digital should free us from our obsession with a textbased idiom in literary studies, it has yet to do so.[17] As this article demonstrates, even the designs of most online poetry audio collections still privilege the methodology of textual close reading rather than encourage us to develop new soundbased methods of analy

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[14] Sterne, The Audible Past, 20.

[15] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 49.

[16] Charles Bernstein, ed., Close Listening Poetry and the Performed Word New York Oxford University Press, 1998, 8.

[17] For a discussion about the neglect of sound analysis in digital literary studies, see Tanya Clement, David Tcheng, Loretta Auvil, Boris Capitanu, and Megan Monroe, Sounding for Meaning Using Theories of Knowledge Representation to Analyze Aural Patterns in Texts, Digital Humanities Quarterly 7, no. 1 2013, http//www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000146/000146.html.

sis.[18] In a similar vein, recent efforts to build Caribbean digital archives have focused on converting print documents and have not engaged as much with sound media.[19] Resources and funding certainly drive this, since print materials are easier and cheaper to digitize. Yet given the oral dimensions of Caribbean cultures, we must address how to represent and archive performance to overcome the structural biases of print archives.

Creating Digital Griots The 2 Cents Movement

Scrolling through The 2 Cents Movements Facebook page reveals a vibrant online poetry community. As of December 2015, they have more than 13,000 followers, and their page includes announcements about upcoming performances, photographs of performances, political news updates, links to livestream their events, and video poems. Its campus origins explain why Facebook, a social networking site designed for college students, has played a central role in the development of the movement. The founder, Jean Claude Cournand, an undergraduate at the time, sought to build a stronger intellectual youth cultureto invite youth to put in their two cents by expressing their views on current issues ranging from marijuana legislation to homophobia through spokenword poetry. In an interview, he explained that they chose to go into the digital habitat rather than trying to reach people through events alone,

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[18] Although I do not have the space in this article to explore their work, studying the standards and practices developed by music historians for online collections such as the Naxos Music Library would be another fruitful line of inquiry to help literary scholars move beyond textbased approaches.

[19] While there are Caribbean sound archives, such as Radio Haiti, in Caribbean literary studies print archiving is much more prevalent. For example, major collections, such as the Digital Library of the Caribbean, while excellent, primarily hold literary materials converted from print documents.

Figure 2   Audience Interaction

in order to attract a youth audience.[20] Their best known projects are the Intercol and Verses national slam competitions, held annually as part of the Bocas Lit Festival Verses was recently renamed the First Citizens National Poetry Slam. The two different slamsIntercol features high school teams, and Verses features prominent poets who compete individuallyreflect their mentorship structure. The 2015 winner of the Intercol slam, Michael Logie, 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

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[20] Quoted in Bobielee Dixon, Not afraid to put in their 2 cents, Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 16 July 2013, http//www.guardian.co.tt/entertainment/20130715/notafraidput their2cents.

[21] Logie Tops Schools Spoken Word Intercol, Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2 April 2015, http//www.guardian.co.tt/lifestyle/20150401/logietopsschoolsspokenwordintercol.

videos and archived on the networks YouTube chan nel. The majority of the movements activities are coordinated and advertised online, and major events like the slam contests can be livestreamed. They exist solely through freely accessible sites and do not have their own server or domain name, which suggests that a lack of resources does not need to be an obstacle to building an online pres ence for Caribbean poetry. In addition to reach ing 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 20142015 Courts Bocas Speak Out Tour of more than fifty secondary schools demonstrates their use of these platforms to enhance audience in teraction. During this tour, some of the nations best performance poets mentored high school stu dents as they wrote and performed their own works through performances and workshops. These school visits provided a way for The 2 Cents Movement to promote the Intercol slam competition. Photo livetweets of their tour performances often fo cused 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 performers back or the corner of her shoulder.[22]

The online viewer gets to stare out at the audito rium filled with students, which allows her to oc cupy the performers gaze but also view a students face as a mirror, inviting her to identify with both the performer and the audience. This elab orates on the pedagogy offered during the tour, where the poets performances provide students with a model for their own poetry aspirations. Vi sually, Twitter and Facebook followers become situated in the continuum of total expressionin

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[22] See their Twitter page https//twitter.com/2CentsMovement. See also their individual albums on their Facebook page, where some of their school tour photos are collected. For example, see the album Five Rivers Sec Speak Out Tour 2014 Day 27 https//www.facebook.com/media/set/seta.61056505573984

Figure 3 Audience interaction

Figure 4 Poet performer

the reciprocal exchange between performer and

audience.

