“Dub Fiction”: The Musico-Literary Features of Jeff Noon’s *Cobralingus*

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Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tarkastelen englantilaisen kirjailijan Jeff Noonin kokeellisessa *Cobralingus*-teoksessa (2001) esiintyviä musikaalis-kirjallisia piirteitä. Kyseisiin piirteisiin kuuluviksi luokittelen kaikki ne teoksen muodolliset ja ilmaisulliset elementit, joiden ymmärtämistä täydentäisi tai merkittävästi värittäisi lukijan tietoisuus niistä musiikkigenreistä joista Noon tietoisesti ammensi ideoita. *Cobralingus* ja Noonin kolme aikaisemmin julkaistua ns. “dub fiction”-teosta (dub-fiktio) jakavat musikaalisen mallin, joka pohjautuu pääasiallisesti tiettyihin dub reggaen ja glitch-musiikin esteettisiin ja teknologisiin käytänteisiin. Kartoitettuani Noonin käyttämän musikaalisen mallin vaikutteita, tutkin millaisia kirjoitustekniikoita *Cobralingus* sisältää.

Analyysini *Cobralinguksen* ja kahden musiikkigenren intermediaalisesta sidoksesta rakentuu ensisijaisesti musikaalis-kirjallisten piirteiden tutkimukselle (musico-literary studies), jossa korostetaan kirjallisen teoksen ja sen musikaalisen mallin vertauskuvallista suhdetta. *Cobralinguksen* malli – toisin sanoen ne dub- ja glitch-genrejen piirteet, joista Noon löysi sekä yleisluonteisia taiteentekemisen periaatteita että tarkkoja teoksen muotoa koskevia ratkaisuja – on täten nähtävä lukijan tulkintaa osittain ohjailevana, muttei täydellisesti teoksen kokonaishahmoa selittävänä elementtinä. Tutkimukseni toisen teoreettisen kivijalan muodostaa anglo-amerikkalaisessa filosofiassa estetiikan alueella käyty keskustelu intentio-käsitteen roolista taiteessa.

Tutkielmani edetessä käy selväksi, että *Cobralinguksen* musikaalis-kirjallisten ja muiden piirteiden välillä on huomattavia, osittain tarkoituksellisia epäjohdonmukaisuuksia. Teosta jäsentävä ns. teksti signaalina -metafora esimerkiksi yksinkertaistaa kirjoitustekniikoiden koko kirjoa sekä luomisprosessin vaihtelevaista luonnetta. Johdantoteksteissään Noon esimerkiksi korostaa kyseisen metaforan avulla kirjoittamisen mekaanista, epäpersoonallista luonnetta, mutta väkevästi autobiografinen aines on läsnä monissa varsinaisissa *Cobralingus*-kirjoituksissa. Pyrinkin osoittamaan, miten musikaalinen malli on jatkuvassa vuorovaikutuksessa Noonin muiden ilmaisullisten tavoitteiden kanssa. Teksti signaalina -vertauskuvan rinnalla Noon kuljettaa mm. utopistista ajatusta “nestemäisestä”, orgaanisen aineksen tavoin manipuloitavissa olevasta kielestä. Nestekuvasto puolestaan esiintyy useissa *Cobralinguksen* lyhyissä proosatarinoissa. Musikaalinen malli täten palvelee Noonin ilmaisullisia pyrkimyksiä yhdessä teoksen muiden vertausten, teemojen ja motiivien kanssa.

Avainsanat: musikaalis-kirjallinen intermediaalisuus, musikaalinen metafora, dub reggae, glitch, kokeellinen kirjallisuus

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1. Introduction

"Dub fiction" is an all-purpose term coined by the British author Jeff Noon to characterize the diverse ways four of his books incorporate literary techniques modeled after popular electronic music produced during the last three decades of the twentieth century.[1] In the course of writing *Nymphomation* (1997), *Pixel Juice* (1998) and *Needle in the Groove* (2000), Noon drew inspiration from musical styles whose shared starting point can be traced back to the early 1970s and to the flourishing of the "sub-genre of Jamaican reggae music known as *dub*, which was pioneered by recording studio engineers such as Osbourne "King Tubby" Ruddock (1941-1989), Lee "Scratch" Perry (born 1935), Errol "Errol T." Thompson (1941-2005), and others".[2] *Cobralingus* (2001), a collection of ten experimental texts, could be seen as the culmination of this project of creating literature based on definite musical models. Since the label "dub fiction" presses together a wealth of information about the origins of Noon's literary experiments, it is essential to unpack the musical notions behind the term to see how they informed *Cobralingus* and the trio of works immediately preceding it. First, however, a few words need to said about the place of Noon's fiction within the broader context of twentieth-century experimental literature.

The aim of the current thesis will not be to place the musico-literary features of Noon's "dub fiction" works within a broad literary-historical framework. Such a framework would certainly have to examine the author's achievement in the light of dominant movements and texts such as 1) the avant-garde writings associated with Dada (Tristan Tzara's manifestos and poems) and Surrealism (the notion of automatic writing explored in André Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Les Champs Magnétiques* (1920)); 2) concrete poetry, both the twentieth-century works such as Eugen Gomringer's *Konstellationen* (1953), Augusto de Campos's *poetamenos* (1953) and Ian Hamilton

1 Noon 2001b and 2001c. In what follows, "contemporary electronic music" refers to the complex melange of popular and experimental developments which have taken place largely outside the realm of classical music in the past quarter-century or so. See Chapter 3.1. for more.

2 Veal 2007, 2.

Finlay's "Le circus" (1964) and "Acrobats" (1964) as well as the earlier history of visual poetry stretching from the few examples contained in the *Greek Anthology* to Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897) and Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918); 3) the constrained writing techniques of the Oulipo group[3] illustrated in Raymond Queneau's stylistically dexterous retellings of a banal incident in *Exercises de style* (1947) and Georges Perec's lipogrammatic novel *La Disparition* (1969); 4) William S. Burroughs's cut-up technique showcased in, for example, *The Third Mind* (1978, with Brion Gysin) and 5) other literary works with significant musical models[4]. In addition, the role of John Cage as a musical innovator and as a model for other twentieth-century artists would also be worth investigating. As it happens, Cage's impact ought to be present in *Cobralingus* through the works of the painter Tom Phillips and the composer Brian Eno, since Noon has acknowledged both the latter's 1975 album *Discreet Music* and the former's *A Humument* (1970 and later editions) as direct influences on the work.[5]

As a contemporary piece of experimental literature, *Cobralingus* is culturally marginal. The expressive effects of the work, too, are frequently delicate and even obscure. All the more reason, then, to trace the explicit musical influences and subtle literary consequences of Noon's models. The choice to go about the extra-literary route is also strengthened by the fact that it is the one that *Cobralingus* and its author insistently point to. The current thesis assumes that, for example, tracing the inspiration of *Cobralingus*'s method of textual erasure back to the techniques prevalent in dub and glitch music is a distinct task from comparing Noon's erasure method to Burroughs's cut-ups.[6] The first approach wants to discover the specific, perhaps even microscopic, context out of which the work actually emerged, while the second favors the exploration of a new literary artifact mainly

3 Cf. Mathews and Brotchie 2005.

4 See Chapter 2.1. for a list of prominent musico-literary works.

5 See Chapter 3.3.. Perhaps not incidentally, Phillips, in his role as Eno's teacher at Ipswich Art School in the 1960s, introduced the future composer to Cage's music and ideas (O'Brien 1998).

6 Noon has been candid about his relative unfamiliarity with authors such as Burroughs: "In my early days as a novellist [sic] I used to say I'd read Philip K. Dick and Burroughs and people like that, just because people kept comparing my work to theirs. But I came to realise it was actually more interesting to tell the truth. My interest in playing with words as a medium in their own right, for instance, is nothing to do with the influence of drugs, as it was for Burroughs, but entirely to do with my love of dub reggae and the mysteries of the remix. I've arrived at a similar place by an entirely different route" (Santala 2002).

through the lens of received wisdom. At its core, the thesis tries to pay attention to the minutest details of Noon's writings and then patiently locate the broader context specific to them. In the case of *Cobralingus*, this means limiting the scope of the study to Noon's musical models and pre-*Cobralingus* "dub fiction" works. And if the great bulk of pre-existing experimental literature is pruned in the process, this is less the result of wilful revisionism (on the part of either Noon or the present author) than of following and expanding on the work's textual evidence.[7]

In the field of contemporary electronic music, the terms "dub" and "remix" are used as approximate synonyms for the manipulation of borrowed sonic material (typically, entire songs or compositions) via electronic means.[8] For both musicians and critics, the coexistence of the words serves to acknowledge the historical precedence of dub reggae: "It was in Jamaica that a record stopped being a finished thing. Instead, in the studio, it became a matrix of sonic possibilities, the raw material for endless "dubs." Thus the concept of the remix was born (several years before similar ideas would dawn on the disco and HipHop DJs)".[9] So, although in everyday use the two terms have the same general meaning, outside of the context of reggae, "dub" also carries an honorific connotation: "The stylistic traits of contemporary dance music cannot solely be attributed to dub, but the fact that many American and European remixes are now labeled on recordings as "dub" mixes attests that many of dub's concepts lay at the heart of what is variously referred to today as "electronic dance music," "electronica," "DJ culture," and/or "remix culture"".[10]

Following this practice, Noon's "dub fiction" seeks to encompass not only the aesthetic

7 To play the devil's advocate for a moment: even if it were proven beyond reasonable doubt that Noon did in fact deliberately emulate, say, classic Oulipian writers such as Queneau and Perec, this fact would not change the statements and textual traces contained in *Cobralingus*. (Naturally, such a discovery would play havoc on the reliability of Noon's non-fictional statements.)

8 The *OED* defines the noun "remix" as: "A new version of a recording in which the separate instrumental or vocal tracks are rebalanced or recombined; (now also) a reinterpretation or reworking, often quite radical, of an existing music recording, typically produced by altering the rhythm and instrumentation; a commercial release of such a recording." A second definition acknowledges the broader, extramusical use of the word: "In extended use: a reworked version; a revamp, a remake." The entry on "dub" closely associates the word with its Jamaican origins: "A re-mixed version of a piece of recorded music, often with the melody line removed and including various special effects, which was developed in Jamaica and is popular esp. in reggae and other Black music."

9 Brewster and Broughton, quoted in Cox and Warner 2004, 327.

10 Veal 2007, 221.

ideas and production methods of the early console-based dub reggae, but also the digital, software-driven electronica of artists such as Oval, Pole and Mouse on Mars: "*Electronica* represents the unlikely meeting of several genealogical strands: the sonic and intellectual concerns of classic electronic music; the do-it-yourself and bruitist attitudes of punk and industrial music; and beat-driven dance floor sounds from disco through House and Techno".[11] As this concise description suggests, even though "electronica" can be broadened to signify the entirety of contemporary electronic dance music, a narrower definition reserves the term for the experimental branch of the genre. It is the music's experimental branch – and particularly the sub-genre known as "glitch electronica" – which together with dub reggae forms the core influences of Noon's music-inspired works.

Throughout his career, Noon has shown a preference for assigning his works with evocative, labels, either directly by the use of subtitles or by mentioning them in interviews or other writings. Alongside "dub fiction", Noon used the labels "post futurist" and "liquid culture" in connection with *Cobralingus*. The problem with such neologistic tags – including the book's subtitle, "metamorphiction" – is that they merely hint at the wide range of techniques involved in the reworking of borrowed literary texts.[12] This is of course also true of "dub fiction", but the term does have the distinct advantage of being both indicative of the general nature of the work and inclusive in terms of genre: the first word underlines the interplay between music and literature, while the second embraces both poetry and prose. "Dub fiction", then, is the term that will be used throughout the present thesis to refer to Noon's enterprise of appropriating the concepts of dubbing and remixing into the domain of imaginative writing.[13]

Proceeding in two clear-cut stages, my thesis aims to explore the precise nature of the

11 Cox and Warner 2004, 365. While Oval, Pole and Mouse on Mars are German bands, the 1990s Internet revolution assured that the composers and listeners of (glitch) electronica formed an international mix. For example, the Japan-based sound artist Ryoji Ikeda and the British bands Autechre and .snd are briefly mentioned in Chapter 3.1..

12 See Chapter 3.3. for an in-depth look at the terms "liquid culture" and "metamorphiction".

13 If we assume Noon's authorship of at least the key sections of the blurbs (and their specific and unconventional phrasing favors such a view), it is significant that both *Pixel Juice*'s "dub cut prose remixes" and *Needle in the Groove*'s "liquid dub poetics" are associated with the creation of a new writing or storytelling style.

aesthetic ideas and writing techniques that Noon relies on in reworking literary quotations and other verbal material in *Cobralingus*.[14] This exploration seeks to understand the work from two complementary interpretive vantage points: an initial obeisance to the context set up by Noon's commentary (in the form of essays, interviews and *Cobralingus*'s prefatory sections) gives way to the issues introduced by the author's practice in the ten *Cobralingus* pieces. The first step, the focus of Part 3, will scrutinize Noon's interart analogy by expanding on the topics just raised: how can *Cobralingus* and the author's previous "dub fiction" writings be said to have been modeled after electronic music ranging from dub reggae to glitch electronica? After providing a brief historical overview of contemporary electronic music which pays special attention to the aesthetic and technological features relevant to "dub fiction" (Chapter 3.1.), I will touch upon how the "prose remixes" of the works leading up to *Cobralingus* differ from those found in the later book (Chapter 3.2.). Part 3 closes with a detailed analysis of the metaphoric framework – the so-called "Cobralingus filtering device" – which emphasizes the extra-literary models behind its singular format. Chapter 3.3. also examines the relationship between *Cobralingus*'s text-as-signal metaphor and Noon's concept of "liquefied" language.

If taken at face value, the great majority of Noon's non-fictional claims either collapse under the weight of contradictory evidence or simply remain imprecise figures of speech. It is more productive to treat the author's oblique neologisms and other statements concerning the influences and techniques of his work as a further artistic layer which may be superimposed on his small library of "dub fiction". The second stage of my thesis, which takes up Part 4, begins by largely removing this conceptual covering and examines the array of writing techniques used in *Cobralingus* without much recourse to Noon's musico-literary metaphors. When we disregard the

14 My reason for preferring "rework" over other candidates like "rewrite", "alter" or "transform" is that the term emphasizes agency and effort while distinguishing between the quoted text and Noon's subsequent versions. "Rewriting literary quotations", for example, implies revision or mere rewording, as if Noon were out to mend deficient texts. One might speak of "altering" or "modifying" borrowed pieces of literature, but I feel the associations of such words are too close to the mechanical metaphors of the "Cobralingus filtering device". As general descriptions of Noon's music-inspired work, "transformation" and "metamorphosis" too have to be ruled out because of their strong poetic and organic echoes. Neither overly mechanical or fantastical, "rework" points to Noon's texts as something intentional and man-made.

terminology appropriated from music-making, a host of traditional issues tackled by literary studies come to the fore. If a work of "dub fiction" is summarized as a piece of literature which uses specific techniques to rework or manipulate literary quotations, we may begin to tease apart what is entailed in the creation and reception of such an artifact.[15]

The three chapters of Part 4 address the questions raised by (1) the expressive intentions of the *Cobralingus* pieces, and (2) the techniques of textual reworking which Noon uses to create the various texts. *Cobralingus* has a number of striking affinities with many prominent tendencies of twentieth-century experimental art and literature.[16] Chapter 4.1. strengthens the claim that the concept of liquidity is pivotal to Noon's aesthetic thinking by discussing the use of liquid imagery in three *Cobralingus* narratives. In Chapter 4.2., expressive typography, literary constraints, deliberate semantic vagueness and other techniques – first among them the method of erasure as applied by the British painter and book artist Tom Phillips (*A Humument*) – will be discussed alongside topics such as fixed poetic forms and improvisation. This last item is important. The definition of "writing technique" used in this thesis finds room for ways of writing or reworking existing material which do not rely solely on rule-bound procedures, since Noon's overall creative approach is undoubtedly very much an improvisational one.[17] When all these formal factors are taken into account, an argument could be made that *Cobralingus* brings to a kind of terminus Noon's experimentation with the "dub fiction" concept while continuing to develop the themes central to his output throughout the 1990s. Therefore, Part 4 concludes with an interpretation of the second *Cobralingus* text, "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", as a complete and unified

15 Noon's term should not to be confused with the so-called "dub poetry" practiced by writers such as Mutabaruku and Linton Kwesi Johnson. This poetic form "stems from the experimental setting of verse to music: the politically challenging poems, often expounding a Rastafari world view, are typically recited in a heavy patois, whilst the rhythmic emphasis is provided by straightforward reggae or a backdrop of jazzy instrumentals and Niyabinghi beats" (Katz 2003, 294). See Habekost 1993.

16 As mentioned in the Introduction, technical or aesthetic aspects which offer, if not outright sources of influence, at the very least useful points of comparison would include the expressive typography of concrete poetry, the literary constraints of the Oulipo group, non-semantic Dada poetry and the automatic writings of Surrealism.

17 The way I use the term, "improvisation" is meant to suggest, mainly, Noon's openness to formal experimentation. The term also refers to his ambiguous stance on revision: certain sections of *Cobralingus* may well have not been rewritten at all. The multi-layered and largely spontaneous nature of free jazz improvisation and other experimental music is congenial to Noon, but his improvisational approach should not be equated with the type of highly unconventional music of composer-instrumentalists like Anthony Braxton and Evan Parker. See also Chapter 4.2..

work of fiction. Remaining attentive to matters of quotation and textual reworking, the chapter hopes to show how these features work alongside traditional means such as narration and characterization to achieve particular expressive effects.

As the foregoing remarks have perhaps indicated, the present study will in the main employ two sets of theoretical tools. The exploration of the "dub fiction" concept will make use of the relatively recent and actively expanding field of musico-literary studies, while Noon's non-fictional comments and *Cobralingus*'s self-conscious form require a philosophical grounding in the role intention can play in art interpretation. "Musico-literary studies", pioneered by Calvin S. Brown (who coined the term), Steven Paul Scher and others, has in recent years been established as one of the labels by which to group a host of scholarly pursuits relating to the intermedial or interart relations existing between literature and music.[18] For Werner Wolf, "musicalization of fiction" – the passage from Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928) which contains the phrase is a *locus classicus* of word and music studies – indicates "a presence of music in the signification of a text which seems to stem from some kind of transformation of music into literature. The verbal text appears to be or become, to a certain extent, similar to music or to effects connected with certain compositions, and we get the impression of experiencing music 'through' the text".[19]

The stipulation that a musically inspired literary work entails a "transformation of music into literature" has created vexing ontological problems for a considerable portion of musico-literary scholarship since "the 'musicalness' of allegedly musicalized fiction as well as musicalized literature in general is always to a large extent a metaphor whose justification is anything but self-explanatory. Therefore the claim that a literary text is musicalized should be made with extreme caution, and the same is true of the very use of musical terminology if applied to literary texts".[20]

18 According to Wolf, "intermedial" is "a flexibile adjective that can be applied, in a broad sense, to any phenomenon involving more than one medium or what originally was conceived of as one medium" (Wolf 1999, 36). Thus, one may speak of the features of musico-literary intermediality present in a work like *Cobralingus*. In current research, the term has effectively replaced "interart" in scholarly efforts to "analyze how the aesthetic and semiotic practices of one art have been transferred or intermingled with another art" (Lagerroth and Hedling 1997, 223).

19 Wolf 1999, 51.

20 Ibid., 71.

Reacting to such demands for terminological caution and justification, Eric Prieto has advanced a convincing case for concluding that

> the question of appropriateness, the search for some deciding criterion of musicality, has been seriously overestimated in the majority of scholarly attempts to account for and explain the musical claims of literary texts. For no matter how consistently all the arts, as Pater would have it, aspire to the condition of music, there can be no literal contact between music and literature short of the actual superimposition of the two, as in song, opera, and the like. Barring this situation of mutual supplementarity, the only relationship that can obtain between music and literature is a metaphorical one.[21]

Once the metaphoricity of the relationship is taken as a given, the musico-literary critic can aim to "isolate and analyze zones of semiotic overlap between music and literature" rather than simply "focusing on direct comparison between musical and literary works".[22] In the case of *Cobralingus*, this metaphoric relationship could be expressed as follows: "The *Cobralingus* pieces sample and remix a borrowed text like a composer of dub or electronica would an existing recording". The relationship itself has limited interest if Noon's "dub fiction" project is not considered as of a piece with the twentieth-century literary trend in which "music has not only served as a theme for modernist storytellers but also as a model for the semiotic functioning of the narrative text, affecting the ways their narratives make and communicate meaning".[23] The stress in current musico-literary criticism has tended to fall on the models Western classical music has offered to novelists, poets and dramatists. Since Noon's works draw inspiration from a popular musical culture that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, the present thesis hopes to contribute to the range covered by the intermedial study of literature and music.

