

Sympoetics of sampling



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Sooley, Howard. Garden at Prospect Cottage. 2005

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Figure 1 Lewis, Geraint. Derek Jarman at Prospect Cottage. 1991.

Introduction

This thesis deals with the topic of sampling. The act of sampling is maybe best known from music production and especially hip hop music. To sample in this context means to use a fragment of an existing music piece or recording and use it as part of a new composition. Often the samples are repeated or combined with other samples to create a new composition. Sampling appears in many forms of art across various kinds of media. Any material can be sampled. An obvious example would be the collage, where images from different sources are collected and combined into a single image. Another example is film montage, where the editor cuts clips out of a film recording and rearranges them in a specific order. Sampling is often considered a controversial practice, because some people will argue that it steals from the original composition. However, I question the underlying assumption that there is such a thing as an original composition. In the end, everything has their origin or inspiration somewhere else.

I want to see sampling, not only as a technique, but as a more fundamental approach to art making. Sampling actually asks for a very modest attitude. There is less focus on originality, but the sampler needs to bring up more attention to the nature of the material itself and has to abandon a certain bias. During the process of sampling there occurs a shift in meaning: the

existing material turns into something else according to a new composition. The new meanings arise in the arrangement of the parts. To find these arrangements, the sampler has to relate to the parts themselves and for a moment, they have to put their own selves aside. The attitude of the sampler is therefore not possessive or dominant, but needs to leave room for the material to speak for itself. In some ways sampling is storytelling with images and materials, because it incorporates the historicity that the objects already carry with them. Sampling always starts with collecting, that's why I want to start off with the carrier bag theory as it is shaped by Ursula Le Guin in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*.

The carrier bag

If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solider container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then (sic) next day you probably do much the same again – if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely gladly, for the first time (Le Guin 32/33).

The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction is an abstract yet imaginative theory about the origin of humanity. In the carrier bag theory of fiction, science fiction author Ursula le Guin proposes an alternative view on storytelling: not the epic story of the hero with a weapon, or “the killer story” as she calls it, but “the other story, the untold one, the life story” (Le Guin 33). She continues: “the natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book is a container for words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to another and to us” (Le Guin 34).

The carrier bag can collect things and keep them together in a meaningful relation. In a broader sense, the carrier bag could help us move towards a certain attitude to the world: as being in a mutual relation with the things that surround us and coming closer to them. The story of the weapon is a story of destruction and of mastery. The killer has a one-way relation towards his surroundings: he forces his own will upon it but, as a result, destroys it. He destroys the mutual relation by objectifying the other and taking away their subjectivity, treating them as dead

material. Le Guin summarizes the difference between the weapon and the carrier bag as follows: “with or before the tool that forces energy outward we made the tool that brings energy home (Le Guin 30).” The carrier bag assures a mutual and meaningful relation with our surroundings: it brings the things closer to us. The weapon on the contrary, forces something outward, onto the things and as such it implies domination. The carrier bag collects the things as they appear to us or as they show themselves to us, without forcing new meanings onto them. By bringing things and objects together in a new constellation, without hierarchies and domination, we can find new relations between them and ourselves. A proper carrier bag is the first thing we need.

Sympoetic living

“We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response. Mixed-up times are overflowing with both pain and joy—with vastly unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing of ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence (Haraway 1).”

A theorist and writer who is very much concerned with our relations to the world and the many species inhabiting it is Donna Haraway. In the introduction to her book *Staying With the Trouble*, Haraway sketches a world that is troubled and damaged. It is damaged, she argues, by individualistic and hierarchical thinking, especially in the sciences. Haraway refuses to believe that one theory or technology could clear all the trouble. Instead she asks us to stay with the trouble and explore new ways of being which are less self-centered and more aware of our relations and co-dependency to other species. Haraway writes: “*staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles*” (Haraway 4).

Many scholars have opted that the era we live in today should be called the Anthropocene. By this they mean that we live in an era that is defined by human beings and their dominant impact on the planet, an era in which humans have become major geological agents. The Anthropocene suggests that humans have become a driving force behind planetary change.

