NEARLYWRITING NEARLYOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Through contextual research and creative practice, this PhD explores the composition of fiction for today's mediatized society. Digital technology allows people to have multiple virtual personas, to be immersed in personalised media bubbles, to take one path but continue to keep an eye on the roads not taken; it also gives the writer new tools for mixing media and interacting with readers. *Nearlywriting* involves using whatever media and methods seem appropriate to convey a story, then seeking digital or analogue means to produce the results. The transmedia comic novel, *What Didn't Quite,* was created using this approach; a story about *Nearlyology,* exploring how things that people nearly do influence who they really are.

Both components of the PhD explore how a transmedia literary fiction can convey the texture of everyday life and the inner lives of its characters while giving space to reader-generated responses and live collaboration. While scholarly writing on transmedia narrative and other related fields examines the potential for telling stories across different platforms and genres, how does the transmedia literary writer approach the production and publication of a multimodal text within the context of a complex publishing ecology?

Contextual research uses the concerns of the novel's three protagonists to examine models of creation, distribution and performance of literary works. Concepts drawn from writing on transmedia narrative by Jenkins, Scolari and others are placed alongside insights from other fields relevant to multimodal composition; these include community arts, aboriginal storytelling, shamanism, outsider art, immersive theatre, psychotherapy, museum curation, songwriting and musical improvisation. Informed by McCluhan's analysis of the limiting impact of writing and print technology on the concept of literacy, Ingold's critique of academic writing which stands apart from the subject it explores and Solnit's comparison between writing and walking, this is nearly a conventional academic treatise, nearly a personal reflection on creative practice.

Redrawing the boundaries of a book to include the total experience of time spent in and around its story world, *What Didn't Quite* includes songs, soundscapes, reader-generated stories, workshops, artworks and live performance as well as the printed text.

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HOW TO COMPOSE

This is a song inspired by a song
Much better than this one
By someone far more brilliant than me.
Her music helps to
Transcend the confines of mundane reality.

I want to tell you what I felt
When the choir stood and sang its bloody heart right out,
Feel free to make something
Far less than what I'm inspired about.

So it goes -
Creativity leaves you exposed.
How to Compose.

This is a story based on a story
A painting, a movie, a website, a chat, a book I once read;
I mingle and mangle them up
With whatever else is currently stuck in my head.

You know that thing
When you're just about to write it down and then you panic?
I need to push through the moment of doubt
To see what arrives if you let it.

So it goes -
Creativity leaves you exposed.
How To Compose.

And this bit's new and sort of mine,
Don't know why I walk the line
Remixing love and guilt and rage.
The Liquid Book, electric page

In stereo, in black and white,
Colouring in what I write,
A manifesto for the age
Of Liquid Book, Electric page.

This is a poem well, not quite a poem,
A lyric, a noise, a series of words,
Broadcast and published in people's hearts
if it's ever actually heard.

You know that thing
When you're just about to write it down and then you panic.
I need to push through the moment of doubt
To see what arrives if you let it.

I want to tell you what I felt
When the choir stood and sang its bloody heart right out,
Feel free to make something
Far less than what I'm inspired about.

So it goes -
Creativity leaves you exposed.

How to Compose.

-    Jamie & The Ifso Band

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NEARLYWRITING NEARLYOLOGY

'I nearly' badges

1. INTRODUCTION

How can a transmedia literary fiction convey the texture of everyday life and the inner lives of its characters while giving space to reader-generated responses and live collaboration? While scholarly writing on transmedia narrative and other related fields examines the potential for telling stories across different platforms and genres, how does the transmedia literary writer approach the production and publication of a multimodal text within the context of a complex publishing ecology?

These are the research questions I have explored through writing my transmedia novel *What Didn't Quite* and in this paper, which examines the contextual and compositional processes involved in the novel's creation.

There is much debate about the contribution of practice-based or practice-as-research and how to connect what academic Robin Nelson describes as the 'liquid knowing' of the arts to the 'hard facts' of traditional academe (Nelson, 2013: 48). In this context, the Practitioner Model of Creative Cognition has been proposed by Lyle Skains as a robust means for creative writers to analyse their practice. On the www.nearlyology.net website and in my notes, I've kept a record of my compositional processes in line with her recommended method of self-directed ethnomethodology.

Tracking my writing decisions as well as the decisions made in running a series of events and workshops which I have piloted to explore the book's themes, I also researched what Skains calls "scholarly domains pertinent to the project" (Skains, 2016), placing this contextual material alongside definitions of the key elements of transmedia narrative. This paper maps my excursions into the realms of transmedia narrative, the themes of my novel and the concerns of its three main protagonists.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold criticizes scholarly writing which perpetuates the illusion that the researcher sits apart from what he or she observes (Ingold, 2011). Such research presents thought and vision, time and space as if they were divisible and so fails to recognize the totality of phenomena. In contrast to writing, Ingold promotes the acts of walking and drawing as uniquely active forms of observation, an "intimate coupling of the movement of the observer's attention with currents of activity in the environment" (Ingold, 2000: 108). I've tried to engage in similarly active observation, imagined myself walking alongside my characters to pick up on their concerns, exploring the interplay between contextual research and its influence on my compositional decisions. And I've written the novel using whatever media and platforms seemed appropriate to its themes and characters. I describe this method as Nearlywriting, but Being Nearly doesn't imply a fudge or compromise, rather an intention to be without preconceptions, open to all possibilities, prepared to stray across boundaries between different art forms and modes of engagement, the actual and the virtual, objective and subjective, real and fictional. As E.M. Forster wrote in *Howards End*, "truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm" (Forster, 2012: 195).

1.1. STRUCTURE

This thesis is structured through a series of numbered sections and subsections. **Section 2. Liquid Book Electric Page** defines terms around digital fiction and puts transmedia literary fiction in the context of debate about communication and technological change. New digital possibilities have opened up for literature; do they help fiction to break free from the constraints which a post-modern novel such as Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* chafed against?

Section 3. How To Compose? looks further into how writing and publishing have shaped our culture, and how a digital book can be shaped and shared to provide space

for song and therapeutic engagement. Having put my project in context, I move on to look at the compositional process and explain why I define myself as a Nearlywriter, what this means and what led me to become one. I introduce my protagonist Jamie who is trying to 'sort himself out' and does this by writing songs. Looking at writing on memoir, therapy and song, I ask how the book can accommodate his music and engage with his soul searching.

4. Outsider Writer & The Nearly Show. I seek models for the Nearlywriter through the lens of my protagonist Gregory Carraday, an outsider artist and self-styled shaman. Replacing the image of novelist as desk-bound hermit, the transmedia author can be a tour guide leading the reader through a landscape of words and pictures, live performance, art works, conversation and creative exchange. I describe Nearlyology workshops and events which I have run over the past few years with a number of collaborators, and how these further informed the content and form of the novel, including its live and online elements.

5. Bookplacewalkshopband. I introduce my third protagonist, digital entrepreneur Freya Seward who in the story expands and exploits Carraday's philosophy of Nearlyology for financial gain. How might she think of disseminating my transmedia project to generate maximum interest and income? Talking to practitioners and looking at examples of innovative book places and psychogeographical book walks, I reach decisions about the form of the final novel, how this might be produced, accessed and monetized, and incorporated into a wider Nearly Project. Finally I look to the world of musical free improvisation for ideas on how to push Nearlywriting further into live collaboration.

6. Conclusion. I return to my research questions. Defining the novel not as an object or a download, but as the total experience of spending time in and around a story world, I argue that transmedia literary fiction has the affordances necessary to render the texture of contemporary, mediatized lives. Neither the publishing world nor digital producers currently seem keen to develop this new genre. My novel may be more conventional than I'd expected, but that makes it more likely to be of interest to traditional publishers, and leaves the way open for me to develop the Nearly Project on my own terms, across other media and art forms.

2. LIQUID BOOK ELECTRIC PAGE

2.1. DIGITAL & ANALOGUE

It is hard to draw a clear dividing line between digital and analogue literature. Despite the current trend amongst writers for buying manual typewriters and Moleskine notebooks, most professional writing, and the acts of editing, typesetting and book design, have largely taken place on screen for decades. Books are sold on-line, some as e-books, others printed on demand, and those for sale in bookshops may be made of actual card and paper but are ordered, tracked and processed by digital means. Long before the arrival of the Kindle and tablet computers, readers have been able to download a book to a mobile device and read the whole work on a screen. In an interview for *Triple Canopy* magazine, pioneer of digital publishing Bob Stein of the Institute For The Future of the Book remembers reading on a prototype Apple Powerbook in 1991. "Just the text on the screen, and you click on it and the page is there. We'd been talking about electronic books for years, but we assumed it was in the seriously long-term future…we looked at each other and said, "Oh, it's here, now" (Visel. D. & Stein. B. 2010).

However, predictions of the demise of the paper book have so far proved unfounded. Following the initial boom in e-book downloads, the decline of bookshops and slide in overall book sales of the past few years, by March 2017 the Publishers Association and Nielsen Bookdata were reporting a rise in analogue book and a decline in e-book sales (Sweney. M. 2017). These changes are too recent to make it easy to predict long-term trends, but readers know that, like it or not, books don't need to be printed, bound and read on paper. Friends of mine who a few years ago insisted they would never read books on screen have since bought Kindles or other electronic readers, even if many of these now lie discarded and uncharged on bedside tables. Likewise, sales of apps which provide multimedia reading experiences have become a reality, if not yet a firmly established literary product. It is now possible to curl up on the sofa with a laptop, tablet computer or phone to enjoy a multimedia narrative which might include text and image, audio and video.

2.2. PLATFORMS, MEDIA & STORIES IN ORBIT

Consumers have also become used to accessing multiple platforms to find elements of one story world presented on different media. Digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Amazon, Wordpress and the iTunes store will all supply content about, say, *Game of Thrones,* in book, movie, blog, tweet and fanfiction forms, as will building-based platforms such as Waterstones bookshops and Picturehouse cinemas (other brands are available) with more content and comment received from posters on the street, at live events and through word of mouth from flesh and blood lips in real time.

Whilst studies such as *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Aarseth, 1997) once aimed to identify unique features of screen-based as opposed to paper-bound literature, today all kinds of literature can be found online. Audio books and animated new media texts serve to remind us that all words happen in time, whether through the picking up and putting down of a book, the random shuffling of a database, the churning of an offset litho printer, the movement of words on screen, or the exhalation of breath to generate voice. For makers of all kinds of creative content, this awareness is leading to what transmedia producers Sean Steward and Ian Lee, interviewed in *A Creator's Guide To Transmedia Storytelling*, call "a sort of Copernican revolution: instead of thinking of the entertainment as something that lives in a book (or box or console) that your audience has to come to, think of that audience as the sun: try building entertainment that orbits around them" (Phillips, 2012: 10).

Any work of literature that contains multimedia elements and is distributed through more than one platform is defined as a transmedia narrative, in scholarly writing by Henry Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, C.A. Scolari, Christy Dena and others who seek to anatomise its other essential characteristics. However, most of their work is concerned with the analysis of major commercial franchises, bestsellers and large-scale projects, which Matthew Freeman's study has shown to have a history reaching back long before the arrival of Marvel Comics and the web to Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan (Freeman, 2016). Aside from these mega-fictions, recent scholarly research includes work on non-fiction transmedia storytelling as a medium for social activism (Hancox,

2017), and the creative process of making a game-based interactive narrative (Abba, 2007). The rapidly growing body of digital literature of the kind anthologised by the Electronic Literature Organization, defined on the ELO website by N. Katherine Hayles as: "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer" (Hayles, 2017), includes hypertext poetry, novels in the form of emails and SMS messages and collaborative writing projects that allow reader contributions. The shortlists of the annual New Media Writing Prize, of which I've been a judge and sponsor since its launch in 2009, range from hand-coded works by solo makers such as J.R. Carpenter and composer Katharine Norman to commercially produced apps (New Media Writing Prize 2017). Examples of shortlisted independent makers are Christine Wilks in the UK, poet Jason Nelson in Australia and Alan Bigelow in the US, many working in or close to an academic setting. At the other extreme are commercial publishers Touch Press, who have made lavish digital renderings of established bestsellers like Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* (Touch Press, 2016) and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (Touch Press, 2016a). The 2014 winner of the prize, *Pry* (Tender Claws, 2014), is a rare example of a new fiction in the form of a highly polished, independently produced downloadable app. *The Cartographer's Confession* by James Attlee, won the prize in 2017, an elegant and lavishly rendered work which uses GPS technology to release elements of narrative in different locations as the reader walks around the story's Central London setting (Attlee, 2018).

Authors such as Naomi Alderman and Kate Pullinger write for digital platforms as well as book publishers, and others such as Kate Atkinson, Jennifer Egan, Miranda July and Ali Smith write literary fiction that in different ways is clearly inspired by, though not uncritical of, the new light that digital innovation sheds on what is possible with words. The forking paths of narrative in *Life After Life* (Atkinson, 2013), the flicker-book graphic in *The Raw Shark Texts* (Hall, 2007), Nick Cave's novel enhanced with his music and voice (Cave, 2010), Richard House's Booker shortlisted novel *The Kills* (House, 2013), featuring links to videos – all these and many more push at the boundaries of literary fiction without breaking out completely. Slowly and haltingly, the novel is coming unbound.

2.3. THE WORD SET FREE

It was Marshall McLuhan who, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, published in 1962, sought to show how the invention of writing, and then moveable type printing, fundamentally shaped human expression. The printing press favoured uniformity and consistency, the visual over the auditory or tactile; it separated poetry from song, it locked meaning into the codex and made the book a portable and saleable commodity. "The invention of the alphabet, like the invention of the wheel, was the translation or reduction of a complex, organic interplay of spaces into a single space" (McLuhan, 2011: 51). Technology, McLuhan believed, was bound to modify our notion of individualism and yoked the concept of literacy to the business model of publishing. Now that we're in the thick of digital transformations arguably more profound than even McLuhan imagined, how can we make fiction using the full potential of the electronic, networked device on which we write?

As Kirstyn Leuner writes: "The transfer of content from books to computers has fundamentally changed the way readers, writers, publishers, editors and technologists interact with text" (Leuner, 2014: 45). With the coming of digital technologies and platforms, the word has taken off from the printed page; the book can be a fluid thing, words can be dripped or poured into our minds, swum through alone or bathed in with friends. Text can be mingled with sound, illustration and moving image, the original authors' words responded to, added to, remixed by each reader. Writers can choose for themselves which platforms, media and business models best suit their artistic intentions. Poet Benjamin Zephaniah says: "We may publish books, we may also put poetry on the Internet, but the most important thing for us is that we publish our works in people's hearts" (Zephaniah, 2016). Rather than be dictated to by technology old or new, we need to find the best way to speak from and to the heart about the actual and the virtual, the real and the nearly.

The digital future for literature is often framed in terms of a threat to authors' incomes, the survival of publishers, the impact on our concentration spans – the end of civilization as we know it. For instance, in a talk for the Hay Festival, author Jonathan Franzen mused whether in 50 years' time serious readers will have "that hunger for something permanent and unalterable" which he associates with the printed book and a system of justice or responsible self-government. "I do fear that it's

going to be very hard to make the world work if there's no permanence like that" (Singh, 2012).

But those in the community arts movement have long hungered for a more fluid and participatory model for publishing and the arts in general. The Sheldon Trust, an influential funding body for Community Arts in the 1980s, defined it as: "a way of working, not a particular artform... Community Arts encourages active participation by ordinary people rejecting the trend towards passive consumption in all other areas of life" (Hinton, 1990: 24). It could be argued that in the 21st century, consumption, far from being passive, has become remorselessly active, our networked and converged cultural landscape hectic with opportunities to chat, to review and to customize our shopping experiences, in constant connection with a global, virtual world but still within confines tightly defined by commercial forces. In *Who Owns The Future?* Jaron Lanier writes: "The primary business of digital networking has come to be the creation of ultra-secret mega-dossiers about what others are doing, and using this information to concentrate money and power" (Lanier, 2014: 54). He predicts the demise of the middle class as all intermediary jobs are replaced by big business using 'siren servers' to give us free downloads and advertising in exchange for the valuable information we give them for free without even noticing it. Lanier argues for a system of micro-payments to reimburse producers and a humanistic computing that challenges the dominance of these gigantic companies. He argues that the collaborative creation and informal barter made possible by platforms such as Facebook, Amazon, eBay etc. in fact concentrate power and money in the hands of the technological overseers who own the servers and the information we feed to them.