As we turn our attention to the topic of intentionalism, the first thing that needs to be said is just how nuanced the differing philosophical accounts of authorial intention are. The advocates of one or another variety of actual or hypothetical intentionalism – as well as critics with an anti-intentionalist attitude – agree on something like the following definition: "Intentionalism in the

21 Prieto 2002a, 17.
22 Ibid., xi.
23 Ibid., ix.

philosophy of art interpretation is, in general, a thesis about intention's determination of the meaning *or* value of works of art. Intentionalism can also be characterized as a family of principles that are supposed to describe apt interpretation or appreciation, namely, those in which authorial intention is the target of some if not all attributions".[24] Chapter 2.2. will offer reasons for subscribing to a brand of moderate or partial actual intentionalism as the outlook which "correctly codifies the orientation of a type of interpretation and criticism that seeks to assess the actual author's intentional accomplishment".[25]

One of the underlying assumptions of the present thesis is that an interpretative approach which takes into account the author's intentions (including, but not limited to, the explicit ones that Noon has presented in articles and interviews) is likely to yield a richer, more nuanced aesthetic experience than one omitting such considerations. The relevance of authorial intention for a critical inquiry of *Cobralingus* is supported by the work's self-conscious positioning as a literary experiment:

> Works of art, like other artefacts, can be put to a bewildering diversity of uses, some of which diverge radically from the purposes the works were designed to fulfil, and from the maker's expressive or communicative aims. And as the popular version of 'the intentional fallacy' has it, biographical knowledge cannot replace scrutiny of the pictures or poems. No one's intentions are infallible, so there is a conceptual gap between the completed work and whatever plans may have preceded its making. Yet there is also an 'anti-intentional fallacy' that ought to be better known. For example, we badly misunderstand and fail to appreciate the specific value of Raku tea bowls if we are unfamiliar with the ideal of *wabi* and the artist's attendant designs, that is, if we do not know they were intentionally made to have irregularities (that advocates of a different aesthetic would later disparage).[26]

As Parts 3 and 4 will attempt to demonstrate, *Cobralingus* and Noon's entire "dub fiction" enterprise share an aesthetic which deserves to be understood on its own terms. Granting the author's non-fictional explications a privileged (but not peremptory) evidential value is a way of enhancing the critical engagement. Noon's views on "dub fiction" do not bind the commentator's

24 Livingston 2010, 405.
25 Ibid., 411.
26 Livingston 2005, 210.

tongue by exhaustively deciphering the works' meanings, nor do they render void any further exploration of their expressive scope.

Especially in light of the elaborate, supposedly mechanical "Cobralingus filtering device", authorial intention is clearly a topic that *Cobralingus* engages with again and again. A *Cobralingus* piece begins with a quotation and is followed by short, interrelated texts. The total effect of these texts, some more self-contained than others, is to represent a process which transforms a quoted passage into a set of new pieces. This format consistently prompts the reader to contemplate the act of writing, and to picture an author – either a wholly imaginary figure or one based on Noon himself – making conscious choices in order to achieve expressive goals. The reworking of literary quotations also cannot but involve the probable authorial intentions of the quoted texts, and one of Noon's most telling claims is that all the borrowed texts possessed for him a highly personal resonance of some kind. In offering tentative answers to the questions posed by these features of the work, I will attempt to remain sensitive to the distinctions between the finished artifact, the process of its making, and the author's subsequent discussions of both.

To date, academic interest in Noon's work has been erratic, consisting mostly of passing mentions. If the author is named without specifying any of his titles, he is usually discussed in the context of science fiction (or the sub-genre of cyberpunk).[27] Criticism which mentions individual works tends to focus on Noon's early work, particularly his debut novel *Vurt* (1993) and its sequel *Pollen* (1995). More than one Lewis Carroll scholar has taken note of *Automated Alice* (1996), but their attention rarely extends to Noon's body of work as a whole. The fantastical imagery of his early works has both incited debate about generic classification as well as provided some critics apt

27 Interestingly, in his preface to the *Mirrorshades* anthology (1986), Bruce Sterling mentions "the jarring street tech of hip-hop and scratch music" as one of the extra-literary influences on the then-emerging cyberpunk aesthetic. (Later, Sterling associates scratch music with Burroughs's cut-up method.) In the essay "Post Futurist Manifesto", Noon evokes a specific hip-hop phrase when discussing his improvisational writing ideal: "Hip-hop DJs have a phrase to describe the detailed, moment to moment controlling of a set of turntables, celebrated in the classic early track by Gang Starr, "DJ Premier in Deep Concentration". The post-futurist novel will employ just such a concentration in its use of language" (Noon 2001c). When it comes to Noon's artistic influences, it is often better to assume a musical rather than a literary source. See also Chapter 3.1..

visualizations of their theoretical interests.[28] Remarking on how the works from *Nymphomation* onward acquire a noticeably more naturalistic tone while retaining and even furthering the linguistic inventiveness already apparent in the earlier novels, David Ian Paddy suggests that Noon's fictions typically depict "hallucinatory worlds of the near future where inner visions become external realities that are sometimes beautiful, sometimes nightmarish".[29] Noon's output during the 1990s forms a body of work occupying a marginal position within both speculative and experimental fiction, perhaps largely due to the author's characteristic openness to both generic imagery and formal experimentation.[30] The contribution made by the musico-literary features of *Cobralingus* to this unique aesthetic in contemporary literature will be the prime interest of my thesis.

28 Recent works of criticism which discuss (however superficially) Noon's individual books include Brooker 2005 (*Automated Alice*), Harris and Taylor 2005 (*Pollen*, *Nymphomation*) and Shaviro 2003 (*Nymphomation*, *Needle in the Groove*).

29 Paddy 2003.

30 Although I will later label some of Noon's stories unproblematically as "science fiction" (see Chapters 3.2., 4.1. and 4.3.), for the bulk of the thesis I will use "fantastical" as an open-ended term for the non-realistic elements of Noon's fiction. Generic influences certainly figure in Noon's aesthetic, but they intermingle with other elements (such as music, myth and self-conscious evocations of writing and creativity) in such unconventional ways that, for the sake of both simplicity and the main aims of my thesis, their detailed analysis will be omitted here. As a temporary label, the various senses of "fantastical" (whimsical, fantastic, chimerical, unstable, far-fetched, invented) leave the door open to generic conventions and Noon's particular expressive concerns alike.

2. Musical Metaphors: Questions of Intermediality and Intention

2.1. Musico-Literary Intermediality

As a burgeoning critical enterprise, studies of intermediality have had to contend with two sets of issues arising from the intertwined histories of artistic practice and scholarship. In brief, these questions circle around, on the one hand, the notions of the distinctiveness and purity of art forms and, on the other, the highly specialized critical terminologies that have evolved around the various arts. Before focusing on how the study of musico-literary intermediality has responded to these issues, it is instructive to take a slight detour by mentioning an earlier but related use of the term "intermedia": "Introduced in the vocabulary of contemporary art disciplines around the mid-1960s, "intermedia" and its various derivatives have become household names for the characterization of artistic phenomena that appear either to fall between established categories or to fuse their criteria".[31] Originating in a 1966 essay by Dick Higgins[32], an early member of the Fluxus movement and the founder of Something Else Press, the term has since been associated not only with artists such as Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys and Allan Kaprow, but also with other contributions to contemporary art made in their wake.

The fact that we can now readily talk about happenings, earthworks and performance art as discrete mediums of artistic expression exemplifies how the making and appreciation of art have an essentially social character, one heavily reliant on broadly shared conventions about materials, techniques and modes of expression. As Ken Friedman puts it: "Many forms of contemporary art began as intermedia. Artists' books, stamp art, performance art, mail art, certainly video all emerged into solidified media from the realm of intermedia. ... The most successful intermedia forms will eventually cease to be intermedia. They will finally become established media with names, histories, and contexts of their own".[33] To give a fuller picture of the connotations of the term

31 Vos 1997, 325.
32 See Higgins 1966.
33 Friedman 2005, 53.

"medium", two further terms should also be mentioned. "Mixed media" refers to any artistic technique which combines two or more materials in a single work – a painting executed in ink and pastel, for example. "Multimedia", by contrast, combines two or more distinct forms, usually in a contemporary art context (for instance, a work of installation art employing video and sculpture).[34] This welter of neighboring, significantly overlapping terms illustrates the degree to which the technological and expressive senses of the word "medium" remain undifferentiated. The adoption of an intermedial standpoint helps one to see how this sort of conceptual confusion has affected the entire history of the arts.

Whereas Higgins' "intermedia" foregrounds the provisional or hybrid nature of particular (mostly twentieth-century) artworks, intermediality as a recent critical undertaking assumes the task of investigating the full variety of creative exchanges that have occurred and continue to occur between the arts. The openly interdisciplinary outlook seeks both to explore the role intermedial features and works have played in the history of art and to invent or reformulate the analytical tools necessary for such a task. W.J.T. Mitchell's work on the illuminated books of William Blake, for example, makes use of literary and art-historical studies in an effort to articulate the manifold ways in which the poet-painter's "composite art" communicates meanings made possible only by its intermediality.[35] Mitchell's preferred term for works building on both verbal and visual literacy is "imagetext", while "iconotext" is Peter Wagner's coinage covering the same central concept in word and image studies. Both refer to "an artifact in which the verbal and the visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images".[36] Daniel Allington's illustrations to *Cobralingus* certainly count as iconotexts, and the expressive typography of Noon's pieces also requires a method of reading that neglects neither the textual nor the visual elements.[37]

34 The former term, however, also encompasses works which bring together painting and collage. And the latter is additionally used to separate earlier media technologies (print, radio, television) from the new digital media (computing, especially the Internet).
35 See Mitchell 1978.
36 Wagner 1996, 16.
37 For the relevance of typography to *Cobralingus*, see Chapter 4.2..

In *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Werner Wolf draws a rudimental distinction between overt/direct and covert/indirect types of intermediality. Based on this classification, the musical references in the titles of Paul Klee's abstract works such as *Fuge in Rot* (1921) and *Pastorale (Rhythmen)* (1927) would be adequate to establish covert intermedial relations between painting and music. The distinction is based on the presence of medial characteristics: "In the field of an intermedial involvement of literature and the visual arts in a text, the much discussed phenomenon of 'ekphrasis' (the verbalization of, e.g., a painting in a novel, short story or poem) would be another striking example of indirect intermediality, which may be opposed to the directly intermedial participation of text and image in illustrated novels or in comic strips".[38] Wolf's overt intermediality is most useful in discussions of new hybrid works (cf. Higgin's "intermedia") or forms which are either relatively uncommon or which have so far received insufficient critical attention as a genre (illustrated novels, for instance). But, as Friedman emphasizes, when more than one medium is habitually brought together practical and critical conventions begin to coalesce under a common name: even if modern comics continue to draw on literary and visual culture (and much else besides), the traditions of creating sequential art are stable and robust enough to make references to direct intermediality on the whole dispensable. In fact, Wolf's classificatory scheme seems to be underpinned by a view of artistic media as separate, clear-cut forms instead of as highly revisable sets of cultural practices whose histories show a considerable degree of complementary influence.

The metaphor of form-as-boundary is symptomatic of the classical view of the distinctiveness of artistic forms. For appreciators and critics alike, a potential source of confusion with certain "borderline cases" in, say, painting (Hogarth's graphic art serves as a paradigmatic example) or relatively new media like comics relates to the difficulty of judging which interpretative conventions one has to call upon in order to fully understand the intermedial work. In most cases of intermedial art, proper appreciation requires learning practices specific to the work's novel

38 Wolf 1999, 43.

configuration of formal characteristics. The existence of intermedial features verifies that the concept of medial distinctiveness does not entail medial purity. The fact that each art form has a distinct set of characteristics (the senses the art addresses, the materials used to create the work, and so on) does not imply that some of these characteristics cannot be shared (either concretely or at a more abstract level) with other forms. Therefore, both music and (spoken, recited) literature address themselves to the sense of hearing, and in each case we can analyze the content of a given work in terms of, for example, its rhythmic qualities. Rhythm, in turn, is one of the most frequently cited examples of an abstract quality which can be expanded beyond discussions of sound to the realm of the visual and plastic arts.

The history of critical language, including writings in which prominent artists stake out their theoretical positions, charts the difficulties that arise when aesthetic properties are corralled into medium-specific contexts. The problem of differentiating between heterogeneous and homogeneous elements can still be felt in much of the received wisdom about the nature of the arts. Historically, partisan interests have contributed in large measure to this prevailing state of disarray: the Horacian formulation of *ut pictura poesis* already captures the thought that the arts can be placed in a hierarchy according to their expressive merits. In the Renaissance *paragone*, or contest, for supremacy among the arts, the political maneuvering of individual artists is glaringly undisguised. In the notion of the various "sister arts" we can see the hierarchical strictures begin to ease somewhat, but the boundary metaphor envisioning forms of art as impenetrable territories continues to loom large. The telling choice of metaphor produces rhetoric which easily lends itself to contentious usages: the medial borders are said to be "broken" or "crossed" or "blurred"; that is, the clarity or definition of the medial lines is corrupted, made less distinct. In this kind of language, the governing metaphor further jumbles the various abstract and concrete properties uniting and distinguishing the arts. The upshot of the foregoing is that the genuine heterogeneity which sets the arts apart does not rule out the emergence of intermedial forms: the making of sound sculptures

(Harry Bertoia's *Sonambient* series, for instance) is informed by absolute music and traditional sculpture even though the resulting works call for an intermedial approach to interpretation.

As musico-literary studies aim to embrace all kinds of intermedial relations between the two arts, the field can be seen as a continuum of approaches reflecting the interests and methodologies of musicologists and literary scholars alike. Here the basic typology devised by Steven Paul Scher remains informative.[39] Firstly, under the rubric of "music and literature" can be placed all the varieties of vocal music: popular songs (including reggae and non-instrumental dub), operas and lieder, choral music, and so forth. The adaptation of poetry into songs and the collaborative work between composers and librettists are examples of this highly prominent strand of overt musico-literary interaction. Secondly, "literature in music" describes the indirect variety of program music, including works like Franz Liszt's symphonic poems *Prometheus* (1850) and *Orpheus* (1853-4) and Richard Strauss' tone poem *Don Quixote* (1897). While glitch electronica rarely if ever makes strictly literary references, the premise of the music as an engagement with the failure of technology constitutes an important extramusical element. Finally, "music in literature" contains all the covert intermedial phenomena in which the medium of literature is somehow affected by musical models. In other words, a literary work like *Cobralingus* has no overt musical component (other than its aural and prosodic qualities), but any serious interpretation of the work has to negotiate the semantic relevance of the musical intertexts of dub reggae and glitch electronica to the functioning of the text.

Given the staggering scope of musico-literary phenomena, it is perhaps understandable why the majority of volumes issued by the International Association of Word and Music Studies since the late 1990s have offered potpourris of scholarly articles centered largely on questions relating to the Western art-music tradition. In its broadest sense, musico-literary studies can be summarized as a critical stance "according to which musicology is newly attentive to literature and literary studies

39 Scher 1982, 175.

is newly cognizant of musicology".[40] Such a Protean attitude has thus far been most fruitful when searching for ways to synthesize or rejuvenate traditionally active areas of research: the aesthetic thinking behind the literary and musical manifestations of German Romanticism is one such area of rife intermedial interest.[41] These studies often concern Scher's first two classes, and tend to launch their inquiries from a musicological basis. By contrast, the third class finds its point of departure in literary studies. The employment of musical models in narrative prose – which Wolf, following Huxley's lead, refers to as "musicalized fiction" – is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon connected with European Modernism, but is rooted in important ways in the reformulation of the relationship between music and poetry which took place in the course of French Symbolism.

When turning their attention to musicalized fiction, Wolf and Scher often imply that a translation of some kind has to occur before it is critically warranted to discuss the musicality of a given piece of literature. In this they are following in the footsteps of Calvin S. Brown, one of the field's pioneers, in whose writings an insensitivity to metaphor more often than not results in a kind of formalism run riot. Brown focuses on direct comparisons between musical and literary effects, and since he rarely gives consideration to the artistic motivations behind intermedial metaphors, the literary works are routinely found wanting (unsurprisingly, a literary "counterpoint" does not, as it by definition cannot, follow the strictures of musical counterpoint). Failing to see that a metaphor borrowed from another art form can frequently be seen as a means by which an artist is able to express something about his or her own form in a discursive manner, Brown's judgement on intermedial matters can lead to absurd pronouncements, as when he admonishes Mallarmé for "getting by with forced analogies and false logic which would be instantly challenged if presented in a less ingratiating fashion".[42] In an even-handed account of Brown's position as an early contributor to the field, Walter Bernhart characterizes Brown as an "essentialist", "a stern defender of the 'separatist' view of the relationship between music and literature" whose aesthetic thinking is

40 Benson 2006, 4.
41 See Donovan and Elliott 2004.
42 Brown, quoted in Bernhart 2000, 99.

on the whole ill-equipped to deal with "historical periods that were syncretistic rather than separatist in nature".[43]

Although the work of Scher and Wolf discriminates between the domains of artistic practice and critical commentary with greater suppleness, both writers continue to frame the discussion of musicalized fiction in terms which strongly suggest as if one art form were metamorphosing into another, as if literature were in the process of becoming music. A major thread running through Scher's essays on the topic concerns the lack of agreed-upon terminology in dealing with interartistic phenomena. More generally, he considers "the predilection of some critics for a set of terms based on little more than metaphorical impressionism"[44] as a serious hindrance to developing such a terminology. In the lineage formed by Brown, Scher and Wolf – a lineage which covers half of the twentieth century – the analytical dilemmas raised by the metaphorical linking of literature and music find no solution which would help us to approach individual works of art in the expressive terms made possible by their intermediality. Eric Prieto's work – particularly *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative*, his book-length study of the musico-literary strategies employed by Robert Pinget, Michel Leiris and Samuel Beckett – marks a major step in this direction.

To date, Prieto's is the most sustained attempt to redevelop the concept of musico-literary intermediality away from perennial methodological insecurities about the nature of metaphor.[45] In so doing, he has made significant strides toward an approach which both acknowledges historical changes (without clinging to theoretical constructs which stress artistic ideals or formal purity) and is able to explicate the workings of individual artifacts operating under widely differing aesthetic principles. In fairness, many of these analytical moves have been mentioned or actually carried out in a number of essays by other musico-literary scholars, but Prieto's account stands out for the

43 Bernhart 2000, 128.
44 Scher 1972, 38.
45 Prieto in fact does not use the terms "musico-literary intermediality" or "musicalized fiction". Instead, he talks of literary works possessing a "musical intertext" or "model" which influences the form of the text. The present thesis uses all four designations side by side.

nuanced, resolute manner in which he refashions the pivotal question of metaphoricity for any literary work with a musical model as a shaping influence. For Prieto, the problem with the type of work exemplified by Wolf and Scher lies in granting inordinate attention to what are essentially verbal entanglements: "[H]aving correctly diagnosed a common source of critical error, the loose metaphor, these critics allow the question of metaphoricity to dominate their analyses to the exclusion of all other considerations. They mistake the effect (metaphors) for the cause (the irreducible heterogeneity of music and literature)".[46] Once this need for regulating the use of metaphor in artistic and critical contexts is transcended, more pressing questions about the functioning of musical intertexts in the creation of specific literary features can be tackled:

> Without evidence of some general pattern of intent in the work, the interart comparison will be of little interest. A metaphor dropped in passing may have no more than a decorative value, but a metaphor introduced into a larger tissue of related evidence establishes a pattern. If such a pattern can be found, it indicates that the musical (or literary) intertext may be acting as a generative model for the text or as a guide to interpretation. ... A model, as I use the term, is a type of metaphor, but one that guides the writer and the reader in the creation and interpretation of the text. Only when the metaphor provides insight into the inner workings of the text can it be shown to fulfill a role that is more than decorative.[47]

The harnessing of music to literary uses will be discussed in Part 3 in connection with the musical model informing the shape of *Cobralingus*. For now, it is enough to note that the "specifically narrative use of music is unprecedented in literary history"[48] before the beginning of the Modernist era. The first such attempts at musicalized fiction are to a considerable extent reactions to the ways in which the traditional nineteenth-century novel had solidified certain representational conventions while in the process decoupling writing from performance. In the parallel history of poetry, the aural dimension, as well as the elemental fact that any literary experience (including mimetic effects) is engendered word by word, had not been suppressed or discarded:

> Modern narrative genres, on the other hand, have tended to identify themselves

46 Prieto 2002a, 19.

47 Prieto 2002b, 56-58. Following Prieto, I will frequently refer to *Cobralingus*'s "musical intertext", but intertextuality as such will not be explored in detail. For a concise overview of the concept's history, see Allen 2000.