Figure 5   Audience interaction

High school students who attended a 2 Cents Move ment 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 downplay individual author celebrity in favor of building a studentfocused collectivity. The 2 Cents Movement uses Twitter and Facebook to create a constancy of presence to link together different high school communities in Trinidad and Tobago.[23]

Although these social media platforms governed by the commercial needs of USbased multination als certainly hold limitations, rhetoric scholar Kevin Adonis Browne stresses the possibility for subversive adaptation. Examining Caribbean In ternet users chatting, blogging, and videosharing

[23] Dhiraj Murthy, Twitter Social Communication in the Twit ter Age Cambridge, UK Polity Press, 2013, 39.

practices, he illustrates how users adapt every day 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 Cents Movements adaptation of social media to expand on the power of total expression in online environments.[24] Rather than view Caribbean folk cultures in opposition to digital forms, Browne views the inventiveness 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.[25] For example, in the colonial era, musicians invented steel pan drumming to get around the ban on using actual drums and managed to make noise in a colonial environment that aimed to silence them. Corporate social media platforms also curtail 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 Facebooks interface encourages users to adopt neoliberal values. The anthropologist Alex Fattal draws a connection between a users desire to gain as many likes and friends as possible and Facebooks 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.[26] To what

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[24] Kevin Adonis Browne, Tropic Tendencies Rhetoric, Popular Culture, and the Anglophone Caribbean Pittsburgh University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013, 129.

[25] Ibid., 134.

[26] Alex Fattal, Facebook Corporate Hackers, a Billion Users, and the GeoPolitics of the Social Graph, Anthropological

extent can this logic of accumulation and curios ity, which sounds eerily similar to older imperial impulses, be disrupted By using social media to augment their performance events, The 2 Cents Movement intercepts this logic of accumulation by bringing users into the dynamic of total ex pression. While scholars often critique Facebook for weakening facetoface sociality, The 2 Cents Movement reveals how it can be used to deepen social connections.[27]

Through social media, they also make their per formances 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 2 Cents Move ment often depicts the performance dynamics of such quotidian spaces in their studioproduced video poems available on YouTube. For example, their most popular video poem Maxi Man Track ing School Gyal originally titled Yankees Gone, by Crystal Skeete, takes place on a Curepe street and on a bus. Skeete addresses her concern about adult males sexually preying on underage school girls by writing a poem in the voice of a teenage girl who refuses their advances. Similar to ear lier women poets like Miss Lou and Jean Binta Breeze, she uses the dramatic monologue to give voice to women who are denied respect in the pub lic sphere. Through social media her video be comes even more impactful because a viewer might be in that particular social space as she watches the poem and even be witnessing what Skeete de scribes. This restores an important aspect of Caribbean oral traditions, where yard performances blend into everyday practices rather than become iso lated special events. Miss Lou had a similar aim

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Quarterly 85, no. 3 2012 931. See also Ilana Gershon, Un Friend My Heart Facebook, Promiscuity, and Heartbreak in a Neoliberal Age, Anthropological Quarterly 84, no. 4 2011 86594.

[27] For a critique of Facebook as a community building form, see Jos Marichal, Facebook Democracy The Architecture of Disclosure and the Threat to Public Life Abingdon, Oxon, UK Ashgate, 2012.

in her market women poems, yet her ability to connect her audience to her settings was often re strained by the artifice of the theater stage. By creating a tangible bond between their reallife users and the mediated voices in their poems, The 2 Cents Movement invites users to do more than merely like their status updates and continue scrolling.

