

Anna Nacher

The Creative Process as a “Dance of Agency”

Shelley Jackson’s *Snow*: Performing Literary Text with Elements

Why did I want to write a story in snow? Because it’s white like a page. . . . Because I have a fascination with the relationship between words and space (a page is a space, but that often escapes our notice), with the idea of publishing a story on or over a landscape (here, on Brooklyn), so that all the complicated activity that goes on in that territory gets unpredictably mixed up with the story. Because I like the tension between the meaning of the word and its physical presence, which shows up all the better when it’s both isolated, when you come across it in an unexpected place and don’t know what it’s trying to tell you. Because snow melts, and I have a fascination with the ephemeral. . . . Because it’s already a writing medium: kids write their names in snow, so why not a story? Because it’s fun to be outside in the bright sun and the cold wind making something beautiful.

Shelley Jackson, “Shelley Jackson Writes on *Snow* for a New Type of Story.”

1 Introduction

Shelley Jackson’s *Snow* (2014–) does not easily conform to established literary categories or interpretative strategies—words written in the snow are evanescent and fragile, vanishing as soon as the surface on which they are inscribed melts away. Yet, where the medium is fragile, the text becomes somewhat more solidified, with each semantic inscription recorded in photo streams that are available through the popular social media platforms *Flickr* and *Instagram*. In this way, according to Søren Pold and Christian Ulrik Andersen, Jackson’s project is “not just a work in snow, but also a work that displays the frictions between the site-specific text and the distributed photos and text on social media” (Pold and Andersen 33).¹ In 2014, the artist started writing a short story on snowy surfaces around her home in Brooklyn, documenting the project with her *Flickr* and *Instagram* profiles. This is, however, her second attempt at designing the story. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Jackson disclosed the fact

that in 2010 she tried to perform the text on the snow for the first time but the endeavor proved to be more difficult and challenging than she had previously thought (Flood). As of March 2017, when this article was nearing completion, the story was almost halfway there (it allegedly has 802 words, and the *Instagram* stream currently has 386 posts).² There are some minor differences between the two versions on *Instagram* and *Flickr*—the former is entitled *Snow: A story in progress, weather permitting*, the latter just *Snow: A story, weather permitting*. The respective streams are also currently suspended at different points (they end up with different words).



Fig. 1. *Snow*.

In my article, I would like to focus on the specific materiality of *Snow*. On the one hand, the work obviously references its unusual inscription surface, inspiring us to think in terms of the natural elements that have been repurposed for literary use. On the other hand, we are also confronted with a more sophisticated question: in the case of an artwork that develops by implementing the strategy of a network, how does the relationship between evaporating substance, photographic documentation and networked media play out in an aesthetic sense? According to Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, who has characterized the various strategies utilized by interactive art, such a strategy constitutes a significant part of contemporary media art and seems to be one of its most important features. Kluszczyński underlines the communitarian and social aspects of the proposed category (which seems to be lacking in the case of *Snow*)

and basically understands it as a work of art placed in the public space. I nevertheless take advantage of his proposition, shifting the focus only slightly.

In my opinion, *Snow* embodies the strategy of a network when viewed through the lens of media hybridity. In this respect, it possesses features that Kluszczyński has outlined as important for such a strategy: “it binds various means of action, including of course, digital communication technologies” (Kluszczyński 22). I would argue, then, that the intermedial quality of Jackson’s project should be accounted for, because the work’s full meaning is located in the space between installments: the actual words written on snow that comprise the story, the *Instagram* stream, and the database of photographs on *Flickr* (also available to download as .zip files). In taking advantage of the tension between the evanescence of actual open-air performances, and the manner in which such performances are documented in various media, these practices follow the tradition of land art. The obvious points of reference in this context are Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Nancy Holt or Robert Smithson and—in an especially significant way—Andy Goldsworthy.