This is certainly true, but digital platforms have stimulated a flowering of open creativity, crowd sourcing and collaborative consumption, which has led to fan fiction, the blogosphere, sites for sharing cars, spare rooms and free advice, global support networks, local community activism, Wikipedia and much more. In *Computers as Theatre*, published way back in 1993, Brenda Laurel painted a utopian picture of digital possibility as she anticipated the creation of new software for writers. She had a dynamic, multi-dimensional view of the process of writing, which nearly describes what for me, on a good day, it is like to write today. "Computers have the potential to transform the process of writing from a series of isolated and

cumbersome tasks into a whole action that retains and refreshes its connections to its inspiration, materials and outcome" (Laurel, 2013: 173).

Transmedia literary fiction seems an appropriate term to describe literature made from this kind of whole action writing. Christy Dena defines transmedial fiction as naming a fictional world that "exists across distinct media and art forms" (Dena, 2014: 486). Henry Jenkins calls transmedia storytelling "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins, 2007). He and the co-authors of *Spreadable Media* (2013) analyze it using examples from popular culture and mass media, characters like Harry Potter and Doctor Who, known as properties in marketing speak.

2.4. TRANSMEDIA, MULTIMEDIA & MODALITY

Jenkins has clarified that: **"Transmedia** approaches are multimodal (in that they deploy the affordances of more than one medium), intertextual (in that each of these platforms offers unique content that contributes to our experience of the whole) and dispersed (in that the viewer constructs an understanding of the core ideas through encounters across multiple platforms)" (Jenkins, 2016). A multimedia product will incorporate different technologies, but the term multimodality refers to modes of communication, how a presentation using sound, movement and interaction delivers meaning to its audience. Screen-based texts are "complex multimodal ensembles" in which modes nestle alongside each other, according to educationalist Carey Jewitt in her article *Multimodality, "Reading", and "Writing" for the 21st Century*. Echoing McLuhan, Kress and van Leeuwen argue that technology has led to the end of the dominance of the mono-modality of black ink on white page, and celebrate digital culture where different modes can be operated by one person utilising one interface "so that he or she can ask, at every point: 'Shall I express this with sound or music?', 'Shall l say this visually or verbally?', and so on" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001:1-2). After all, we interact with the world through interpreting multiple modes as we walk through the landscape of our lives, reading, watching, listening, smelling, touching, tasting, talking. However, Jewitt points out that print-based reading and writing have always been multimodal, requiring "the interpretation and design of

visual marks, space, colour, font or style, and, increasingly image, and other modes of representation and communication" (Jewitt, 2005: 315).

2.5. LITERARY & EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

Literary Fiction is a hotly contested term, often used in debates which situate it as the snobby sibling of popular fiction (Rothman, 2014), (Stevens, 2011). *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* refers to literary fiction as the "presumed opposite" of genre fiction, expected to go beyond generic boundaries and offer "more original imaginative exploration" (Baldick, 2015: 50). One writer's advice site curtly lists its essential elements as: "Character comes before plot... 'fine writing' is essential... anything goes" (Chapman, 2017). The polished prose of literary fiction could be considered too carefully and individually crafted to be altered by anyone other than the author. It may not easily be rendered into re-mixable chunks, scattered across media or disrupted by readers' interjections. However, critic Terrence Rafferty writes that "literary fiction, by its nature, allows itself to dawdle, to linger on stray beauties even at the risk of losing its way" (Rafferty, 2011), and transmedia literary fiction has new means to make spaces for that dawdling without losing readers entirely.

Experimental fiction on the other hand isn't afraid to lose a few readers completely as it challenges realist conventions such as linear plotting and well-rounded characterization. Those who define this term tend to cast it as either the realm of the unreadable or of all things most interesting. For William Paterson University's maplitererary.org it is "a reminder that the universe has not yet been satisfactorily explained" (Parras, 2017) and can be as hard to read as a foreign language, though the site's list of examples includes not only the daunting word hordes of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Robbe-Grillet's Nouveaux Romans, but also more accessible storytellers including Borges, Angela Carter and Milan Kundera. Much new media writing utilises databases and coding to shuffle, cut up and randomize texts in the way Dadaists did with scissors and Oulipans with self-imposed constraints. Digital makers like Jason Nelson make thrilling soundscapes, wordgames and waterfalls of poetry that don't easily reveal a narrative shape. Other websites are unreadable due more to glitches and poor design than avant-garde intent.

To paraphrase Omar Khayyam, the moving finger clicks and, having clicked a bit, moves on.

2.6. STICKY SITES & PARATEXTS

Theorist Marie-Laure Ryan notes that digital literature has so far tended to thrive in either what she calls 'the Tropics' of mass-market games and popular fiction or 'the North Pole' of the esoteric and avant-garde, but believes an "artistic medium only becomes truly significant when it is able to conquer the center of the spectrum" which she defines as 'The Temperate Zone' (Ryan, 2005). Commercial Transmedia products may be technologically innovative but not usually experimental in literary terms. They are hand designed to grab the attention of a mass-market readership, and it's the methods they use to do this from which literary writers can learn, helping to make compelling yet complex fiction which holds readers till the end.

For instance, Jenkins argues that successful transmedia content uses *stickiness* to retain the dawdlers, and "gains this through an awareness of how media texts are taken up by audiences and circulate through audience interactions". Bringing users to your site and holding them there indefinitely by providing material that can be circulated and repurposed easily, the concept of spreadability "assumes that anything worth hearing will circulate through any and all available channels, potentially moving audiences from peripheral awareness to active engagement" (Jenkins, 2013: 6). The page turner is replaced by the sticky site, the bestseller by popular destinations like J.K.'s Pottermore and Jane's Austenland, the literary novel by all manner of fictional spaces, experimental, original and radical, but all governed by the psychology of online attention. The single, compelling linear plot makes way for a new pattern of story world and clusters of characters, which can be elaborated, expanded and remixed within that world's topography without destroying the fiction's central premises.

Today every writer has the potential to design a personal threshold to their particular narrative world, and, in so doing, to define the terms of their engagement with the reader. The author's website, often controlled by the writer rather than the publisher, allows the creation of a form of paratext, the digital equivalent of marginalia, cover art, foreword, footnotes, those trappings of a book which the author of *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* calls "a zone between text and off-text, a

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zone not only of transition but also of transaction" (Genette, 1997: 2). Whether published or not, writers can easily make blogs and websites presenting their work in whatever context they wish, adding illustrations and elaborations that were previously limited by the technological, commercial and contractual constraints of publishing. Society may, as Lanier believes, have lost vast swathes of middle-class jobs for intermediaries in the supply chain of literature, but for the writer there are creative opportunities to be found in taking control of some of these processes.

2.7. THE THIRD POLICEMAN AND THE LIMITS OF THE PAGE

Digital possibilities for literature should make it possible for authors to do what was previously impossible in a bound book. Is there evidence that novelists of the past hankered after these superpowers? A good place to look for clues is in the dark wood of *The Third Policeman* (O'Brien, 2010), a 20th Century novel that rattled the cage of the conventional linear novel, eager to burst out of its confines. Flann O'Brien wrote from a much older experimental tradition, which includes Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1996), published in nine volumes between 1759 and 1767. Sterne's book was a metafiction testing out the possibilities of what was then a genuinely novel form, as innovative as interactive story apps today. O'Brien's blackly comic fiction, published posthumously in 1967, is described by Keith Hopper in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist* as the first post-modern novel, and it uses paratextual elements to conjure up a story world beyond the story (Hopper, 1995).

In *The Third Policeman,* the narrator is drawn into committing a murder and then finds himself lost in a wood where he meets strange policemen investigating disappearing bicycles. The narrative is interspersed with footnotes relating to the theories of De Selby, an imaginary scientist; his studies include how the intermingling of molecules between bicycles and their riders lead to humans propping themselves up bike-like against walls. De Selby's experiments in time travel involve many mirrors and postcards of Brighton. The narrator argues with his conscience, who becomes a character in his/its own right, forgets his own name and eventually turns out to be already dead (or maybe not).

"If art traditionally held a mirror up to society, then metafiction holds a mirror up to the mirror" (Hopper, 1995: 6). Hopper describes O'Brien as "shamanistic",

playing the role of tribal medicine man, "healer of the relationship between mind and body, between matter and spirit, between people and their environment, between culture and nature" (Hopper, 1995: 4). With digital technology, the shaman writer can use multiple platforms to play with convention. In his book *Urban Shaman*, Serge Kahili King describes the outstanding quality of the shaman as being "the inclination towards engagement, or creative activity. Knowledge and understanding are not enough, nor does passive acceptance hold any appeal. The shaman plunges into life with mind and senses, playing the role of co-creator" (King, 1990: 14). The transmedia literary novelist can plunge into co-creating story, using whatever tools seem appropriate, with the readers as collaborators, adding their own stories and illuminations, interrogating the characters directly.

Hopper analyses in detail O'Brien's use of a self-conscious narrator and frame-breaking strategies such as the inclusion of the paratext of footnotes, lists and *macaronic* language – nonsense scholarship parodying academe – all techniques of post-modernism, designed to undermine the conventions of realist fiction and challenge the authority of the author as well as the notion of the novel as an organic whole containing some essence of the real world, and reveal it as nothing but bare text, a constructed string of squiggles, signs and codes.

Like *The Third Policeman*, transmedia fiction is often *metaleptic* in that it shifts from one narrative level to another and frequently leads to paradoxical transgressions of the boundaries between levels. For example, Blast Theory's *Karen* is an app fiction featuring a life coach with problems of her own, who starts out offering professional advice based on multiple-choice questions and ends up bombarding the reader with needy, flirtatious or threatening text messages which ping up alarmingly on his or her phone day and night (Blast Theory, 2015).

As Hopper points out in relation to O'Brien, "metalepsis can trip itself up by its very cleverness; the dazzling displays of technical virtuosity can become indulgently self-gratifying and therefore extrinsic to thematic concerns" (Hopper, 1995: 167). Many experiments in new media offer game elements to the reader, but in the process limit the imaginative range of the reading experience. For instance, in designing an iPad app of *John Buchan's The 39 Steps* (MP Digital, 2016), the developers responded to research that readers want to imagine for themselves the characters in stories. Their solution was to visualise the scenery from the book but leave the characters as ghostly blurs. But clicking around lonely landscapes, stabbing

with a finger at the misty head of a character to see if it will jump or speak or explode doesn't build empathy. In 2010 the Royal Shakespeare Company "took Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet to* the digital world in a ground-breaking production which unfolded to Twitter followers around the globe over the course of five weeks." *Such Tweet Sorrow* was a bold experiment to transpose the story onto a new medium, but do we need to receive tweets from Romeo and Juliet *as if they were really real* to care about their fate? The *Guardian* culture blogger Charlotte Higgins thought not. She wrote: "Does a tweet like 'Goooooooooood morningggggg :):):):):):) It happened... with THE most beautiful boy alive... IT happened :):):):):)' really cut it?" (Higgins, 2010).

Flann O'Brien's metafictions, however avant-garde in form, still appeared as paperbacks on the shelves of bookshops. Proponents of digital publishing envisage a future in which we experience story in metaleptic ways, using mobiles as the wands we wave to connect information and plotlines, which come at us from a multiplicity of sources and are accessed on the move on networked but private devices. For example The Ambient Literature project, commissioner of *The Cartographer's Confession* and mobile fictions by Kate Pullinger and Duncan Speakman using GPS technology to track their readers' locations, asks: "What happens when data aspires to literary form? What does it mean when the place where you're reading becomes the stage for the story? How might writing, reading and the idea of the book itself change when we use technology to design stories, rather than just present them?" (Ambient Literature, 2017). Experiencing narratives across platforms may soon seem as natural as tweeting friends on a sunny day. *The Third Policeman* could take the form of an app along the lines of *Pokemon Go* or Naomi Alderman's *Zombies, Run!* (Six to Start, 2016), a hugely successful story made to be listened to on headphones whilst exercising. I imagine the reader/jogger pursued by burly policemen, their molecules mingling with those of the bicycles they ride. Free at last, the book can become a gym, a consulting room, a meeting place between author and reader.

2.8. CREATIVE READING
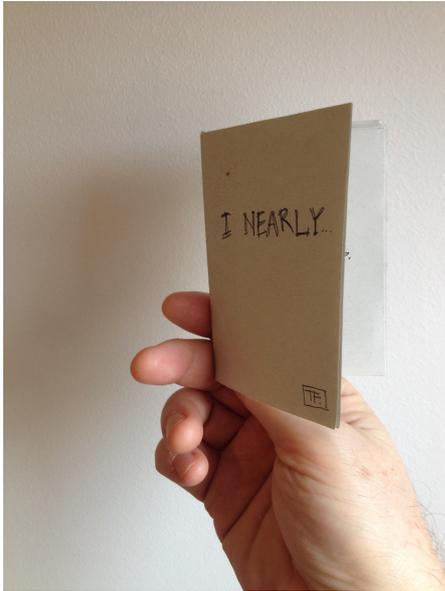
Nearly booklet folded from a sheet of A4

When Roland Barthes wrote *The Death of the Author* in 1967, he was challenging the cosy assumptions behind realist fiction and literary criticism that deified the individual maker. He wrote: "In ethno-graphic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'" (Barthes, 1993: 142). He considered the author to be a product of English empiricism and French rationalism and its belief in the prestige of the individual. Post-modernism and post-structuralism stem from a political critique of the cult of the literary personality, and those assumptions about power relations in society which underpin realist fiction. For the transmedia community, however, the changing shape of the book is a practical rather than a political matter; the omniscient author has been deposed by technology, not ideology, and the new creator is not just a notionally creative reader but what transmedia theorist Stephen Dinehard defines as 'the viewer/user/player or VUP' who "transforms the story via his or her own natural cognitive psychological abilities, and enables the Artwork to surpass medium. It is in transmedial play that the ultimate story agency, and decentralized authorship can be realized. Thus the VUP becomes the true producer of the Artwork" (Dinehard, 2015). The author is even deader than Barthes imagined.

The reader, though, may never have been more alive. In 1989, while working in Sheffield libraries, I was joint co-ordinator with Rachel Van Riel of a festival of reading and writing called *Opening The Book*. As workers in literature development and community arts we stressed that, far from being passive consumers, readers of fiction actively imagined the landscapes of the books they read, found associations and resonances which were all their own, charted their own course from book to book. But this activity was all in the mind – whereas the VUP really can drive the characters wherever they want them to go, design their own onscreen avatar, make their own scenes to insert in the story.