Figure 6 Embedded video. Youtube url https//youtu.be/9OA8eLoPylU

In addition to microblogging their performances, The 2 Cents Movements video poems, like Skeetes Maxi Man, demonstrate how audiovisual record ing technologies can be used to enhance the com munal dynamic of total expression. Their videos challenge the idea that poetry depends on print publication, since many of their wellknown po ems 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 2013, Skeetes video went viral on social media and received more than 88,000 views on YouTube.[28] Her poem

28 Crystal Skeete, Maxi Man Tracking School Gyal, YouTube video, 5.27, posted by The 2 Cents Movement, 25 June 2013, https//www.youtube.com/watchv9OA8eLoPylU.

exemplifies the 2 Cents Movements 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 2013 Verses poetry slam with her performance of this poem however, the popular version on The 2 Cents Move ments YouTube channel is a studio recording made by BeatOven Productions with videography by Denithy. Rather than aim to recreate the expe rience of the live performance event, the video in vites a viewer to feel included in the street scene being depicted. Through their synthesis of the dramatic monologue form and the music video genre, Skeete and the 2 Cents Movement team cul tivate a sense of audience connection and encour age dialogue beyond the space of the poem.

Figure 7 Maxi man cast

Skeete dresses in a government school uniform to play her character in the video. Her embodiment of the character creates a dialogic relationship between her persona and her words because her recitation critiques the behavior that she acts out. The dramatic monologues implied addressee is another high school girl who is swayed by a

maxi mans 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 sour.[29] Skeetes conversational style, enhanced by the video editing and camera angles, encourage the viewer to feel as though Skeete is speaking directly to her. Standing in the middle of the street, Skeete begins with the lines, Posing on every street corner / this is the resurrection of Jean and Dinah... No Yankees here / only maxi man conductor. Referencing Mighty Sparrows calypso hit 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 maxi men for sexual favors recreates a similar dynamic. Through an intergenerational call and response, she situates her poem in the Trinidadian oral tradition. Skeetes poem 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, Skeetes recitation alternates between a voiceover and her character speaking onscreen. By playing with the boundaries between diegetic and nondiegetic sound, the editing capitalizes on sounds permeability, encouraging her virtual audience to feel a closer connection to her words. Skeetes voice extends beyond the boundaries of the video and infiltrates the listening space, collapsing the distance between the onscreen performance and the audiences experience of it, especially if they happen to be in a similar setting.

In the narrative that unfolds, the camera angles accentuate Skeetes embodied performance. While conventional music videos often sexually objectify womens bodies, the jump cuts between medium shots, medium long shots, and closeups often from a slight low angle emphasize Skeetes power as she dramatizes her characters selfactualization

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[29] Skeete, Maxi Man hereafter cited in text. Since I transcribed the quotations from a recording, any inaccuracies are mine.

and encourages other girls to do the same. Skeetes 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 sits in the back of the van reciting her critique and a reverse shot depicts the maxi man gazing at her in the rearview mirror. His gaze is liter ally reflected back at him, while the speaker ver bally refuses his objectification. In the middle of the van, a girl flirts with another maxi man. Throughout the poem, the speaker seems to com pletely condemn this behavior however, the poem ends with a surprise twist. As she gets out of the maxi mans van, she tells the audience, This brownskinned gyal / going home and mind she child, indicating that her advice is based on her own mistakes with a maxi man Skeete. This sur prise ending builds the speakers authority not by separating her from her community but by under scoring her participation in it and encourages schoolgirls watching the poem to trust her ad vice.

In the live performance of Maxi Man Tracking School Gyal, Skeetes critique of sexual harass ment is likely powerful however, the video for mat allows a viewer to experience with greater clarity the embodied experience of resisting sex ual harassment on the street. For female viewers who went through something similar, the recre ation of the scene and its provocative ending deep ens their identification with the speaker. Like a griot, Skeete speaks for a community of young girls, or rather speaks with them, as her perfor mance encourages them to bring their experiences into their interpretation of the poem.

Unlike many poetry recordings available on line, which are taped at live events, The 2 Cents Movement engages technologies as part of the artistic composition of the poem through their studioproduced poems. By borrowing from music videography, they invite us to see performance archives as something more expansive than as a place to simply store copies of original live events. This moves us move beyond what Sterne

characterizes as the preoccupation 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. It maintains the illusion of reproduced sound as a mediation of live sounds however, the medium does not nec essarily mediate, authenticate, dilute, or extend a preexisting social relation.[30] Rather than only view an archive as a space to preserve former in stances of total expression, *we* should also view them as an opportunity to engender new forms of it. Rather than use recording technologies to re cover or preserve a lost history of the voice, they can be used to actively construct a history of the voiceto create a sonic reality where new social relations can take shape.