2 The Artistic Strategy of a Network

Traditional interpretations of land art focus on connections between the artwork and the site of its location/performance, pointing to the indexicality of such work, its site-specificity, and its tendency to undermine discourses that present the art gallery as a “white cube.” However, some contemporary examples of land art have been almost entirely appropriated as a kind of mainstream public art that is imbued with environmental sensibilities, the kind of work that is often supported by the various agencies dedicated to regional development, as illustrated by the French Portail du Land Art initiative. An example is Christo’s latest large-scale installation *The Floating Piers*, which was carried out on Italy’s Lake Iseo in 2016. The media reported that the artwork became the main tourist attraction (Morlin-Yron; “Italy: Christo ‘walk on water’ project opens on Lake Iseo”), and, indeed, the crowds it drew even caused some disturbances in local public transport (*The Local*).

The *Floating Piers* epitomizes the significant tendency to design and build monumental structures out in the wild. Gesturing towards the aesthetic practices of American artists who were known for making the landscape a theme of their art, Robert Smithson famously coined the idea of “earthworks” to distinguish such works from more traditional sculpture—an exhibition with the same title was organized in October 1968 at the Dwan Gallery in New York City (Lailach and Grosenick 8; Shapiro 4). Francesco Careri does however propose another way of categorizing works of land art. His proposal differen-

tates between projects that leave visible and solid traces on the sites where they were carried out, and (mostly walk-based) projects that are evanescent and ephemeral, evaporating as soon as the project is complete, with the only stable “site” of the artwork being its photo documentation (Careri 149). While the monumental works of Robert Smithson, James Turrell, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude are typical examples of the former, the works of Andy Goldsworthy, Hamish Fulton and Richard Long belong to the latter category.

Operating in this way, Richard Long performed a whole series of his *Lines*, works that left traces on the surface of the earth but that were, nevertheless, reversible, fading with passing time. He started with *A Line Made by Walking* in 1967, followed by *A Line in Peru* (1972), *A Line in Ireland* (1974), *A Line in the Himalayas* (1975), *A Line in Australia* (1977) and many other *Lines* around the globe. In the case of his most famous work, *A Line Made by Walking*, Long walked back and forth across the grass to produce a straight line. Because great technical care was taken to ensure that the line was really visible, the impression left was significantly magnified in the photographs taken, but it eventually vanished when the grass grew long enough to cover the traces.

Seen from such a perspective, land art seems to exploit strategies that are associated with a certain kind of conceptual art—art that aims to dematerialize the object that constitutes the work of art and to shift the focus towards accompanying documentation, be this video, text or photography. However, if we investigate the role of documentation in the aesthetic practices of land art, we discover that the manner in which most artists employ such documentation works a little differently. The aim, in fact, is not so much to get away from the object, but rather to dismantle the stable ontological grounds of the artwork as object. Such work is not, apparently, aimed at the dematerialization of the artwork but at materializing it in a different way: across a whole range of elements (some of them placed in the physical space, others embodied as the objects of media technologies), and between them. Accordingly, photography plays a different role than, for example, in the case of performance art, where photographs function as the record of a singular, ephemeral act.

What is probably the best-known work of land art, Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), illustrates such a strategy in a particularly remarkable way. Placed in complete wilderness at Utah’s Great Salt Lake, the monumental rock spiral is rather difficult to access, requiring either a very detailed map or precise knowledge about the location. However, Gary Shapiro insightfully notices that the trouble with locating the *Spiral Jetty* is not confined to its geographical position. In fact, at least three elements of Smithson’s project bear the same title: the rock spiral mound itself, a film made when the structure was built and a photo-essay published in *Artforum* in October 1972. Hence, Shapiro states: “I want to suggest as do multiple referents of the title *Spiral Jetty*, that there is no

primary, authentic object (the spiral) to which the film and the essay are merely ancillary” (Shapiro 7).

The remark is valid for virtually every land art project; for the most part, the work’s legacy lies in the series of photographs that are circulated, in art books, and in specially designed exhibitions or video clips, which are often combined with additional statements from the artist. Such an approach (which is precisely what I call the artistic strategy of the network), was present from the very beginning of the land art movement. According to Gilles Tiberghien, land art’s founding gesture can be traced back to Tony Smith’s journey along the New Jersey Turnpike, which he later described in an essay in a 1967 issue of *Artforum*. Instigated by Michael Fried in reaction to Smith’s project, suffice to say that the article inspired one of the most famous debates of the 20th century on the subject of modernist aesthetics. In this case, the whole artwork consisted of the ephemeral (but embodied and lived) experience of driving along a highway that was still to be completed, and the consecutive documentation of the journey, as published in *Artforum*.