In *Staying with the Trouble* Haraway announces a new era that comes after the Anthropocene: the Chthulucene. Haraway proposes a slogan for this era: ‘Make Kin Not Babies (Haraway 102)!’ She continues: “We need to make kin symchthonically, sympoetically. Who and

whatever we are, we need to make-with—become-with, compose-with—the earth-bound (Haraway 102).” The Chthulucene as coined by Haraway is characterised by a sympoietic way of living.¹ Sympoiesis simply means ‘making-with’ and is opposed to the word autopoiesis which means something like ‘self-making’ or ‘self-maintaining’ (Haraway 58). Haraway argues that barely any species on earth is truly autopoietic. Instead, species are entangled with each other and form networks of co-dependency. Organisms form complex arrangements to ensure their ability to survive. Haraway contrasts sympoietic living with possessive individualism and even neoliberal thinking, characteristics that she associates with the before mentioned Anthropocene (Haraway 33). As neoliberal thinking tends to promote self-made individuals or companies that compete with each other to guarantee their progress and (financial) success. Haraway’s sympoietic living fosters collaboration over individual success, and acknowledges our fundamental co-dependency as species on this earth. In this narrative, humans do not take up a more prominent role than any other species or things. Because of this Haraway encourages us to form assemblages and collaborate with other species on earth: ‘all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time) (Haraway 103).’

Le Guin's carrier bag and Haraway's sympoiesis both function as guiding principles throughout this thesis, which deals with the method of *sampling* or *collaging* as a sympoietic way of making art. Like the novel in Ursula le Guin’s *Carrier Bag Theory*, a piece of music or a film could be considered as a kind of bag. The bag contains a collection of things from our surroundings, that are put together in a new constellation, or “a bag of stars” (Le Guin 37). Instead of claiming the things or destroying them for our own sake, the things are kept as they are, without removing their past and acknowledging the fact that they already originate from somewhere else. At the same time they are put into new constellations or new bags. You could maybe say that their meaning is kept and changed at the same time; their meanings change according to the new arrangement of which they become a part. This is why I would like to look at sampling as an attitude towards the world: as an open relation to the world and the things around us. Like the carrier, the sampler looks at the things without judging. To sample is to find a place between and among the things: a form of belonging without violence and domination.

¹ Sometimes Haraway also writes sympoetic without the ‘i’ which suggests that sympoiesis also has a poetic aspect (Haraway 102).

Derek Jarman's sympo(i)etic arrangements

An artist who extensively made use of sampling as a way of relating to a “troubled world” was Derek Jarman, a filmmaker, poet and gardener from England. Derek Jarman spent the last years of his life in an old fisherman hut called Prospect Cottage in the alienating landscape of Dungeness. This coastal area in England is known for its wide, almost desert-like, shingle plains and cold and salty winds. In this harsh environment, against the backdrop of a distant power plant, Jarman sculpted himself a garden using bits and pieces from his surroundings, while also adding objects and plants from other places. He would gather large pieces of driftwood and place them upright and they would be sculptures. He would cherish the plants and stones that were already there and add new plants that thrive well under the blanket of stones. In Jarman's garden there is no hierarchy between the different elements. This is strengthened by the fact that there is no fence or border around the garden. Jarman writes: ‘There are no walls or fences. My garden's boundaries are the horizon’ (Jarman 3). The garden has no end: everyone and everything is allowed to enter and become part of the whole. - the salty winds, the driftwood, and even the powerplant, all these things have a share in shaping the garden.

The garden around prospect cottage is a good example of a sympoietic work. It has come into existence through an arrangement between Jarman and his surroundings. Jarman had to collaborate with the harsh climate and the local conditions in order to shape this garden in the middle of a shingle stone desert against the backdrop of a power plant.

Jarman's garden is exemplary for his approach to art in general. Jarman's films can be seen as documents of his personal life contrasted with the struggles of the times he lived in. Jarman's film *The Garden* (1990), as the name suggests, mostly takes place in and around his garden. But the idyllic environment of the garden is constantly being intruded by hostile influences from outside. For this film Jarman made use of various types of sampling. By layering different kinds of footage into one image, the film almost becomes a moving collage. The result is a film that reflects on Jarman's personal life as well as the cultural conditions he found himself living under. Like the carrier bag, this film captures a life story. And like the garden, the personal life is never secluded from its environment, be it a cultural or a natural one.