Redesigning Internet Audio Archives for Caribbean Poetry

The 2 Cents Movements DIY approach to digitiz ing poetry illustrates that a lot can be accom plished by adapting existing platforms and with limited resources however, the underrepresenta tion 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 struc tural biases that silence and drown out Caribbean performance poetry online. As Rick Prelinger es tablishes, YouTube has become in the eyes of the public, the default online movingimage archive.[31] Yet it lacks many of the defining characteristics of archives that make them valuable, such as a focus on longterm preservation and strictly codi fied lines of conduct that have been carefully de veloped through academic practice and intellec tual debate.[32] The underrepresentation of Caribbean

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[30] Sterne, The Audible Past, 219, 218, 226.

[31] Rick Prelinger, The Appearance of Archives, in Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, eds., The YouTube Reader Stockholm National Library of Sweden, 2009, 269.

poetry in Internet audio archives is also sympto matic of the global digital divide, which is espe cially acute for Africadescended populations.[33] However, Curwen Best points out that the flip side to the notion of the digital divide is there fore the formation of strategic space. It is this strategic space that opens up an area and arena of knowledge about evolving technologies.[34] To take advantage of this strategic space, this sec tion 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 webbased poetry audio archive. University of Pennsylvania professors Charles Bernstein and Al Filreis started the collection in 2003 primarily for classroom use. It holds over 45,000 poetry recordings available for free stream ing and download. Their files are downloaded roughly four million times a month.[35] For poetry, this number is astounding when one considers the limited print runs and book sales for contem porary poetry. Although US poets and avantgarde aesthetics tend to predominate, the site includes

[32] Frank Kessler and Mirko Tobias Schfer, Navigating YouTube Constituting a Hybrid Information Management System, in Snickars and Vonderau, The YouTube Reader, 277.

[33] Mary F. E. Ebeling, The New Dawn Black Agency in Cyber space, Radical History Review 87 Fall 2003 98. For a dis cussion of the global digital divide, see Pippa Norris, Dig ital Divide Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide New York Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[34] Curwen Best, The Politics of Caribbean Cyberculture New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 4.

[35] Tanya Barrientos, Penns Rich Poetry Legacy, Penn Current, 20 May 2010, http//www.upenn.edu/pennnews/current/ 20100520/features/pennsrichpoetrylegacy.

author pages for some prominent Caribbean po
ets, including Brathwaite, and M. NourbeSe Philip.
They also hold some of the few Bennett record
ings available online. The site uses the follow
ing archival taxonomies authors, series, antholo
gies, collections, groups, and classics, which pro
vide the user with a variety of ways to study a
poets work. The PennSound Manifesto is worth
examining because it has set the precedent for
subsequent Internet poetry collections. They pro
vide 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 bibliographic information in the file and
It must be indexed.[36] 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
adapt a consumeroriented MP3 file exchange ap
proach for a nonprofit library.[37] By embedding
bibliographic information in the file and nam
ing each one, they uphold archival standards and
ensure that future researchers will have access
to information about the context for the record
ing, something a social media platform like YouTube
does not always provide. Their straightforward
interface, which lets users select from an alpha
betized list of authors, also erases implicit hi
erarchies that come from the emphasis on accu
mulation in social media sites where voices are
forced to compete with each other for likes and
views.
   While Penn Sounds open access model holds a
lot of potential for Caribbean performance po
etry, their prioritizing of free resources may not
be as easy to achieve for Caribbean poetry. An

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[36] Charles Bernstein, PennSound Manifesto, PennSound, 2003,
   http//writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/manifesto.php.
[37] Ibid.