48 Prieto 2002a, ix.

> increasingly with writing and to forget and even actively repress the links that had traditionally bound narrative to music and performance. ... The ancient epics, like the medieval chansons de geste, were certainly sung or chanted, but novelists have consistently downplayed this historical link between narrative and performance in order to focus with ever greater exclusivity on problems of representation, referentiality, and the mimetic illusion. Thus novelists have tended to emphasize the denotative function of language over all else, subordinating the linguistic performance to the objects and events to which they refer.[49]

By allowing musical intertexts to shape their fictions, Modernist writers from Joyce and Woolf to Huxley and Mann were able to revise some of the conventions traditionally associated with narrative prose.[50] Their individual methods produced a fascinating range of musico-literary effects, but it needs to be underscored that a musical intertext forms only a part of the complex set of artistic considerations structuring a given work. The critical attention granted to intermedial features should not cloud the overall form of the piece from view. The study of musico-literary intermediality needs to be guided by a pragmatic, context-sensitive approach which zeroes in on those aspects of the chosen musical metaphor that would make a reading omitting the extra-literary intertext look incomplete or seriously lop-sided. The central, analytical chapters of the present thesis (Parts 3 and 4) will consider *Cobralingus* as a literary work with just such a semantically significant musical intertext.

2.2. Authorial Intention

In the previous chapter, we saw how critics with entrenched or lingering essentialist norms ran into a brick wall when presented with works executed in one art form in such a way as to contain fundamental links to the practices of another medium. Why should the interpretation of a literary work with a semantically relevant musical model pose problems for critics already well-versed in

49 Ibid., 11.

50 The "Dream Fugue" section of Thomas de Quincey's *The English Mail-Coach* (1849) is often considered as a precursor to the Modernist interest in musical models. Prominent musico-literary works include the "Sirens" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Virginia Woolf's "The String Quartet" (1921), Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928) and Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1949). Later English-language contributions such as Anthony Burgess's *Napoleon Symphony: A Novel in Four Movements* (1974) and *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* (1991) and Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) have also received scholarly attention. In his study, Prieto discusses Robert Pinget (*Passacaille* (1969)), Michel Leiris (the autobiographical works beginning with *L'Age d'homme* (1939)) and Samuel Beckett (*Watt* (1953) and a host of other works).

the explication of other pieces of literature? I believe that the reason for this apparent difficulty – and for the resistance that authorial intention, the topic of the current chapter, has often met in literary studies – can be attributed in part to the ill-defined concept of interpretation itself. As mentioned in the Introduction, the relevance of authorial intentions in establishing the meaning or value of works of art remains a contested question in the philosophy of art interpretation. And profound disagreements about the nature and aims of criticism certainly do not cover all the reasons behind the debate.[51] Mirroring a lack of consensus at that higher, metacritical level, the academic discussion about authorial intention not infrequently makes the concept out to be a whirligig, an open and modifiable definition whose importance for criticism can easily be either buttressed or shot down depending on one's point of view. That the debate tends to have a polemic edge comes as no surprise when we realize that intentionalist claims cut a swath across the whole of traditional criticism.

Within Anglo-American philosophical aesthetics, in Stephen Davies' neat synopsis, interest in intention can be sorted into three dominant viewpoints, these being "*actual intentionalism*, according to which the author's intentions, when successfully executed, determine – or constrain, at least – the proper interpretation of her work; *hypothetical intentionalism*, which holds that the interpreter is to surmise what a hypothetical author could have intended the work to mean; and the value-maximizing theory (also known as *conventionalism*), which maintains that the piece is to be interpreted in ways that maximize its value as a work of literature".[52] Unlike interpretive strategies associated with post-structuralist tenets or stridently ideological interpretations, all three accounts are "committed to a contextualist ontology for literary works", believing that proper interpretation has to admit that "works take their identity from the circumstances of their creation, including facts of their authorship, of the literary conventions, styles, and genres, as well as the wider linguistic

51 Anders Pettersson's essay "Five Kinds of Literary and Artistic Interpretation" is a good starting point for this discussion. He contends that there are "many legitimate kinds of interpretations, and that perceiving the actual multiplicity of what we call interpretation helps us to do justice to the complexity of the task of understanding literature and art" (Pettersson 2003, 52).

52 Davies 2007, 166.

practices, of the time".[53]

At its core, the value-maximizing conventionalism endorsed by Davies is a vigorous and subtle defense of the primacy of linguistic and literary conventions in explaining many crucial aspects of artworks – but the view concedes that there are instances where it is simply not feasible to prohibit talk of intentions. The hypothetical intentionalism developed in the essays of Jerrold Levinson, on the other hand, can be seen as a "form of nonintentionalism"[54] which sits uneasily between full-blooded conventionalism and genuine intentionalism. The chief merit of Levinson's philosophizing has perhaps been in eliciting a series of clarifying ripostes from the advocates of actual intentionalism. However, the rest of the current chapter will be devoted to providing a workable definition of authorial intention, one closely following the robust account of partial intentionalism set down by Paisley Livingston. Although I will also refer to the writings of Noël Carroll, the ablest early supporter of moderate actual intentionalism, it is in Livingston's recent work that the concept of intention has been defined in such a way as to make possible an authentic advance in the conversation.

The partial intentionalism described in Livingston's *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* is at heart a conservative stance aiming to provide philosophical support for a widespread critical practice while trying to do away with certain persistent misunderstandings about the making and reception of art. Anti-Romantic (as far as the lionizing of artists is concerned) and anti-metaphysical (as far as the hunt for mental phenomena is concerned), partial intentionalism keeps its feet on the ground, claiming that attending to the artist's probable intentions should be welcomed as a valid but not all-embracing pursuit: "A moderate or partial intentionalist thesis holds that intentions determine some, but not all, of the semantic properties of at least some works of art."[55] Livingston's definition clears a conceptual space for intention as a particular mental attitude:

53 Ibid., 167.
54 Levinson 1996, 212.
55 Livingston 2009, 93.

> Someone with an intention has a goal as well as a schematic means to the realization of that goal: the intending person's attitude towards this plan is a firm yet defeasible commitment to acting on it. The agent's actual motivation at the time of intending is a separate issue, since motivation can diminish or strengthen before the intended time for action arrives. One can strongly want to do something, for example, without having any intention of doing this thing: conversely, one can intend to do one's duty without really wanting to do so when one settles on that intention. And the fact that someone does not actually act on a scheme does not mean that the person never genuinely intended to do so. These sorts of cases drive a conceptual wedge between intentions, reasons composed of beliefs and desires, and the actions to which intentions sometimes give rise.[56]

To have an intention, therefore, entails a commitment to execute a specified plan, although both the commitment and the plan can undergo significant changes: "Intentions are prior and future-directed, then, in the sense that they precede the action, but this does not mean that they cannot function to sustain, adjust, and guide an action once it is in progress, especially with regard to those aspects of the action that are as yet incomplete".[57] It is important to keep in mind that a work like *Cobralingus* is the result of an immense stock of intentions ranging from the project's general features all the way to individual word choices. And the book, like many works of art, required a sustained period of development from conception to completion. Even if it were practicable to talk about the work's "master plan", Livingston's pragmatic view wants to catch the real-life instability of intentional commitments: "A plan provides, then, some more or less definite specification of the intended behaviour and results, but there remains a gap between the schematic features of the mental construct and the actual, concrete deeds that may eventually realize the plan".[58] From these introductory comments, it should be clear that although authorial intention has the capacity to influence critical practice, the adoption of a partial intentionalist standpoint does not result in the vast field of literary studies being colonized by intentionalist queries.

It could be said that the debate over intentions takes place on two fronts: textual and contextual. The former refers to so-called "embedded intentions" which can, if the writer is in control of his material, be detected in the work without too much trouble; the latter posits that

56 Livingson 2010, 401.
57 Livingston 2005, 10.
58 Ibid., 8.

comments made by the author can reveal important features of the work. It is easy to understand why the idea of embedded intentions is sometimes considered a treacherous one: taken to extremes, it can be made to account for every single detail as well as the overall meaning of a given work by essentially blending the notions of intention, action, convention and expression into one indivisible unity. The question revolves around the legitimate grounds for inferring facts about the author's intentions solely from the text; I will return to the topic in a moment. The contextual problem has its roots in the notion that the work of art itself should remain the object of critical attention: if the author's intentions have been successfully carried out, if they truly are embedded in the text, looking for answers in authors' statements or self-interpretations of their work would be without justification. According to Livingston, this stipulation yearns for a clarity and autonomy which is simply not available:

> Just what is and is not to be covered by the expression 'the work of art itself' remains the crux. Some anti-intentionalists assume that a work simply *is* a totally detached and independent artefact, object, text, or performance, and that attending to the latter's wholly intrinsic features is sufficient. Intentionalists contend, on the contrary, that a work of art's meanings, artistic and aesthetic values, and indeed its very identity and individuation *qua* work of art depend on a broader array of properties than those non-relational properties that are inherent in an artefact or type thereof.[59]

An author's stated intentions cannot retroactively deprive the work of the properties it manifestly possesses. But in cases where complicated symbolic communication opens up opportunities for variant readings, the author's self-interpretations can at the very least be counted among the more plausible interpretations. Since sustained aesthetic engagement allows one to discern nuances and non-obvious patterns within the work, it is clear that the actual making of the artifact involves a similar kind of engagement on the part of the artist – with the crucial distinction that the creator of the work is responsible for the selection and pruning of the material. As a form of symbolic communication, language is liable to produce a surplus of meaning. The dominant meanings suggested by the work's elements and their interplay are constrained only to a certain degree by the

59 Livingston 2003, 282.

artist's choices. Partial intentionalism supposes that a high proportion of artists are acutely aware of this state of affairs and carefully prune their work in such a way as to maximize the prominence of certain elements while minimizing the occurrence of irrelevant chains of associations. The artist, needless to say, does not have ultimate control over these connotations since "[s]igns, symbols, gestures, words, marks, and signals also have unintended implications".[60] In making the work, the artist has spent more time engaging with the artifact than most critics ever will. The artists' views on their work will have their particular blind spots, to be sure, just as the artists themselves can be "insincere, untruthful, or forgetful about their purposes, or can become distanced from them over time".[61]

For the critic, it would be intellectually dishonest to draw on authorial commentary without making the debt explicit. Naturally, the tracking of relevant authorial intentions – successful or unrealized, conscious or unconscious, embedded or merely indicated – is "an empirical issue about which there could never be absolute certainty or scepticism-proof knowledge".[62] This does not change the fact that the great majority of art is sensibly approached with intentions in mind. Indeed, as Noël Carroll underlines, most artists and appreciators are interested in artworks precisely because they are the worthwhile results of intentional action: "For intentionalists, interpretation is a matter of explaining why artworks have the features, including meanings, that they possess. Since artworks possess these features as a result of the actions of artists, it seems natural to explain them, as we explain the results of actions in general, with an eye to the intentions of the pertinent agents, who are, in this case, artists".[63] The body of critical thought suspicious about the stability of meaning is a relatively isolated intellectual trend. It would be to move from one unreality to another to suggest that attention to intentional factors is an open sesame to absolute mastery over semantic content, but it is eminently possible to relinquish radical scepticism while retaining a healthy anxiety. It is

60 Livingston 2005, 149.
61 Davies 2006, 117.
62 Livingston 2009, 107.
63 Carroll 2001, 197.

because we know that our intended meanings – explicit and especially implicit – can be misunderstood or missed altogether that we remain anxious and alert about our communicative success. Livingston proposes that the veracity of authors' statements about the intended features of their works can be explored by seeing if the authorial self-interpretations mesh sufficiently with the internal evidence provided by the text. I will outline this "meshing condition" at the close of the chapter. But now it is time to return to the question of embedded intentions.

To state that authorial intentions are embedded or contained within the literary work is, according to partial intentionalism, to report the findings of a careful process of inference centered around the text: "Tracking authorial intent need not send us "outside" the artwork; typically, attending closely to the artwork is our best avenue for approaching authorial intent".[64] Such an approach treats the meaning of literary works as utterances; that is, as "expressive or communicative actions indicative of attitudes".[65] The anti-intentionalists who suggest that the actual author's intentions are either unavailable or unnecessary tend to claim for the conventions of language and literary expression powers which favor their allegations. These assertions about textual meaning usually concentrate on the difference between what a speaker intended to say and what her words actually express – the so-called utterer's meaning/utterance meaning dichotomy – and the possibility of such a mismatch between intent and statement clearly forms an important aspect of verbal communication:

> Where utterances that are used in the service of communication might be interpreted in several ways, we try to isolate what the utterer meant or intended. Indeed, if she misspeaks, so that what she meant to say – the utterer's meaning – comes apart from what she said in fact – the utterance meaning – we are liable to become interested in both and in the difference between them precisely because the flow of communication has been interrupted. Where we desire to keep the conversation going, it is what the speaker meant, not what she said, that is of ultimate concern.[66]

Much of the intentionalist debate has been plagued by the mischaracterization of intention as the

64 Carroll 2002, 326.
65 Livingston 2010, 407.
66 Davies 2007, 169.

individual's private will to transcend all conventional boundaries. Such an unfounded conception of intention as absolute control – known as "extreme actual intentionalism" – is clearly fallacious. Colin Lyas summarizes the interplay between intentions and conventions in the production of textual meaning in the following fashion: "If meaning *is* to be made clear, it will be because in explaining meaning we appeal not to private acts by means of which individuals assign meaning to their words, but to a public, interpersonal structure of understanding which, independently of the whims of individual speakers, gives meaning to *our* language. ... But those structures are open to alteration, criticism, change".[67] It is precisely the interpersonal yet open structure of language which guarantees that – ambiguous sentences and other communicative failures notwithstanding – literature and other verbal expression can be imbued with intentionality and fine discriminations in meaning: "The rules of a public language do not replace our meaning-intentions with other ways of assigning meaning to our utterances. They are, rather, the apparatus which allow us to make our intentions, and so our meanings, clear".[68]

Livingston's proposal of a minimal success condition for the congruence of text and intention comes in the form of the "meshing condition":

> On this account, the intention to mean *q* by saying *p* is successful whenever the intention to imply *q meshes* sufficiently with what is written or spoken. Such an intention may be signaled or indicated by a diary, letter, or some other source that is not the literary work itself, but it is not successfully realized by the literary work unless the text or verbal performance of that work meshes sufficiently with the intention. That some well-informed audience is apt to infer the intention from the text is a *symptom* of meshing, but not a necessary condition. Another symptom is the interpreter's ability, given independent knowledge of the intention, to develop a detailed and systematic interpretation of the text consonant with the ideas intended.[69]

It is important to notice that Livingston is cautious not to overstate the case for intentions. The various signals and symptoms which alert readers to the manifestations of authorial intention ultimately have to accord with the text: "The meshing of text and intention require a high degree of

67 Lyas 1992, 394.
68 Ibid., 400.
69 Livingston 2010, 414.

coherence between the content of the intention and the text's rhetorical patterns. This requirement is satisfied when the intended ideas are articulated with such internal semantic relations as contrast, parallelism, exemplification, generalization, explication, and elaboration".[70] In accepting the meshing condition, a literary critic can introduce circumstantial evidence of authorial intentions and analyze to what extent the condition has been met. The use of a symbol system like language will in all likelihood also produce unintended associations and meanings. Depending on the utterance, there may be minuscule or vast open spaces in the intentional net. In fact, such unintentional meanings are an important part of the intentionalist case: if the unintended meanings do not enrich the work but manifestly damage the work's coherence, we are often correct to conclude that the artist's skills have not been adequate for the task at hand. At present, Livingston has "no proposal for a sharpening of the meshing condition or any method or explicit procedure for its application".[71] Nonetheless, the investigation of the meshing condition calls for just the type of critical tools employed by traditional literary scholarship in ascertaining the meaning of a specific work:

> A mesh is a net, and the meshes of a net can be either too fine or too large, depending on what one is trying to capture. The net I have in mind is supposed to capture utterance or work meaning, including that part which is not said, but implied. Meshing is a relation between an intention and the various sorts of actions and accomplishments to which it can give rise, such as the making of a text, picture, or audio-visual display.[72]

In the name of defending this or that supposed cut-off point of analytic engagement, literary critics all too often talk at cross-purposes. The consideration of authorial intentions implies that in the making of an artifact, the artist has strived to create an object which possesses specific properties which in turn refer to the work and the wider world in a fantastic variety of literal and metaphorical ways. Naturally, every work of art, like all things liable to interpretation, cannot help but remain a busy referential trading port: the work and its features are engaged in an unending commerce with other things, abounding in associations, connotations and echoes. However, it is generally accepted

70 Ibid., 415.
71 Livingston 2009, 99.
72 Ibid., 100.

that it is usually possible to arrive at what the maker of the artwork most likely intended to get across by bringing together the various elements displayed in the work.

The academic discussion about interpretation traditionally lays little emphasis on the fact that the exploration of cultural artifacts is a gradual process. Encountering a wholly new piece of literature involves considerable guesswork as the interpreter attempts to assign probable meanings to the work. This stage of reconstruction and assimilation is by necessity entangled in all sorts of prejudices and misinformation about the piece. A closer acquaintance with the work leads to locating more relevant patterns in the text – and these findings are often in part the result of research about the genesis or context of the work. At this level of appreciation, the reader may label herself an admirer or fan of the work: the piece has succeeded in capturing and maintaining her interest. If the reader sees it fit to launch a more "scholarly" reading of the work, she will begin a meticulous attempt to find a meaningful coherence between the work's features. At all these stages, arriving at a fruitful interpretation is akin to reverse engineering: the reader is predisposed to find the work imbued with intentional designs. While the reading is in progress, the interpreter promptly translates the encountered information into significant patterns (which are continually revised as new facets emerge). Rereadings of the complete work are naturally very different in character: the pattern-searching is in higher gear, and even though the moment-to-moment uncertainty about the contents of the work has been replaced by the process of determining coherent designs in the entire work, the activity continues to be characterized by surprise. The art of literary interpretation consists of the multiple mental drafts and concrete notes which are part and parcel of attentive reading, one of the primary goals of which is to form a global hypothesis concerning the work's intent. In a literary work of any reasonable length, underwriting this global view are innumerable lower-level intentions which in all likelihood tell a checkered history of the author's endeavor and accomplishment. The exploration of *Cobralingus* and Noon's other "dub fiction" works in effect constitutes a case study of one kind of criticism underwritten by a partial intentionalist thesis.

3. "Dub Fiction": Noon's Use of Musical Models

3.1. Dub, Glitch and Musical Experimentation

> Music can be inspired by a beehive, the malfunction of a machine, an ecosystem, the reflex reactions of another musician, a state of consciousness, a digital glitch, robotics, an ancient divinatory book, an historical incident, the pulse of a city, rhythmic variation, a cinematic mise en scene, a fragment of captured documentation, turbulent water, a particle of speech, a feedback loop, the logic of software, the pattern of the heavens.[73]

As David Toop's motley catalogue of sources of inspiration indicates, experimental musicians have sought ideas not only from the various interactions between musicians and technology, but also from natural phenomena, city life, literature and film. In the "dub fiction" works of Jeff Noon, the fragmented vocals and hypnotic drum 'n' bass of dub reggae (in addition to glitch electronica's embrace of malfunctioning technology) engender a highly personal literary response. I feel that placing Toop's evocative quotation at the start of a chapter dealing primarily with technical matters is a fitting reminder of the fact that Noon and many of the musicians his work drew upon have not been at all uneasy about propounding suggestive metaphors, nebulous theories or hyperbolic aesthetic claims in their public statements. The occasionally wild or bafflingly vague statements artists like Noon, Lee "Scratch" Perry or Oval's Markus Popp have made about the creation and import of their work should not be taken as proof that the people in question are well on their way to cloud-cuckoo-land. On the contrary, these artists are trying to render in words certain elemental aspects of their working lives which, notwithstanding their prevalence, continue to defy description. Examples of such aspects would include, for one, the profound psychological or experiential impact of those sounds and/or words which the artists find particularly fascinating or significant. At times, as in the case of the more self-conscious passages of *Cobralingus*, it is precisely these seemingly ineffable facts about creativity that these artists intend to communicate through their work.