Figure 2. Still from Jarman. *The Garden*. 1990

The Garden 1990

Jarman's garden is exemplary for his approach to art in general. Jarman's films can be seen as documents of his personal life contrasted with the struggles of the times he lived in. Jarman's film *The Garden* (1990), as the name suggests, mostly takes place in and around his garden. *The Garden* is one of Jarman's later films. Jarman made this film when he was already living at Prospect Cottage. Not surprisingly, the garden also forms the background to the biggest part of the film. Jarman often described his garden as 'the garden of Eden'. As such it becomes a promise of paradise or 'the good life', by which everything else is measured. The film starts with Derek Jarman sitting at his desk. From the look of his face he seems to be pondering about big things before he falls asleep. What follows is a moving collage of visions and nightmares and daily life, the film as a whole feels somewhat like a feverish dream.

Derek Jarman made *The Garden* in 1990. Many of his friends had already died of HIV by this time. Jarman himself was also diagnosed with the disease. Also during this time, a controversial series of laws prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality' was introduced by the conservative government. Jarman himself was an outspoken opponent of section 28. A small fragment of footage of an anti-section 28 demonstration is also included in *The Garden*.

In *The Garden*, there is almost no dialogue. What's left is a loosely connected but still coherent sequence of images, where you cannot extract one clear meaning. The film loosely follows two young boys falling in love. For its themes the story relies heavily on biblical imagery, which suggests the couple lives in a society formed by christian morality. At the beginning of the film, we see the bright side of a romance unfolding between the two lovers. The ambience quickly shifts into its opposite and the couple soon finds themselves in hostile settings where they are being bullied and tortured. The young lovers' dream is destroyed by a homophobic society they find themselves living in. During the whole movie there is a threat of a sudden shift from serene moments towards violence and darkness.

The scenes that I described above are heavily staged and loaded with themes. They are intersected with different kinds of images, very mundane shots of Jarman's garden and of himself working in the garden. These were shot on a super 8 camera by Jarman himself and some of his friends and they carry the feel of a homemovie. The footage brings forward a very personal and modest aspect of the movie, in contrast with the other heavy thematic images. Sometimes the shots of the garden offer a space for relief and reflection amongst the thematically charged shots. Other times, when gloomy dark clouds appear in the frame, they enhance the mood of darkness and uncertainty, evoked by the violent acts.

I already pointed out the collage-like character of the movie. Throughout the film we can recognise different forms of sampling.



Figure 3. Still from Jarman. *The Garden*. 1990

The most obvious examples of sampling are the shots in which Jarman uses one image as a background for another image. For the background he mostly uses close-up shots from his garden, for example flowers. By means of this technique the intimate space of Jarman's garden forms a constant background to the story. These shots mostly accompany the more peaceful scenes and as such they emphasize Jarman's conception of his garden as a rendition of the garden of Eden. As I mentioned earlier the images of the garden bring to the screen a certain calmness and secludedness compared to the violence that is constantly lingering.



Figure 4. Still from Jarman. The Garden. 1990

Secondly, there is the combining of different kinds of media. Derek Jarman mixes professionally recorded 16mm film with super 8 footage from his personal archive. The super 8 footage was shot by friends of Jarman and often shows him working in his garden or around the house. The manner in which these images are woven in between other scenes resembles how Jarman's personal life is embedded in cultural context. Just like the garden Jarman's personal life has no fences isolating it from the stories of others. Whatever his view on christianity might have been, he was still shaped by it, because it is part of the cultural narratives that shaped him. Even when he is trying to resist them they still form a part of his life, because as a subject with a body he is situated in a material world.

Another thing that caught my attention are the many christian symbols in the movie. Jarman's approach to these symbols is very true to the nature of sampling. By removing these images from their original context of a biblical story and making them part of this modern life story,

their meaning becomes mixed up. For example, there is also a very strange scene in which we see a Judas in a leather motorbike suit being hanged. He is part of the set of a commercial in which a salesman promotes the benefits of having a credit card. Jarman brings christianity in an association with violence and commercialism. There are also scenes in which Maria, as impersonated by Tilda Swinton, is being chased and harassed by paparazzi-photographers which causes her to be parted from her child and her crown. The young gay lovers later find the baby and the crown, which seems to fulfil some kind of wish in them. Again christianity is connected with other narratives to form new associations. While these kinds of images seem to be overflowing with meaning, they are also the most obscure and difficult to grasp.