extreme example of this free culture ethos is rep
resented by Kenneth Goldsmith, the founder of
UBUweb, who for awhile maintained a page on
the site called the Wall of Shame, where he would
publically condemn any artist who asked for her
work to be removed from the site by writing her
name on the wall.[38] Unlike Goldsmith, PennSound
strives to ensure that all of their recordings are
cleared for copyright to be distributed free for
noncommercial and educational purposes.[39] While
this democratic and anticapitalistic approach
may seem appealing for Caribbean poetry, in prac
tice it may be more difficult to implement, partic
ularly for poets who view performance as a cen
tral part of their artistic production. In the man
ifesto, Bernstein states that the debates about
file sharing in the music industry do not apply
to poetry One of the advantages of working with
poetry sound files is that we dont anticipate a
problem with rights. At present and in the con
ceivable future, there is no profit to be gained by
the sale of recorded poetry.[40] Yet Caribbean poets
such as Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Johnson
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 de
serves its own treatment in a separate article. In
terms of the current discussion, it offers another
example of the persistence of printcentrism in
poetry scholarship. The emphasis on free record
ings implicitly upholds the idea that the artistic
labor of poetry is more worthy of payment when
it is printbased. Moreover, it demonstrates how

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[38] Astra Taylor, The Peoples Platform Taking Back Power and
Culture in the Digital Age New York Picador, 2014, 153.

[39] Bernstein, PennSound Manifesto.

[40] Ibid.

we define poems as texts rather than as perfor mances. The Poetry Foundations Code for Best Practices in Fair Use For Poetry underscores this point. A group of poets, editors, and publishers met at the Poetry Foundations Harriet Monroe Po etry Institute and collaborated with American Universitys Center for Social Media and its Wash ington College of Law in 2011 to create the guide. Although they outline their purpose as identi fying obstacles preventing poetry from coming fully into new media and, where possible, imag ining how to remove or mitigate these obstacles, almost none of their examples involve poetry au dio.[41] Yet for Caribbean poets a major stumbling block to coming fully into new media is a clear set of fair use practices for performancebased work. In the Poetry Online section, their exam ples pertain to the appearance of text on websites. The document concludes with a section on Liter ary Performance however, it only addresses poets who incorporate poems by other artists into their readings. This document becomes completely ir relevant for groups like The 2 Cents Movement who rarely produce text versions of their poems.

This printcentrism 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 poten tial of archiving sound due to the widely held assumption in literary studies that the archive is necessarily a space of writing and, hence, op posed to speech and other performative acts.[42] Eichhorn proposes that we need to create a sound archive designed to recover and preserve the em bodied, interactive, and present nature of the performed word.[43] In her assessment, archived po etry recordings too often become flat and lifeless

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[41] Code for Best Practices in Fair Use For Poetry Center for Social Media and the Poetry Foundation, 2011, http://www .poetryfoundation.org/foundation/bestpractices.

[42] Kate Eichhorn, Past Performance, Present Dilemma A Poet ics of Archiving Sound, Mosaic 42 2009 187.

[43] Ibid., 190.

artifacts.[44] Although Eichhorn focuses on avant garde poets, her arguments apply to Caribbean poets who foreground sound as an integral part of the poems meaning. Such work accessible in an archive designed to disrupt our textbased con ceptions of archival knowledge would undoubt edly lead us more assertively into other forms of knowing rather than allow the digital to recon solidate print paradigms.

One notable exception to the underrepresen tation of Anglophone Caribbean poets in Inter net audio collections is The Poetry Archive, sup ported by the Arts Council of England. This site features more Caribbean poets than most, because the Caribbean Poetry Projecta group of scholars and poets from the Cambridge University Faculty of Education, the Centre for Commonwealth Ed ucation, and the University of the West Indies collaborated with The Poetry Archive to improve access. Out of 476 poets, twentythree are from the Caribbean region. While this is not a huge per centage, it is considerably more than most sites, and every Caribbean poet page has sound record ings that can be streamed for free or downloaded for a fee of 0.89. The Poetry Archive, like many In ternet audio archives, specializes in classroom resources. They have a special page for teach ing Caribbean poetry with a selection of sound recordings and A Guide to the Language of Caribbean Poetry. The Caribbean Poetry Projects work with The Poetry Archive demonstrates how crossdisciplinary and crossinstitutional collaborations help to break down Anglocentrism.