Robert Smithson’s projects such as *Monuments of Passaic* and *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in Yucatan* (1969) possess a very similar structure. The former revolves around an actual trip to the small New Jersey town of Passaic, and the work consists of photo documentation made with an Instamatic camera, a map, and an essay entitled “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic,” New Jersey, which was published in *Artforum* in 1967. The latter artwork follows the same logic by again creating a multimodal and multimedia network of various aesthetic objects—the artist performed a series of installations in Yucatan, placing mirrors in the wilderness, and the work was later presented as a series of photographs and yet another photo-essay by the artist himself, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in Yucatan” (1969). Both works—if analyzed as multipart, networked phenomena—uncover slightly different interpretations of Smithson’s works. Seen from this angle, he is an artist primarily interested in the transversality of the embodied visual experience.

With all that said, some obvious questions remain outstanding: Where is the actual location of meaning? Is it the “earthwork” itself, the structure or performance carried out on the ground at a specific physical site that lies beyond the walls of the art gallery? Or maybe it is the documentation that delivers the meaning? According to Miwon Kwon and Peter Kaiser, who prepared the significant land art retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2012, it is reductive to view the material that accompanies such works as mere documentation of the actual artwork:

Rather than being supplemental or secondary, then, the production, distribution and circulation of images and information about a work

“out there” is defining of that work’s existence. This is not to say that mediation fully eclipses “the work” but rather that the identity or meaning of “the work” cannot be fully realized without it. This is a structural condition, a fundamental attribute of Land Art from the outset in the 60s. (Kaiser and Kwon 27)

Kaiser and Kwon second Shapiro’s observation, quoted above, about *Spiral Jetty*: the production and circulation of imagery accompanying land art projects should be perceived as a meaningful component of the work, something that is always related to the other elements of the project. The strategy of the network does not, therefore, exclusively designate the artwork’s intermedial quality; crucially, the distribution and circulation of elements, something that is often considered “additional” or “external,” in fact constitutes the very structure of the work. In this respect, Shelley Jackson’s *Snow*—considered as the actual performance on the snowy surface combined with two photographic collections that have different functionalities (*Flicker* and *Instagram*)—is significantly similar to the works just discussed. However, what seems particularly interesting in this case is the manner in which the aesthetic strategy of the network relates to the very materiality of Jackson’s project.



Fig. 2. SNOW (@snowshelleyjackson).

3 Between Early Materiality and Ephemerality

Looking closer at the possible affinities between Shelly Jackson’s *Snow* and land art, Andy Goldsworthy’s oeuvre seems especially appropriate as a point of reference, as both artists make a convincing attempt at striking a balance between ephemerality and specificity, between evanescence and earthiness. Jackson became inspired by Goldsworthy while working on her *SKIN* project (Walters), and the reasons for the affinity are apparent. Goldsworthy is known for creating artworks out of natural elements: the leaves and stalks of various plants, different types of mud, stones and rocks, ice and... snow. Often these elements are purposely left to decay, as passing time slowly but steadily changes their structure and appearance. Some of Goldsworthy’s sculptures are sizeable structures, inspired by the traditional mounds or stonewalls of Scotland. These can be located at particular sites or stretch for many miles, intertwined, when necessary, with a highway (e.g. *Contour 950* in Ohio, USA).

Goldsworthy’s art circulates mostly in the form of photo albums and documentary movies, of which *Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time* (2001)—directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer, with music composed by Fred Frith—is probably the best known. The documentary established Goldsworthy’s reputation as an artist interested in uncovering the fragile temporalities that revolve around natural occurrences and non-human time scales. Owing to the passage of time and the course of natural processes (be it growing grass or the sea tide covering part of a sculpture), the “objecthood” of such work is often questioned. The cinematic medium, with its capacity to enable time-lapse sequences, does therefore seem particularly well suited to rendering the specific processuality of some of Goldsworthy’s ephemeral, site-specific sculptures.