In this chapter, I will explore those features of dub reggae and glitch electronica which offered crucial formal models for *Cobralingus* and Noon's other "dub fictional" works. As the

73 Toop, quoted in Cox and Warner 2004, 364.

remaining chapters of the thesis will focus on the literary practice Noon derived from music, the present chapter will exclude references to Noon's fiction in an attempt to flesh out the salient aesthetic and technological aspects of the genres. The technological side of things is vital to my argument only to the extent to which it furnished Noon with his main musico-literary metaphors. The filters of analog mixing consoles and the remarkable features of modern audio software are central to understanding Noon's "Cobralingus filtering device". Without some background knowledge of these technical issues, Noon's claim that he is treating words as if they were recorded sound will appear misleading or merely preposterous, and the serpentine imagery at the heart of the work – evoked by such terms as the "word-snake diagram" (*Cobralingus*, 13[74]) – will remain incoherent. Instead of a smooth historical survey, this chapter will make a jump cut between two quite dissimilar domains of audio production: the early, pioneering dub of the 1970s belongs to the analog world, while the glitch music of the 1990s is predominantly digital. As the forerunner, dub's techniques have undoubtedly influenced the thinking and working habits of certain glitch electronica artists, but it is good to keep in mind that the two musics inhabit largely disparate terrains from a technological point of view.

Under the broad rubric of "aesthetic", we can place all the artistic methods and goals which make it possible to speak of dub reggae and glitch electronica in the same breath. It is here that many fruitful points of commonality are to be found: the genres share an experimental ethos which does not consider borrowing as antithetical to creativity, relies on improvisation (and has no problem with a sense of incompleteness or fragmentation), emphasizes the process of making (in such a way that the final product often stresses the material conditions of the production process), encourages the implementation of non-musical sounds as well as unorthodox uses of technology (and so welcomes technical failures as valid musical gestures). In both genres, the dub/remix concept of borrowing and reworking existing music (or, even more generally, any recorded aural information) is closely tied to an attitude of playfulness, to a willingness to explore unlikely sonic

74 Noon 2001a; hereafter cited as C.

atmospheres in search of fresh expressive possibilities.

Despite their clear relevance to the make-up of the two musical genres, practically everything that falls outside the above-mentioned technical and aesthetic features will be omitted in the pages to come. In the case of dub, these factors include the politics of post-colonial Jamaica, the Rastafari movement's shaping influence on roots reggae (out of which dub evolved), the role of drugs (especially cannabis) on music-making, and the intricacies of the local music business.[75] As for glitch electronica, the music's much narrower extramusical concerns befit its standing as the relatively recent experimental wing of a musical genre itself considered adventurous in terms of popular music. Indeed, all the key issues – at least at the inception of the sub-genre – seem to have been bound up with the correct way to classify a recording such as Oval's ground-breaking *94 Diskont* (1995). Are we dealing with a strand of popular electronica or have we entered into the realm of experimental music? And if we have, would it be more accurate to rank what we hear as music or sound art? Glitch's degree of experimentation, understood here as the magnitude of the music's deviation from recognized mainstream practices of composition and listening, has often been projected as being in line with radical political theory and continental philosophical trends. The German record label which released Oval's first CDs, and remained closely associated with glitch through the "Clicks + Cuts" compilation series, is not named Mille Plateaux for nothing.[76]

Even though Noon's inspirations come from a popular, non-academic lineage that has been driven by experiments with recording technologies largely by people with no formal musical training, a few words ought to be said about the place of dub and glitch in the broader picture of twentieth-century electronic music. The cluster of concepts associated with the general term – *elektronische Musik*, *musique concrète*, electroacoustic music, computer music, electronica and electronic dance music – distinguishes between forms of music which could only exist thanks to the

75 For a good survey of all these aspects, see Veal 2007, 14-18 and Chapter 1.

76 The label's founder, Achim Szepanski, has been vocal about the influence of *Mille Plateaux* (1980) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on his musical interests (Reynolds 1996).

electronical recording, manipulation and/or generation of sounds. Both *elektronische Musik* (Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (1958-60)) and *musique concrète* (Pierre Schaeffer's *Cinq études de bruits* (1948)) refer to fairly precise historical moments within the classical tradition, while the distinction between electroacoustic and computer music points to the expanding range of compositional possibilities made available by the computer revolution. Electronica and electronic dance music are far more open-ended terms, specifying, in the first instance, a cadre of approaches to music-making outside classical or academic circles. (When not synonymous, electronica can be seen as the experimental offshoot of electronic dance music – adventurous music, such as glitch, made mainly for home listening.)[77] Of course, in a fundamental sense, electronic music covers most of the recorded music of the twentieth century. The analog, tape-based production methods of dub rarely extend to electronically generated sound effects, instead relying on the manipulation of voice and traditional instruments. Electronica, including glitch, is the result of sound manipulation made possible by digitalization and advanced software. In a broad sense, then, both genres can be classed as electronic music. But as the following survey of *Cobralingus*'s musical models hopes to show, the digital revolution has made such matters less important, since (in Michael E. Veal's words) "[as] the digital technology upon which the electronica phenomenon is based has increased the ease with which all sorts of sound information can be manipulated, so has the creative sphere of electronica as a phenomenon been the catalyst for the consolidation of many of the creative currents in popular, improvised, and experimental music that have evolved since World War II".[78]

At the start of "*Cobralingus*: Origins of a Dub Fiction" – a key essay about the musical influences behind the book – Noon recalls the impact that the song "Police and Thieves" (1977) by The Clash had on him as a young Mancunian punk rocker. A cover version of the Lee "Scratch" Perry-produced track by Junior Murvin released a year earlier, the song served as an introduction to dub reggae for many British music fans of Noon's generation and background.[79] Remarking how

77 Popular electronic dance music includes genres such as House, Techno, electro, drum 'n' bass and Ambient.
78 Veal 2007, 233.
79 Noon was born in 1957 to a working-class family in Droylsden (Paddy 2003).

dub music reversed the traditional song-writing process so that the "final mix of a song became the starting point for experimentation"[80], Noon goes on to describe how in the following decades this Jamaican musical secret became an international production method in the form of song remixing. The story of how dub emerged from the B-sides of dance songs – growing from instrumental backdrops for deejaying to increasingly more experimental and structurally sophisticated remixes – to a full-fledged musical genre in its own right is a complex and fascinating one. In the development of dub music, the role of the recording engineer gradually expanded from the overseeing of modest, isolated essays at song re-composition to the creation of a new musical idiom:

> What made dub unique in the context of pop music both in Jamaica and worldwide was the creative and unconventional use recording engineers made of their equipment (as, for example, using acetate as the dub plate). This enabled them to fashion a new musical language that relied as much on texture, timbre, and soundscape, as it did on the traditional musical parameters of pitch, melody, and rhythm. In general, the most important understanding of the dub mix is as a deconstructive, B-side remix of a 45 rpm single; the remix engineer draws on various strategies to manipulate the listener's anticipation of musical events, and defamiliarize the vocal song on the A-side.[81]

Without a doubt, the commercial competition between record producers and sound systems (groups of disc jockeys and engineers responsible for holding street parties) fuelled the growth of dub. Working at the outer limits of their low-grade equipment, the recording engineers crafted versions of popular songs to answer the needs of the local music industry. The endless recycling of earlier recordings, the fast rate of new releases and the limitations of available technology gave the pioneering dub engineers such as King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry an opportunity to experiment and improvise by pushing against technical and commercial strictures.[82] Although the basic techniques of dub's sonic innovations were initially realized on quite limited equipment, the

80 Noon 2001b.

81 Veal 2007, 64. Veal drops into his text terms central to post-structuralism ("deconstructive") and Russian formalism ("defamiliaze"). Here (and elsewhere in his study), Veal's references to Viktor Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization (Rus. *ostranenie*) and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction are largely ornamental: the adjective "deconstructive", for example, seems to refer to the effect that the dismantled and reworked dub track has on a listener who is familiar with the original song.

82 An introduction to the classic dub aesthetic is provided by King Tubby's *The Roots of Dub* (1975) and *King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown* (1976), Lee "Scratch" Perry's *Revolution Dub* (1975) and *Super Ape* (1976) and *Blackboard Jungle Dub* (1973), a seminal collaboration between the two pioneers.

conceptual masterstroke underlying the music has gone on to prove highly attractive to later musicians and artists. By taking advantage of a close-knit musical community, the engineers nudged commercial recycling toward creative quotation, so that many dub mixes present "a version of a preexisting song that allows fragments of its prior incarnations to remain audible as an obvious part of the final product".[83] It could be said that the first dub engineers discovered the plasticity of recorded sound as something which called for an intuitive response:

> As a form of real-time improvisation performed by engineers on the multitrack mixing console, dub's combination of fragmentation and its manipulation of spatiality gave a new perspective on the pop song. ... One good analogy for the dub mixer is that of an "action painter" of sound. Operating upon a continuously unfolding "canvas" of drum & bass, the engineer throws up a snatch of piano, a few seconds of organ, a bit of guitar, and a dash of singing, modulating and blending the "colors" (frequencies) through the use of reverb, equalization, and other sound processing.[84]

In the creation of a typical dub track, echo and reverb effects are used in conjunction with equalization to extensively manipulate the pre-recorded sounds in such a way as to form a wholly unique soundscape:

> Using equalization and filtering controls, overtones of an instrument can be manipulated until it sounds full, warm, and robust, or until it sounds thin, shrill, and eviscerated. Applied to an entire ensemble, a group can sound as if it is expanding or diminishing in size. Equalization could also be used to help craft the ambient aspects of a performance. In particular, the interplay of echo and equalization enabled engineers to make simulated soundscapes sound as if they were continually morphing in dimension and texture.[85]

Against these essentially static soundscapes, the dub engineer adds various fragments or samples of music. Especially the vocal parts tend to undergo significant disintegration with the aid of mute switches and various fader controls; these controls "are central to what can be called a mixing

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83 Ibid., 22.

84 Ibid., 77. Veal's metaphoric description of the composition of a dub track as resembling the making of a "drip painting" such as *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)* by Jackson Pollock is appropriate also from the viewpoint of *Cobralingus*: Noon, like action painters and abstract expressionists, cherishes immediate, improvised handling of his materials. As a former painter (Paddy 2003), Noon's evocation of language in its "liquid state" (C, Blurb) is surely connected with the physical properties of oil paint. See also the discussion of Noon's liquid imagery in Chapters 3.3. and 4.1..

85 Ibid., 73.

strategy of *fragmentation*, the abrupt introduction and removal of formerly continuous material".[86] Within this strategy of fragmentation, the partial erasure of vocals constitutes a subtractive method of manipulating sonic, and in this case also verbal, material. The lyrics of a popular song are drastically stripped down, in essence creating a new text which is further divorced from its original context by being implanted into the ambient soundscape crafted by the remixer. Crucially, although the transcripts of the borrowed song and the dub version might be termed as two different texts, the reused vocal snippet remains first and foremost a fragment of the original, still identifiable recording.

The recognizability of the original vocal performance was also cashed out in creative terms with another compositional method. If erasure placed fractured words within ambient soundscapes, the method of putting together a number of disparate vocal performances created layers of material: "The juxtaposition of several generations of fragmented text, on the other hand, was an additive strategy that produced an equally striking effect, through what might be called an aesthetic of *accumulation*".[87] In such tracks, the dub remix becomes a kind of echo chamber of voices and musical gestures where different sounds, whether freshly recorded or sampled from existing records, are molded in ways which create a soundscape that feels at once unified and compellingly disjointed. It is dub's pre-eminence as a form of musical collage built on several layers of fragmented material which has assured that the remix concept driving the music has continued to be acknowledged in extramusical contexts: "Dub remains a dance music first and foremost, but it has proved particularly useful when its conceptual processes assume the foreground and the music suggests other parameters of thought and experience".[88] As will become clear in the course of the following chapters, Noon's "dub fiction" clearly forms one body of work alive to the innovations of remixers like King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry.[89]

86 Ibid., 64.
87 Ibid., 67.
88 Ibid., 253.
89 See, in particular, Chapters 3.3. and 4.2..

In his essay on the origins of *Cobralingus*, Noon notes that the "experimental electronic music" of the 1990s was the other major influence behind the book: "Some of this [music] is allied to the outer fringes of Techno Culture; music by Pole, Autechre, Oval, and so on. Other musicians place their music in a more avant garde setting. But what all these musicians share is an interest in computers as a creative tool".[90] In another pertinent essay ("Post Futurist Manifesto"), Noon characterizes glitch and other experimental electronica as "the music of machines with diseases".[91] The two facets highlighted here – the experimental use of computers and the "diseased" sounds characteristic of the music – point toward the fact that glitch music is generally not concerned with sampling and remixing recognizable musical fragments. The initial samples are distorted beyond recognition, and the process is largely dependent on modern audio software such as Max/MSP and SuperCollider.

In an interview with Mark Amerika[92], Noon mentions an article on glitch by Rob Young which originally appeared in the British music magazine The Wire. Called "Worship the Glitch", the largely impressionistic 1999 piece describes glitch as "underground digital music"[93] and provides a survey of the sub-genre's main features and key players, emphasizing the numerous ways in which software programs enable the composer-programmers to both endlessly manipulate and playfully improvise with sonic information: "The most celebrated operation in IDM [Intelligent Dance Music, yet another label for experimental electronica] circles is the 'Bucephalus's Bouncing Ball' effect – an algorithm used by the likes of Autechre (check "Drane2", the final track on LP5) and Aphex Twin (who titled one track after the equation) that speeds up a pulse as if it was an object bouncing on a table, subject to the force of gravity".[94]

The initial releases of the German band Oval relied on sampling sounds produced by the skipping of purposefully damaged CDs. The template set by Oval's *Systemisch* (1994) and *94*

90 Noon 2001b.
91 Noon 2001c.
92 Amerika 2007, 238.
93 Young 2002, 49.
94 Young 2002, 53.

Diskont was explored by such musicians as Microstoria, Mouse on Mars and Pole, in whose music sonic artifacts and other traditionally unwanted sounds produced by technology were treated as musical textures.[95] Composer Kim Cascone has written extensively on how this creative application of electronic malfunction can be seen as a reflection of contemporary life immersed in digital technology:

> The "post-digital" [i.e. glitch] aesthetic was developed in part as a result of the immersive experience of working in environments suffused with digital technology: computer fans whirring, laser printers churning out documents, the sonification of user-interfaces, and the muffled technology of hard drives. But more specifically, it is from the "failure" of digital technology that this new work has emerged: glitches, bugs, application errors, system crashes, clipping, aliasing, distortion, quantization noise, and even the noise floor of computer sound cards are the raw materials composers seek to incorporate into their music.[96]

By definition, a technical glitch is disruptive: even if a single slight error can slide past undetected, repeated or large-scale glitches cannot be ignored. The creators of glitch music employ technological errors in heterogeneous ways, embracing abrasive washes of distorted noise, the interweaving of danceable beats with abstract blips, and calm, meditative soundscapes which give the listener the feeling "as if the Ambient soundfields on the Cage-Eno axis have been zoomed in on until we are swimming amid the magnified atoms of sound".[97] The inventive use (and deliberate misuse) of technology is one key tie between classic dub and glitch, but both musics also gain much of their effectiveness from the disruption of familiarity, of upending the listeners' expectations. Even though their technological means and musical idioms remain far-flung, the two genres share an underlying commitment to musical experimentation – a point echoed by Veal's remarks on glitch:

> These so-called clicks & cuts artists have taken the anomalies of the analog-to-digital transfer process – the skips, hisses, scratches, and other glitches that have been typically sanitized by producers and engineers in the name of digital precision and fidelity – and

95 In addition to the Oval releases mentioned above, essential albums associated with glitch electronica include Microstoria's *Init Ding* (1995), Mouse on Mars' *Autoditacker* (1997), Ryoji Ikeda's +/- (1997), Autechre's *Chiastic Slide* (1997), Pole's *1* (1998) and .snd's *Makesnd Cassette* (1999).

96 Cascone 2004, 393.

97 Young 2002, 46.

> refashioned them into new gestural and textural vocabularies. In this sense they reproduce the strategies of Jamaican engineers, who themselves innovated a stylistic vocabulary partially formed from sonic anomalies and mishaps of the recording studio.[98]

Creative methods which subject off-the-peg technology to aggressive, disrespectful treatment – King Tubby lifting and dropping his studio's spring reverb unit; Oval's Markus Popp scratching CDs with an X-Acto knife – should not be equated with the ensuing music. In both cases, the musicians' creative treatment of technology is tied to their wish to overcome the limitations of often cheap and replaceable technology and thereby discover new sounds. Implicit in Noon's use of musical models in *Cobralingus* and in his earlier "dub fictional" works is an understanding that the governing ideas of dub and glitch alike constitute a positive, constructive method of creating new fictions out of the materials provided by other texts. Noon's achievement in conveying this attitude is fundamental to the proper appreciation of "dub fiction". As a literary work with a musical model, *Cobralingus* appropriates some key terminology from electronic music-making, but rather than attempting to mimic or translate into literary terms any specific compositional or instrumental effects, Noon borrows from dub and glitch music the central concept of remixing existing materials by the fragmentation and accumulation of elements.

A pivotal aspect that my whistle-stop tour of the musical model of Noon's "dub fiction" has perhaps not underlined sufficiently is that both dub and glitch combine at times quite abstract musical experiments with reassuringly humane textures: the human voice, however fragmented, is part of many dub tracks, while the whole premise of glitch rests on the fact that the listener can recognize and appreciate that the music is composed of sounds made by the malfunctioning of familiar technological devices. In the next two chapters, it will become increasingly clear that what drew Noon to dub, glitch and other contemporary experimental music had a lot to do with qualities he found congenial to his own creative methods: physical immediacy, materiality or textural detail, intuition and improvisation and a trust in twists and turns of the creative process – these are all

98 Veal 2007, 236.

values a host of experimental musicians share with the author of *Cobralingus*.

3.2. "Prose Remixes": From *Nymphomation* to *Needle in the Groove*

In the three "dub fiction" works which prepared the way for *Cobralingus*, the relationship between the textual passages and the musical factors outlined in the preceding chapter is largely a conceptual one. What I mean by this is that whereas a casual browse through *Cobralingus* – the pages of unconventional typography headed by "filter gate" boxes; the music-laden prefatory material such as the Instructions and the Key to Filter Gates – makes plain the "techniques of electronic dance music" (C, Blurb) shaping the work, this is not quite the case with the earlier books. *Nymphomation*, strikingly, contains no indicators of a musical model having influenced the novel, but the key passages are clearly in line with the dub-influenced procedures of Noon's later works. The relevant passages of *Pixel Juice* and *Needle in the Groove*, on the other hand, carry parenthetical subtitles which announce the texts as "remixes" of some kind. In a sense, Noon's radical reworking of existing texts does not require any indication of the musical sources behind the writing methods. That the author chose to divulge the overriding musical model of all these early "dub fiction" works tells us that Noon felt that the influence went beyond the merely conceptual. And when we look at Noon's body of work, it quickly becomes apparent that a far-reaching interest in music constitutes one of the cornerstones of his fiction.