Yet analyzing the design of the Poetry Archive author pages reveals that we need to do more than add voices to existing archives. As Amy Earhart cautions, for digital recovery projects for writ ers of color to be successful, we also must the orize the technological with the same rigor as we theorize the content.[45] If one compares the recording of Linton Kwesi Johnson reciting Di

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44 Ibid., 184.

45 Earhart, Can Information be Unfettered

Great Insohreckshan on The Poetry Archive with a YouTube recording of him performing it at an outdoor festival in Venezuela in 2008, the total ex pression feels much more resonant in the YouTube version than on the Poetry Archive site.[46] I make this comparison to illustrate how the design of the Poetry Archive page mutes the insurrectionary tone of Johnsons poem about the Brixton Riots, not to demonstrate that the YouTube platform is inherently better at representing total expres sion. Obviously, the YouTube video allows one to see Johnsons body and facial expressions, which one cannot get from the Poetry Archive audio record ing, but it is not as simple as video versus au dio. Although the sound quality lacks the clar ity 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 spon taneity of live performances, including sound glitches and background noises, becomes part of what Brathwaite characterizes as the sonor ity contrasts of total expression.[47] As Eichhorn points out, these intruders are precisely what sound technicians often seek to filter out as they prepare recordings for the archive.[48] The Poetry Archive version of Di Great Insohreckshan fol lows the predominant soundediting style for In ternet audio archives. Martin Spinelli describes this style as the seamless edit, designed to high light the poets voice and minimize all other dis tractions, including the recording scene whether live or instudio and the material elements of their production.[49]

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[46] Linton Kwesi Johnson, Di Great Insohreckshan, YouTube video, 2.00, posted by Oscar David De Barros, 25 January 2013, https//www.youtube.com/watchvIUNQS7Pwwu4.

[47] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 46.

[48] Eichhorn, Past Performance, Present Dilemma, 190.

[49] Martin Spinelli, Analog Echoes A Poetics of Digital Audio Editing, Object 10 Cyberpoetics 2002 36, UbuWeb Papers, 16 May 2007, http//www.ubu.com/papers/object/06spinelli .pdf. Spinelli criticizes poetry sound editing for being too

In addition to using conventional sound editing, Johnsons 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. Johnsons author biography explains that his poems on the site were recorded from live performances and come from his CD LKJ A Cappella Live. Despite the claim that the energy of his live recitals gives the recordings a unique electricity, interspersed with the laughter and applause of audiences around Europe, the seamless editing of Di Great Insohreckshan allows one to listen to Johnsons entire recitation before realizing that it is a live performance.[50] 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 subdued 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 dub consciousness.[51] By

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influenced by traditional radio theory, questioning why most archived poetry recordings present sound as though it were a linear medium by using the seamless, invisible, inaudible edit which dislodges nothing, which interrupts nothing, which is in fact deployed to remove interruption, to remove digression and to clarify 36.

[50] Linton Kwesi Johnson Author Page, The Poetry Archive, accessed 23 July 2015, http//www.poetryarchive.org/poet/lintonkwesijohnson.

[51] Onuora quoted in Morris, Is English We Speaking, 38.

not clearly identifying the track as a single per
formance, the archive presents it as the author
itative audio version. In the lefthand 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 Furr notes that while online poetry col
lections devote attention to different aesthetics,
what unites them is the idea that hearing a poet
voice her own work is crucial to understanding
the poem. Yet despite the interest in vocaliza
tion, collections tend to downplay the setting
of the poets performance by providing little in
formation about when and where the reading oc
curred and why this particular event was recorded.[52]
While certain sites, such as PennSound, make
sure that all of the bibliographic info is embed
ded in the single file with accurate metadata, of
ten all 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 record
ings both live and instudio become valuable be
cause when we close listen, we hear not only the
sounds of the poem and the poets voicing of them,
but also the echoes of previous scenes of read
ing and listening.[53] Through webpage design and
sound editing, The Poetry Archive downplays the
previous audiences of Di Great Insohreckshan so
that the online user feels as though she is the
only person in the audience. While The 2 Cents
Movement illustrates how cinematic approaches
can be used to deepen total expression, the John
son example illustrates the value of preserving
the ephemeral qualities of a live performance in
a recording to enrich the listening experience.
Furr borrows Charles Bernsteins term close lis
tening to characterize how a user should engage

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[52] Derek Furr, Recorded Poetry and Poetic Reception from Edna
Millay to the Circle of Robert Lowell New York Palgrave
Macmillan, 2010, 5.