In fact, a significant tension between transience and permanence is hidden at the core of Goldsworthy’s art. In the closing sequence of *Rivers and Tides*, we see the ultimate evanescent work of art: an artist is throwing powder snow in the sunny air, forming shaky, shimmering clouds whose transient quality becomes almost tangible. From almost the beginning of his career, snow as material has been present in Goldsworthy’s practice—one of his early works, executed in Leeds, Yorkshire, is *First Snowball* (1977). Following on from this, different works making use of this element span his entire career. Looking only at the early period, these include *Snow Jump* (1977), *Snowball made from last remaining patch of snow left in the shadow of a tall hedge* (1979), *Snowball in trees* (1980), *Snow compacted in to series of joining arches* (1984), and *Snow circles* (1987). Capturing the process with film and photography remains necessary because, to some extent, this imbues the performance with a sense of “objecthood,” becoming much more than mere representation or documentation. The information provided by Goldsworthy’s digital archive supports this observation:

It is well known that every ephemeral work that Goldsworthy has made is invariably photographed, always immediately following the making, and often in revisiting the work. He has described the process of photography as one that is “routine” and “demanding.” Certainly, in terms of the setting up, timing, viewing, and awareness that it requires of Goldsworthy, the photographing process constitutes a performative corollary to the making of the sculpture. (Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue)

By the way, the last photo uploaded to Jackson’s *Snow* Flickr database, is reminiscent of Goldsworthy’s snowballs as works of art, although it is not present on the *Instagram* stream.

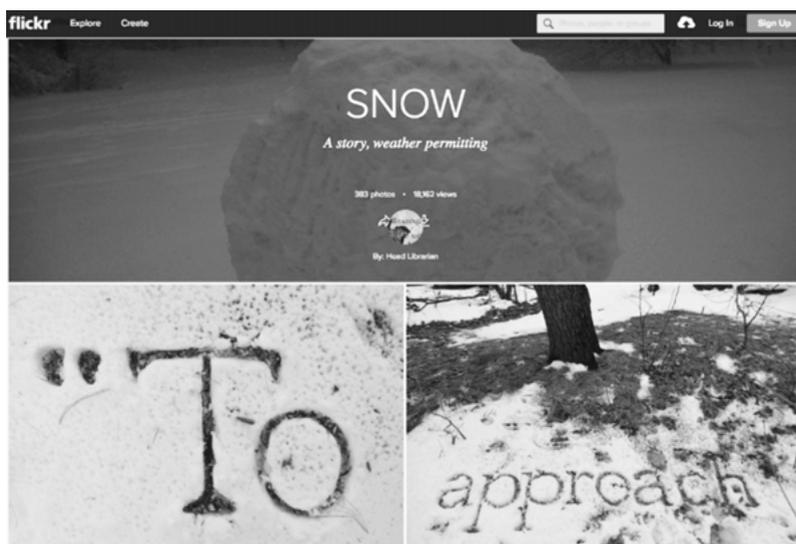


Fig. 3. *Snow. A story, weather permitting.*

It seems that such practices are a way to engender a whole variety of modes for the materialization of the actual artwork. This ranges from the most fragile and fugitive act (throwing the snow in the air) to the most tangible (holding the actual photograph), with the consecutive steps of the photographic process and the archiving of analogue negatives falling in between. This argument finds support in the description of the photographic process that is presented on the website of the Goldsworthy archive:

The resulting photographs have an indexical relationship to the sculpture(s) that they record, an aspect that is enhanced by Goldsworthy’s preference for maximum depth of field in picture quality. Goldswor-

thy also “brackets” his exposures, shooting a number of different exposures sequentially. This is necessitated by constant, and often imperceptible, fluctuations in atmospheric and lighting conditions, and the influence these have on the photographic rendering of the work. (Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue)