Musicians and DJs people Noon's novels and short stories, references to records and the radio occur frequently, and night clubs and DJ culture in general feature in many of his fictions. Unsurprisingly, the emotional force of making and listening to music is a recurring subject matter. Given all this, Noon's gradual exploration of writing methods modeled after modern music-making techniques does not come out of the blue. Noon has noted that the three works immediately preceding *Cobralingus* contained his first experiments in "using musical processes such as dub, and the remix, to make a new kind of fiction".[99] In the essay in question, he therefore retroactively

99 Noon 2001b.

associates elements of *Nymphomation*, *Pixel Juice* and *Needle in the Groove* with a concept he had only began to talk about at the time of *Cobralingus*'s publication. In Noon's version of the events, the origins of "dub fiction" can be traced back to a night club. Noon had contributed the short story "DJNA" to *Disco Biscuits* (1997), an anthology of "new fiction from the chemical generation" edited by Sarah Champion, and took part in the subsequent reading tour. Set in night clubs, the writers' performances were habitually interfered with by the loud dance music playing in the other rooms. The interference led Noon to his first inkling of literary remixing:

> I was standing next to Sarah, watching one of the other writers do their piece. The management had turned off the music in this room, but there were other rooms next to this one, and the music was still playing there, a loud, throbbing beat coming through the walls. This rhythm was mixing in with the writer's words, and, as I stood there listening, a rather surprising idea came to me. I can remember turning to Sarah, leaning right in so that she could hear above the noise, and saying, "You could do a dub, of a story." ... Three years later, through a long convoluted process, this sudden moment of inspiration evolved into the *Cobralingus* project.[100]

Although *Nymphomation* unarguably contains the first examples of "dub fiction", the novel is a special case in that the musical model is not alluded to at any moment in the text. From one perspective, then, the novel patently fails the rule of thumb insisted upon by Prieto and other musico-literary scholars: since the prose offers no reason for concluding that a musical metaphor has shaped the formal features of the text, it would be misleading to speak of *Nymphomation* as possessing a musical model. On the other hand, the novel proves to be an enlightening test case for Livingston's meshing condition for the success of authorial intentions. Even though the model is not announced in the novel, knowledge of Noon's commentary effortlessly aligns the relevant passages with the other "dub fiction" works. But since the extra-literary model is more conceptual than strictly musical, it remains an open question to what extent being aware of the musical metaphor ought to shade the interpretation of the novel's key passages.

Even if in a strict sense *Nymphomation* ought to be disqualified as a literary work with a

100 Ibid.

musical model, the novel marks the first instance of Noon reworking a borrowed text and using the new composition as a major structural element of the narrative. According to Noon, the "reverse dub"[101] of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" included in *Nymphomation* is designed so as to hold off the reader's identification of the Carrollian source for as long as possible. Unlike in *Cobralingus*, then, the sampled poem is not quoted verbatim, nor is the author named. The plot of *Nymphomation* revolves around a domino-themed lottery game which has become the overpowering obsession of the inhabitants of the novel's near-future Manchester. The "Jabberwocky" dubs are embedded within the introductory passages of the main chapters, and evoke the city's lottery craze with neologistic nonsense, advertising slang and quick transitions between scenes as the narration paints a picture of the players getting ready to hear the weekly results. After each introductory passage, the narration resumes a more conventional register. All seven passages are therefore stylistically arresting, but the influence of the first two lines of "Jabberwocky"[102] are not equally strong in each. Read as a sequence, the passages form a clear trajectory: the first is relatively restrained and quite close to the novel's normal tone, but the following five render the wait for the results in progressively more frenzied ways, until the final passage presents a complete reworking of "Jabberwocky". The first passage – whose extremely faint Carrollian echo nonetheless helps to set the storytelling mood[103] – is followed by introductory sections which describe the lottery mania in frantic and increasingly sexualized tones. However, in this series of texts, the "Jabberwocky" allusion is all but undetectable without recourse to the later, more extensive reworkings. The penultimate section, the introduction to Game 45, contains a direct quotation from the poem. In addition to the minute traces sprinkled in the previous passages, the close proximity of the quoted elements is enough to reveal the Carroll connection for the informed reader:

> Play to win some, winsome Moonchester! All over the dirty, shitty, bonefried Fryday, freeze us some game-juice. Six thoughts from pipflight, how howling the *slithy hordes*.

101 Ibid.

102 "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe" (Carroll 2000, 148-50).

103 "*It was* Domino Day in lucky old Manchester, and the natives were making love to the television, all glazen-eyed and drunken as the opening credits came into view" (Noon 1998, 11; emphasis added).

> Clacky doms on dommy clacks, clutched in fingers, banged down hard. Boardrooms, bedrooms, headrooms, hidden rooms, unbidden rooms. *Jabber*bone and punyburg. *Gyre and gimble* ultraspeed. All of Mobchester, playing the gambles.[104]

Carroll's poem forms the undeniable template for the final introductory passage. In his reworking of "Jabberwocky", Noon has replaced the nouns and verbs, while keeping close to the original syntax. The new text, laid out in prose, refers to many of *Nymphomation*'s characters and other details connected with the dominoes: "'Twas nine-ish, and the slimy hordes did clack and gamble in the wave. All dotty were the game-parades, and the telebox did crave. 'Beware the Dominock, my daught, the pips that the young chances feed! Beware the House of Bone and shun the Mr Millipede!'"[105] The narration goes on to add that this version of Carroll's poem was used as a lullaby by the parents of young children: "Fathers sang this song to their daughters, mothers to sons, using jangling domino toys to lull their babes to sleep".[106] Of course, the bulk of the story occurs between these introductory signposts, and it is quite likely that the allusions to "Jabberwocky" will not register with even a careful reader until he or she encounters the complete reworking. However, once in possession of the Carrollian allusion, the reader can return to the earlier passages to see the tiny clues embedded within the hyper-active opening paragraphs. Given knowledge of Noon's musical model, the reader is in a position to view the seven passages as a sequence charting the extreme reworking of "Jabberwocky" in reverse order.

If *Nymphomation* marked the beginning of Noon's "dub fiction" period in a clandestine manner, the following year's *Pixel Juice* touted the so-called "dub cut prose remixes" right on the back cover blurb.[107] As signalled by the parenthetical subtitles of the reworked texts, the "prose remixes" come in two varieties: "in the mix" and "remix" proper. The former involves the

104 Noon 1998, 239; emphasis added.
105 Ibid., 319.
106 Ibid. A further complication is presented by the fact that the novel is narrated by Jazir Malik, one of the main characters. *Nymphomation* contains many allusions to Carroll's *Alice* stories (see, for example, 323-6), but the rationale for incorporating a reworked "Jabberwocky" into the supposedly historical account is not broached by the narrator.
107 In the "Acknowledgments", Noon thanks various publications for releasing the "original mixes" of certain stories. The playful gesture indicates the pervasiveness of the dub/remix concept in Noon's aesthetic thinking at the time.

interpolation of material from one text to another. The reused, often slightly edited sentences are placed in parentheses, forging a bridge between the two neighboring stories.[108] The "remixes" are the kind of radical reworkings of existing stories of which *Nymphomation*'s "Jabberwocky" dub was the first example. In the case of the five remixes of *Pixel Juice*, however, Noon refrains from using outside sources. Another crucial difference between the two works is that in *Pixel Juice* a given text is not revised in stages. Instead, the reader can directly compare the original with the remix. The remixes make Noon's musical model transparent for the first time by clearly indicating that one text has been based on the language and imagery of another.[109]

The "prose remix" is a piece of writing which rarely adds words not found in the original text, but instead reshapes the available material. A look at "Dub Karaoke", the first remix of the collection, helps to illustrate this process of textual transformation. "Homo Karaoke", the science fiction story on which the remix is based, is narrated by 19-year old DJ Perfume Sword and recounts a momentous battle with another disc jockey in a Mancunian nightclub. In the future vision of the narrative, battling DJs vie for the attention of dancers by constructing a constantly morphing visual illusion based on the so-called "ghosts" they have at their disposal. These ghosts are virtual characters who possess (or perhaps only stand in for) certain musical skills, styles, melodies and so on. It is left ambiguous how aware the dancers are of these illusions, or whether the visualizations of musical qualities are only available to the players hooked into the "DJ machines". The basic premise – a mixture between DJing and virtual reality simulators – is rendered using Noon's more anti-naturalistic style, one that relates a fast-paced story with imagery-heavy, wordplay-laden language. At the story's climax, set inside the virtual world, DJ Perfume Sword has changed himself into a skyscraper and fails to withstand his opponent's latest attack. As DJ Skinvader quickly

108 This type of mixing appropriates the DJ technique of seguing between tracks; the technique is unique to *Pixel Juice* and merits attention, but due to space constraints will be passed over here.

109 The relevant stories are: "Homo Karaoke" (85), "Dub Karaoke (electric haiku remix)" (96); "Blurbs" (156), "Dub Blurbs (press release twister remix)" (162); "Call of the Weird" (243), "Dub Weird (crawling kingdog remix)" (248); "Spaceache and Heartships" (270), "Dubships (blues for a lost astronaut)" (275); "Pixel Dub Juice (sublimerix remix)" (342-343). As a poem commenting on the make-up of the entire collection, the fifth and final remix is an anomaly.

metamorphoses from character to character, it looks like the narrator is about to lose the match:

> I'm lulled by my own dream, when suddenly the enemy-bass really slithers, earthcore deep, and the drums surge into a speeding plague that travels the crowd by the veins, sucking energy from them. The noise twists again, into a swordfish locomotive, steam driven, ravaging. The blast hits my building dead centre; elemental. Expressway to the skull. Headburst. I come crashing to the ground, so now I see only the club's ceiling, all the lights ablaze with sizzle. Dancers rush through the broken rooms of my body, scattering, cheering.
>
> It's done. So easy.
>
> Hovering, kaleidoscoped, Skinvader hangs triumphant from the beams of light, his shape now a horse, now a hammer, now a switchblade, now a swarm of wasps, now a rocketship; each with its own, terrifying melody. Finally, a giant snake looms suspended over me, salivating with a venom song, each drop of which burns right through my walls.[110]

This excerpt exemplifies some of the common characteristics of one end of Noon's prose style. In describing the impact the music has on him (the "sounds" being presented in visual form), the narrator's choice of words creates layers of literal and figurative imagery. Although the passage contains many conventional metaphors (the enemy hits him "dead centre"), some are coinages which lack unambiguous definitions (as when the ensuing damage feels like a "headburst"). The use of nouns as verbs ("kaleidoscoped") is also a common device of Noon's, and the name of the narrator's opponent ("Skinvader" = "skin invader") is only one of many precursors to the "metamorphiction" of *Cobralingus*'s subtitle. Out of this image-rich narrative, Noon fashions a two-page poem called "Dub Karaoke". Noon's own gloss on the process delineates both the practical steps taken to arrive at the raw materials for the reworking as well as their improvisatory handling:

> What happens here, I take the Homo Karaoke story, I strip it down on screen to its essential images. Break these into words, phrases, juggle them around, looking for a new hit. Start to build it up again. The phrases started to naturally fall into three-line stanzas, and it came to me that I was actually trying to write haiku, the Japanese poetry form. Then it's just a matter of getting them to work as a page, as a text, as a shimmer of meaning. I fully understand that some people just won't get this at all, and that's fine. We all move to different drummers.[111]

110 Noon 2000, 93.
111 Noon 1999b.

The "shimmer of meaning" emanating from the reworking revolves around the perception of musical experience. In formal terms, Noon's "electric haiku" stands as a one-off experiment. As with the musical models behind "dub fiction", the genre mentioned in the subtitle primarily indicates a conceptual borrowing, since Noon patently does not adhere to the rules of the historical poetic form. Although he follows the traditional English variant, here and there adding an extra syllable, Noon's nine three-line clusters actually form a single poetic text. Noon also disregards conventional strictures regarding content. For example, the reworking makes no seasonal references, nor does it set up and then complicate the type of philosophical observation or argument typical of the genre. The kinship with haiku is found instead in the tranquil, even detached ambience evoked by lines such as: "all is floating calm / on tremble-haunted wavelengths / disco magnified".[112] Noon's piece, which concentrates on music's emotional impact on the bewitched listener, juxtaposes instruments ("turntable") and musical or technical terms ("rhythm", "system") with metaphoric imagery ("illusion's perfume").[113] After the mid-point of the text, keywords such as "heartache" and "tearstain" inject a melancholic note, while the words "the little girl whispering / lullaby poison" seem to refer back to "Homo Karaoke". The independent meaning of the text, however, can only be said to be radically undecidable. It is at this juncture that we ought to return to the point raised at the end of our discussion of musico-literary intermediality in Chapter 2.1..

At the end of that chapter, we were left on the threshold of an artistic revolution as some European Modernists began to use musical models in the shaping of their literary work. In his study, Prieto links the appearance of the narrative use of musical models with the Modernist backlash against the representational conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Traditional realistic representation not only focused on the description of external reality, but did so in a way which suggested that language could be taken to be as transparent as window-glass: "The novelist may

112 Noon 2000, 96.

113 "Illusion's Perfume" doubles as the title of the part the remix appears in. The titles for the second and third parts of *Pixel Juice* are also culled from the remixes, flagging them as pieces on which the author desired the reader to pay attention to.

tend to treat the words on the page as if they were (or as if he or she wished they were) invisible and inaudible: the better the mimetic illusion, the less the reader is aware of the physical act of reading one word after another".[114] The Modernist response to this, to offer an all-too-sweeping generalization, was to foreground the problematic nature of mimetic illusion, while simultaneously expanding the objectives of mimesis to include the detailed depiction of subjective, inner experience. Musical models offered the Modernist writers an alternative way of thinking about narrative structure, one which didn't need to consider the denotative function of language as the sole organizing force of textual cohesion. Prieto is quick to deflate one of the persistent commonplaces about "the musicalization of fiction", namely that the use of a musical intertext offers the writer a key to literary abstraction:

> A work of literature can superimpose nonsemantic schemata over the semantic structure, as in rhyme, meter, and the fixed forms of poetry, but without the basic semantic mechanism of language – denotation – literature cannot exist. Thus, notwithstanding certain experimental forays into the domain of the nondenotative (like *Lettrisme* and Hugo Ball's poetry), there can be no such thing as "abstract literature," at least not in the sense that one speaks of abstraction in music or painting. A work of literature that didn't denote anything would not be abstract, it would simply be unreadable, in every sense of the word.[115]

The Modernist tradition of "musicalized fiction" forms a potent contrast to "dub fiction", although it remains debatable to what extent Noon was consciously responding to this tradition. Regardless, the critical debate about the Modernist use of musical models contains many points which remain salient to Noon's enterprise. In the "prose remixes" of *Pixel Juice*, as in "dub fiction" in general, Noon retains his strong interest in representation and storytelling; to achieve narrative coherence (including a sense of closure), he employs an array of traditional descriptive and formal devices. In other words, even at his most experimental, Noon relies on the tested means of narrative prose and lyric poetry for engaging the reader's attention by appealing to his or her intellect, emotions and senses. But although representation of a kind remains Noon's default goal in all of the "prose

114 Prieto 2002a, 12.
115 Ibid., 26.

remixes", it is clear that the entire "dub fiction" concept is a departure from the type of mimetic illusionism associated with naturalistic prose fiction. Noon's literary remixes can be taken as examples of a mode of writing which I would call "fractured mimesis" or, as a nod to *Cobralingus*'s musical intertext, "mimesis with glitches". In "dub fiction", the clichéd metaphor of written language as a window which grants the reader a clear view into the fictional world is deliberately broken to pieces. In technical terms, Noon's rearrangements often divert from usual syntax or grammar and create nonce words by fusing and juxtaposing parts of the source text. In the main, this selective reworking, which emphasizes wordplay, nonsense and the temporary (or small-scale) overpowering of sense by sound, is aimed toward the generation of *fantastical imagery.* The newly-minted words form texts which are rife with non-existent things and concepts, but due to the brevity and unconventional presentation of the reworkings, this imagery can also be described as fundamentally imprecise: like unexpected details favored by a cracked mirror, or random glitches in an audio signal, the imagery of *Pixel Juice*'s remixes careen away from the conventional path set out by the original text. A comparison between "Dub Karaoke" and the quoted passage from "Homo Karaoke" reveals many instances of this method ("drum" - "drumsoft mechanisms"; "headburst" - "needleburst skullfire"; "kaleidoscoped" - "the turntable's soft horizon / spins kaleidadelic"), but the very fact that the remix points the reader back to the original text serves as an example of the other main goal of "fractured mimesis". The bond between a source and its reworking underline the artifice of all writing by drawing the reader's attention to text as *inscription*, as a set of marks intentionally placed on the page in order to secure mimetic and other literary effects. The other functions of "dub fiction", which will be investigated in Chapter 4.2., arise from this interplay between inscription and fantastical imagery.

In the dub paradigm, the remixer is responsible for the mixing and modification of existing materials or samples (which can be long or extremely short in duration), and many remixes include elements he or she prepared especially for the piece. The remix, the completed new work, has a

structure that can be called the creation of the remixer. Noon's "dub fiction" also highlights the "double" nature of the source texts and their reworkings. Treating the texts as inscriptions which can be copied and then changed in numerous ways without affecting the identity of the original composition, Noon is able to accentuate the material or physical character of writing while at the same time insisting on the texts' power to function as pieces of mimetic literary fiction. The "prose remixes" of *Pixel Juice* are spotlighted in a number of ways, but the texts are modest in size: none of the "in the mix" segues between stories or the reworked "prose remixes" exceed more than three pages in length. In *Needle in the Groove*, by contrast, the remix aspect is brought to the fore even more prominently. In fact, the whole structure of the novel has been affected by "dub fictional" devices. The five remixes which most closely resemble those found in *Pixel Juice* are signalled by the chapter titles. Just like the short story collection, *Needle in the Groove* only contains reworkings of Noon's own texts. The so-called "original mix"[116], the source text for the remix sequence, consists of the narrator Elliot's impressionistic description of the song "Scorched Out for Love" being performed for him by the band he is about to join, and the points about Noon's image-heavy style made above apply to this passage as well. Nonetheless, the original text is a perfectly understandable instance of first-person narration. In the reworkings, "fractured mimesis" once again claims center stage, and the general trajectory of the reworked texts can be said to be toward ever-increasing fragmentation. Yet in a meaningful departure from the techniques used in *Pixel Juice*, the remixes are embedded within the unfolding story, so that the reader encounters a single narrative with remixed passages instead of *Pixel Juice*'s linked original-remix pairings. For example, the first, "soft remix"[117] gets its subtitle from the dialogue in the following chapter, wherein the other band members explain to Elliot that what he has just heard had been produced by softly shaking the globe containing the mysterious musical liquid central to the novel's plot. The remix chapter in effect stands in for the remixed song, but instead of trying to imitate the music itself, the reworking

116 Noon 1999a, 28.
117 Ibid., 36.

provides an atmospheric account of the narrator's listening experience (which naturally refers to the interplay of instruments, lyrics, and so forth).[118]

In the novel's closing dialogue, remixing is explicitly used as a grand metaphor for life, as one of the main character states: "but yer know, what if, like, all of life is just one big remix".[119] The reply – "you'll need a bloody good dj, won't you" – in a sense spurs the reader to circle back to the book's opening pages, where Noon lists the conventional dedications to friends and family under the title "scratches and samples".[120] In numerous interviews prior to *Needle in the Groove*, Noon had stated that atmospheric background music had proved essential to his writing process. Here, under the heading of "rhythms", Noon for the first time provides a concrete list of some of the musicians who he had listened to while writing the novel. Unsurprisingly, the list covers a number of genres and artists who have already made an appearance in these pages: dub (King Tubby), glitch (Microstoria, Pole), electronica (Autechre, Plastikman, David Toop), hip hop (DJ Premier), free improvisation (Derek Bailey, Evan Parker) and rock (The Smiths, Sonic Youth Research). The final part of the dedications, "mix process", underlines the connectedness of Noon's work by declaring that the novel's "dubs [were] created using the *cobralingus filtering system*".[121] It is to this strange fictional device – the underlying metaphor responsible for the structure of *Cobralingus* – that I must now turn my attention.