Transmedia writers today can invite their readers to dip their brushes in all kinds of digital paint pots, using sound, image and movie as well as the printed word to draw and colour their story world. For example the children's book app *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore* (Moonbot Studios, 2012) includes sound and animations; it invites readers to draw on the book, to play games with the characters and make tunes on a keyboard embedded within it.
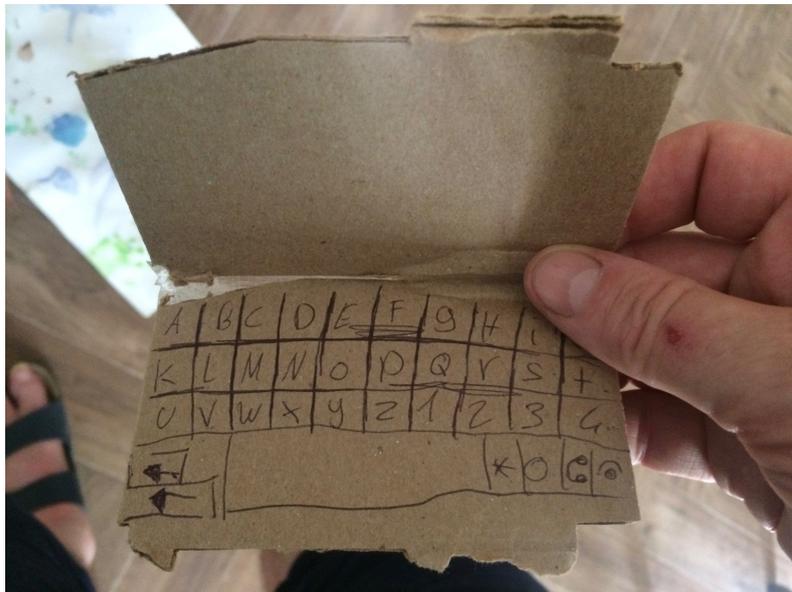
Cardboard Laptop by Camilla Hochleitner

3. HOW TO COMPOSE?

3.1. NEARLYWRITING

Back in the mid-1980s, the Opening The Book team used the term *creative reading* as a metaphor to stress the imaginative activity involved in consuming any text. We set up events in libraries at which groups of readers were asked to share their thoughts and feelings on books they'd read. We commissioned sculptures and poems about reading which decorated the festival square, and we concocted a book of the 1989 festival, written, edited, printed and published during the event, utilizing the wonders of word processing and desktop printing and including quotes from participants and audience members (Van Riel & Fowler, 1996). From this Literature Development work grew my notion of Nearlywriting. I realised that activities characterised as ancillary, educational or promotional sidelines to real writing and publishing were central to my creative process.

Why did I think of myself as a Nearlywriter? After all, over the years I've done plenty of things that real writers do: had a book published by Penguin, a play performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, been mentioned in the Guardian, commissioned by the BBC to write a TV sitcom that was nearly produced, and I've taught Creative Writing. Like Jamie I'm an older white middle class male, so I might be expected to feel fully entitled to write. However, for my day jobs I've worked as a Literature Development Officer for public libraries and then as CEO of The Poetry Society and Booktrust, collaborating closely with award-winning authors of all varieties, but not as one of them myself. In such company it's perhaps not surprising that my own identity as a writer waned even as my confidence grew as a professional arts manager committed to widening access to literacy and literature through community projects which constitute a kind of 'nearly literature', connected to but not part of mainstream literary production.

In 2007 I took an M.A. in Creative Writing & New Media firstly to explore the potential of digital tools to bring literature to new audiences, but also as a means to make stories of my own again, away from the gaze of the literary scene and outside the formal strictures of the mainstream. I learnt a great deal and enjoyed writing *In Search of Lost Tim* (Meade, 2008), a digital novella including cartoons, puppetry,

songs and video. The course led me to step down from Booktrust and set up if:book uk, a charitable company exploring digital possibilities for literature, founded with Bob Stein of the New York based think and do tank The Institute for the Future of the Book. I became a commentator on the extraordinary disruption of the publishing business that we have been witnessing over the past decade.

I began this PhD believing that the act of writing fiction had been fundamentally changed by the arrival of digital platforms, which allow writers to breach boundaries previously defined by the technology and economics of the publishing industry. However, I felt less sure about how I wanted to write for myself. My intention was to test how these new digital possibilities for literature might be fruitful in exploring people's relationships with their regrets and desires in the light of digital technologies, which make it possible to create an abundance of online personas, to travel virtually through time and space, to take one route in life but use the web to follow alternative paths.

After years of giving talks and writing articles for if:book uk, I had evangelized enough. I decided at the outset of this PhD that as I wrote the story, instead of setting out to create either a paperback novel or a digital app, I would allow myself to compose using whatever media, old or new, felt appropriate in the expectation that what was eventually concocted could somehow be produced by digital if not analogue means. I wandered freely down any creative pathways that inspired or intrigued in the hope that this process would reveal the most fruitful way to present the story of Nearlyology.

During this period of free creative wayfaring, I undertook research, wrote a draft narrative text and set up the Nearlyology.net website. Having fixed on my theme and three main characters, each representing a different aspect of Nearlyness, I tried fleshing them out in different ways. I ran Nearly Workshops similar to those run by one of my novel's protagonists, digital consultant Freya Seward. I wrote and recorded songs in the persona of her musician husband Jamie, and made artworks and animations in the spirit of the book's third main protagonist, Gregory Carraday. Over the past four years I have gathered Nearly Stories from members of the public around the country; studied Flash Animation at London's City Lit to make short film animations, and Puppetry and Writing for Puppets at the Little Angel Theatre; formed The Ifso Band and sung songs at open mic evenings in pubs and cafés; devised a piece of Nearly Music with members of Academy Inegales; performed a section of

the novel using a loop machine and improvised musical accompaniment; I have held workshops with other collaborators, including theatre director Lily McLeish and dancer/choreographer Jia-Yu Corti. I documented and analysed these experiments to see how they helped me to create the final work. This consists not just of the text novel presented for this PhD, but also the larger Nearly Project, including live workshops, performances and pop-up installations, songs recorded by the Ifso Band, booklets, badges, artwork and podcasts, all brought together by digital means on the www.nearlyology.net website.

My aim has been to refine a creative practice for myself, The Nearlywriter, not to lay down general rules or definitions. And to me the digital possibilities for literature still seem fundamentally liberating. Growing up in the 60s and 70s and working in the book trade and the arts during the 1980 and 90s, my imaginative life was hugely influenced by all media. However, books still felt like the place where big ideas belonged. An old Olivetti manual typewriter was my most treasured possession as a child. With carbon paper and staples I tried to replicate real magazines and booklets. I went to the bookshop around the corner to find the latest facts and fictions. I wanted to write books, not because I loved their look and feel, but because that was where I'd been led to believe proper stories lived. Later, as a Community Arts Worker in libraries in the 1980s, I became intent on setting the word free from those buildings and bindings, to empower new voices in a wider cultural conversation. In 1982 I was working for the Sound Collective at Commonground Resources Centre, in Sheffield, producing *Commonsound*, a community cassette magazine, in a building that contained a recording studio, printing press, silk screen, video and photographic equipment – like a gigantic analogue iPhone, sending out multimedia messages to the populace, calling them to join the revolution.

Fast forward to 2013, starting out on this PhD, I sat writing words on a networked screen, at the same time alone with my thoughts, connecting voluntarily with the gatekeepers to a networked world, and connected to what felt like a vast global subconscious of rumour and desire. The texture of my inner life had certainly changed since the arrival of the Internet and this needed to be documented, the commercial influences hid inside laptops needed to be revealed and challenged. I hammered away at the keys on my laptop, googling out into the web to track down information and make connections to further my inner world, tweeting this and blogging that, hyperlinking to relevant sites, creating characters and actions with

words, then downloading apps to help me enhance, animate and share, how and when I wished.

What began to emerge – somewhat to my surprise - was a long form narrative: a novel with songs and extra bits, a chamber piece of transmedia literary fiction. Although I wouldn't make claims for its literary quality, in *What Didn't Quite* the plot was secondary to the book's themes, its style didn't neatly fit into any particular genre, and I was trying to say something satirical about society and the times we live in. I also didn't expect the novel to reach a mass audience, regardless of what media it was made in or what platform it appeared on. For my purposes, I sought to use transmedia storytelling techniques to deepen and spread engagement with the themes of my book, rather than to attract swarms of new readers or generate multiple stories set in its world. However, I did want to hold my reader. My experiment involved choosing from the range of possibilities available to try to create fiction that grabbed readers and pleased me. By exploring the tools of transmedia narrative I was looking for ways to tell a satisfying and absorbing story to readers of long form fiction who may often find the web a distracting and fragmented place. I'd found plenty of weird stuff to read online, fewer stories that drew the reader in as closely as a good book can.

On the www.nearlyology.net website (Meade, 2017), I documented my experiments in how to make my story stickier, trying different ways to draw readers into the wider Nearly Project. Unlike a conventional literary novel fixed in print, digital formats allowed for spaces within the story where readers were able to write freely, and might receive direct, customized communications from the world of this new kind of book. Inspired by digital possibilities, I began to think of the novel not as an object nor a download, but rather as the totality of the reader's experience over the period of time during which they are engaged with its story world: the whole time spent reading and nearly reading the book.

An early decision I made was that the form of the novel should be shaped by the characters who lived in it. With each of my three main protagonists, I researched issues relevant to their lives, and tracked how this research and creative experimentation led to the composition of transmedia elements within the book, helping to shape the concept of Nearlywriting.

3.2. JAMIE & THE IN-BETWEEN

Made redundant from his management job in play work, diagnosed with a condition likely to render him impotent, deserted by his wife in whom he's felt unable to confide, fearful of losing the love of his puppeteer daughter who has come out as lesbian, my protagonist Jamie is in danger of being consumed by regrets, failures, fears and bitterness. Coming to terms with his Nearlies, with being alone, letting go of assumptions about himself as a worker, lover and father, confronting what he thinks of as a lost opportunity to become a musician, Jamie gradually finds new opportunities to express himself, firstly by writing songs, then contributing to an online advice forum. Here were two solid reasons for my book to take a multimedia and interactive digital form: I wanted readers to hear his songs and, like him, be able to express their Nearly stories.

For me, Jamie also represented the reader in search of self-realisation. Nearlyology is an invented word which I define as the study of how the individual copes with the desires and frustrations surrounding things they didn't quite do, how they describe their nearly experiences and how these can enhance or diminish their sense of self. Of course, the concept of Nearlyology is also a joke, a parody of self-help books and courses offering catchy ways to tackle inner demons and find the elusive Real You. My character Jamie and I are both at an age when it's tempting to look back at the life one's led and the roads not travelled. We forget actual

experiences, retain vivid images of scenes that didn't in fact occur. As the Nearly Manifesto says, "In the middle of the journey of life, what we've done and nearly done begins to blur" (Meade, 2017). Like Jamie - and most people who have ever been in rock bands, drummers especially perhaps - I feel I could have become a famous pop star, if only… Four years ago, thanks to a songwriting group in my local library, I started to write songs 'seriously' - though I enjoyed it precisely because I didn't think of it as a serious activity. I've found it very liberating to compose music and lyrics in the guise of a fictional character rather than as myself; I've gradually overcome my own insecurities about not being 'really' musical (I have no musical training, am left-handed and play a right- handed ukulele upside down). Lyrics and tunes arise in me without the self-consciousness I feel when attempting poetry.

Digital technology has opened up vast new virtual spaces between what we do and don't actually do. Critics of the Internet such as Andrew Keen tell us that the gatekeepers have lost their grip; in many fields the wall between amateur and professional, nearly and really, is evaporating (Keen, 2008). Jamie – and I – can record and upload songs without the need for any gatekeepers to decide if we deserve to be listened to. We can even build a following and a creative community around our Nearly Art.

3.3. DIFFERENT WAYS OF TELLING

Rebecca Solnit writes in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, about how we try to pretend all is findable, keep-able, explicable. "It is in the nature of things to be lost and not otherwise. Think of how little has been salvaged from the compost of time of the hundreds of billions of dreams dreamt since the language to describe them emerged, how few names, how few wishes, how few languages, even" (Solnit, 2006: 185). Perhaps psychoanalysis can help us cope with our losses and our Nearly lives. "So much wanting. So much longing. And so much pain, so close to the surface, only minutes deep. Destiny pain. Existence pain. Pain that is always there, whirring continuously, just beneath the membrane of life," writes psychotherapist Irvin D. Yalom (Yalom, 2013: 3). That pain doesn't need to be disabling. Freud charted his theory of how we develop from hungry babies, only capable of fantasizing the breast

so urgently needed, to adults capable of coping with the Reality Principle, feeling pangs of hunger but prepared to shop and cook or book a table for later, to spin out our desires in order to enhance the eventual moment of gratification (Freud, 1911). Delay can become not only tolerable but pleasurable, preferable even to the having of the wanted thing itself. Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips argues that culture is what humans have devised to fill up this space created between wanting and getting. Conversation, thought and storytelling all grow in the gap between desire and consummation, a means to handle what we might want and may not get. Phillips catalogues the types of unlived lives we lead and the different frustrations we endure:

> There is a world of difference between erotic and romantic daydream and actual sexual encounters; getting together with actual people is a lot more work, and is never exactly what one was hoping for. So there are three consecutive frustrations: the frustration of need, the frustration of fantasized satisfaction not working, and the frustration of satisfaction in the real world being at odds with the wished-for, fantasized satisfaction (Phillips, 2012: 23).

In our youth this sense of longing can be overwhelmingly poignant. In older age there may be some relief from yearning; it's perhaps easier to enjoy admiring the desirable without the craving to get it. Rebecca Solnit writes, "We treat desire as a problem to be solved" and wonders if it is possible to "look across the distance without wanting to close it up, if you can own your own longing... whether with a slight adjustment of perspective it could be cherished as a sensation on its own terms" (Solnit, 2006: 30). The Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard writes in depth about yearning and desire and much else in his epic memoir *My Struggle* which grew out of his boredom with the overfamiliar, narrative tropes. He declared himself sick of fiction. In Volume 1, *Man In Love*, narrator Karl Ove becomes nauseated by fabricated characters in fabricated plots:

> Every single sentence was met with the thought: but you're just making this up... The only genres I saw value in, which still conferred meaning, were diaries and essays... that were not about anything, but just consisted of a voice, the voice of your own personality, a life, a face, a gaze you could meet (Knausgaard, 2013: loc.8752).

On the other hand, true stories perhaps allow less wiggle room than made-up fiction for readers to put themselves in the narrator's shoes. Fiction still has the power to seize and hold our attention and Marie-Laure Ryan, discussing stories in games as well as novels, argues that it is the product of an act of make-believe, "whose prototype can be found in children's role-playing games, such as playing house, cops and robbers, or big bad wolf chasing little pigs" (Ryan, 2013: 264). In *Why We Read Fiction*, Lisa Zunshine writes: "Our enjoyment of fiction is predicated – at least in part – upon our awareness of our 'trying on' mental states potentially available to us but at a given moment differing from our own" (Zunshine, 2006). Fiction allows us to nearly become other people. The transmedia literary novel can provide a customised space for this informal bibliotherapy, a public playground or mind gym for exercising our imaginations in relation to the themes of the work. For many years some publishers have included notes on discussion topics for reading groups in certain titles, but a book that is read online can contain links to virtual space within itself space for a conversation between readers.

3.4. PEOPLE & PUPPETRY

Where once the novel sat far apart on the shelves from the author's biography and reviews, in a networked environment these are all just a click away for readers. We can enjoy seeing the early drafts and research involved in making fiction, want to read about how the story was made, how it might relate to the author's real life or source material. Enjoying the artifice, being able to 'see the strings' of a fictional character, doesn't make the characters any less nearly real. This is revealed particularly clearly in puppet theatre.

Puppetry experiments constantly with the space between fiction and reality, the human and the simulacrum. In the essay *Sign Systems of Puppetry*, Henryk Jurkowski reflects on the history of puppetry and concludes: "The puppet theatre throughout its history has been a theatre of the constant pulsation of the means of expression and their relationships" (Jurkowski, 1983: 112). He looks back at German puppetry of the 1930s, which introduced the 'opalescence of the puppet', by which he means its double existence as a wooden object and an actor in the drama. "Clown

Gustav of Albrecht Roser is a clown character, but when his strings get entangled and he asks for help, he is a puppet; furthermore, he is a puppet playing on its awareness of being a puppet" (Jurkowski, 1983: 109). Another marionette puppet fights off its wicked, manipulative operator but, of course, 'dies' in the process. Contemporary audiences seem to enjoy this exposure of the fictiveness of story, on stage and in novels. Banraku puppetry, a traditional Japanese form born in the 1600s in which several operators per puppet are in plain sight of the audience, moving the head and limbs of the figure, has been popularized by the stage version of Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse*.