Overall the movie is very reflective in nature. There are various images that point towards certain periods in Jarmans life, like the protests against Section 28 and of course his own cottage and the garden. Without naming specific places and events, Jarman succeeded in showing the conditions of his time and life using poetic imagery. By sampling all kinds of materials he encountered during his life and bringing them together in new configurations, he managed to form a self portrait, a personal story, which in its turn can function as a mirror for others. *The Garden* can be seen as an effort by Jarman to find a place in a culture that had often been harmful to him and even denied parts of his life.

Towards a semiotics of sampling

The word sample originates in a scientific context. A sample is a small piece of a whole which as such can represent the whole where it's derived from. One could for example take a sample of a chemical substance and use it to determine the quality of the whole substance. However, once a sample is taken out of its original substance, it has the potential to become part of other substances. A sample can be repeated endlessly in different contexts, its meaning will change accordingly. This reminds of the way words in a language function. The sample can be seen as a sign conveying some sort of meaning. According to semiology, the meaning of a sign is dependent on its context. The meaning of one sign depends on the other signs surrounding it. That is why I would like to look at sampling in terms of semiotics. Although samples are not necessarily words, we can still say they convey some kind of meaning, just like signs. I would like to look at sampling as a signifying practice. It is like a language of images, containing

sound images, visual images, moving images and text images. However, before I can make this statement I first need to dive a little deeper into the field of semiotics.

Semiology

Semiology is a field of study that is concerned with language and signs. Semiology is a structuralist approach to linguistics, which means that it studies language by means of its structure instead of its individual parts. An important linguist and philosopher, who is actually one of the founders of semiology, is Ferdinand De Saussure. His understanding of language meant he examined it as a system consisting of signs. According to De Saussure the signs, or words, of a language don't refer to fixed objects in the 'real' world. Instead, language only refers to itself. De Saussure stated that the meaning of signs is the result of their differences and relations to other signs. De Saussure's theory proved to be a major influence for a lot of post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers in various scientific fields.

According to De Saussure the sign consists of a sound-image (the spoken word) and a mental image or the concept. In semiology the sound-image is called the signifier and the concept is called the signified. However, De Saussure states that the link between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Saussure, 101) . As Beetz puts it: There is no necessary connection, no intrinsic link, between a sound-image like [dolphin] and the mental image of 'dolphin' evoked by it. That makes the whole sign arbitrary, resting on nothing but social convention (Beetz 75).” In other words, there is no reason why the sign 'dolphin' is linked to the concept of a dolphin.

The implication of this arbitrariness is that signs themselves don't bear meaning in themselves. Their meaning only arises in their relation to other signs, i.e. in relation to their context. So although we can use signs to convey meaning, according to De Saussure meaning is only present in the linguistic structure as a whole and not in its individual strands. Later, we will see how philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan radicalised this idea by saying that there is no such thing as positive meaning, only negative meaning.

When we think of the term 'sympoietic' of Donna Haraway, we can see a resemblance to the nature of the sign. The nature of the sign is not autopoietic because it can't bear meaning on itself. The sign is co-dependent on the other signs in the language system and its meaning is

only the result of its relation to those signs. Now we can recognise that there are sympoietic-like dynamics between signs. As such language can be seen as a sympoietic system.

The decentered subject

The arbitrariness of the sign and the negative conception of meaning have a radical implication for the subject who depends on language to express itself to others. Since the meaning of a sign is only derived from the total structure of language, this means that the speaking subject is not the original source of meaning. As Beetz explains, quite the opposite is true: “In structuralism, the speaking subject is no longer the origin of meaning. The subject thinks and experiences the world in language, a structure that precedes it. Thus, it seems, the subject is spoken by language as much as it speaks language.” It seems that the subject itself is structured by language, and not the other way around. Therefore, according to Beetz, the subject is decentered in language.

The subordination of the subject to language is a crucial thought in the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan is known for his revision of the work of Freud with a strong emphasis on language. According to Lacan, the inner world of the subject is fundamentally structured by language. In the subject's early childhood, the subject enters into a language which has already been formed by others. Lacan calls language the Symbolic Order, or just the Symbolic. He also calls language *l'Autre*, the Other, because it is made up of the stories of others. Because of this, the subject is subjected to and formed by language, and not the other way around. This causes an internal split in the subject. Since the subject is only able to express itself through the language of the other, it is never able to do so fully. There is always a part of the subject that escapes symbolisation, that remains inexpressible. For Lacan this is where the unconscious comes into existence, as we know it from Freud. The unconscious part of the subject's innerworld is simply the part that cannot be put into words.