3.3. "Cobralingus Filtering Device": The Text-as-Signal Metaphor

For the first-time reader of *Cobralingus*, the book's front and back covers raise a number of pressing interpretative questions. What is the meaning of the work's title? What is the connection between it, the "Cobralingus Engine" and the so-called "Metamorphiction process"? How do these relate the "techniques of electronic dance music"? The biographical matter featured in the back

118 Likewise, the chaotic nature of the next three remixes (42, 117, 137) is explained by their immediate contexts. Note that all the remixes save the last one are included in the first of the novel's two parts. The final remix (257) is also tightly integrated into the action of the surrounding chapters.
119 Noon 1999a, 287.
120 Ibid., 5 (unnumbered).
121 Ibid., emphasis in original.

cover mentions that the "debut of the Cobralingus Engine" occurred in *Needle in the Groove*. In that novel, as we have just seen, the "cobralingus filtering system" is openly linked to the creation of the novel's literary dubs and/or remixes. By contrast, *Cobralingus* contains no explicit references to either dub music or remixing.[122] The "Instructions" and "Key to Filter Gates" sections which precede the ten *Cobralingus* pieces, while providing tentative answers to some of these inquiries, offer a number of additional complications. Taken together, the "Blurb" and the two introductory sections put in quasi-fictional terms many of the key points concerning the work's musical intertext.[123] Noon clarifies these points in the non-fictional statements written to coincide with the release of the book, but the expository material contained in *Cobralingus* itself can only be said to be perplexingly incomplete and, in places, self-contradictory. In part, this impression can be read as a symptom of Noon's uncertainty about striking a balance between an introduction to his literary practice and an exposition of the musical models which stimulated the writing, but many features of the Instructions are puzzling precisely because the ten *Cobralingus* pieces contain the clues for solving the major discrepancies.

That said, it remains the case that the fictional device and the clutch of related terms which provide the framework of the book offer the uninitiated reader a bewildering assemblage of metaphoric imagery. Noon's preliminary material assumes an acquaintance with contemporary electronic music, and given the "dub fictional" trajectory of his prior work, he may have felt that his projected or ideal reader would take to *Cobralingus*'s musical metaphoricity like a duck to water. As discussed in Chapter 3.1., "dub fiction" is an umbrella term which coalesces into one musical model a range of elements from two musical genres united by the practice of remixing. An important feature of Noon's model is that it takes into account both the listener's experience and the relevant

122 The exception here is "Dubchester Kissing Machine". Michael Bracewell's introduction, too, is explicit about Noon's musical models: the reader unfamiliar with Noon's earlier work will glean from his opening remarks the names of two artists associated with glitch music (Pole and Autechre) and the key concepts of "re-mixing and dub" (C, 6).

123 In this chapter, when I speak of the book's prefatory material I refer exclusively to these three sections authored by Noon. Later, I refer to all three simply as the Instructions.

musical production techniques. The perceptional and affective experience of listening to dub and glitch music must have convinced Noon of the viability, or desirability, of literature produced along similar expressive lines. In order to find a mode of writing capable of creating such expressive affinities, Noon turned for inspiration to some of the actual technologies and compositional processes used by dub and glitch musicians. While pointing to a wide range of topics concerning the listening and making of music, the musical model of *Cobralingus* considerably streamlines the technical, extra-literary matters unrelated to Noon's writerly objectives.

In the prefatory and non-fictional texts relating to *Cobralingus*, then, Noon presents a simplified musical model adapted to his literary goals. This being the case, the "Cobralingus filtering device" (C, 13) could be called a toy version of modern audio software.[124] In the terms laid out by the introductory sections, the "Cobralingus Engine / (filtering) device / machine" runs the "Metamorphiction process" producing a "Word-snake diagram", i.e. a readable "example" of the functioning machine (C, 13-15, Blurb). That is, in *Cobralingus* Noon uses audio signal processing as a metaphor for manipulating borrowed pieces of text in an improvisatory manner. An analog filter, a stable component of classic dug reggae, is "a specialized amplifier that controls the amount of gain to prescribed frequency ranges of sound. Making such adjustments changes the balance of harmonics found in the source sound signal. Adjusting the perceptibility of harmonics is key to modifying the identity or timbre of a sound, making filters one of the most important sound modification components available to the composer".[125] For Noon, however, the "Cobralingus filtering device" and its set of "filter gates" refer not only to analog and/or digital audio filtering, but stand in for the whole range of sonic manipulation made feasible by modern technology. Contemporary software-based composition enjoys a near-total control over the created or sampled audio material, so that the process of composition blends seamlessly with the notion of remixing.

124 Contemporary musical software programs are, of course, capable of mimicing analog production techniques. This explains in large part the terminological overlap between analog and digital music creation. A simpler, more pragmatic reason for the overlap is that many musicians continue to have a foot in both camps.

125 Holmes 2008, 194.

So far, I have been writing about the Blurb, the Instructions and the Key to Filter Gates as preliminary material prepared by Noon as a sort of manual for the reader approaching *Cobralingus* for the first time. But as their quasi-fictional tone makes clear, these sections cannot be taken as straight-forward authorial remarks.[126] The three sections, far from merely preparing the reader for the book proper, are essential parts of it.[127] The Instructions mix fact and fiction in a way which almost causes a traffic jam of meanings and connotations. As mentioned above, the style of these sections can partially be explained as a sign of confusion on the part of the author as to how far to take the analogy between the production of electronic music and his improvised brand of writing. To some degree, a style of metaphoric overload, of a cornucopia teeming with partly contradictory or down-right irreconcilable images and concepts, is a familiar tactic of Noon's fiction writing.[128] Furthermore, we must not rule out the possibility of ludic intent: the prefatory sections are playful in that the so-called Instructions deliberately lack crucial details, thus frustrating the reader's desire for helpful information and, by doing so, parodying the format of practical user's manuals. By describing the various "filter gates" the way he does, Noon in effect proposes a game for the reader to play while reading *Cobralingus*: how do the colorful descriptions match up with the various textual transformations supposedly engendered by them? Having said all this, however, the opening sections undeniably bear witness to unresolved contests between fact and fantasy over three important problems: (1) the author's role in the writing process, (2) the analogy between sound and text and (3) the nature of language. I will deal with each of these in turn.

The Blurb is adamant that the "Cobralingus device" should be understood in metaphorical terms by remarking that all of the pieces have been written only with the aid of "imaginary technologies and the strangely twisted pathways inside Jeff Noon's head" (C, Blurb). This

126 I say "quasi-fictional" with intent. In the *Cobralingus* essays and interviews, Noon recapitulates features of the writing process using expressions lifted almost word-for-word from the prefatory sections.

127 To date, only a single edition of *Cobralingus* has been published. It is conceivable that the back cover blurb, being after all only a few paragraphs of advertising copy, could be edited or changed for potential future editions, but the text would unlikely lose its basic thrust. Allington's pair of two-page illustrations (C, 8-9 and 122-123 (unnumbered)) bookend the main contents of *Cobralingus*, making a strong case for the unity of the Instructions and the pieces which follow them.

128 Cf. Chapter 3.2..

statement, which is the only time during the opening sections that the author's name is evoked, foregrounds individual consciousness, imagination and agency. Throughout the opening sections, Noon's authorial role is effaced: both the Instructions and the promotional blurb have the matter-of-fact tone of an instruction manual and a processual, slightly mechanized format, with each text announcing its end-point. The style of an impersonal technical manual for a piece of make-believe technology clashes with Noon's wish to let the reader know about and enjoy the actual improvisatory writing process. Noon's pretend distance is a bluff which the Instructions fail to maintain all the way through. The cracks in the façade begin to show when, in a context meant to underscore the mechanical nature of using the "filter gates", the Instructions mention that "[e]ach gate allows the writer to access different creative responses within his or her imagination" (C, 13). An even more conspicuous sentence comes at the end of the second paragraph: "This progress is entirely dependant [sic] on the user's inspiration, moment to moment, as the text makes its journey through the machine" (C, 13). This is a marked example of the paradoxical style of exposition employed in the Instructions: the text posits simultaneously that the metamorphosing text journeys through the machine on its own and that the writer, the user of the device, controls all the changes the text undergoes – which amounts to saying that the author wrote the *Cobralingus* pieces while fantasizing about a set of "imaginary technologies". What function does the distancing of Noon-as-author serve in the Instructions? The major reason for their detached tone is to act as a counterpoint to the *Cobralingus* pieces in which clear-cut autobiographical elements, as well as a host of implicit ones, are sprinkled throughout the sequence.[129]

Because the dominant signal processing metaphor relies on an analogy between audio signals and text, it is understandable that references to sound are rare in the opening sections: Noon wants to avoid creating cruxes in which it becomes unclear whether the mentioned sounds denote the properties of the text-as-signal or those of spoken language. Therefore, Noon systematically

129 The concluding "Sources" section confirms many of these autobiographical connections. In the case of "Dubchester Kiss", the entry provides additional information which helps bolster the autobiographical nature of the text. See also Chapter 4.3..

equates language with text, making almost no reference to speech. In the "Key to Filter Gates", the description of the "Release Virus" filter gate necessitates a small reference to how it changes "words of choice into others of a similar sound" (C, 15).[130] Generally, though, the term "text" (as well as "words" and "language") is used side by side with "signal" without giving prominence to any one word.[131] Having described a musical metaphor which identifies the manipulation of written language with audio signal processing, Noon introduces another set of metaphors about the nature of language which, while licensed by the flexibility of software-based composition, is not in any sense musical. For Noon, digital music such as glitch is a form of art which remains perpetually, as the Blurb has it, in a "mutated, liquid state" (C, Blurb). The Blurb does not refer to signal processing, but instead speaks of language as having the capacity to participate in "a future liquid state of consciousness". (Tellingly, the Instructions and the Key drop the liquid imagery altogether, replacing it with the text-as-signal metaphor.) The metaphor likening language to a liquid medium is one that Noon had begun evoking in non-fictional statements around the time of *Needle in the Groove* (e.g. the touting of the novel's "liquid dub poetics" on the back cover). In the two main *Cobralingus* essays, he sketches the relation of "dub fiction" to what he sees as the contemporary "liquid culture". On the whole, these comments can be seen as a short-lived theoretical offshoot of a fascination that has engaged Noon's fictional work, in one shape or another, since *Vurt*. In many of his stories, Noon returns to liquid (or other equally fluid biological) imagery in order to forge complex relationships between reality and writing.[132] In the opening sections of *Cobralingus* (particularly in the Key), written language – whether imagined as a signal or a liquid – is described as if it were a living organism. Some of the filter gates of the "Metamorphiction process" can "[force] language to behave itself", "[inject an] artificial stimulant into the language" or even "[kill]

130 This reluctance to mention sound is another example of how the Instructions offer a contrast to the *Cobralingus* pieces. Many of them – including "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", which I will explore in detail in Chapter 4.3. – feature sound and/or music as prominent subjects. More elementally, sound constitutes one of main domains of *Cobralingus*'s formal interest since a great number of reworkings extensively alter the prosodic qualities of their source texts.

131 In the Key, "text" and "signal" can appear separately ("Randomise" mentions only "text", "Sample" only "signal") or in conjunction (e.g. "Decay": "Gently breaks down the text. ... Introduces corruption to the signal.").

132 *Pixel Juice*'s "Alpha Box" stories, for example, envision letters as living entities which feel liquid to the touch.

the text" (C, 14-15). All of these metaphors – signals, liquids, animate matter – point to Noon's utopian desire to see common language somehow exceed its material bounds as written characters or spoken syllables. In these flights of fancy, Noon wants language to be alive, so that words would cease being fixed vessels of semantic content and turn into living creatures with the ability to grow and shape-shift, breed or unite with one another.

A scent of this fantastical desire clings to many of the expressions describing the "Metamorphiction process": according to one formulation, the process involves "dissolving language" (C, Blurb), while another asserts that "the transformation of the text" (C, 13) includes "[manipulating] language into new shapes and new meanings". In all of these statements, there is an ambiguity about the extent to which the organic metaphors ought to be taken literally. And even when the phrasing unmistakably refers to a process that is undertaken by a flesh-and-blood writer – for example, when the Blurb states that "borrowed text is ... transformed" by reworking "words ... into new forms" – the key terms are indebted to imagery reminiscent of biological change. The portrayal of this process wavers between these two views, and its neologistic name does the same. "Metamorphiction", which also serves as *Cobralingus*'s subtitle, blends together the words "metamorphic fiction". The coinage most likely has its origins in the artist's book *A Humument* (1980) by the British painter Tom Phillips.[133] The visual artist had obtained his title from W.H. Mallock's novel *A Human Document* (1892), and the method of first erasing selected letters and then uniting the fragmented words into a new whole is one which both Phillips and Noon use throughout their respective works.[134] The close association of the words "transformation" and "metamorphic" (in guise of "metamorphiction") suggests that for the purposes of the Instructions, the core meaning of both terms – a "change of form" of some description – is more relevant than potential nuances between the two. The ease by which the term metamorphosis has been applied in biological, artistic and other contexts undoubtedly owes much to the fact that, as one critic has it,

133 Phillips 2005, "Notes on *A Humument*" (unnumbered).
134 See Chapter 4.2. for an in-depth look at this method of erasure and recombination.

the term can "be used to indicate various aspects in the process of change: the evolutionary movement between two forms, the time (of change) that is spent between some point that was "before" and the one that comes "after", as well as the complete revision of an earlier form. Metamorphosis is characterized by a simultaneous drive to identity and difference".[135]

In the Key, the filter gates of the "Metamorphiction process" are imagined to act on the borrowed text and the subsequent reworkings in a highly mechanical manner. At no point is the text itself envisioned as a living organism. As I have been telling it up to this point, the story behind the layers of imagery used by Noon has gone through two stages: 1) the notion of reworking literature is aligned with an underlying fantastical conception of language as existing in a biological or "liquid state" (C, Blurb), and 2) this conception is complicated by the text-as-signal metaphor, which recasts the idea of textual reworking in noticeably more technical terms. However, the Instructions fail to explain the additional complication brought into the picture by the serpent imagery of the terms "Cobralingus" and the "word-snake diagram". The latter term leads the reader back to the domain of music technology. Noon has pointed out that the back cover of Brian Eno's *Discreet Music* (1975) includes a small but important detail which elucidates the origin of the term.[136] The back cover of the original LP contains an operational diagram which maps the pathway of the initial voltage signal – visualized simply as a black line – through the recording equipment. It is from such "schematics of audio processing modules"[137] that Noon derived the image of the "word-snake diagram" (C, 13). The meandering shapes of acoustic waveforms provided another key source for the serpent imagery. Beyond these musical models, of course, the term "word-snake" is derived from the layout of the actual *Cobralingus* pieces, from the way that the more fragmentary passages twist and turn on the page. The word "Cobralingus" – which we can gloss as being fake Latin for "cobra's tongue", or (more crudely) "cobra-tongue"[138] – continues the serpent motif, and

135 Mikkonen 1997, 2.
136 Noon 2001c.
137 Holmes 2008, 203.
138 The intimate linking of creativity and sexuality in Noon's body of work suggests that *Cobralingus* is also a mild sexual pun. *Pollen* and *Nymphomation* are two earlier titles with sexual overtones. In all of these works, creativity is

the development of both terms can be seen in the first two *Cobralingus* pieces to have been written (C, 119-120). "Exploding Horse Generator Unit" and "Boa Conscriptor Breeding System" are companion pieces which self-consciously reflect the ongoing process of writing.[139] In both cases, the self-conscious process insistently returns to the image of a "word serpent" (C, 51) or a "tongue-snake" (C, 97), and the title of the book appears during the writing process of the second piece (C, 99-100). Both texts add important details to the serpent imagery which the first-time reader encounters during his or her introduction to the "Cobralingus filtering device", but since they are extensions rather than fundamental components of Noon's text-as-signal metaphor, their closer examination will postponed until the next chapter.

A calculated change in terminology is perceptible between *Cobralingus*'s Instructions and Noon's non-fictional statements concerning the book. As we have seen, *Cobralingus* is a work so saturated with the dub/remix concept as to consider it a given, and this fact is bolstered by the spotlight the Instructions give to the signal processing metaphor. Conversely, in his essays and interviews, Noon replaces the "metamorphiction" label with the broader concepts of "dub fiction" and "liquid/fluid culture". The terminological shift is triggered by the varying functions the musical model serves for Noon's artistic project. *Cobralingus*, as a work of fiction, primarily draws on dub and glitch music as a formal and expressive model. Since the extra-literary debt is foregrounded by the "Cobralingus filtering device", the subtitle "metamorphiction" refers solely to imaginative literature.[140] In his non-fictional statements, on the other hand, Noon pursues two closely-related objectives. Firstly, he wants to spell out the nature of his musical borrowings in greater detail than he saw fit to do in *Cobralingus*. Secondly, after having established the pivotal importance of unrestrained interplay between the arts, he moves beyond literature and music to discuss his broad views on contemporary life, cultural and otherwise. Central to both goals is the rhetoric of literary

explicitly evoked in conjunction with sexual desire and fecundity.

139 Which, importantly, are not placed as the first texts; Noon clearly chose not to give away the source of the book's title right out of the gate.

140 Being free of musical connotations, the term completely sidesteps the complicated issues relating to the actual variety and specific cultural resonances of dub reggae and glitch.

innovation Noon employs in the two main *Cobralingus* essays. In these texts, "dub fiction" is presented as a mode of writing, "a potential literature"[141], which offers a challenge to traditional, backward-looking prose fiction by seeking stimulation from a range of contemporary genres of popular music. For Noon, dub marked the cultural moment when music "become a liquid experience"[142], and the reworking of borrowed literary texts in *Cobralingus* is just one instance of "allowing narrative to partake of the liquid experience".[143] In phrasing which mirrors quite closely that of the Key, Noon asserts that contemporary British prose fiction is overly preoccupied with plot-based, character-driven stories. What is needed, Noon argues, is a heightened attention to "the interplay of words": "Looked at in a different light, however, words become a liquid medium, a malleable substance capable of being transformed in surprising ways. Words can be stretched, broken, melted, drugged, mutated, forced into submission, set free. We need writers who revel in the wild excitement of language, at this deepest level, creating a kind of dub fiction".[144]

Needle in the Groove's "liquid dub poetics" had associated the dub/remix concept with Noon's imaginative view of language as a "liquid medium". The fluid imagery – from *Cobralingus*'s "liquid state" (C, Blurb.) to the manifesto-style evocations of our contemporary "fluid society"[145] – bridges Noon's fiction and non-fiction, and takes a further step away from the essential characteristics and intermedial possibilities of literature and music in order to discuss the author's creative methods in more general terms. By appealing to the supposedly natural fluidity of his chosen materials, Noon suggests that an awareness of the particular musical models is not an absolute requisite for enjoying *Cobralingus*. Noon also allies the fluid imagery with both experimentation and improvisation, and in the "Post Futurist Manifesto" he states that he has no interest in producing "the latest masterwork that manages to tell a good story in a simple enough

141 Noon 2001c.
142 Noon 2001b.
143 Ibid.
144 Noon 2001c.
145 Ibid.

manner".[146] In the kind of experimental context provided by *Cobralingus*, Noon's prime interest is in creative activity which happens to occur using the medium of language. Despite this anti-essentialist rhetoric, however, Noon's literary work as a whole is notable for the various literary labels he has affixed to them. Noon's labels ("avant pulp" (*Pixel Juice*), "metamorphiction", "dub fiction") typically bring together two unrelated words with settled, conventional meanings. Understanding the meaning of the coinage requires relating it to the features of the work to which the label has been attached. In this the labels function similarly to the "dub fictional" musical model: in both cases, the main interpretative task is not to explain away the inherent paradoxes, but to repeatedly confront them as part of the general engagement with the work in question. The only partially explained label has imaginative significance since it is both a guide to the literary work and an opportunity to fantasize about the contact points, aporias and conflicts conjured up by the elements of the label itself.

The echo chamber of key words formed by Noon's labels and introductory sections to *Cobralingus* is, then, worthy of sustained imaginative attention. But this should not obscure the degree to which the book's literary interest relies on a deliberate mismatch between the neat, mechanical exposition of the "Metamorphiction process" and the wonderful range of creative activity that goes on in the *Cobralingus* pieces. From the choice of the literary quotations to the array of clever technical solutions and the expressive richness of many of the passages, *Cobralingus* truly comes alive when the musical model is released from its confines in the Instructions and seen as an aid to literary composition in the ten texts which form the bulk of the book. By concentrating on the highlighted words of the Instructions (C, 13), we can move from the level of the fictional "Cobralingus filtering device" to the concrete aspects of the writing process Noon employed in *Cobralingus*:

> INLET [TEXT]: Choose and copy an existing text.
> FILTER GATES: Rework the text in a number of exact or wholly improvised ways.