3.5. SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Song writing allows for another kind of re-telling. Here's a chance to dance fleetingly with different aspects of ourselves, in the format of a love tune. Songs are three-minute fictions, miniature opportunities to play with a character or state of being and then move on. The pop song with three or four verses and middle eight provides another structure for storytelling, less wedded to realism, fleeting but catchy. John Berger said, "songs can express the inner experience of Being and Becoming at this historic moment... because songs are self-contained and because songs put their arms around historic times... without being utopian" (Berger, 2016: 193). This is in contrast to prose, which he calls "an exchange with a surrounding circle of different points of view and opinions, expressed in a shared and descriptive language". Berger believes this shared language no longer exists in public discourse. Amid discord and misunderstanding, which can shatter the shared knowledge needed by readers to comprehend a fictional world, a song unlocks a tiny but complete universe at each hearing.

Major songwriters can be refreshingly unpretentious about the meaning of their work. Paul Simon consciously tries not to think about what a song should say, "because I'm interested in what I find, as opposed to what I'm planting... People bring meaning to it, which is more interesting to me than for me to tell meaning to somebody" (Zollo, 2003: 96). Viv Albertine writes in her memoir of life before, during and after playing guitar in The Slits, that making a record is "like being a kid and getting all my mates over to help build a tree house out of bits of wood that are lying around" (Albertine, 2016: 392). Leonard Cohen, who famously took five years

to write 'Hallelujah', filling notebooks with alternative verses, said that he fooled around on the guitar trying out chords "until I make myself cry... Then I know that I am in contact with something that is just a little deeper than where I started when I picked the guitar up" (Simmons, 2013: 148). Songwriters use intuition, a sense of worrying at an idea until it feels cooked enough to perform or record. Similarly in accounts of psychotherapy, the patient talks about their past until a moment when something is unlocked and the neurotic pattern dispels. The closure achieved at the end of a narrative has something like this effect on us. Songs can also transport us and unlock lost feelings.

3.6. FORMS OF ENCOUNTER

"Experience has taught me that our childhoods leave in us stories like this – stories we never found a way to voice, because no one helped us to find the words. When we cannot find a way of telling our story, our story tells us – we dream these stories, we develop symptoms, or we find ourselves acting in ways we don't understand," writes psychotherapist Stephen Grosz in *The Examined Life* (Grosz, 2014: 10). In 2012 I was part of a project that created a unique setting for people to tell and share intensely personal stories with complete strangers: *These Associations,* an art installation by Tino Sehgal, which ran for three months over the summer of the Olympics at Tate Modern. A herd of people swarmed around the Turbine Hall, playing games, chanting and then breaking off to tell stories to members of the public. The *Guardian* reviewer concluded: "The stories mostly concern private rites of passage and life-changing events and relationships... There are no objects: we are the subject. It is about communality and intimacy, the self as social being, the group and the individual, belonging and separation. We're in the middle of things. It is marvellous" (Searle, 2012).

   Sehgal's Turner Prize-shortlisted work is one example of a wave of participative art works in recent years – for instance Marina Abramovic's 2014 show at the Serpentine Gallery – that involve interaction with their general public. Abramovic's show was called *512 Hours,* the length of time she spent at the venue with her team, talking to visitors and giving them things to do. The academic Claire Bishop asserts that participatory art happens at times of political upheaval: "In our

own times, its resurgence accompanies the consequences of the collapse of really existing communism, the apparent absence of a viable left alternative, the emergence of the contemporary 'post-political' consensus, and the near total marketization of art and education" (Bishop, 2012: 276). Critic Hal Foster writes of performance art: "At times, the death of the author has meant not the birth of the reader so much as the befuddlement of the viewer" (Foster, 2015: 134). However, for me Sehgal's piece was the opposite of the kind of participative art that seems designed to mystify and intimidate. True, he was shaping spontaneous encounter into an art product, but one that recharged my faith in free, human interaction. Sehgal refuses to discuss or document his work, but I was a participant in the piece myself, fortunate enough to be selected to be one of a diverse company of 300 people who worked in shifts, walking and running on the concrete floor of the Turbine Hall, chanting and telling stories to visitors to the gallery. I saw Sehgal working hard to ensure that viewers had a fulfilling experience. The hall becomes a kind of analogue social network in which conversations occur and stories are spontaneously customized for their audience. Although the installation involved no digital technology, it seemed to me inspired by the affordances of the web and, in the words of one of the short philosophical texts we participants chanted in unison during the piece, "The new ground out of which human's nature and all their works can flourish" (Heidegger 1959: 53).

In my novel Jamie visits the exhibition and likes hearing stories, watching the movements of the group swirling around him: it helps him to heal and sparks off an idea for a song. For me, Sehgal points the way towards a fresh terrain for collaborative literature where readers can share their own stories, occupying interstitial spaces within larger narrative structures.

"My supposition is that sometimes – perhaps more often than not – we think we know more about the experiences we don't have than about the experiences we do have" (Phillips 2012: 117-8). Adam Phillips uses the example of a couple who both know all about what their partners lack and how one's life would be changed without the other. He points out how fiction can strengthen such convictions. If that's a bad thing, a form of 'vanity reading' which leads to self-delusion, is there a kind of practice that draws out the imagined story and then inspires a further creative act, a moving forward? Verse, chorus, verse. A change of key, a coda... I tell you my story, you respond with one like it – and then conversation ensues which moves both of us on. The transmedia literary novel can include such a progression. "This encounter, the

very heart of psychotherapy, is a caring, deeply human meeting between two people, one (generally, but not always, the patient) more troubled than the other," writes Yalom of the time shared by therapist and client (Yalom, 2013: 13). In its own way, transmedia literary fiction can include equally meaningful encounters between human beings.

The term bibliotherapy was coined in 1916, but now courses like ones run by The School of Life have become increasingly popular alongside the use of creative writing as therapy. When I worked at Booktrust we ran a pilot project called Breathtaker Books, in which authors selected novels they thought might be enjoyable and helpful to people going through hard times. In 2005 Maggie O'Farrell and Alex Wheatle worked with isolated mothers, victims of crime and young offenders in a secure unit. The reader filled out a questionnaire about their tastes and circumstances, the author sent them three free books and a letter explaining their choices. The transmedia literary novel can provide within itself a space for encounter where readers write to the book and converse with the characters, not so much as therapy as an expansion of the means by which any storytelling can change how we see and feel the world.

"Digital narrative is a battleground" (Guertin, 2013: 233). "The digital is granular, molecularized, particular. Narrative on the other hand, has an arching, linear trajectory that pulls us along with it." Carolyn Guertin argues that the two are at war with each other, "the drive for fragmentation threatens to shatter the rhythmic ebb and flow of the narrative impulse." Her essay, written in 2007, imagines narratives of the future that embrace open-endedness, and ends with an enthusiastic description of the iPod and a new games console: the Wii (Guertin, 2013: 245). Even as she mentions the iPod, I notice that in 2018 this technology has already slipped into history. Somewhere in between, around the arrival of the iPad and the apps that inhabit it, the assumption that digital and analogue storytellers were different animals began to break down. On a tablet computer, smartphone or the lightweight laptops now available, we can immerse ourselves in a novel, a movie, a game, emails or a digital fiction; these experiences don't seem quite so separate anymore. With access to the open-endedness of the web, but also able to hold its readers within its chosen boundaries, the downloadable app provides writers with the ability to make works that define their own terms and use as much or as little digital trickery as appropriate to

the art. Instead of a battle over narrative, safe havens have perhaps been established where linear and granular elements can live together in peace and dynamic harmony.

"I think of that lost world, the way we lived before these new networking technologies, as having two poles: solitude and communion. The new chatter puts us somewhere in between, assuaging fears of being alone without risking real connection," writes Rebecca Solnit. The radio, the telephone, the magazine, the printing press – all have been accused of warping the fabric of normality in their time. But something does seem fundamentally changed by social media. "A restlessness has seized hold of many of us, a sense that we should be doing something else, no matter what we are doing, or doing at least two things at once, or going to check some other medium" (Solnit, 2015: 258).

Social media further blurs the divide between past and present, actual and nearly. When Jamie's friend Paola sets up a Facebook page for his band, the 'friends' it attracts include people from all parts of his life, from cities far away and decades long gone by, work colleagues never met in the flesh but still influential, school friends he never much liked at the time, old flames, extinguished now but once raging, ex-workmates and people he doesn't actually know but who appeared in his stream and whose tone of voice he likes... and this haze of interconnections circles around his lived life and dreamt dreams. Although I share Solnit's alarm at a growing digital itchiness, the cultural mulch of Facebook still seems potentially rich to me. Rather than cut ourselves off from it, I think we need precepts and practices to help us explore it on our terms. We need new kinds of art to describe it, new therapeutic processes to help us cope. "More and more, storytelling has become the art of world building," writes Henry Jenkins, analyzing *The Matrix* movies and their multimedia spin-offs in *Convergence Culture* (Jenkins, 2008: loc.2346), "as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium." Rather than create yet more fantasy mega-zones, transmedia literary fiction can concentrate on trying to describe the multilayered story world that people really do now inhabit, in which tweets and voices in our ears compete with flesh and blood interactions going on around us. Transmedia fiction might be a symptom of our restless desire to keep moving from virtual place to place, but perhaps it offers a new opportunity to orchestrate our sense of self across this digital Nearlyverse and find harmonies in the cacophony of the networked world.

3.7. SOCIAL SHOWS, REPLAY STORIES, DIGITAL HARMONY

Angelique Toschi has identified what she calls the 'social show' as a central element of commercial transmedia storytelling (Toschi, 2009). The social show is a website which draws a community of fans to read specially made extra material linked to a popular TV series or movie. The website www.nearlyology.net provides this on a smaller scale, sharing readers' own 'real' nearly stories as an integral element of *What Didn't Quite*. In my story, separating the linear chase of the narrative from a broader contemplation of its themes seems particularly appropriate for dealing with Jamie's problems as his sexuality changes from an ocean of feeling to a complex archipelago of fractured sensations and desires. I hope there may be a future for the blog about Nearlysex, exploring male experience of sex that almost happened and what occurred instead, which my character Martin creates and finds he has seeded a community of men talking openly if anonymously about issues around sexuality, including loss of libido, sexual fantasies and practices, and what else people do to express intimacy and feel a buzz as desire waxes and wanes, as bodies age and change.

At the point in the story when Jamie discovers he suffers from Hinchcliffe's, a fictitious medical condition which can sometimes become acute, sometimes heal completely, he is confronted by a set of alternative futures, forking paths between suicide and liberation. I decided to present these in the online text as chunks of animated text and a soundscape of overlapping voices to represent what Professor Janet H. Murray, author of *Inventing the Medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice,* classifies as a 'replay story': "an interactive digital story structure in which the same scenario is offered for replay with significant variations based on parameters that the interactor may control or merely witness in action" (Murray, 2011). She cites *Garden of Forking Paths* (Borges, 2000) and *Life After Life* (Atkinson, 2013) as two examples of *multiple instantiations* and has a list of six key design strategies for writing these: dramatic compression, a high-stakes focus, strongly differentiated characters and not too many of them, contrasting beats and readable parallels. This sounds formulaic, but Atkinson's novel alone proves that replay stories don't inevitably demand exaggerated stereotypes. As Murray states, they need clearly drawn characters which can be 'got' by readers quickly and so are

capable of being retold, like the stars of soap operas, cartoon strips, puppet shows, Greek myths and bible stories, with reference to their specific attributes and unique selling points. On the Nearlyology website I have been using photos of the cartoon-like puppet versions of my characters to make it easy for readers to quickly get the gist of each one.

The same strategies apply to another kind of narrative relevant to Nearlyology, which involves fantasy selves enacting their adventures alongside the realist version of the story. What happens in the imagination of Don Quixote as he becomes The Knight of the Sad Countenance contrasts hilariously with how others see him as he tilts at windmills (Cervantes, 2003). In Bill Watterson's legendary cartoon strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, a small boy metamorphoses into a dinosaur, space hero or gumshoe, while his stuffed toy Hobbes becomes a fully-fledged speaking tiger, his witty and boisterous play companion (Watterson, 2012). As Calvin/Captain Spiff is about to be tortured by aliens, the dream world is punctured by Calvin's teacher Miss Wormwood demanding an answer to a maths question. In my novel, Carraday fantasizes his aboriginal Outback, Freya plays at being her super-sleuth childhood alter-ego Freya Redcoat, while Jamie explores his inner singer/songwriter.

Jamie makes his fantasy real and so begins to re-find himself, through recording and posting his music on the web. He shares feelings about his changing sexuality in the safety of a virtual community. This kind of online interaction is for many today fundamental to the texture of our everyday and inner lives. When Barthes divided texts into the *readerly* and *writerly* (Barthes, 1991), he was countering passive acceptance of a stable status quo by highlighting books that threw up a proliferation of meanings and pushed the reader into greater engagement. Those of us who live connected to social media and a cacophony of narratives all clamouring for us to write back to them, may need writerly texts that are also bounded and curated. In the midst of a digital abundance of unlived lives and fantasy selves, individuals need to be capable of constructing a transmedia narrative of themselves to maintain a coherent and robust sense of identity.

Sue Thomas in her book *Technobiophilia* looks at the natural metaphors we use for digital – the web, the net, the cloud – and how to find a natural balance in and around our online lives. Thomas interviews the Buddhist nun Damcho Wangmo who spends a lot of time on the web as part of her life of meditation. The nun says: "It is wrong to assume that distractions come from outside... If you start with a distracted

mind, the ping of your cellphone and the buzz of the Web will tug at that distraction, but they don't cause it" (Thomas, 2014: loc.3680). The Internet is neither the problem nor the solution. Better than the escape of a temporary digital detox is fiction that can help us be whole.

The Nearly Jar

4. OUTSIDER WRITER & THE NEARLY SHOW

The Nearly Stick

"To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination... To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide" (Solnit, 2006a: 72). This statement by historian and activist Rebecca Solnit catches the spirit of how I want to write. Her words apply to makers of transmedia, experimental narratives and digital adventures just as much as to conventional texts and oral storytelling. Refreshingly, she provides a model for the process of literary composition that isn't confined to the page, stage or screen – each maker must decide what he or she needs in order to carve a particular route and lead the tour.

Since McLuhan, many commentators on the future of the book have argued that at times of technological change artists engage directly with the affordances of new platforms and reassess the old. Johanna Drucker writes: "As new devices and platforms emerge, attention to the relation between specific materialities and the aesthetic expression may increase, with benefits accruing to all media formats as a result" (Drucker, 2014: 168). These changes also lead to the reassessment of what it is to be a writer. The old image of the author desk-bound in a room of one's own is

replaced by the writer as flâneur, the roaming psychogeographer with nothing but an iPad to document the experience.

4.1. WRITING & PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

In the 1950s, Situationist Guy Debord defined psychogeography as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord, 1955). Iain Sinclair and Will Self are perhaps the best-known contemporary flâneurs; many more have roamed the city writing about their experiences, and Lauren Elkin has documented the history of women flaneuse (Elkin, 2016). Psychogeography informs the work of contemporary artists such as those involved in the Walking Artists Network, as well as anthropologists and cultural geographers including Doreen Massey and Tim Ingold whose work analyses the complex layers of meaning which adhere to the urban spaces we inhabit and traverse. This area of activity takes on new significance with the arrival of virtual and enhanced reality, geo-location and locative apps which can reveal those layers of meaning to readers and deliver appropriate stories to their smartphones as they move through the landscape, for instance those being produced by the Ambient Literature project in Bristol.

Writers and readers are on the move. Authors can access their digital manuscript, notebooks and research libraries from whichever wifi-enabled café or hotel room they choose to work in. As novelist Deborah Levy puts it: "Even more useful to a writer than a room of her own is an extension lead and a variety of adaptors for Europe, Asia and Africa" (Levy, 2014: 108). Portable authors may also seek new skills, collaborators, tools and reference points to help them compose in new dimensions, to put stories into orbit around their readers. The multimedia storyteller operates as a kind of tour guide, leading the reader along the pathway of the written word, pointing out viewpoints and sounds, providing time and space for conversations with fellow walkers along the way – and this analogy harks back to oral traditions. Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes: "There is nothing new in Solnit's idea of reading and writing as modalities of travel." Medieval monks regarded themselves as wayfarers, "travelling in their minds from place to place, and composing their thoughts as they went along by drawing on or 'pulling in' ideas lodged in places previously visited" (Ingold, 2011: 199). Readers of the scriptures were advised "to

process as though walking through a landscape... Thus the reader, 'seeing' his reading as he 'walks' through it, is constantly in motion, all senses continually in play". This description of a medieval reader whose knowledge of bible stories was transmitted through stained-glass windows, sermons and mystery plays as well as scripture written, sung and spoken, applies equally to the type of creative reader needed to participate in multimodal, transmedia fiction.