[53] Ibid., 149.

with audio recordings. Based on his experience with PennSound Bernstein proposes close listen ing as an alternative to close reading, where one prioritizes the materiality of sound and the au ral experience.[54] Yet, in practice, how much does close listening actually deviate from close read ing on Internet audio archives

Annie Murray and Jared Wiercinski, curators of SpokenWeb, a collection of recordings of a Mon treal poetry reading series from 1966 to 1977, point out that while most Internet audio archives make listening the focus, their structure makes them multimodal. Accordingly, they stress that the visual elements of online poetry archives need careful consideration. They explore what kinds of site navigation, audio visualization, design el ements and functionalities could be offered by a Webbased spoken word interface, and how these might enhance the listening process and, ulti mately, the scholarly endeavor.[55] Because very little scholarship exists on how people engage with sounded poems, they acknowledge that their suggestions for a sound archive recipe that other cultural heritage institutions can follow are based on established reading practices.[56] They make some helpful 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 sug gest incorporating any available images and videos of the performance event, much like The 2 Cents Movements photo documentation on Twitter and Facebook. However, other suggestions such as tethering audio playback with a written transcript

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[54] See Bernstein, Close Listening, 326.

[55] Annie Murray and Jared Wiercinski, Looking at Archival Sound Enhancing the Listening Experience in a Spoken Word Archive, First Monday 17, no. 4 2012, http//firstmonday .org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3808/3197.

[56] Annie Murray and Jared Wiercinski, A Design Methodol ogy for Webbased Sound Archives, DHQ Digital Humani ties Quarterly 8, no. 2 2014, http//digitalhumanities .org8081/dhq/vol/8/2/000173/000173.htmlp6.

keep the primary focus on reading rather than listening.[57] For example, on the Poetry Archive site, beneath the link to play Di Great Insohreck shan, 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, Bernstein suggests that poems, set adrift from their visual grounding in alphabetic texts, might begin to resemble the songs from which, for so long, they have been divided.[58] However, to achieve this we need to 1 be wary of a onesizefitsall approach, and 2 carefully design visual elements to encourage sonic engagement rather than to reify a visual economy of text. Such a divide between song and poem has never existed for Anglophone 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 timelapse 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 selfcontained object. Listening, like reading, becomes an isolated, individualistic expression rather than a

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[57] For a summary of their specific suggestions for visual design, see Murray and Wiercinski, Looking at Archival Sound.

[58] Charles Bernstein, Making Audio Visible The Lessons of Visual Language for the Textualization of Sound, Textual Practice 23, no. 6 2009 966, doi10.1080/09502360903361550.

communal endeavor.[59] Sound reproduction tech
nologies have also encouraged our hearing to be
come more individualistic. Using headphones as
his example, Sterne argues that such devices en
courage listening to be more orientated toward
constructs of private space and private property,
which encourages sound to become a commodity.[60]

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 tweets and poetry videos make online mem
bers a part of their participatory audience. We
have much work to do to figure out how to build
Internet audio archives that recreate this commu
nal experience of listening. Everything including
sound editing, interface, database design, navi
gation system and copyright issues needs careful
consideration to realize the digital potential of
total expression. To embark on this work, it is
crucial that we turn to the poets themselves and
build on their education legacies.

So much of the history of the voice has already
been lost, or muted, by the ongoing colonial bias
toward nation language, as well as limited re
sources and funding. Caribbean poetry record
ings that survive buried in dusty boxes in attics
and library storage rooms sit silently waiting
for new audiences to return to them the noise and
sounds that the maker makes.[61] 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 digitizing this vital record
of Caribbean poetry history a priority.

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[59] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 18.
[60] Sterne, The Audible Past, 24.
[61] Brathwaite, History of the Voice, 1819.