Already in an early stage of its development a child gains access to the symbolic order by being given its own name, a sign. This name places the subject into the chain of signifiers. However, like any sign, its meaning is only a negative meaning. By its name, the child is differentiated from all other signs in language, but the name itself only means as much as ‘not everything else’. When the subject wants to express itself or understand itself, it needs to do so through the

language of the other, and it needs to objectify itself by naming itself. Therefore, the subject actually loses its original subjectivity. This is why, in the innerworld of the subject, language causes a split between the conscious and the unconscious. What is inexpressible stays unconscious and is not directly accessible to the subject.

Before the child learns to speak it needs to pass through another stage of development. The child first needs to form a sense of being a whole. In what Lacan calls the mirror stage, the child, for the first time, recognises itself as a whole body when it identifies with its own image in the mirror. 'La fonction du stade du miroir s'avère pour nous dès lors comme un cas particulier de la fonction de l'imaginaire, qui est d'établir une relation de l'organisme à sa réalité.' (Lacan 1966, 96) Lacan explains that the mirror stage is a special function of the imago, the image, which is to establish a relation between the child and its reality. The child mirrors itself not only to an actual mirror but also to its parents and more broadly to everything surrounding it. Now the child has acquired a sense of an 'I', a 'moi': "le moi comme constitué en son noyau par une série d'identifications aliénantes" (Lacan 417). Here Lacan writes that the I, at its core, is assembled from a series of alienating identifications. Remarkable is that Lacan calls the identifications 'alienating'. This is because the identification is based on an illusion: the image the child uses to form a self, is borrowed from outside of itself, from the mirror and from its parents. The part of the experience that is concerned with images and identifications is what Lacan calls the Imaginary Order. The function of the Imaginary is to give the subject a sense of coherence and an image of itself as a whole unity.

We can now see that the subject is a fundamentally sympoietic being. Its formation as a subject is based on the Other down to its very foundation. It is based on identifications with other objects and beings. We could suggest that the subject itself is actually made up of 'samples'. Even the subject's sense of a self is borrowed from outside itself: the sensation of an 'I' is formed through identifications with other things and other subjects. Furthermore, to express itself, the subject has to depend on a language that already existed before the subject was even born, and that consists only of the narratives of others. To express its personal life story, the subject has to make use of existing images and narratives. We can think back of the carrier bag and we can begin to see the subject as a container, as a constellation of the stories of others.

Kathy Acker's fake identities

We just saw how the subject, for its formation, is fundamentally dependent on others: to enter language, the subject needs to objectify itself as an I. As Kristeva and Menke explain, “language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as I in the discourse” (35). Therefore the speaking and writing subject is never truly able to express their ‘real’ self. Even worse, the ‘I’ can take on a life of its own. Once it is written down anyone can take the place of the ‘I’. Poet Kathy Acker radicalised and played with the ambiguity of the ‘I’. She was an experimental writer who was active in the New York punk scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Inspired by the cut-up technique as practiced by Williams S. Burroughs, Acker would often cut up texts by other authors to rearrange them and implement them in her own work. For Acker the cut-up approach was not as much about plagiarism as it was a writing method. Acker wrote about her writing: “I do not write out of nothing, or from nothing, for I must write with the help of other texts (Acker 95).” By literally including the cut text fragments, Acker makes something explicit that is always part of a creative process. She shows that there is no work of art that is made out of nothing.

Not only did Acker take the place of other writers by copying their writings, she would also take the place of the different characters. She writes, for example “I tried to figure out who I was and who I wasn't and went to texts of murderesses. I just changed them into the first person... and put the fake first person next to the true first person (Acker 36).” By including text of others in her work and making herself merge with other characters, Acker shows that the self and the ‘I’ are actually radically fake. By stealing identities, Acker raises the question if an original self exists as such. On the contrary, she shows that it is actually possible to adopt different, or even multiple, personalities simultaneously. Acker also shows that we, as subjects, are sampled beings ourselves. We find ourselves constantly copying the behaviour of others and trying to fit into narratives that are culturally determined.