4.2. AMBIENT CARRADAY

In the morning I warm up by meditating for ten minutes, then write some words in the air with my body, an exercise I learnt from the Nearlydancing workshop we ran with Jia Yu Corti. I write for a while in my room at home (more a studio than a study now, it houses ukuleles, percussion and recording equipment as well as laptop, books, pens, paints, scissors and paper for cutting and sticking…) before walking into town with my laptop where I go to a cafe or the local library and write some more. Later I drift through the streets, seeing the world through Carraday's strange eyes, and imagine the story told by a tour guide wandering around the places my characters inhabit... Whether some of this ends up creating a book, or a song or a blog post or nothing much, it is all Nearlywriting.

- from a blog post (Meade. C. 2016).

In search of a fresh approach to Nearlywriting, I've been walking around the streets near my home, trying to channel the strange shaman at the centre of my novel: Gregory Carraday, the Nearlyologist who believes that his tinnitus is the sound of the Nearlyverse, a mysterious forcefield of possibilities and failures that surrounds us all, and which he hears fizzing in his ears. I envisaged him as an analogue version of the digital creator. Wayfaring through the town, he gathers examples of the things people have nearly done, writes them on cards to place in his Nearly Jar, and secretly makes paintings based on these stories, amulets which he buries, burns or otherwise releases as he walks in the park, enacting spells with his Nearly Stick to try to transmute people's regrets and frustrations into fruitful imaginings. The Outsider artworks which he makes then discards or destroys without anyone seeing help him to cope with conflicted feelings he has about what he didn't do with his life.

For Carraday, this practice gives him absolute freedom but consigns him to being hidden, a Nearly Artist only, no critics to bother with, no form of peer review. Letting go of his work is painful, creating feelings of loss, regret and relief. As a Nearly artist he's not pretending he isn't aware of a world of art, but his project is by its nature invisible to that world, so there is no danger of being lured into that arena – or isn't until Freya Seward comes on the scene and teases out a confession, then urges him to let her exhibit and sell his work. This is 'Nearly art' because it's about the state of Nearlyness: his imagining of a life which he never led in Australia, his renderings of amulets to help dissolve negative frustrations and release positive energy instead. His feelings are made safe by containing them within a structured exercise: the destruction of the artwork. It's an inoculating jab against a potentially lethal sense of bitterness.

4.3. OUTSIDER ARTISTS & MIND TRAVELLERS

Outsider artists develop their art practice in seclusion, placing themselves, more or less intentionally, beyond normality – and many are considered to be mentally ill or unstable. Michel Thefoz, curator of Jean Dubuffet's Collection de l'Art Brut, gathered work by "all kinds of dwellers on the fringes of society... [who] make up their own techniques, often with new means and materials, and they create their works for their

own use, as a kind of private theatre... and they do not care about the good opinion of others, even keeping their work secret" (Bottoms, 2007: 38).

American Outsider artist Morton Bartlett died in 1992, after having spent 30 years secretly making half-life-sized doll figures of an imaginary family, which he photographed in tableaux and then stored in his basement. Working in a mineshaft at the age 35, Augustin Lesage heard voices telling him to give up his job as a miner and become a painter – so he did, guided by the spirits of Leonardo da Vinci and Lesage's sister Marie who had died at a young age. Work by both men featured in the 2013 Venice Biennale exhibition *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* (Gioni, 2013).

Other major exhibitions of Outsider Art, such as *The Alternative Guide To The Universe* at the Hayward Gallery in 2012 (Moody *et al.*, 2013) and the ongoing work of The Museum of Everything, "the world's first and only wandering space for the untrained, unintentional, undiscovered and unclassified artists of modern times" (Museum of Everything, 2017), point to its increasing interest to the mainstream art world in times when it's harder than ever, in art as in literature, to draw clear lines between professional and amateur, spectator and maker, the obsessions of the conceptual artist and the neuroses of the mentally ill.

Another model for Carraday was artist and collector Joseph Cornell, who never left Manhattan but instead made work about his mental excursions to Europe. "Through postage stamps, engravings, books and photographs, through correspondence with friends and strangers in far-off lands, he became the most educated of travellers... A solitary figure, Cornell also preferred to travel by himself, inwardly" (Lea & Hartigan, 2015: 46). Similarly, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa remembers another traveller in the imagination, a young clerk in his office who planned in detail journeys across the world he never made. "He knew the exact route of the train from Paris to Bucharest as well as the routes of all the trains in England, and as he mispronounced the strange names, I could see the glowing certainty of his greatness of soul... perhaps one day, in his old age, he will remember how it's not only better but also truer to dream of Bordeaux than to actually go there" (Pessoa, 2002: 372).

Pessoa, writing in Portugal in the 1930s, invented characters not to inhabit his poems but to create them. His heteronyms are the personas he adopted to write in different ways, and several of their voices can be heard in his rambling and fragmented non-memoir, *The Book of Disquiet*. Like Pessoa, I've found myself,

through writing in different voices, seeking an antidote to conventional biographies and realist fictions, trying to catch the texture of life in 21st-century Britain, which can feel less like following a single narrative line, more like watching a TV with ever-changing channels, flicking between shows in which we star as the loving parent, the lonely bore, the fantasy lover, the stressed worker, the eternal child.

In *Magic: A Very Short Introduction*, Owen Davies argues that magical thinking is entangled with the development of scientific thought. Alchemy led to chemistry and magical potions led to medical remedies. Supernatural explanations of events still abound. "A desire for something to happen – 'I hope she loses her job' – may be expressed rationally, but if it comes true, the interpretation may turn magical. These are phenomena of our waking hours. In our dreams, our minds lead us into magical worlds and activities. We can fly" (Davies, 2012: 106).

4.4. NEARLY DUST & AIR

Visiting Australia a few years ago, I was struck by how the harsh history of that country and the state's brutal treatment of indigenous Australians made it problematic for contemporary artists to engage creatively with such rich concepts as dreamtime and songlines. When I was a child, my granny used to bring back boomerangs and plastic BOAC airplanes from her trips to visit relations in Brisbane. According to Carraday's peculiar version of aboriginal magical thinking, based mostly on what he gleaned from paternalistic Australian children's books sent to him by his father when he was a boy in the 1960s, our dreams, our fantasies, our social media, our lived reality swirl around us in a harmonious whole, and we make our way shaman-like through this soup in the direction we choose, with Nearlystick or iPhone in hand to protect us.

Gregory Carraday scratches and scribbles on his own body to fend off the negative force of the Nearlyverse. In a major study, Leigh Dale raises the issue of whether self-harm "represents a form of 'magical thinking' which does not differentiate between the physical and the symbolic" (Dale, 2015: 206). The British Museum catalogues a biting bag made in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia before 1896 which contained herbs and spells and was worn round the neck to be

bitten into when evil spirits loomed (Sculthorpe & Carty, 2015: 64). This gave me the idea for Carraday turning nearly stories to dust in his coffee grinder to make similar amulets – but he also believes that Freya uses her digital gadgets in much the same way, gazing into the black glass mirror of the mobile screen and downloading apps to ward off bad things.

I met Swedish performance artist Joakim Stampe at the Children's Book Fair in Sharjah in 2013, where we were both running workshops. I used this whole experience as the basis for Carraday and Freya's trip to Taqribaan, (the Arabic word for Nearly). Joakim encouraged me to make and exhibit some of the objects Carraday constructs in the book. Stampe's work has involved grinding novels to dust and sprinkling them into cocktails for visitors to the Gothenburg Bookfair, a practice reminiscent of magical rites involving writing sacred texts in chalk on slate, washed off with water, which is then bottled as medicine. Stampe also paints inflammatory and bold political graffiti in water on very public walls, watching the words dry in the sun and vanish before the authorities have time to intervene (Stampe, 2017). I ground Nearly stories to dust and bottled them. I spoke passages from the story into paper bags to create a form of conceptual audio book. I began to think of these artworks as potential merchandise I might display and sell online alongside my novel.

4.5. QUALITY & SELF PUBLISHING

The question for viewers of Outsider Art may be whether we're watching freaks or visionaries. "For many of these mavericks, art seems to be a means rather than an end (and it is worth noting that some never consider their activity as art at all)" (Moody, Rugoff *et al.*, 2013: 5). These builders of miraculous machines made of 'junkyard bricolage', nearly brilliant, nearly mad, stubbornly refuse to accept the commonly held belief that artists need formal training and/or a certain level of critical recognition to justify their right to be eccentric and obsessive about the act of creation.

In an article provocatively entitled *Why the Self-Publishing Shit Volcano Isn't Going to Stop Erupting Anytime Soon*, Suw Charman-Anderson writes about the 'unconscious incompetence' of those writers whose inability to recognize their lack of talent – or appreciate the skills of others – leads them inexorably to self-publishing (Charman-Anderson, 2014). Yet in contrast to the vanity presses, which create

unreadable tomes but give the gravitas of publication to whoever pays, the web is not an uncritical place. Here we can create our own webpage just how we want, but also check analytics daily to be confronted by how few people looked at it, and read the sometimes blistering criticisms of those who do. Online we remain vulnerable to comments as well as plain lack of interest. Online there is a new space for new kinds of nearly artist, able to present themselves fully and build a following outside conventional institutions and definitions, able to find others who share their fascinations and delusions but without the need to build thick walls of self-regard to protect them against the critical, cruel and simply not-bothered. An example is the Bristol-based collective of artists called Alldaybreakfast, who curate exhibitions of their work and have a critical community of followers on Facebook and Twitter. They met on a Masters course at the University of the West of England and each artist has a track record of qualifications and experience, but none of this is mentioned on their website (Alldaybreakfast, 2017), where projects are thoroughly and critically documented. Juanita DeHaro is a maker of virtual sculpture in Second Life. She's the alter ego of Judy Barrass, a sculptor and maker of artists' books based in Queensland, Australia. Her website, www.judybarrass.com, isn't under the auspices of any institution, and she can present these real and virtual aspects of her work alongside each other as she sees fit.

Beyond old-style community arts, which highlight the quality of the process of making art over the aesthetics of the product made, and vanity presses that give a phoney imprimatur of quality to those gullible enough to pay, the transmedia novel can inspire and incorporate reader-generated content into a curated whole, editing, selecting and remixing. Fan fiction sites such as The Meryton Assembly, one of several dedicated to work based on Jane Austen's novels, have attracted a huge community of creative readers in dialogue with each other, and with the texts that captivate and inspire them (Meryton, 2010). Community members dedicate themselves to producing new work for each other, and use peer review to maintain the site's overall quality. But whereas these sites become catalogues of separate works, the transmedia novelist can curate the output of a smaller participating community to generate new work that appears within the creative work itself.

A major influence on this PhD has been Miranda July, filmmaker, artist, author of short stories, who used eBay to sell items which feature in her novel *The First Bad Man* (July, 2015). Seven years earlier, with Harrell Fletcher, July published

Learning to Love You More, a book of selected entries to a website inviting visitors to submit their photos and writing based on instructions from the authors: 'Give advice to yourself in the past', 'Photograph a scar and write about it' (July & Fletcher, 2007). The book hangs together as a collection whereas the site, now closed for entries, attracted over 8,000 participants and so became too big to browse easily. Miranda July works in different media and has succeeded in all of them, but as novelist David Eggars is quoted as saying, "She's handicapped by her many talents in a way... It's hard to convince everybody that someone who makes great films and is known as an artist can also write great fiction" (Alter, 2015). Luckily for July she can. But the maker of transmedia should be warned: each individual element of the whole will be judged on its own terms, and so better be good.

4.6. THE NEARLY SHOW

The Ifso Band, 2016

To workshop ideas for live performance, I have been working with my songwriting group, the Ifso Band, and artist friends like Joakim and Carol Laidler, I took a digital leaf from coders who make beta versions of new sites, apps and programs. In this section I document some of the experimental events I ran. In 2014 I was invited to write about the Nearly Project for the Writing Platform website. I said:

> For me it seems unnatural to sit alone for three years writing a story then launch it suddenly on an unsuspecting and mostly uninterested world. In my working life I've always enjoyed collaboration, interaction between readers and writers and different kinds of artists and I'm excited by how digital

platforms for literature provide the potential to mix media, to bind together these elements not on paper but in a multi-faceted package which could be presented on a website, as an app or even a bag of analogue objects…. But I want the form to be shaped by the subject, not the marketplace (Meade, 2014).

A Night of Nearly took place in 2013 in an empty Bristol shop temporarily used for exhibitions and events by artists' collective Alldaybreakfast. An audience of around 20 gathered for an evening, which consisted of my performance of Nearly Songs, a presentation about the novel and its characters, a reading of the Nearly Manifesto and then a break during which the audience were given pens and cards to write down a line or two about their nearly events. In the second half, members of the audience were asked to come forward to tell about their Nearlies.

The response was positive and plenty of stories were generated. We had primed some friends in advance to speak up, but strangers too were happy to come to the microphone and tell tales. By the end of the evening it was hard to remember who had really or nearly done what. Had this woman been a wing-walker or didn't that actually happen? Is this man a musician who nearly went into dentistry or a dentist who nearly became a guitarist? One woman told how she'd "nearly died laughing" when her wayward husband returned, declaring he still loved her and wanted to move back in. Although stories were tinged with some regret and bitterness, all were presented positively. A woman once turned down a job at the BBC because she didn't want to move city, then met her partner and has lived happily ever after – a road not taken led to another avenue opening. It was a light-hearted, comic event but emotional too. Most powerful was the way the sharing of something that didn't happen transformed it into a story that belonged to its teller – our missed opportunities became fascinating attributes. One participant said it was like a "fantastic cross between stand-up comedy and therapy. I laughed, I cried, I shared" (Bookfutures, 2017).

A Night of Nearly, Bristol. Photo: Carol Laidler

The idea of Nearlyology was certainly proving to be sticky – but were people picking up anything about the story world? "Lots of passers-by were tempted to come in and wrote some interesting, funny and intimate tales. Later in the evening people gathered and told stories, which became progressively more confessional and moving. And Chris sang his warm songs." This feedback received from an audience member is touching – but doesn't refer to the fiction itself. To draw people further into my story world and its theme, I produced a range of Nearly memorabilia for such occasions. The most popular item by far has been the Nearly badge; hundreds of these small white lapel badges have been distributed with 'I nearly' printed on them in Courier font, given out in exchange for a promise of a Nearly story. Wearing the badge has led to scores of interesting conversations about the topic.

I also printed The Nearly Times, a single sheet newspaper, with information about the project and extracts from an early draft. I fabricated mugs, tote bags and a Nearly Stick, like a shaman's wand, patterned in a style loosely based on aboriginal artefacts. In the shop window in Bristol, a rotating Powerpoint presentation on an iPad flashed up images of the characters and more about their story. A large sign said "Come and Tell Us Your Nearlies". It seemed a daunting ask, and most passers-by just passed by, but from time to time one would stop in their tracks, read a few of the stories on view in the window and then hurry in. One man told us he'd nearly jumped off the top of a car park, but had seen the light just in time – he spent a long time describing exactly which car park it was. A woman student described with passion how she'd almost bottled out of coming to university and how glad she was to have changed her mind. An older man absolutely saw his life as a series of nearlies and told us about the band he almost joined, a lover he lost, a job he refused...