The last sentence references the fact that the very materiality of the photographic works is a crucial element of Goldsworthy’s outdoor practice. This explains why archiving the photographs is such an important part of Goldsworthy’s artistic practice; indeed, Riedelsheimer’s documentary devotes a separate section to the slide archive. Known as the “Slide Cabinet Index,” and located at the artist’s studio in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, the archive mostly consists of Kodachrome slides and transparencies, organized according to a special system set up by Goldsworthy himself. In 2002, the part of the catalogue that covers the first ten years of Goldsworthy’s career was digitized by the University of Glasgow and made available to researchers as the *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue DVD (Volume 1: 1976–1986)*. Materialization and materialities are also key themes in Goldsworthy’s practice more generally, and, in fact, his art is not so much about the passing of time as it is about the multifarious relations that exist between time and materiality. To put it another way, it is about the role that temporality plays in various processes affecting the material.

Such an exploration of different modes of materiality and the tension between the tangible and the ephemeral is also important for Shelley Jackson. This is the case with the previously discussed *Snow* (2014–) and also with her *Ineradicable Stain: Skin Project* (2003–), the latter being a story that is tattooed on the skin of volunteers, one word at a time, the full text of which is known only to participants. The tension is visible when both projects are compared to one another, but also within each respective project. This is especially the case with *Snow*, where—as mentioned above—the transient substance of the writing surface (snow) collides with the dynamics of the networked database, both existing in different states of tangibility.

The tangibility of digital photography is itself ambivalent,³ a fact that is exacerbated by both the logic of cloud computing and the popular streaming services where the content is hosted (this has been extensively analyzed by Søren Pold and Christian Ulrik Andersen). It is also necessary to remember that while Jackson’s work could be perceived as a kind of installation, she assigns the major role to literary content. My observation follows the line of Roberto Simanowski’s argument when he differentiates between digital literature and digital art (although in this context the notion of “digital” might not be obvious). While admitting that the borders between the two concepts can

sometimes remain blurry, he nevertheless underlines a fundamental difference, something that is based on how the material used (i.e. text) functions in both genres: “If the text continues to be important as a linguistic phenomenon, then we may speak of digital literature. If the text becomes primarily a visual object of interaction, then we are dealing with digital art” (Simanowski 937). So, even if Jackson’s works share with land art the intermedial strategy of the network, *Snow* is still meant as a story, where the semantic component is crucial. Nevertheless, judging from what is already available (considering the word count, this amounts to roughly half the story) the work is tightly interwoven with the more general question of the materiality of substances. As is clear from the opening sentences, the lines unveiled so far enumerate various sorts and kinds of snow, something which, at times, plays the role of an extended metaphor:

“To approach snow too closely is to forget what it is,” said the girl who cried snowflakes. Through a microscope one discovers that there are many kinds of snow: those made up of tiny paintings of shipwrecks in the style of Bonaventura Peeters, those made up of miniature bowls of wax fruit, very beautifully and realistically formed, except for the size; those made up of the fingernail clippings of babies; and those made up of the trimmed and tattooed scalps of shrews, used as money by certain native peoples of the Southern Urals. (Jackson)

However, the snow functions here as much more than a surface—its materiality is also important structurally; in the age of climate change, snow is not only a robust semantic trope. That is why I would now like to ponder the second part of Jackson’s title, “Weather permitting.” To what extent can the weather and other natural elements be treated as the kind of literary agents that are capable of delivering meaning?



Fig. 4. Snowflakes.