According to Beetz, language has a social function: our words need to be understood by others. Therefore language needs to be repeatable. This is something that has been pointed out by postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida with the concept *iterability*. Beetz explains that communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers (Beetz 84).” However, this iterability also implies an absence of the writer or speaker of the words, since the words can be repeated without their presence. In the iteration of text lies its potential of its comprehensibility, but also

of a possible change of meaning. Beetz writes that iteration “never just repeats but shifts the meaning of what is iterated (Beetz 84).” By placing texts in other contexts, Kathy Acker changes their meaning. She takes the place of the absent author, only to become absent herself.

Language as a material

Acker’s poetry also leads us to another important aspect of language: its materiality. Acker treats text as a material that can be cut up, altered, and deformed or even erased. Although language is often seen as an abstract system parallel to the real world, language relies on material entities and is therefore also material itself... In the above section, I explained that language has a social function and needs to be repeatable to be understood by others. Therefore language needs a carrier or a medium, it needs to be presentable to others in a certain form. Beetz writes: “In the absence of the author the writing has to be materially present, otherwise—in the absence of the text that has already severed the connection to any presence of the author—there can be no iteration (Beetz 84).” For language to be language it needs to take on a material form like ink on paper or light on a screen, or sounds from a voice (Beetz 82). This is also implied by the metaphor of the carrier bag: with the image of the carrier bag, Le Guin reformulates language and stories as material entities, as matter that can be collected and put in a bag. Without a carrier like sound or ink, language is useless because it is no longer transmittable. Donna Haraway writes: “The last thing the hero wants to know is that his beautiful words and weapons will be worthless without a bag, a container, a net (Haraway 39, 40).”

I think what Donna Haraway means with the expression “staying with the trouble” is that we should acknowledge the material foundation of language and thinking, and thus of ourselves. Our thinking is always troubled: because language is rooted in matter we can never extrude a clear *absolute* meaning. Even the most abstract sciences have their roots in daily social practices and physical encounters. According to Haraway, it is through the patterning and configuring of matter, that we can imagine and think new worlds. A world is like a web of patterns. Haraway leaves behind the sole interpretation of the story as a container. The carrier bag is not only a container, but a “bag of stars”, it holds constellations (Haraway 14).

To clarify this “patterning” Haraway uses the metaphor of string figures. String figures are figures that are made by stringing a cord between hands and fingers. According to Haraway

“String figures are like stories; they propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit, somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth (Haraway 10).” For Haraway, stories are manifest in daily practices and it is through seemingly ordinary practices like string figure games that



Figure 5 Sammlung prinzhorn. Embroidered coat made by Agnes Emma Richters in 1895.

we are able to imagine new worlds. “Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn’t there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite flourishing on terra, on earth (Haraway 10).

Agnes’ coat

The image above depicts a coat made by Agnes Richter. The jacket is part of the Prinzhorn collection. The Prinzhorn collection is a collection of artworks made by mental health patients

that were collected by Hans Prinzhorn between 1919 and 1921. Agnes Richter was a seamster who was hospitalised in a mental institution in Heidelberg. She was arrested for disturbing the peace in her hometown, after she had called the police several times, claiming that her money was being stolen. When entering the institution Agnes Richter was deprived of all her possessions. The jacket was probably made by stitching together parts of the institution uniform she had to wear. The most striking are the embroidered lines of text in different colours and sizes that run across the jacket. According to the website of the Prinzhorn collection the words are often barely readable. Some of the only phrases that have been identified read: 'my white stockings', 'no cherries', 'brother freedom', 'my money', 'no-one in Hubertusburg', 'I plunge headlong into disaster' and her laundry number '583'. Further the words 'Me' and 'I' often appear, indicating that the embroidered text is mostly autobiographical (Hornstein).

The coat seems to be an effort by Agnes Richter to hold onto herself while she was situated in the sterile environment of the institution, away from her possessions and relatives. She made the anonymous uniform into a personal garment. In a poetic way the coat shows how we need material objects to remind us who we are. Just like the child identifies with the image in the mirror, as we saw with Lacan, the coat could have given Agnes Richter something to identify with and to keep her *self* together as a whole unity: the coat literally enclosed her. As such the coat is another example of a carrier bag, but this time the carrier bag not only carries the life story of the carrier, but also the carrier itself. The texts on the jacket remind me of the string figures of Haraway. They show language in its pure materiality, the textile and the text have become one. And just like the garden around Prospect Cottage might have done for Derek Jarman, Agnes' coat might have offered her a pattern to inhabit, *somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth*. (Haraway 10)

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