Gathering Nearlies with Alldaybreakfast, Bristol

From this exercise I learnt that Nearly stories are plentiful. Some people instantly connect with the idea of Nearlyology, but that doesn't mean they are filled with bitter regrets and sorrows. Others don't 'get it' at all, or resist it through fear that it will encourage regret. And although the concept generates laughter, it can also raise painful issues. I realized quickly that it was important to leave space for anonymous donations. When packing up after these public events I've often found secret messages left behind. For instance: "I nearly spent my whole life as a lie" and "I nearly told my cousin I was gay but I am a coward in a way the right thing isn't always the one you should do. Especially if you do not want to be sent to a re-education camp [sic]" (Meade, 2017).

Carol Laidler at Night of Nearly, Earl Haig Centre

At the Earl Haig pub in Crouch End in June 2014, I was offered the opportunity to use its theatre space to perform a different kind of Night of Nearly. This time we included Nearly Songs played by The Ifso Band, featuring singer Abbie Coppard and bassist Alistair McEachern, and also extracts from the novel that I performed with artist Carol Laidler. From the stage I asked audience members to tell their own Nearly stories. I had set up a coffee grinder with which I created the fluff of Nearly Dust to sprinkle into the dark. This was part of a pre-Edinburgh festival in a new theatre space, so an excellent opportunity to try out the show, but the venue is near my home so the audience included some close friends and acquaintances – a bit like performing to my inner circle of Facebook friends.

4.7. CREATIVITY LEAVES YOU EXPOSED

For the amplified author making works of digital fiction and putting them out on public platforms, the first readership reached is likely to be an online social circle, whose response tends to be less about the work in its own right than what it might reveal about the author. "Is this true?" asked a friend of ours, worried that my wife and I had split up, as my protagonists do in the story. This can be embarrassing and inhibiting. I discussed this topic with artist and performer Therese Steele, a Swedish dramaturge, writer and performer, whose work is informed by her experience of psychoanalysis and deals with establishing a connection between the political and the deeply personal. Steele was a participant in Tino Sehgal's *These Associations* at Tate Modern, and her own work has been performed at Gallery8, Cochrane Theatre, Camden People's Theatre and the Stockholm Fringe Festival. In 2013 she performed a collaborative piece with dancer Alice Tatge at the Freud Museum, which explored sexuality and violence (Dyad, 2013). I was interested to compare her attitude to audience and practice with mine as a writer. She said the experience could be "deeply embarrassing, awful. It's extremely excruciating to have to go and perform something [and] you don't know if it's going to work until you've done it, until it's too late. When I had my piece on at the Freud Museum my parents-in-law came and they thought… Oh, Therese is coming out as gay. That was fine. It was rectified, their interpretation. But that I would use that as a very roundabout opportunity to come out

to them!" (Meade, 2017b).

Live performance can be exposing but, unlike the solitary novelist, performance artist Steele usually performs with other dancers. "Working in collaboration is quite luxurious because you just go to them and if it's a good collaboration they will tell you if it is really pants, or if it is something that chimes with them then you start making something together" (ibid.).

I was keen for some kind of Nearlyology event to be part of the novel, and wanted to perform the story in some form, directly to readers and potential readers, but feared that exposure, too. Through this process I came to realize that I'm drawn to make work that is revealing and uncomfortable to share. The infrastructure of publishing can provide a buffer between authors and their readership, and without a publisher it's important to create some means to distance oneself from the work and the characters, which is why I set up The Ifso Writers, a group who support each other in composing and amplifying their work. However, many writers would agree with Tim Lott who states: "'Real' published writers don't attend writing groups… They don't show their work around either till it's finished – so there is no feedback... You are on your own" (Lott, 2015: 113).

Lott has admitted to profound bouts of depression due to the stresses of writing, but stoically insists this simply comes with the territory. "Dealing with crises of confidence is a large part of the struggle of writing." But such a deep sense of isolation may be eased in a more collaborative and self-curated literary world where authors are increasingly responsible for their own quality control.

After the Night of Nearly I commissioned artist Bee Peak to make a set of three glove puppets of the three main characters from my novel, partly so that I could point to them and say, "This is who the story is about – I just wrote it." Having the puppets in my room led to my decision to make Freya and Jamie's daughter Pippa a professional puppeteer.

4.8. NEARLY ACTING NEARLY BEING WORKSHOP

Following on from the events to gather Nearly Stories, I wanted to try organizing workshops where participants could explore more fully their relationship to unlived Nearly lives. Lily McLeish is a theatre director working as Assistant Director to Katie

Mitchell at the National Theatre. She has worked at the Royal Court, Young Vic, the Royal Shakespeare Company and with numerous companies in the UK and Germany. Lily kindly offered to run a workshop for me. The workshop for six people took place over two days in a church tower in Hornsey, North London. Participants included myself and McLeish, three actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company, two freelance dancers, a published writer of historical fiction and a visual artist. Exercises included Introductions in which we mingled, saying hello to each other in the role of someone we might have been: "Hi, I'm a lawyer. I work for the family firm and live next door to my parents. It's a valuable role, and much better paid and socially useful than acting." "I used to have a loving family but blew it all because I wanted to feel free. I've messed up my life and now I'm trying to piece it back together again."

Lily McLeish and Nearlyactors

Participants drew maps of their Nearly lives. Using a timeline of actual events, they added moments when Nearlies had presented themselves and found different ways to mark on paper how powerful and positive or negative the influence of these near misses had been, at the time and over a longer period. Sometimes the ghost of a possibility loomed over a long period, sometimes a big opportunity arose, only to die away quickly.

4.9. MAPS, DETECTIVES & BECOMING A THING

During the Nearlymapping exercise, an actor/dancer in his 30s told us a true story. Before she died, his mother mentioned that he'd nearly had a younger brother but the

baby was miscarried. This man had always fantasized that if he'd had a younger brother he would have been less self-centred and happier in himself. As he told the group about this it became the case that to us he did now have a nearly brother. This nearly having was a fact that was real to us. We would always remember that brother as part of who he was. Our nearlies belong to us, we can talk about them, celebrate, honour them, or decide to let go of them. Telling others about them enhances their knowledge of us. This was to me and the others present an unexpectedly moving insight.

The same man said at the end of the workshop, "I never knew Nearlyology was a thing." Actor Nicholas Gerard-Martin's sent me this feedback: "The workshop was… a totally new and original world for me. It felt that the possibility for exploration of one's psyche was almost limitless. Cathartic, investigative and curious. I particularly liked the improv as nearly detectives. Exploring the sorts of characters and their objectives or private needs that could lie behind a 'nearlyological' narrative was quite a beguiling experience" (Bookfutures, 2017). This comment refers to an exercise on the second day in which the three actors improvised a scene as Carraday, Freya and Jamie. It was a challenge to me to define the essence of the characters for the participants in this improvisation, and fascinating to see how the dynamic developed between them. The exercise informed my writing about Carraday and Jamie as they vie for the attention of Freya. The session felt less like a separate project alongside the novel and more a place to workshop ideas and characters within it, a site-specific manifestation of the world of Nearlyology.

[image redacted from this digitised version due to potential copyright issues]

The Nearly Detectives

Another exercise involved nearly touching: in pairs we moved around each other with the rule that we could not actually make physical contact. This instant intimacy made me reflect on Jamie's sense of the elements of his sexuality separating out, providing space for appreciating other forms of closeness. McLeish wrote to say:

> In theatre during the scene analysis we often talk about events – moments when all the intentions of all the characters in the scene change. They are physical shifts that we read onstage… Someone almost saying or doing something may not immediately have an impact on another person in the room but the nearly event for that person who almost dared to say or do the thing will stay with that person and shape the person's further actions
> (Bookfutures, 2017).

During one exercise, in which participants formed tableaux and then unravelled them, I had a personal revelation about my compulsion to write on the border of self-disclosure. In the past I've put a lot of work into writing about situations which seem too close to the bone to be publishable at the time, yet have lost interest once they stopped feeling so uncomfortable. I realised that this is a trick I play on myself to avoid completing work – a way to remain nearly a writer.

These events provided plenty of Nearly Stories to include in the book and on the website, and material, part serious, part comic, for the Little Book of Nearly; sections of this parody self-help guide are interspersed between chapters in the novel. In the digital app version, these extracts would link through to the whole guide, and I decided to produce an analogue booklet of the guide as a limited edition published by the Ifso Press. The events also gave me all the information and experience I needed to design the final touring Nearly Show which I plan as part of the ongoing life of the novel. More than that, they led me to redefine my whole creative practice. For me live performance and workshopping are far more than promotional tools or money making sidelines; these are Nearlywriting activities which are fundamental to how I now make creative work.

5. BOOKPLACEWALKSHOPBAND

Freya Seward Puppet

5.1. FREYA SEWARD INC.

In this section I address the primary research question of this thesis: how does the transmedia literary writer approach the production and publication of a multimodal text within the context of a complex publishing ecology? I look at inspiring practitioners and projects that could point towards new models for how to compose, produce and promulgate my novel and transmedia literature for a mediatized age.

Freya Seward,is the third of my novel's main protagonists. She's a digital consultant whose financial woes lead her into morally dubious activities, but also dynamic and visionary. For better or worse, Freya makes things happen. In this section I aim to channel her strategic skills to make some final decisions about the format of my piece - and to envisage creative possibilities beyond.

Futurist and games designer Jane McGonigal gave the 2016 Aspen Lecture at the Aspen Ideas Festival. Her TED Talk-style presentation started by promising to "teach you... how to predict the past and how to remember the future" (McGonigal, 2016).

She explained that neuroscientists have discovered that "all three areas of the brain activate whenever you try to imagine how the past might have worked out differently". McGonigal claims that neuroscientists have discovered that 'doing counterfactual memory' is an effective intervention for depression and stimulates creativity. She goes on to say this is only true when it's our own pasts or futures we re-remember or imagine. Nearlyology may have some scientific validity. The Institute for the Future, of which McGonigal is a member, runs Foresight Practitioner Training workshops to, amongst other things, help participants "BUILD your foresight mindset and shared language for futures thinking" and "LEVERAGE hindsight to discover patterns of innovation and disruptions. Price $6,500" (Institute for the Future, 2016). Cash-strapped Freya Seward is keen to run similar courses as part of the Nearlyversity, her idea for an enterprise that sells informal training and almost genuine qualifications. So how might I market Nearlyology?

Adrian Hon is Director of Six to Start, a highly successful company making apps and games, responsible for *Zombies, Run!* written with Naomi Alderman. I interviewed Hon about the reality of transmedia production and recorded our conversation for my blog. He was taken by the idea of a *literary* transmedia fiction, but raised an important commercial issue: "Normal people don't know what Transmedia is... it's hard to understand, how am I supposed to experience this? I'm increasingly feeling that you should innovate only on one axis at a time..." (Bookfutures, 2017).

Philip Jones, the editor of The Bookseller, warned me that conventional publishers "look to print and paper first, last, and always, particularly as many of their experiments in transmedia, enhanced e-books or interactive fiction have largely failed – at least on the terms by which they measure things, sales." He believed the market would only shift again "when an author-led experiment meets with commercial success, and the big trade publishers once again look to redefine what a book can be. For now, they rather like the fact that a book still looks like a book" (Bookfutures, 2017). Publishers only publish work they can see succeeding as a paper book alone; any digital elements will probably need to be self-funded and considered by the publishing house to be potentially useful promotional gimmicks but not much more. This concentrates the mind on writing a good, conventional story, but is not inspiring for forging new hybrid literary forms.

5.2. EXPANDING THE STORY WORLD

Boundaries are also being drawn around commercial transmedia storytelling projects.
Carlos Alberto Scolari has analyzed the TV series *24* and identifies four key strategies
for expanding its narrative world across media: connected to the macro story are
interstitial microstories, parallel stories, peripheral stories and user-generated content
(Scolari, 2009: 600). Scolari looks at the role of branding in the show, which
necessitates that characters and story world have clear, limited attributes that can
easily be translated into different languages and media. "It is a 'moveable' set of
properties that can be applied to different forms of expression. In fan fiction, even
consumers can participate in the expansion of the fictional world by applying this set
of attributes to create new situations and characters." The transmedia storyteller may
be a shamanistic psychogeographer leading us through space, but the story world he
or she presents is a bounded one that needs to attract and hold its readers. A super-
brand like Marvel or Harry Potter with huge marketing clout can spread its points of
entry around, but my chamber work needs to create a unified space in which, for a
time at least, readers will want to hang out, not so much cut off from distractions as
blended in with and enriching their mediatized world. In transmedia, this space can
just as well be real as virtual, so it is useful to consider the book as an exhibition that
immerses visitors in story world and theme.

5.3. CURATOR OF INNOCENCE

A unique example of the book as a place is *The Museum of Innocence*, created by
author Orhan Pamuk. This is the title of a novel (Pamuk, 2010), and of a small
terraced building in the cobbled streets of the Galata district of Istanbul. The novel, a
tragic love story full of longing for a bygone age, has many short chapters and the
museum of the same name houses a vitrine for each one, containing photos and
memorabilia featured in the book. On the stairs there is a huge display case in which
are pinned, like butterflies, 4,213 cigarette stubs, all smoked by the book's heroine,
with notes of the time, date and circumstances of each one's smoking. *The Innocence
of Objects* (Pamuk, 2012), the catalogue of the museum, describes each assemblage of
bric-a-brac and artwork, capturing a section of the novel and a flavour of life in the

city. The museum illustrates the novel and is a fascinating collection of everyday objects evoking the unique atmosphere and history of a beautiful and troubled city.

This could be little more than a vanity project for the Nobel prizewinner, or a marketing ruse to shift copies of the book, but to me it seems much more. I enjoyed the book but not because of the museum. Such transmedia elements are engaging, but can lumber the central work with unnecessary clutter. To avoid this in my own work, I've tried to ensure that each element is not just of good quality but makes sense independently from the others. And no element needs to be gigantic; transmedia can work on a domestic scale. Pamuk's manifesto argues: "If objects are not uprooted from their environs and their streets, but are situated with care and ingenuity in their natural homes, they will already portray their own stories." He advocates small domestic museums rather than monumental buildings that dominate neighbourhoods and quash our humanity (Pamuk, 2012).

Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has written about the influence on him of Alexander Dorner, author of *The Way Beyond 'Art'* who rethought the museum as an institution in a state of permanent transformation, presenting artworks in dynamic relationship to each other, not in cold, chronological order. "He advocated a concept of art history that allowed for gaps, reversals and strange collisions. The museum for Dorner is not just a building but an oscillation between object and process" (Obrist, 2015: 63). Influenced by Gilles Deleuze's argument that each process of actualization is surrounded by a constantly thickening fog of virtual possibilities (Deleuze, 2014), one project of Obrist's is to collect information on unrealized arts projects. "These roads not taken are a reservoir of artistic ideas: forgotten projects, directly or indirectly censored projects, misunderstood projects, oppressed projects, lost projects, unrealizable projects" (Obrist, 2015: 63).

5.4. TOOLS FOR TRANSMEDIA

Another arts practitioner I interviewed was Annette Mees, co-founder of Coney Theatre Company (Bookfutures, 2016). From Mees I picked up two useful terms for my transmedia toolkit, techniques she uses in creating site-specific, immersive theatre. 'Capitulation' is her expression for the process of hooking the spectator, sparking the suspension of disbelief necessary to engage in an imaginary world – and this may be through personalized emails written in the voice of a character sent in the

run-up to the performance, or a live pre-show at the venue. 'Scooping up' is the art of checking that audience members who aren't joining in don't feel left out, making sure, for instance, that nobody has wandered into a storage area thinking it's the portal to another immersive world (Meade, 2017b). Similarly, it's all too easy for digital products to confuse readers if they don't work properly. 'Is this YouTube clip part of the story or have I clicked on the wrong link?' How can readers be sure they haven't missed hidden layers of content?

Tiina Roppola, author of *Designing for the Museum Visitor Experience*, observes that visitors to a gallery relate to an exhibition "through four key relational processes... framing, resonating, channelling and broadening" (Roppola, 2015: 3). The *frame* of my transmedia work is the description of what it consists of, who it's by and how it works – the digital equivalent of the back cover blurb. The piece *resonates* by striking a deep chord with its readership – Nearlyology has so far proved to be an enduring theme. Readers are *channelled* through the contents by the plot and the characters, but this choreographed movement through can be enhanced by the multimedia elements as well as the architecture of the site; *broadening* applies to those spaces where readers add their content and participate in proceedings more actively.