4 Weather Permitting, or “Dance of Agency”

To answer such questions, I will borrow from the domain of science and technology studies the metaphor of the “dance of agency,” a concept that is notable in Andrew Pickering’s *The Mangle of Practice* (Pickering 21–24). At first glance, such a choice might come as a surprise. Yet, upon closer inspection, quite significant similarities can be found between the aesthetic strategies of land art, Shelley Jackson’s project, and scientific methods and procedures, understood here as the cultural practice of meaning production. The role of photography offers one obvious parallel, particularly in the way that it accounts for the intermedial strategy of the network. In scientific practice—as understood by adherents of action-network theory and science in its performative aspect—the material traces of research and any documentation (be it diaries, notes, lab reports or more formal texts) exert a significant role; these cannot be seen as mere “documentation,” but rather they are “translations,” important elements in forging the actor-network (Latour 121–141). In the case of both land art and Jackson’s *Snow*, photography is also related to the temporality of the projects at hand. Such works develop according to a logic of experimentation, and such a logic lies at the heart of the scientific method, moving it closer to artistic culture than has traditionally been thought to be the case.⁴ The spirit of experimentation is clearly visible in Jackson’s description of her creative process and the motivations behind it:

I hadn’t worked out my technique, the snow was too deep that day, and you could barely even make out the words ... so I tried drizzling maple syrup in the shape of letters (my dog liked that) and then soy sauce, but they splattered and looped and sank into the snow, making spindly, uneven, handwritten-looking letters. (Then there was pee, which has a nice long tradition, but I didn’t think my technique was up to the job). (Flood)

Jackson wanted her words to have a “printed” feel, so she eventually modelled the font after the Courier typeface. This proved to be difficult, and it slowed the process down: “I had hoped that I would be able to get the whole story done that winter, but it turned out to take much longer than I imagined—hours with freezing toes and fingers to finish half a sentence!” (Flood).

The subtitle “weather permitting” can, therefore, be read quite literally, and with this in mind, we must grant that non-human agents (i.e. the medium of snow and wider meteorological patterns) have a notable ability to shape the meanings of a literary text. Furthermore, interestingly enough, *Snow* consists of at least a few layers where media materiality really matters. In this case, the

meaning of the category of “media” is understood in its double sense: it is both the medium of artistic expression and the media technology of popular photo sharing platforms. The two meanings are mutually interwoven, something that is underlined by Jackson’s emphasis on the fact that she devised a special approach and technique for her undertaking. That’s how the “material metaphor” comes into existence. It is a means of enabling “the traffic between words and physical artefacts” (Hayles 23), although the question of inscription technology is rather ambivalent in this particular case. After the snow has melted and all we are left with are images “stored” on platforms that are susceptible to all the illusions, deterritorializations and abstractions of “cloud computing” (Pold and Andersen 12–18), to what extent can Jackson’s traces on the snow be thought of as “marks”? Or, on the contrary, is the seemingly illusory architecture of cloud computing the logical way to forge the actor-network of a story that is constantly shifting between ephemerality and tangibility?

The idea of the “dance of agency” is, then, particularly useful when it comes to questions concerning the respective roles and agencies of various human and non-human actors and their contribution to the final outcome. The concept is not, however, employed to altogether do away with the notion of the author. Rather, the “dance of agency” helps to modify our concept of the author, just as N. Katherine Hayles’s notion of “technotext” once did by implementing a category that was inclusive of technological agents. Pickering’s idea—especially when combined with Jane Bennett’s notions of “vibrant matter” and “vibrant materiality”—seems to be an interesting and fruitful point of departure if we hope to grasp the networked agency of any “material metaphor.” This would encompass literary projects that involve organic and synthetic life and that make use of synthetic biology and genetics, such as Christian Bok’s “living poetry” or Eduardo Kac’s “biopoetry” (Górska-Olesińska 173). Key to Pickering’s proposition is the claim that, while material and human agents are closely intertwined and “intimately connected with one another” (Pickering 17), the material and the human cannot simply be mutually substituted. Pickering underlines the fact that acknowledging the contribution of material actors to the final outcome does not mean eradicating human intentionality. Instead, this helps to modify the ways in which we understand the category of intentionality. Pickering shows—when differentiating between the temporal emergence of the material agent and the goal-oriented, disciplined human actor—that, in scientific practice, human intentionality is in fact prone to temporal and unstable emergencies in the process of experimentation: “Goals are temporally emergent from culture (including machines and their material performativities) and can themselves be transformed in, and as inte-

gral part of, real-time practice, which includes sensitive encounters with material agency” (Pickering 20).