146 Ibid.

> INTERIM [TEXT]: Make only a certain, highly variable, number of changes per filter gate.
>
> OUTLET [TEXT]: Bring the piece to a definite conclusion.
>
> WORD-SNAKE [DIAGRAM]: Emphasize the processual, unpolished nature of this mode of writing.

The exploration of these five main features of Noon's writing process will be the goal of Part 4, beginning with the expressive qualities of *Cobralingus*'s short prose narratives.

4. *Cobralingus* and Noon's Literary Practice

4.1. "Find Story": *Cobralingus*'s Fluid Narratives

According to the Instructions, the "Find Story" filter gate "[f]orces text into the nearest possible narrative, however nonsensical" (C, 14). Although the filter gate is evoked six times in connection with short prose narratives (C, 53, 68, 77, 90, 98, 115), it is by no means the only vehicle by which elements of storytelling are introduced into the *Cobralingus* texts. In addition to clear-cut prose fiction, many poetic and fragmentary reworkings have a tendency toward telling stories.[147] In the present chapter, however, I will explore three "Find Story" interim texts which I take to be representative of Noon's broader expressive purposes in *Cobralingus*. As such, the chapter marks a shift in focus from the musico-literary preoccupations of Part 3 to the more exclusively literary concerns of the next few chapters. By calling attention to the "expressive" qualities of the three "Find Story" reworkings , I hope to show how the narratives are not only quite in keeping with Noon's pre-*Cobralingus* fiction, but that they also share crucial themes and motifs with the other *Cobralingus* material, including the quasi-fictional Instructions. I will also argue, *pace* the Instructions, that the short stories featured in *Cobralingus* are not predominantly "nonsensical", but in fact frequently display a high degree of internal consistency in face of a creative process based on the repeated use of borrowed and manipulated key phrases. That creative process and its salient techniques will be the topic of Chapter 4.2., while the final chapter of Part 4 will bring together expressive and formal aspects in a sustained reading of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn".

A few general points about *Cobralingus*'s prose narratives are in order before we take a look at the most striking features of the three stories. To begin with, Noon's habitual interest in fantastical content and vague, metaphorical wordings results here in at times exasperatingly short fictions. Due to their extreme brevity, the narratives feature such schematic plots and characters that they can seem little more than opportunities for creating fascinating images and surprising phrases

147 For example, "Organic Pleasure Engine" relates a Thomas Lodge stanza to Noon's everyday experiences – in essence, a story-free poetic text inspires a chronological account of events (C, 23-4).

out of the earlier reworkings. Consequently, rather than feeling resolved and full-bodied, the narratives may come across as inconclusive or loosely suggestive. As an accompanying danger, readers familiar with Noon's earlier work are likely to overread the texts' expressive implications. Accepting that the *Cobralingus* narratives work rather more through suggestion than elaboration – and that this tendency affects all the features of the story, from the characters' psychological motivation to the physical details of the fictional worlds – is the necessary first step toward appreciating the narrative effects that Noon does manage to achieve while working under a set of self-imposed creative constraints. Befitting their miniature form, all the three stories are primarily concerned with sketching a vivid narrative situation which either undergoes a single major change or concludes just at the moment when the "real" action is about to start. The main reason for these all-too-soon climaxes is obvious: rather than stalling the step-by-step development of the *Cobralingus* pieces by devising full-length short stories, Noon wanted to keep up the pace of textual changes – and, by extension, the speed of reading as well. But a closer look at "The Circle Club" (C, 53), "Moon Base IX" (C, 68) and "HMS Juliet Bravo" (C, 98) – the made-up titles, by the by, are used simply for making clear which story is being referred to at any given time – shows that these concise narratives display many of Noon's characteristic expressive concerns.

"The Circle Club" (C, 53; from "Exploding Horse Generator Unit"). The informal first-person account of a bizarre anecdote opens with a sentence that places the reader smack *in medias res*: "Oh yeah, we went down the Circle Club last night, you know, the πr2 joint?"[148] The narrator's excited speech mixes cool reporting with heated metaphoric flourishes as he retells the previous night's "stage battle" between a performance poet and a male stripper.[149] To render vividly the wild, cartoony action which took place in the small, confined space of the Circle Club, the narrator uses a few neologistic expressions that are readily understandable in their immediate contexts (the poetic motormouth is called "speed-crazy"; the Club's "airhead" audience, a "zero-space posse").

148 The *skaz*-style narration can be profitably compared with *Pixel Juice*'s "Bassdust", a story which is also highly significant from the perspective of "dub fiction".

149 The story does not specify the narrator's gender.

However, his description of the poet's dance as "way past corruption" marks the moment when the narrator himself gets carried away: "Crying out that she wants to find the cure for dead love, and making like a yellow butter moon-mist photo, or some such, like a chiming dance, way past corruption". In his improvised attempt to convey the woman's body movements, the narrator first spits out a streak of words that seem to compare them to a blurry image (a "moon-mist photo"); he next realizes his poor choice of words (giving up with the added non-clarification of "or some such") and calls the performance "a chiming dance", an expressive dance that moved in agreement with the poet's words. The story's last few sentences introduce a series of wild metaphors as the poet blows up her "artificial horse":

> Oh yeah, I'm telling you, [the poet] spews all this crazy mixed-up *word-oil* at the horse, *sets fire to the language* and the whole fucking horse just blows up right there on the stage, splattering the poor stripper guy, the owner, and most of the audience as well. I tell you, man, it was *like Shakespeare exploded*. *Like a word-serpent*, making a nightmare book, and the poet wins a tumbling.

The narrator confuses the performance poet's action (of pouring oil over the "plastic horse") and her frantic intermingling of poetry, dance and sculpture. This results in picturing language as a flammable liquid. The two similes compare literary production with, respectively, violent activity and fantastical biology. If the narrator felt that "Shakespeare exploded" at the performance's climax, the simile may perhaps indicate something about the contents of the poet's work. Alternatively (and, I believe, more plausibly), the narrator here takes the figure of Shakespeare to stand for the type of canonical writing with which the poet's performance has stylistically very little to do. The second simile likens the performance's crazy conclusion to the literary work of a "word-serpent". In the context of the *Cobralingus* project as a whole, this mention marks the first instance of the "Cobralingus creature" that will be developed in the remaining reworkings of "Exploding Horse Generator Unit" and fleshed out from a different angle in "Boa Conscriptor Breeding System".

In an important sense, all the sentences quoted so far bear witness to the creative compromises entailed by the *Cobralingus* process: Noon's obligation to reuse as many words from

the previous reworking as possible leads in this "Find Story" text to a series of highly visual yet ambiguous phrases. By placing the retained words (in an edited form) in the mouth of a worked-up and imaginative speaker, Noon achieves sly effects which resonate both within the short narrative and with the larger themes of *Cobralingus*. When the mysterious "word-serpent" is related to the narrator's earlier mention of the stripper's hoped-for ability to "get the [audience's] old *snake-glands* powered up", it becomes clear that his improvised phrases associate literary creativity with sexual arousal by means of serpentine imagery. Let us follow the connections between the metaphors: 1) the venom-producing "snake-glands" symbolize the glands in human males and females responsible for lubrication (named, respectively, after the anatomists Cowper and Bartholin); 2) in this context, the "word-serpent" links the use of language with sexual excitement; 3) the link is strengthened by the evocation of a "word-oil" which couples language with (by now fully sexualized) liquidity.

"Moon Base IX" (C, 68; "What The Flower Holds Most Sweet"). The liquid imagery continues to carry libidinal undertones in this science fiction story set in a lunar colony. In her role as the supposedly dispassionate observer, Dr. Janet Plath compiles a journal entry in which she notes that mutated nectar from certain "stunted, ill-formed, night-blooming" flowers has caused drastic changes in one of the bee hives. She makes three key observations, signalled by the repeated imperative "Witness", about the "new circumstances" of Hive 7. The first of these notes the frenzied sexual activity within the nest:

> Witness: activity inside the hive is fevered, hyper; as though crisis were at hand. Watched on the monitors, amazed, as the Queen was serviced time and time again by her countless, over-fertile suitors. I felt a guilty pleasure, as though from watching a pornographic film. A dark orgy of buzz and wingbeat. In vaporous heat.

The narrator's "guilty pleasure" in recording the sexual behavior of the bees is evident in her use of language: she cannot help herself from becoming lyrical in her description of the illicit, curious sight and lets a rhyme ("wingbeat"/"heat") slip into her straightforward prose narrative. Due to the

effects of the “brightest, thickest honey”, the bee colony is about to produce oversized grubs which Dr. Plath views as “obscene and serpentine”. The multivalent first adjective not only serves as an objective description (the new grubs are markedly larger than the normal ones), but also registers the narrator’s ambiguity concerning the mutated grubs (she finds them simultaneously arousing and disgusting). “Serpentine” too is primarily used to call attention to the size of the mutants. However, if the *Cobralingus* pieces are seen as a network of internal allusions, the serpentine imagery of “The Circle Club” adds a sexual element to the description. It would be unreasonable to suggest that the narrator is sexually attracted to the bees; rather, she is fascinated by the potential for fundamental change that the mutated colony so potently illustrates. Unlike in “The Circle Club”, sex here is not explicitly linked with literary or artistic production. Instead, as the essential form of fecundity, biological reproduction effortlessly represents other types of creativity as well. The bees, in interacting with their mutated environment (the flowers which Dr. Plath calls “the diaspora of the accelerated evolution programme”), set in train a process of major yet largely unknown transformations.

For the narrator, the “moon honey” is an index of drastic transformation and genuine novelty. In examining the “royal jelly” she has collected from the queen, Dr. Plath ponders whether she will be able to cross from private imaginings (the idea of bodily transformation) to experiential fact (the taste of the honey and its potential effects): “A strange tranquillity comes over me as I examine this mutated elixir: what moist knowledge must it contain? Shall I ever be brave enough to take a mouthful...” The sense of tranquillity she feels might be the calm before the storm, the final moment of serenity before a life-altering event. Alternatively, the tranquillity may be rooted in the narrator’s dim awareness that the honey, regardless of its mutated state, will not transform her very being in any way analogous to the bees of Hive 7. If she finally decides to taste the honey, the sticky liquid may not have what it takes to turn from an index to an instigator, to an actual agent of biological change. The future “mouthful” – Noon opts for the word that underlines corporeality of

the product of this transformed, over-sexed bee colony (cf. a variant such as "spoonful") – will perhaps be a sensuous experience with only a thin layer of transformative symbolism attached. And so the story ends, the suspension points leaving the narrator in a tremulous state of intellectual and sensual expectation.

"HMS Juliet Bravo" (C, 98; "Boa Conscriptor Breeding System"). Like "Moon Base IX", this fantastical story with a slightly Victorian atmosphere takes the form of a fictitious report that allows Noon to quickly set up a richly suggestive scene. And also like the earlier story, "HMS Juliet Bravo" seems more like the prelude to a longer narrative than a self-sufficient imaginative achievement. The text economically sketches the "unearthly atmosphere" of the "ghostly vessel" and concludes precisely at the moment when the narrator feels that his life might be threatened by the deadly cobra which remains on the loose abroad the ship. The encounter with the snake could perhaps also shed light on the crazy experiments conducted by the scientist Oscar Romeo. The narrator's wish – "If I could only connect the various clues." – becomes the reader's as well as he or she learns a number of startling facts from Romeo's "blood-stained workbook":

> Most of his papers have been set on fire, but from these few pages we learn the *Bravo* was carrying a bejewelled King Cobra (quaintly named Charlie in the notes) back from India. They also made a stop at Sierra Leone, obtaining there 'certain magical items of Zulu origin', namely a kilo of pollen grains taken from a rare species of lilac flower. Also, he writes of his use of the alphascope, a device 'to reveal the secret meanings of words'. With this he claims to have uncovered something called the 'tongue-snake thesis'. In his rhymed suppositions, the dove, the pollen, and the mysterious tongue-snake are all connected.

What can be made out of this tantalizing, inconclusive listing is that Romeo had utilized magical artifacts and ordinary flora and fauna (if rare lilac pollen and a king cobra can be called "ordinary"), together with an "alphascope", to form a "'tongue-snake thesis'". The "mysterious tongue-snake" recalls the "word-serpent" of the "The Circle Club". And indeed, "Boa Conscriptor Breeding System" was the second *Cobralingus* piece Noon composed, and in the very next reworkings (C, 99-100) the title of the book is mentioned, ostensibly brought about as a result of improvisation. As

the first two texts to have been written, "Exploding Horse Generator Unit" and "Boa Conscriptor Breeding System" are noticeably self-conscious pieces in which Noon is imaginatively searching for the boundaries of the writing method formalized by the "Cobralingus Engine". In this light, the "alphascope" – "a device 'to reveal the secret meanings of words'" – is a knowing reference to the "imaginary technologies" introduced in the Instructions.[150] When the narrator of "HMS Juliet Bravo" concludes his or her report by describing the elusive cobra as "a sliding, flowing shape always just out of my vision", the conjunction of serpent and liquid imagery should come as no surprise. Perhaps it is too far-fetched to see the snake as flowing, fluid-like, just behind the narrator. But the extreme shortness of the *Cobralingus* fictions, especially when they are read as "interim texts" of pieces which constantly point to the language of *Cobralingus* as being in a "mutated, liquid state", almost invites the attentive interpreter to see in them self-conscious allegories of Noon's ideas about the nature of writing and the functioning of the creative imagination.[151]

It is striking how much emphasis Noon chooses to place on liquidity even under such tight space constraints. For Noon, one of the main attractions of liquid or fluid imagery (he does not draw a technical distinction between the two) is that the concept of liquidity can cover and cross-link many of his creative preoccupations. The theoretical flirtation with a contemporary "fluid society" in Noon's non-fictional statements is transmuted in *Cobralingus* into an acute fascination (bordering on obsession) with a wide array of liquid imagery. Not only is the notion of reworked language as a "liquid state" promoted in the Instructions, but – as we have seen – liquidity is a central source of motifs in many of the prose texts. From "word-oil" (C, 53) to "mutated elixir" (C, 68) and "poison" (C, 98), fluids obviously occupy a pivotal place in Noon's private store of symbols. In *Cobralingus*, "liquid" – both the general concept and the assortment of substances – functions as a loaded key word which describes and interrelates two separate topics: 1) the foregrounding of embodied experience and 2) a utopian vision of language.

150 Cf. C, 13: "The Cobralingus Engine allows the user to manipulate language into new shapes and new meanings."
151 See also Chapter 3.3..

The ways in which Noon employs the concept of liquidity is occasionally quite hermetic, but it does not follow that his use of the concept is utterly inpenetrable. Rather, liquid imagery seems for Noon to mark the end of explication, the very point at which the author feels that, were he to spell out the implications of his stories, he would have to involve himself in a complicated, rational argument he would rather not take part in. Here the two manifestations of liquidity reinforce each another. On the one hand, the various concrete fluids featured in the *Cobralingus* texts represent things that language has a hard time getting a grip on: the corporeal interaction with liquids encompasses a host of sensory experiences which are, in the main, sensual and highly subjective. On the other, as an abstract concept rooted in embodied experience, liquidity is one of Noon's preferred ways of imagining language in the process of becoming more than itself. That is, language as a subject of Noon's fantasies becomes a "liquid medium".[152] The two manifestations of liquidity, then, are both reactions against the limitations of language. Where one recalls the wide range of somatic experiences which are largely non-linguistic, the other dreams of language as a type of frictionless communication.

What makes this "liquid state" so attractive to Noon is the way in which it surpasses the limitations of language, even if only in the imagination. Liquefied language comes with the promise of total communication since the malleable words can assume any form the author wishes. In fact, a major part of the fantasy is to obliterate the need for an author altogether: in its "liquid state", language is alive, composed of metamorphosing letter-forms which have the potential to express absolutely anything. This imagined language has no need for words, and the "production of words" (C, Blurb) is a matter of organic growth and reorganization that does not entail an iota of delicate writerly craft which has to weigh the connotations of each and every word. This dream image of language as a living, prolific multiplicity of fluid shapes has its roots in the unchecked imagination, in the mental, only partially linguistic imaginings in which the thoughts groping for verbal expression are not yet coupled with specific written characters or spoken sounds. A liquefied

152 Noon 2001c.

language would have the potential to express every known nuance and discover wholly new facets of reality – and once those nuances and facets were unearthed, they could be passed from one mind to another in a way which cuts across subjective differences. This organic view of "the production of words" is essentially a dream about bridging the chasm between thought and language.

To be sure, the few previous paragraphs contain much that is purely conjectural, but I hope that my discussion of Noon's use of liquid imagery has demarcated a vitally important area of Noon's aesthetic thinking.[153] A more down-to-earth explanation for Noon's vision of a "liquid" language would start from the fact that a remix is a musical mixture, a seamless blend of sonic elements. What a "liquid state" of language entails, therefore, is first and foremost the kind of freedom to mix and re-combine elements which dub reggae and glitch electronica enjoy. Another label for such infinitely pliable writing would be "dub fiction", a form of fiction which does not consider characters as "set in stone". In the next chapter, I will continue to explore the large subject of Noon's literary practice as it is displayed in the pages of *Cobralingus*.

4.2. Noon's Techniques of Textual Reworking

As we saw in Chapter 3.3., *Cobralingus*'s Instructions provide conflicting information about the exact nature of Noon's writing methods. On the one hand, each of the "filter gates" is said to have "a specific effect upon the language" (C, 13); on the other, the entire writing process is taken to be reliant on the writer's "inspiration, moment to moment, as the text makes its journey through the machine" (Ibid.). It is fair to say that the Instructions raise expectations which are not fully met by the *Cobralingus* pieces.[154] But it is equally well-founded to point out the large-scale continuities between Noon's chosen musical model and his writing methods. In the current chapter, the terms set out by the musical model are largely rejected so that we might, so to speak, look under the hood of

153 Incidentally, a similar kind of metaphoric use of liquid imagery (fluids as emblems of changeable and fundamentally unsolid concepts and situations) is found in the work of the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity* (2000)).

154 As noted in Chapter 3.3., the incongruity between the Instructions and the *Cobralingus* pieces may well be an intentional stratagem on Noon's part.

the “Cobralingus Engine” and assess the range of literary applications Noon derived music. Such an evaluative task runs the risk of turning *Cobralingus* into a taxonomist’s sandbox. In what follows, then, *Cobralingus* will be approached as a work which possesses both a significant formal framework and a set of individual texts which are rife with exceptions to the purported rules of this overriding framework. The compendium of writing methods presented in this chapter has been compiled with an awareness that many features of *Cobralingus* cannot really be analyzed apart from the reworked texts in which they appear. Since so many of the intriguing compositional details are unique responses to the available textual material, it is not always unproblematic to abstract clearly defined writing methods from the reworked texts. Although the main aim of the present chapter is to examine *Cobralingus*’s most common writing techniques, a host of rarer, even one-off procedures forms a secondary area of interest.

Without any doubt, improvisation served as the guiding principle in all ten *Cobralingus* pieces. Next to the great variety of unsystematic, improvisational techniques, the examples of the sort of constrained writing which the “filtering device” metaphor might lead the reader to expect may seem few in number. However, Noon does employ some precise formal constraints, including various poetic forms with fixed rhyme schemes. Furthermore, Noon’s central method of textual erasure effectively straddles the improvisational and rule-bound modes of composition: the method demands that the writer has to delete parts of the source text, but does not specify any additional rules. The acceptance of improvisation as Noon’s *modus operandi* provides an explanation for many of the redundancies introduced in the “Key to Filter Gates”. If the suggested functions of numerous “filter gates” overlap with one another, it is good to bear in mind that such overlap is the direct result of Noon’s process of discovery. For the author, the “Cobralingus filtering device” worked as an enabler of a free-form mode of writing which retained Noon’s control over every aspect of composition. The *Cobralingus* pieces carry their maker’s stamp: Noon’s decision-making power over the final form of even the most fragmentary reworkings was total. In the course of reworking

texts, Noon faced three compositional choices each time he proceeded from one step to the next: Which elements of the current text should be retained? What new writing should be added? And how should the material be arranged visually? The first choice calls for the erasure of large parts of the source text, creating a reworking with a fragmented visual form. The second entails the introduction of new writing in the form of either new quotations (or "samples") or, more frequently, poetry or short fiction authored by Noon himself. This second creative choice also encompasses the slight or extensive alteration of existing borrowings or pieces of text. Like the method of erasure, the addition of text involves a fixed number of typographic decisions. Before looking into the more specific layout solutions used for poetic and prosaic texts (and their fragmentary counterparts), however, we ought to address the nature of the ubiquitous "filter gates".