5.5. THE HAMPER

When I started writing *What Didn't Quite*, to stop myself worrying about the technical or economic issues of making transmedia fiction, I bought a wicker hamper into

which I put things I wanted to include in the project. The hamper now contains a printout of the manuscript, three glove puppets, a CD of *Nearly Songs*, a spoof self-help *Little Book of Nearly*, a handmade blank booklet for a reader to write their Nearly Story in, a flyer for the Nearly Show, a piece of Nearly Art made of wood, wax and string, an 'I nearly' badge and bottle of Nearly Dust. It was important for me that the book wasn't defined by what can be accessed on a tablet computer, but by what seemed right for the story and its themes. I didn't want to assume that my book needed to involve digital platforms. Laurie Anderson once said that "technology today is the campfire around which we tell our stories", but later added that its power is "both warm and destructive... I think we're powerful without it" (McCorduck, 1994).

What Didn't Quite included interstitial Nearly Stories and animations, the parallel narratives of Jamie's songs, and spaces for user-generated Nearlies. Peripheral stories featuring further adventures of the characters could be added in future. To create a kind of brand I developed a visual style, based on Carraday's artworks, which helped to build cohesion between elements on different platforms.

Website Header
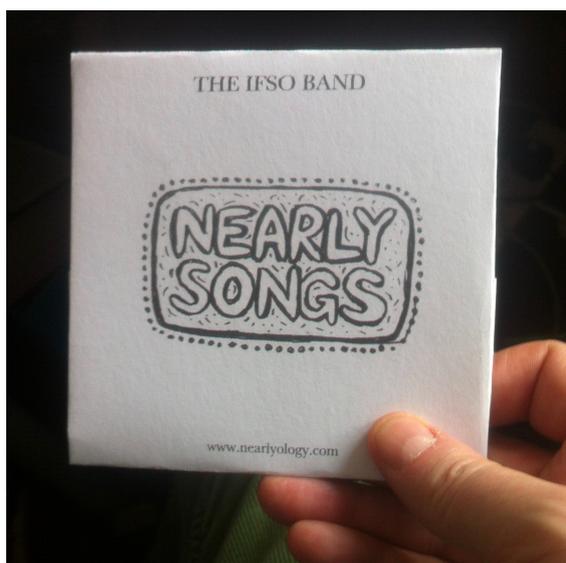
The Album Cover

The Nearly Store

The growing archive of Nearly Stories I'd been gathering from the public is a sample of the fog, examples of counterfactual thinking as described by Jane McGonigal, the multiple alternative possibilities from our past which allow us to think creatively about the future. Picturing nearly versions of our lives empowers us to believe we can shape our own future and seek new conclusions from within our memories. Gutenberg's printing process encouraged the fixing of the text, making it definitive, hard to alter, encouraged the notion of one correct form of grammar and understanding. In contrast, digital writing can be rewritten and remixed at a stroke, countless variations published without difficulty, producing an illuminating array of interstitial stories, each shedding some kind of light on the actual history. Printed books may live on shelves, fixed and finite, waiting to be rediscovered, but transmedia literary fictions remain porous, some parts fixed but others changing, open for participation by the public, like a park in which a certain kind of play is always encouraged – or a venue where a certain kind of theatre is made.

Nearlydancing Workshop with Jia Yu Corti

Through my research, I have begun to find a new way to describe transmedia literary creation. Instead of writing on the page, we are putting in orbit around the reader elements of story, character, theme, story world in text, images, sounds, opportunities for collaboration. The choice isn't just between a paper book and an e-book – the optimum shape for this project might be an online seminar and a booklet of poems, or an exhibition and a movie, or a free-to-download story and a luxury box set of songs. Tickets to the conference might be expensive but the download free. These are creative as well as commercial choices, decided on the basis of creative intention.

Even after the book's 'publication' I intend to continue to gather Nearly Stories at live events. What's the best format for these? I spoke to Julia Bird who runs Jaybird, a company devising and touring poetry shows to arts centres and festivals (Jaybird, 2017). She charges the venue £500-700 per night for her productions, which are Arts Council-funded. Audiences tend to be mostly females over 55, but Arts Council England is keen to attract a wider demographic. Bird offered to help me shape a Nearly Show involving daytime workshops, a pop-up shop/exhibit and an evening performance featuring songs, readings from the book and Nearlies gathered at the venue during the day.

Nearly Workshop at Bath Spa, Mix Digital, 2016

A good book creates a story world that I can think around the edges of, characters that stay with me like friends or enemies, it makes me think afresh about my own life and the themes it explores. My project is a deconstructed version: the Nearly events, the Nearly stories, the characters, the songs can be tasted in different combinations and sequences. But the recipe won't work if each element isn't cooked properly. Freed from the tyranny of print, I need to decide what a map of my transmedia book project might look like. My character Freya Seward is an experienced co-ordinator of brainstorms and workshops; her voice tells me, "Try drawing and collage and see what comes out." Illustrated are two of my attempts: the first a collage, a dotted maze of plot in which the characters are embedded, a mouthpiece allows the reader to breathe their stories into the piece, stringed instruments play back songs, there's a shop – and the whole has wheels. My second picture is a doodle, which starts with the Nearly Store as a means to draw people in to the story and at its heart has the Nearly Show, a setting for collaborative work related to the piece, which is the prelude to the story's denouement.
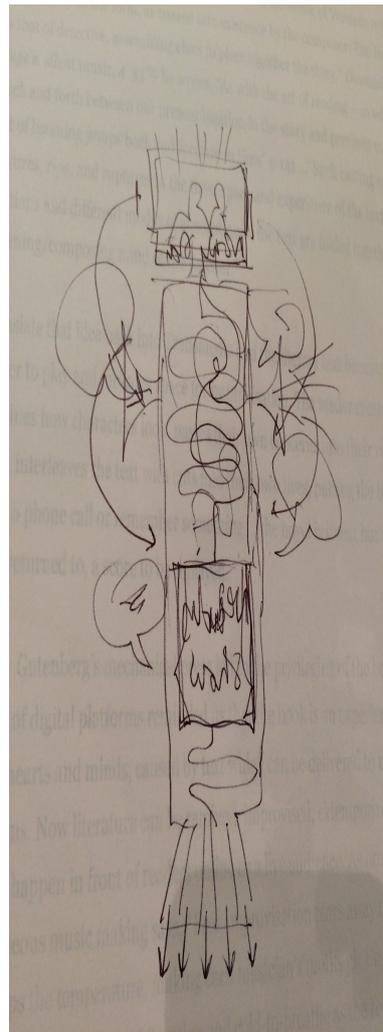
Nearly Diagrams

Reader-generated responses and live collaboration are at the heart of the novel, but this raises another question: what constitutes an unacceptable appropriation of the efforts of readers and other collaborators into the making of what remains *my* book?

It can be argued that digital culture is stealing the radical, libertarian techniques of community arts practice and re-appropriating them to make commercial products that involve the free labour of a user-generation. In *Who Owns the Future?* Jaron Lanier writes eloquently of the destruction of middle-class jobs by companies like Amazon, which have overwhelmed whole industries dedicated to the selection and distribution of culture (Lanier, 2013). The economic consequences of digital convergence are real and serious: power in the hands of a few global companies, jobs destroyed and incomes lost, gobbled up by the mega-deliverers, but the artistic consequences are a completely different matter.

5.6. THE NEARLY APP

As an independent storymaker, I wanted to make something radically new, but also hoped to monetize my activities. Like Freya, I was seeking a business model for the Nearly Project that was both true to the aims of my work and commercially viable. Transmedia narratives of loss and discovery are open-ended and dynamic, but a work of transmedia needs to be a product which readers know how to get hold of, and will hopefully pay for.

When I looked at everything in my wicker basket, it seemed to me that the project could best be delivered as an app for the iPad or tablet, downloadable at a price. This is because I find it easier to read prose on a tablet computer than on a Kindle or mobile; page layout can be spacious and attractive. Into the text can be set rich and bright illustrations, animations and sound players. As a networked device, the iPad can link through to websites and email; it was the first of the tablet computers designed primarily for the consumption of digital content, a screen with which you can curl up and enjoy rich media content in the way one does with a book, picking it up and putting it down at your leisure. The tablet's glow may not be good for our sleep patterns, but can draw us deep into immersive imaginary worlds of game, film and fiction.

I asked through Twitter if anyone out there knew of an app designer and heard from an ex-colleague, Dan Visel, a fellow alumni of the Institute for the Future of the Book. Visel now lives in Thailand and makes apps and websites. He was keen to help make a demo, so we started working on the design via Skype calls and email. Discussing the brief with Visel via Skype helped me realize that instead of cluttering the reading experience with features, which might feel like obstacles to immersive reading, I wanted readers to be able to play and replay the songs and animations if and when they wished. I wanted space for reader-generated material within the app, but also for each reader to be able to write their Nearly Stories into their copy of the book whether or not they went on to share these with other readers. I asked Visel if he could animate some pages of the text so that the words themselves would come and go before the reader's eyes, like memories fading and growing strong, a jumble of alternative possibilities circling, out of which the description of actual events coalesce. The demo of an early draft of the closing section of the story features other multimedia elements including two songs and a cartoon animation. I'm pleased with

the beta iteration of the demo, which is easy to navigate, and on it's way to becoming a desirable item to download.

Many remain to be convinced that such a hybrid could be literature. Paul Fournel is the current President of Oulipo, the literary collective founded in 1960 which sets itself strict constraints to write within. His novel, *Dear Reader*, satirizes publishers' limited ideas for digital books. "Turning Proust's madeleine into a shortbread cookie, sprinkling perfume on the red lady, getting up Pauline Reage's skirt, cheering up a novel by Bernanos with a few side-splitting gags" (Fournel 2014: loc.1234). McLuhan, predicting a transformation in human consciousness brought about by changing media, surely envisaged more than that. Fournel's own novel is a booby trap for digitizers: it has a fixed form based on its character count, so "anyone entering it to change a single letter will destroy the entire project" (*ibid*: loc.1577). But dynamic writing demands new dynamic forms of reading and publishing.

5.7. THE BOOK AS WALK

Following in the footsteps of Freya, researching the threads of her feminism and interest in reading groups led me to the discovery of the Walking Library, the practice of artists and cultural geographers Deirdre Heddon and Misha Myers who gather groups of readers to go for a hike, each bringing with them a copy of a different book to read and share (Heddon & Myers, 2017). An alternative to the patriarchal shaman's guided tour, these creative readers converse and write together, then donate their travelling collection to a fitting resting place. I think Freya would smell a commercial

opportunity. We could make a Nearly Bag to sell at premium rate, containing a paperback, notebook and other Nearly-abilia. This package could be handed out, like a picnic basket, at the beginning of a Nearly Walk. Setting off from the Nearly Project camper van, the walk would be interspersed with readings and performances from *What Didn't Quite*, time to stop to look at places where things nearly happened, to read on together and to write one's own Nearly Story in the notebook provided. This gentle mingling of reading, writing, performance and conversation, taking place in a public setting but introducing participants to a private reading experience – here is a space for the 'performance' of words on many fronts; this feels like a suitable vessel into which to pour my story.

[image redacted from this digitised version due to potential copyright issues]

Peter Wiegold and Academy Inegales 2015

5.8. HEARING VOICES

Charles Fernyhough states in his book, *The Voices Within*: "Writers... give us fictional characters speaking out loud, and they play on our ability to reconstruct those voices in our own minds... Writers also eavesdrop on the words their characters do not say out loud. They give us minds in dialogue, imaginary creatures engrossed in internal conversations" (Fernyhough, 2016: 94). We can use multimedia elements to mix text, image and sound in order to approximate the voices we hear in our media-saturated heads as the sights and sounds of everyday life, real and virtual, mingle with internal thoughts and feelings.

Transmedia narrative theory provides a framework for complete works involving collaborative-making and multiple stories in an 'open source' story world, but for further inspiration on how to develop the audio, performance and improvisational elements of the Nearly Project, I turned to the world of new music and composers who are also community music-makers. Peter Wiegold, Director of the Institute of Composing at Brunel Universty and band leader of Notes Inegales writes about how, as a workshop leader, his motivation was not simply to facilitate his client and, as a composer, he wanted to do more than produce solo works. What interested him most was the mysterious place in between. Wiegold posits three ways to make music:

"THE FIRST WAY

Closed, final, the authority held 'outside'.

You will do this. (Leading to issues of transgression).

The image of a box.

THE SECOND WAY

The way of the 60s – an open space – equality, democracy.

What shall we do today, class?

The image of an open space.

THE THIRD WAY

A holding centre, with the possibility of multiple responses to it.

The backbone.

Begin here, ground here, centre here.

The image of a central holding line with spirals spinning off"

(Wiegold, 2015: 262).

To transpose this idea from music into new media writing terms, the first way is akin to the fixed, printed, single-authored text, the second to user-generated texts such as the experimental online wiki novel *A Million Penguins* (Mason & Thomas, 2008), created over one month by around 4,000 writers. The third way could be a model for transmedia literary novels which have an authored backbone decorated with readers' own riffs on the theme. Digital tools like Google Docs make it possible for

multiple authors to write onto the same page, and for a much more nuanced dialogue to occur between writer and the mediatized creative reader.

André Jansson defines mediatization as "how other social processes in a broad variety of domains and at different levels become inseparable from and dependent on technological processes and resources of mediation" (Jansson, 2013: 281). The article features interviews with people of different ages from Stockholm in Sweden, describing how social media, far from taking people into a global cyberspace, is woven into the personal fabric of their everyday lives. As an illustration, a father talks about the texture of his experience of Facebook, which keeps him loosely in touch with old classmates and allows him to share old photos from his past life with his kids.

In the era of privatized and converged media forms, the spaces between public and private are disappearing, across politics and all social relations (Thompson, 2011). A conventional realist narrative of characters in a landscape is perhaps no longer adequate to convey what it feels to be alive in our converged, networked world, in which we can stand in one place while looking at another, holding hands with one person while in deep conversation with others online.

According to semioticians such as Umberto Eco, every text constructs its reader (Eco, 1976). Eliseo Verón describes how the writer addresses an implicit reader and if the real reader identifies with that imagined one, then a reading contract is established, and a potentially fruitful conversation between the reader and text is initiated (Verón, 1985). Up to now that conversation has occurred only in readers' thoughts and in scholarly papers, but technology allows the reader to become a creative and visible presence within the book. The contract between transmedia author and a co-creating reader may come to include some kind of ongoing commitment on both sides to revisit and remix the text, as well as an option to meet up at online and at real life events.

Researchers have explored how we experience the acts of thinking and reading, how exactly we hear the voices of authors and characters in fiction, how we translate our interior monologues into utterance (Abramson & Goldringer, 1997). If McLuhan was right to propose that the arrival of print culture fundamentally changed the way individuals make sense of our experience, emphasizing sight over tactile and aural

sensation, then what is the texture of the perceptual transformation that has been initiated by digital innovations?

The soundscapes I've recorded to include in the app version of the novel attempt to imitate the ways in which mind and text interact. Working with members of Academy Inegales, we have tried to suggest the tone of the internal conversations readers experience, and explore how that tone has been altered by social media and the networked screens through which we view the world now.

5.9. MAKING NEARLY MUSIC

One evening in June 2016 at a jazz club in London I was on stage with 12 musicians performing Nearly Music. The piece began with a recording of a reading of the opening of my novel, using a vocal looper machine to create an echoing soundscape of words. The ensemble began to 'nearly play' their instruments: rattling and tapping, tuning and parping, the air filled with the hissing of amplifiers, coughs and mutterings. I began to read the Nearly Manifesto and the players attempted to copy

the sound of what I was saying as I spoke it, using voice or instruments. I sped up and slowed down the words to fox them. Then a return to Nearly Music. One by one I asked each member for a personal Nearly Story for which the ensemble then improvised a response. Nouria Bah, a young singer from Maryland, explained she nearly went to Opera Camp as a teenager but her parents couldn't afford it. The band made the dramatic, tumultuous sound of nearly opera. Violinist Jo told us she nearly goes for a run every morning; the musicians played echoes of exercise not quite taken. Martin nearly missed a concert as a boy because he got his head stuck in his tuba. When he re-enacted this, saxophonist George Sleightholme was keen to see how the inverted instrument

sounded. At the end of the evening a woman in the audience handed me her nearly story: she once nearly built a new kind of musical instrument.