Shelley Jackson’s experiments with snow as writing-space can be framed as precisely this kind of “real-time practice,” a “sensitive encounter with material agency” which has, to a great extent, influenced the way in which the project is carried out and how the meaning is produced and conveyed. Drawing upon a notion coined by the early philosopher and sociologist of science, Ludwig Fleck (“Practice and posthumanism” 163), Pickering has referred to the whole process—which involves consecutive, sensitive encounters with material agency, which recursively affects the scientific practice—as “tuning.” Accordingly, such “tuning” of human and non-human actors (including also scientific technical apparatus) is modelled as a “dance of agency,” where human agents interchangeably take up active and passive roles. These roles include making passive, but careful, observations at moments when material agency has been enabled by the performance of a machine that has been constructed for the purposes of experimentation. Hence, an extended definition of the “dance of agency” is provided:

The dance of agency, seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation, where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency in practice, and accommodation of active human strategy of response to resistance, which can include revisions to goals and intentions as well as to the material form of the machine in question and to the human frame of gestures and social relations that surround it. (22)

Such a dialectic of accommodation and resistance is precisely what Pickering calls the *Mangle of Practice* (1995). Although the term has come to describe a process in scientific inquiry, it could also connote a significant part of artistic practice. In other words, the notion of the “dance of agency” here implies at least two important things. Firstly, there is the mutually supportive, reciprocal and recursive relation between emergence (associated sometimes with chaos, ephemerality and the instability of operations) and order (perceived as disciplined, organized and goal-oriented) or between contingency (ascribed to the culture of the arts and humanities) and a pattern (located usually on the side of scientific culture). Secondly, as “the material and social agency are mangled in practice” (Pickering 23), the meaning of the material shifts towards an active force rather than a passive object. According to Pickering, he seeks an idiom that will destabilize the binary opposition between human and non-human agents, offering instead “a posthumanist space” (Pickering 23).

Indeed, such a posthumanist space is opened up by the material metaphors of such works as Shelley Jackson’s *Snow*. And this has to include the fragile, inconsistent and risk-based world of climate change, where human agency alone is inadequate when it comes to capturing the scale of phenomena in the natural world, let alone properly addressing the problem. It is not a coincidence that, when explaining his metaphor, Pickering starts with a simple meteorological observation, noticing that material agency “comes at us from outside the human realm and that cannot be reduced to anything within that realm” (Pickering 6). Moreover, according to Jane Bennett (who follows Latour), it seems that the universal notion of agency requires further reconceptualization if it is to address “multiple modes and degrees of effectivity” (Bennett viii). Bennett calls for a more distributive concept of agency, one that would account for “vibrant matter” or “vitality in matter-energy.” To her this means “the capacity of things . . . not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett x). Such a notion of distributed agency offers an extremely interesting starting point from which we can start to think again about authorial instances of creative practice in the posthumanist world (including writing with elements). Weather permitting, of course.

*I would like to thank Shelley Jackson for the permission to include the photographs in the publication.

Notes

- 1 Unpublished manuscript kindly provided by the authors before publication.
- 2 The last photograph to date was uploaded to *Instagram* on March 28th, 2017.
- 3 I have already analyzed such ambiguities elsewhere (cf. Nacher).
- 4 The subject was often discussed from the perspective of the chiasm between the so called “two cultures”—the sciences and the humanities—as outlined by C.P. Snow in his famous 1959 lecture. Snow proposed methods for closing the gap within the framework of a “third culture.” The discussion currently continues with the fields of the arts, sciences and technology, where links between the three domains are being forged extensively and fruitfully, generating new ideas about possible collaborations between artists and scientists (the most obvious examples come from digital art, bioart and other artistic endeavors requiring sophisticated scientific

apparatus). In fact, upon closer historical inspection, the “two cultures” might never have been that distant. According to Martha Blassnigg, “When looking into the intersections between Art and Science of individual case studies, however, many of the frequently discussed boundaries appear to dissolve in the acknowledgment of the productive tensions with contradictions, paradoxes and inconsistencies of day-to-day practices” (Blassnigg 69).

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