This event was the culmination of a nine-month project as part of Academy Inegales, an ensemble of players of which I was a member for nine months in 2015-16, selected and led by Peter Wiegold, who was working on ways to compose and improvise across different musical genres and traditions. With Academy Inegales I've been looking at how writers can develop a collaborative practice that allows them to 'play' together in the way jazz musicians do, practising their different literary 'instruments' then improvising live in a structured and dynamic way, riffing on great 'tunes' they remix and reimagine, responsive to their fellows and the atmosphere of the audience, to make quality work which is also transient and of the moment. I curated *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Academy Inegales, 2015), an evening of music inspired by words from Rebecca Solnit's book, performed by Academy Inegales. We selected quotes from the book to inspire pieces by each player. My contribution was a reading of an extract from *What Didn't Quite*, which was embellished by other instruments until music drowned out the words. For that event we ordered multiple copies of Solnit's book to sell on the door, created 'menus' for each table containing the quotes that had inspired compositions, and also prepared animated text from the book to project on the wall. This opened up new possibilities for performance and inspired me to include a series of soundscapes in the novel, linked to passages of animated text. These soundscapes, which in another setting might appear overly abstract and alienating to some readers, here seemed to help draw people into the text. The theme of a second evening was *Found in Translation* and this involved poets, translators and illustrators working as part of an improvising big band. Like a game of Chinese whispers, members of this ensemble 'translated' poems into music into poems into pictures into music and back into poems.

To further explore the potential for such collaboration, I've run a digital project with participants in the Jerwood/Arvon mentored writers scheme. The 2015 cohort met online for an hour each day for a week in the summer via Google Docs and, inspired by examples of written scores for contemporary music (Lely & Saunders, 2012), I gave them a different 'score' to respond to each time. For instance:

"WRITE A PIECE OF STORY WITH A DOOR IN

Now find another one here

Open the door in it

And write some more

Repeat till satisfied

FIND A LINE HERE YOU LIKE

Write another line that's a bit like it

Then write what you like"

This led me to re-write several of the spoof exercises from *The Book of Nearly* which appear in *What Didn't Quite* as written scores for the reader.

5.10. COLLABORATIVE LITERATURE

If we think of the book as encompassing the whole time spent under the influence of a story, and digital platforms allowing ongoing communication between readers and author, then the possibility opens up for ongoing improvisations and collaborations around its themes and characters. Since my days as a Community Arts Worker, I've collaborated with artists, writers, actors and musicians, with adults, children and young people to make work including a community play about the history of Sheffield, a sitcom about radical pensioners commissioned and nearly made by the BBC, a poem for National Poetry Day using found tweets and donated verses, a poem written in a morning with a class of seven-year-olds, which was then carved in stone in a Hackney playground, as well as collaborative novels such as *A Vauxhall Chorus*, written with Kate Pullinger and 20 other writers working with the organization Spread The Word (Team 24hr Book, 2009). In 2008 if:book uk and the Institute for the Future of the Book put the entire text of *The Golden Notebook* online in a format called Commentpress, employed seven women writers to read it over a few weeks, commenting in the margins, and invited their readers to comment on their comments (Lessing, 2008). In 2015 I was one of three writers who created a thriller over a weekend, set in the English seaside village where we'd gone to write. The story was

later published in instalments on the mobiles of young South Africans thanks to FunDza Literary Trust, a reading project for mediatized youth (FunDza, 2017).

As an artist and a literature development worker, I love working collaboratively, but since the birth of Community Art there has been much debate between those who see community work as in opposition to 'real' artistic creation and other artists who maintain that their creative practice is fundamentally inspired by collaboration with community. In *Beyond Britten: The Composer and the Community*, musician John Barber defines his position and describes its creative power: "So who am I now? I am not a teacher, not an animateur, not a music therapist; I am a composer and I get strength from feeling that what I am doing is having some kind of positive human impact... I am working collaboratively: I am finding ways to make music with playful rules" (Barber, 2015). Nearlywriting certainly involves these collaborations and playful public improvisation as core elements of creative practice.

With funding from the Clore Duffield Foundation I've devised resources for teaching poetry in schools. We created *SET POETRY FREE*, an anthology of new and classic poems which was introduced to students by The Ifso Poets, a fictitious team of poetry subversives dedicated to the liberation of poetry who called on students to "refresh, re-mix, respond and release [these poems] back into the WILD to create your own poetry happenings" (Ifsopoets, 2013). Pupils sent us their poetry responses and we replied in character, sending personal critiques of children's work, as members of this underground movement. This experience gave me the confidence to offer visitors to the Nearlyology website the opportunity to receive a personal response from a character in the novel. I intend to offer this to readers of the finished book. The messages could be uniquely composed for each reader, or sent automatically via an email auto-responder along with an invitation to participate in a live or online collaborative workshop. Whereas paper books may sit abandoned on shelves gathering dust, the transmedia literary novel has the potential to remain in play for longer, with readers revisiting the app to check for recent additions or to report on their own latest Nearly. No longer stuck at a desk in front of fixed screens, mediatized readers are also on the move, digital content and social media blending (my spellcheck made that 'bleeding') into our face-to-face social encounters. Mediatized

life can be stressful and disjointed too. Engagement with a story world can help creative readers to navigate their way through.

5.11 FISSURES, RIPS & RUPTURES

The 'Temperate Zone' which Mari-Laure Ryan describes between the mass-market and the avant-garde is a thrilling space for accessible experimentation aimed at creating approachable, challenging and rewarding literary experiences *(Ryan 2005)*. Here is the place where the reader can carve a coherent pathway through the ever-shifting landscape of the web, can hear their own tune in the frequently overwhelming cacophony of digital noise, and find a new sense of self in the post-Gutenberg world.

Debates concerning the tensions between tradition and the avant-garde take place in music and sonic art just as much as in the literary world. Traditionalists seek the composer's authentic voice in a work, whereas experimental composers in the tradition of John Cage have asked listeners to hear music as pure sound and create a meaning for it themselves. "In the music of Western notation, the emphasis is on the form, as coaxed into existence by the composer. The listener's role is that of detective, assembling clues to piece together the story," writes Seth Kim-Cohen. Of Cage's silent music, *4' 33"* he writes:

> As with the act of reading – in which we jump back and forth between our present location in the story and previous events... the act of listening jumps back and forward in time... Such cutting creates fissures, rips, and ruptures in the time, space and experience of the text. Different sections and different modes of absorption of the text are folded together in the listening/composing mind of the listener (Kim-Cohen, 2009: 141).

Reading has always been like this. Even in analogue times and temperate literary climes, the reading of any story gets broken up by interruptions, conversations, memories and ideas sparked, the need to go to sleep or work. In digital times these fissures and rips are more evident as hotlinks jump readers from text to clip to text again, on devices pinging with notifications and incoming messages. The transmedia literary writer composes a score for the reader to play across platforms and includes space for improvisation. The reader creates voices, imagines how characters

look, pastes their own concerns into their version of the book, interleaves the text with cuts into their own lives, putting the book down to make a phone call or remember something... the novel is linear but also a scrapbook to be returned to, the literary equivalent of a written musical score like those created by John Cage, Yoko Oko, Cornelius Cardew and others as documented in *Word Events* (Lely & Saunders, 2012).

Gutenberg's mechanical press led to the privileging of the book as object; the arrival of digital platforms reminded us that the book is an experience that happens in our hearts and minds, generated by text which can be delivered to us on a range of platforms. Now literature can be remixed, improvised, extemporized on to make new writing happen in front of readers online or a live audience. As one proponent of spontaneous music-making says: "Free improvisation tears away the comfort blanket and drops the temperature, making each musician's motifs gleam against a backdrop of black nothing. It's as exhilarating and cold-to-breathe as the revolutionary idea itself – but if you won't learn to breathe this ether, a non life of conformity and repetition beckons" (Watson, 2004: 377).

While working with Academy Inegales I decided to intersperse my narrative with the written scores from *The Book of Nearly*, Freya and Carraday's self-help guide to Nearlyology, which can be accessed as a sound file alongside my novel. The animated text and accompanying soundscape of words which appear in the beta Nearly app are elements I want to retain and build on in future projects.

Towards the end of my novel, the three Nearlyologists set off in a camper van to 'do' Nearlyology. They plan to travel from place to place, gathering stories and singing songs. In fact, nobody is much interested and the trio become absorbed in their shaky relationships, but Freya has a vision of what a travelling Nearly Roadshow might become. In the book, I provide the link to a website hosting live Nearly Workshops and a changing collection of new work, like the Nearly Music described above. This is an integral part of the book, not a bolt-on extra.

5.12. THE IFSO ENSEMBLE

Such tempting multimedia possibilities are still dependent on tools and platforms like YouTube, Soundcloud, Google Groups, Drive and Hangouts, all provided via the siren servers of mega-corporations. How can the solitary author hold his or her own against the insidious forces of global capitalism that Lanier identified? In the field of music, Seth Kim-Cohen discusses how a pop band may have a main songwriter, but the whole group create the final sound, and re-create it afresh at live gigs, the same but different. Between classical composition and avant-garde experimentation sits the informal conversation of rock and roll. Pop music was oppositional, challenging authority and power, until an industry and marketplace commodified it. "Since its inception, rock and roll has flip-flopped between partaking of power and resisting it" (Kim-Cohen, 2009: 138). Artists including megastars such as David Bowie, counter-cultural figures like Laurie Anderson, and Amanda Palmer who uses crowd-funding and couch-surfing to run her tours, the many thousands of acts with websites and teeshirts and homemade CDs and Bandcamp accounts, still have some power to resist – if they refuse to flip-flop. In *Fair Play* Jen Harvie writes how neoliberalism has encouraged the growth of 'Artrepreneurs', artists drawn into promoting their brand to the detriment of their creative work (Harvie, 2013: 62). But for writers who have always relied on the publishing industry to make their voices heard, the potential for the author to engage in DIY entrepreneurialism may have benefits over the half-hearted attentions of a lacklustre publicist.

The transmedia literary author certainly needs collaborators – a web designer, publicist and editor at the very least – to help produce and publish multimodal text. In today's complex publishing and media ecology, the author becomes bandleader, the transmedia novel their creative project involving fixed tracks and live performance, something to rehearse, organize bookings for and sell merchandise from – and take on the road, a micro-brand which may not make money, but perhaps has a chance of doing so. Inspired by the example of Héloïse Letissier, the unconfident singer who transformed into *Christine and the Queens* (Snapes, 2016), I've decided to write under a pen name, not for anonymity so much as the chance to create a kind of collective version of myself, a protective covering, a liberating alter-ego free from baggage and bagginess. And with the Nearly Show I want to develop a form of collective creative

reading in which a group grows around the novel, leading into conversations and new creation inspired by its wider themes.

6. CONCLUSION

My submission for this PhD in digital writing is a paper document containing a novel which stands alone as fiction. However, the appendices include links to Dan Visel's beta version of the app featuring an early draft of the novel's final pages, with animated text, soundscape, song and animation. Also appended is a link to the www.nearlyology.net website with its growing archive of stories, poems and events, The Nearly Album containing Jamie's songs, a flyer for a performance lecture and installation which I plan to tour, starting at The Poetry Café in June 2018, copies of the Nearly Manifesto and other small, hand-made booklets which I will sell alongside badges, artworks, posters etc. I've been encouraged to submit the novel to publishers to trade publishers for publication, and had some encouraging feedback so far, but have commissioned Dan Visel to create a multimedia trailer for the website with sound and animations embedded. I'm preparing to self-publish a time-limited digital edition linked to the website where artworks and handmade Nearly Books are for sale and to a Facebook page where readers can share their nearly stories. For me this whole Nearly Project has been fundamentally transmedia – multimedia, multiplatform, multimodal, interactive, performative and collaborative, digital and analogue.

I've adopted the writing name Chris & The Ifso and will continue to work with a changing Ifso Band of collaborators. My next project, *The Percussions*, is in its early stages, but will involve a set of interlocking stories, recordings of music for different forms of percussion, drumming and writing workshops… and whatever else crops up. I'm not sure if the written element will be its centre or not. This open-ended way of working seems very natural to me now.

Shedding the self-deprecating, hesitant implications of the term, we who Nearlywrite are always becoming, never quite there; do other things, alongside and instead; follow creative instincts to make work in new ways; use digital and analogue tools on our own terms; see the process of production and promotion as part and parcel of the creative enterprise; stay open to creative criticism but take responsibility

for our own self esteem; decide for ourselves when work is cooked enough to show and to whom to show it; view writing as part of the bigger picture of our own lives and what matters in the world; welcome conversations with readers; work with all kinds of collaborators, media, modes, platforms, genres and art forms to try to make a world of imagination and vision.

The research questions I have attempted to address are:

1) How can a transmedia literary fiction convey the texture of everyday life and the inner lives of its characters while giving space to reader-generated responses and live collaboration?

I've argued that the potential for active conversation within the story world connects with the mediatized lives of contemporary readers, creating a unity from diverse art forms, delivered on multiple platforms but telling one story: a 'book' that can hold its readers' attention through time, across media and platforms, inviting conversation and collaboration. I've shown how my understanding of the characters in my novel has been deepened and sharpened by creating layers of content such as Jamie's songs, Carraday's Nearly art, Freya's self-help package of badges, workshops and *Book of Nearly*, and believe this can expand the story world for readers and enrich the written text.

2) While scholarly writing on transmedia narrative and other related fields examines the potential for telling stories across different platforms and genres, how does the transmedia literary writer approach the production and publication of a multimodal text within the context of a complex publishing ecology?

It seems that both the conventional publishing industry and digital producers remain wary of investing in transmedia literary fiction at present. However, it has never been easier to self-publish or self-produce stories in print and other media and, in the converging spaces of the digital, to bundle up and market hybrid literary products or activities. The financial rewards may be small for now, but the same is true for most books published conventionally. The new contribution to knowledge of the Nearly Project is not a technological innovation but a multi-dimensional, collaborative approach to the writing process which, even if the end result is black print on white pages, can hopefully inspire those who seek to make literature happen afresh, today and tomorrow.

WHAT DIDN'T QUITE

APPENDIX 1: NEARLYWRITING NEARLYOLOGY

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APPENDIX 2: NEARYWRITING NEARLYOLOGY

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APPENDIX 3: WHAT DIDN'T QUITE > THE NEARLY SHOW

Other Elements of What Didn't Quite

http://www.nearlyology.net is the website I created for this project and have regularly updated with news of events, latest Nearly stories gathered at workshops and readings, documentation of collaborations, reflections on the process plus drafts of sections of the fiction and contextual essays.
I intend it to continue, becoming a permanent but changing element of the transmedia experience and a focus for the Nearly Project and its community.

The Nearly Album of songs and soundscapes, made with the Ifso Band, can be downloaded at: https://theifsoband.bandcamp.com/album/what-didnt-quite-the-nearly-songs. It includes studio recordings and other tracks recorded at home so sound quality is variable. These are not finished recordings but show Jamie's involvement with music where he mixes reality and fiction to make short, hummable songs.

The Nearly App can be accessed at http://danvisel.net/tempo/nearly/.
Made by Dan Visel, it uses an early draft of the final section of the novel.
Users can write their Nearly Stories into their 'copy' of the book and send it to the book.

The Nearly Bag is designed to accompany the printed paper novel and includes
 2 x 'I nearly badges, a small sample of Nearly Dust, a copy of the Nearly Manifesto and a booklet for readers to write down their own Nearly Stories, to keep, copy and send to the Nearly Project, photograph and post to www.nearlyology.net… or grind to Nearly Dust.

We hope each reader of *What Didn't Quite* will want
to post a Nearly at www.nearlyology.net.