The "filter gate" boxes, which are among the most noticeable features of the book's layout, fulfill several functions. The main one is simply to signal that a change, or a set of changes, has occurred between the source text and the reworking. By itself, a filter gate indicates only that a specific or general modification has taken place, but it will not help the reader to predict the next stage in the transformation of the text.[155] The amount of change between the various texts is often greater than the type or number of the filter gates would imply. The process therefore leaves out steps which conceivably could have been presented as additional "interim texts". The registering of erased, added or otherwise modified elements is an important part of reading *Cobralingus*, and certain passages self-consciously refer to the fragmented form of much of the book.[156] Regardless of the insight the individual filter gates provide about the process of textual reworking, they all form graphic boundary markers between the texts, thus structuring the reading experience and helping the reader to focus attention on the continuities and disruptions between the various interdependent texts. Lastly, the filter gates act as constant reminders of the text-as-signal metaphor underlining the literary experience. Since the reader could perfectly well infer the type of change taking place

155 With the exception of "Search & Replace".
156 E.g. "The wreckage of the text itself together binds / From dregs and flecks, from knots of twisted hair" (C, 60).

simply by comparing the adjacent reworkings, the filter gates could plausibly have been replaced by a single, unchanging symbol, such as an asterisk. But, as in Noon's earlier "dub fiction" writings, *Cobralingus* explicitly links a mode of writing with a musical model in such a way that unconventional features of the text can be given, in the first instance, an extra-literary rationale and, via analogy, a set of coherent literary aims.[157] Even if the filter gates – particularly when more than one are employed simultaneously – grant only an imprecise indication of the next reworking, the difference between an asterisk and a graphic unit such as "Mix - Purify - Enhance" (C, 66) is plain. The names and the graphic look of the boxes forge an analogy with modern electronic music, and the often contrasting series of evocative verbs – other powerful examples would include "Decay - Control" (C, 30) and "Randomise - Increase Sense" (C, 51) – point to the main techniques of modification by using strongly emotive terminology.

The filter gates essentially assign each passage to its own space on the page, avoiding the build-up of textual traffic jams. They also function as adhesive elements, tying the individual passages into a linked chain of reworkings. The modular structure of the book is complemented by the spacious page design. The layout follows predictable typographic parameters: the body text, for instance, has a uniform font type, size and color (although punctuation fluctuates quite a bit). The uses of cursive (e.g. all the material added using the "Sample" filter gate) and bold type (cf. C, 65, 76, 89,97) vary a little, but both are always used to highlight certain words or sections in a way which makes the reading experience more uncluttered. Practically no two neighboring pages have the same text alignment. *Cobralingus* contains justified prose texts, while centered (C, 69), flush left (C, 101) and flush right (C, 55) are used in different poems. Other frequent shifts in typographical style occur in the relative horizontality (all prose paragraphs, many lists (C, 29, 51, 87)) or verticality (poetry, certain lists (C, 42, 50)) of the texts.

The typography, then, mirrors the process of textual reworking on the level of the spatial

157 If Noon had drawn inspiration from Western classical music instead of contemporary electronic music, the *Cobralingus* pieces might employ tempo ("molto allegro") or mood ("vivace") markings in place of the filter gates.

organization of writing. In fact, all the characteristics mentioned so far would be unremarkable if they were part of an independent work of short fiction or poetry. The tension created between the typographical forms of the texts within a single *Cobralingus* piece is what makes the layout truly expressive. Similarly, the use of italics and bold type aims toward clarity within a particular reworking: the occasional chaotic feel – the sense of a "Metamorphiction process" being in operation – comes from a succession of such small texts with slightly varied layout solutions. In addition to the two examples of traditional visual poetry (C, 24 (the apple), 44 (the six-fingered hand)) in which a kind of picture is formed by the careful positioning of letters, *Cobralingus* features a great number of "text clusters".[158] The instances of expressive typography make parts of a given text pictorial: the standard linear scanning of text is abandoned as the eye registers a space occupied by an image. The switch between reading linear text and looking at a picture-made-of-words (or the spatial relationships between different texts) is quite natural.

For the great bulk of the texts, the intended reading order is apparent. Each *Cobralingus* piece is a linear process (a set of texts, a series of transformations) with mainly unidirectional texts, but occasionally a passage is laid out in such a way that it prompts the reader to make choices regarding the order in which to read the words. Most of the word clusters call for this sort of indeterminate reading order, but there are important distinctions to be drawn between passages which superficially look quite similar. Although many of the quotations are introduced independently into a *Cobralingus* piece using the "Sample" filter gate (C, 30, 41, 51, 57, 96, 114), others are juxtaposed with other new material (C, 23, 29, 40, 42, 50, 67, 87, 113).[159] The juxtaposition of textual passages opens up the possibility for a truly multi-directional reading order, but there is no fear of a mix-up thanks to the typographical distinctness of the various "streams". Most of the "Sample" quotations are either word lists or non-fragmentary excerpts of prose or poetry, so that they can all be read as an independent unit, or a separate textual stream, which has

158 The graphic beehive hexagons (C, 70) also have a clear representational shape, even though they haven't been produced in a similar fashion.

159 A further complication: both free-standing and juxtaposed quotations may have a cluster shape (C, 30, 40, 42).

been placed parallel to the other elements of the reworked text. Mimicking the reader's need to contrast the various "interim texts" in order to enjoy the whole "Metamorphiction process", the texts with juxtaposed elements really begin to exert their expressive force when the reader studies the connections between these disparate streams of information.[160]

The second category of text clusters consists of (unsampled) words and/or letters which are randomly spaced and can be read in any order. Importantly, the complete words (C, 41, 67, 70, 76) and individual letters (C, 74, 99, 100, 117) clearly relate to their immediate contexts. So, while the reader's eye may initially be drawn to one grouping rather than another, the semantic import of the cluster as a whole is clear at a glance. (In "Pornostatic Processor" (C, 76), for example, each of the key words is surrounded by words Noon associated with them.) The third and final type of text cluster is made out of fragmented passages which differ from the other types in two pivotal ways: 1) even though they are randomly or irregularly spaced, these clusters benefit the most from a strictly linear reading, and 2) the words and phrases of these fragmented texts do not often yield transparent semantic or even grammatical sense. Both differences can be accounted for by the method of textual erasure. Unlike the other two cluster types (which either add new words or transfer short snippets from one reworked text to the next), the fragmented clusters were produced by going over the preceding reworking, deleting most of the words, and then possibly slightly changing the order of the resulting fragments. The looser, more clustery arrangements (C, 32, 49, 50) contain only complete words, but both the smaller phrases and the overall meaning of the cluster is extremely vague. Other textual arrangements (C, 30, 54, 112, 114, 116) are noticeably tighter, and although they may contain individual letters, a linear reading of these fragmented texts promises to make a kind of sense. In the "Ghost Edit" reworking of "Exploding Horse Generator Unit" (C, 54), a linear reading offers the only chance of binding the fragments together in a meaningful way: the stand-alone letter E effortlessly links up with next words of the same line to produce "e_lastic poet",

160 The use of the "Sample" filter gate is not universal; cf. "Pornostatic Processor" and "Lamenting Mechanism". Additionally, by comparing the dates of composition (C, 119-120.) we can see that the use of fragmentary clusters became rarer as Noon's project developed. Half of the *Cobralingus* pieces do not utilize fragments at all.

while the other surrounding words yield no sensible combinations (e.g. “wheels_e”, “e_reads”, etc.). By comparing the fragmented text with the following reworking, it becomes evident that the latter text has been created by reading through the fragments in a linear fashion and then slightly revising the results (e.g. “we / the Circle // poet” (C, 54) becomes “we the circling poem” (C, 55)). All this talk of textual erasure, fragmented writing and vague semantic meanings point to a single conclusion; namely, that the idea of “fractured mimesis” raised in Chapter 3.2. can now be reformulated to fit the demands of *Cobralingus*.

The fragmented word clusters formed by erasure, together with *Cobralingus*’s other typographical peculiarities, foreground the materiality of text. By its persistence attention on written language as a set of modifiable inscriptions, the work enacts some of the central problems concerning the nature of writing, with a particular focus on certain thorny questions raised by the reading strategies required by representational fiction. The empty spaces left between the retained words indicate that a significant amount of text has been deleted, as when “Oh yeah, *we* went down *the Circle* Club last night, you know, the πr2 joint? Should’ve seen it, they had this *poet* on stage, going speed-*crazy* she was, *like a million words a minute*.” (C, 53, emphases added) becomes: “we / the Circle // poet / crazy / like a million words a minute” (C, 54). But as this example illustrates, the reader is meant to cross the gaps with ease, since the remaining words and phrases often create a new, inchoate continuity (with possible misspellings) which is preferable to treating the isolated elements as unrelated gnomic utterances. The more fragmentary the inscriptions (e.g. “st” and “alk” (C, 30)), the greater the impetus to merge the meaningless units into a familiar word (“stalk”), but – and here “fractured mimesis” is in full swing – the fragments remain separate on the page, just as semantically open as before. The reader is responsible for making sense of the textual debris, of trying the neighboring fragments together to see if they fit. For Noon, the fragmentary clusters gave a chance to redirect the course of the unfolding *Cobralingus* piece by trimming down the available material. For the reader, they provide an opportunity to track Noon’s creative choices, while at the

same time fantasizing about how the fragments might be manipulated toward other forms that were not pursued by the author.

Tempering with the qualities of a given "interim text" – that is, reworking parts of its inscription – has major consequences for the representational information carried by the changed text. Once the smooth surface of verbal representation has been broken into fragments, some words or phrases continue to sustain mimetic effects ("oh girl_dancing_a tune unknown_lost deep in the_groove" (C, 112)), while others function only as single (often fragmentary) words that no longer refer to any specific context or narrative situation (on its own, the denotative content of the "vens_u" fragment (C, 114) is null: it accrues functional meaning as a bridge between "Levenshulme" (C, 113) and "Venus" (C, 115).). The break-down of mimesis achieved by fragmenting grammatically and expressively conventional texts is only the most obvious way Noon's writing methods can be said to produce a "fractured" form of literary representation. A second sense, one perhaps better captured by the alternative label "mimesis with glitches", is that once examples of error or deviation from standard representation have crept into the text, the reader will find that customarily unproblematic aspects of the reading experience also start to feel more troublesome, less securely fixed. This is because the reading of conventional, "error-free" texts – such as a a prose piece with directly identifiable mimetic goals (e.g. C, 90) or a poem with a fixed rhyme scheme and a poetic speaker (C, 95)) – is also influenced by the text-as-inscription aspect highlighted by the fragmentary passages: more than is the norm, the reader of *Cobralingus* is aware that the words he or she is perusing are both a series of printed letters as well as varied, highly patterned examples of literary representation.

Most of the features touched on up to this point can profitably be compared with the remarks made about dub and glitch music in Chapter 3.1.. The text-as-signal metaphor accounts for the basic processual nature of the *Cobralingus* pieces and the range of textual manipulation occasioned by the various filter gates (many of which are actually namesakes of music production techniques (e.g.

mix, overload, sample)). Dub reggae's pioneering notion of sampling and altering well-known existing compositions is of course the fundamental starting point of Noon's practice, and his frequent use of juxtaposed elements finds a parallel with dub's accumulation of distinct vocal performances during the course of a single song. The fragmented word clusters, on the other hand, are akin to the tiny samples or sonic artifacts of glitch music. These different kinds of fragments are essential to the works they are featured in, since both glitch and *Cobralingus* would be unthinkable without minute, random-seeming units as parts of their textural make-up. But whereas the entire musical language of glitch is based on these distorted samples, *Cobralingus* employs its textual fragments only sporadically as "way stations of random noise".[161] As chaotic, ungrammatical passages whose meaning is allowed to remain sketchy, the fragmentary clusters form bridges between coherent texts. In this way, Noon's musical model helps him fold non-sequential materials back into a sequential order. Since textual reworking and selective quotation (i.e. filtering and sampling) form the backbone of the over-arching creative process, each *Cobralingus* piece can be viewed as a continuity that has been designed to withhold even extreme breaks in the thematic and motivic strands from one reworking to the next. A listener's experience of a classic dub reggae track can also be seen as one of Noon's inspirations: the relatively steady background of, say, King Tubby's vast drum 'n' bass soundscapes give the listener a sense of an unshakeably unfolding process, while the rich details achieved by improvisation and experimentation provide surprises and color to the musical action. In a similar manner, Noon could trust in the form-giving qualities of the "Cobralingus filtering device" and improvise freely upon the quoted or already rewritten material.

In addition to (1) the structural reliability provided by the filter gates, (2) the semantic flux of the fragmented clusters, and (3) the multi-directional reading experience offered by juxtaposed streams of quoted and newly composed text, *Cobralingus* is formally marked by (4) a variety of texts which fall into different genres and employ a great number of technical solutions. Noon has stated that *Cobralingus* is an attempt at "a new kind of writing, somewhere between poetry and

161 Amerika 2007, 240.

prose, that revels in the secret life of words"[162], and the book's layout substantiates the claim that many of the pieces are best seen as liminal experiments in form, as texts to be located "somewhere between poetry and prose" instead of as traditional examples of either genre. While the exact generic parameters of prose and poetry are under constant revision by contemporary authors, it seems clear that the processual nature of *Cobralingus* allowed Noon to move between mainly rhyming poetry (C, 33, 60, 69, 88, 91, 101, 106-7, 113), short prose narratives (C, 28, 29, 31, 40, 53, 55, 57, 58, 68, 77, 90, 98, 115), and a host of liminal, harder-to-classify texts. The prose texts and poems often make quite good sense outside of their immediate context, and would not seem out of place in, say, *Pixel Juice*. Most of the poems do not follow traditional forms, but nonetheless rely on simple rhymes (C, 33, 60, 69, 88, 101, 113 all stick to an ABAB structure; ABCB (C, 91) and AABA (C, 107) are the exceptions) and fairly constant metres.[163] The diction and syntax are often noticeably formal and even archaic ("Allow the heart's encompass set a course" (C, 33), "tomorrow's tales are stretching / your waiting question's kiss // the smile a dancer's body / that never is and never is" (C, 113)). The adherence to strict forms is again best understood as part of Noon's modular, accumulative writing process: the individual text, though it can be read, appreciated and critiqued as a stand-alone work, ought to be first and foremost considered as a link in the chain of textual transformations. The prosodic patterns of the poetry contrast sharply with both the looser prose pieces and the isolated word clusters. *Cobralingus* packs considerable stylistic variety into a relatively small space, and the "success" of a given poem (none of which would, I think, weather well divorced from their surrounding reworkings) is less important than the stylistic and expressive contrast it offers to the preceding text. Noon has stated that similar thoughts lead to *Needle in the Groove*'s "Bass Instruction Manual"[164], a sonnet about bass playing tinged with melancholic brooding: "For instance, you could write about a DJ mixing, but in the style of John

162 Noon 2001c.

163 For examples of more free-form poetry, see C, 28, 55. In these cases, however, the typographical presentation may be misleading: instead of searching for the texts' "poetic" qualities, the reader could just as well view them as non-generic, fragmentary texts.

164 Noon 1999a, 46, 106, 174, 277.

Donne ... [You can write] very elegantly and poetically about something which is very modern and chaotic. And it sets up a kind of mix, a clash of styles".[165] The "clash of styles" evident in each *Cobralingus* piece takes precedence over considerations of poetic theory and practice: for Noon, it seems, the "elegant" and "poetical" qualities of a poem lie in its rhymed formal regularity and unconventional, preferably old-fashioned syntax and vocabulary.

The *Cobralingus* pieces make use of certain clear-cut literary constraints which members of the Oulipo, or other contemporary adherents of constrained writing such as the Canadian experimental poet Christian Bök (*Eunoia* (2001)), would have no trouble accepting. The *restricted vocabulary* of "The Argument of His Book (eleven letter version)" (C, 101) uses only words which share letters with the word "Cobralingus". On two occasions, reworkings consist of *anagrams* of the previous texts (C, 39, 75). There are three cases where key words trigger *associations* (C, 76, 87, 88). More mechanical operations include the *translation* (C, 64) of the Latin names for certain "areas of the Moon" (C, 63). Use of the "Search & Replace" filter gate (C, 58, 67, 106) substitutes a designated word for another. One of the "Drug" filter gates, "etymol", functions much like the "Sample" filter gate and delivers factual *etymological information* (C, 89). There is a single instance of what could be called *substitution with modification* (C, 66) where the reworking keeps close to the formal template of the previous text, but replaces most of the nouns. (The result is achieved by mixing two samples, so no new material by Noon is introduced at all. The 11-letter poem (C, 101) also uses Robert Herrick's poem as a formal template, but this time Noon is responsible for most of the material.) Elsewhere, some portion of the borrowed text survives as a verbatim quotation in the subsequent reworkings: the intact borrowing is effectively assigned a new expressive role in the reworked texts.[166] Although this sort of mechanical enumeration does provide us with a high-altitude mapping of *Cobralingus*'s recurring or otherwise striking formal features, it completely loses the flavor of what it is actually like to read one of the pieces from start to finish. As a

165 Johnston 2000.

166 C, 21-24 (variations of Thomas Lodge's "taste the pleasure"); 85-91 (the concluding line of Emily Dickinson's poem is carried through all the reworkings); 105-107 (key words of the Ecclesiastes passage shape the final text).

countermeasure, the next chapter will be dedicated to a close textual analysis of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn". Such an analysis will hopefully make clear how large a part the accumulation and shifting of meanings plays in the reading experience. It will also illustrate how Noon used the various writing methods simultaneously in the course of the reworking process in order to both improvise upon the available material and direct (and, frequently, redirect) the main thrust of the developing piece. The analysis, in essence, will show how technique and expression come together in the *Cobralingus* pieces.

4.3. "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn": Technique and Expression

Above, *Cobralingus*'s most striking writing methods and formal characteristics were considered in isolation from the sequential, improvised pieces in which they appear. While such an atomized catalogue helps to unmask the recurring technical solutions responsible for the teeming detail found in the pieces, it sidesteps many crucial issues raised by their additive format and wide range of expression. In the present chapter, I will concentrate on "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", the second *Cobralingus* piece, in order to investigate how Noon employed his staple of writing techniques in fulfilling specific expressive goals. Questions central to such an undertaking include the following: How close is the relationship between the opening quotation (the "inlet") and the reworkings? What expressive concerns do the "interim texts" address? More specifically, what thematic and motivic continuities are traceable throughout the piece? The varied character of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn" – the piece features quotations (including "samples" of factual information (C, 29-30)), prose (both fantastical (C, 31) and naturalistic (C, 29)), poetry (C, 28, 33) and fragmented clusters (C, 30, 32) – makes it a suitable focus for a discussion of these aspects of the "Cobralingus Engine in operation" (C, 13).[167]

Although Noon has been outspoken that he considers the "Cobralingus Engine" as an

167 The general comments made about Noon's writing methods during the chapter apply to the other nine *Cobralingus* pieces as well. In part, "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn" was chosen as the subject of sustained analysis because it nicely illustrates how Noon treats themes such as loneliness and childhood creativity in both fantastical and realistic modes.

"improvisation machine"[168], he has not provided details about the roles of planning and revision in the composition of a given piece. This being the case, Noon's notion of improvisation could plausibly range from the making of irreversible, on-the-spot decisions to any amount of forethought prior to writing (as well as the strategic emendation of the spontaneous first draft). The main thrust of Noon's remarks on improvisation highlight the intuitive and unforced character of the entire writing process. Noon clearly designed the *Cobralingus* framework in such a way that it might easily accommodate rough-and-ready solutions. He wanted a format in which he could set extremely coarse or experimental material (including developments which peter out or lead to cul-de-sacs) alongside polished, traditional texts:

> Trial and error takes place; something emerges, and is passed on, through another choice of [filter] gate. Some pieces make sense, some make nonsense, and others are just way stations of random noise. The filters are designed so that some break down the text (decay, explode etc), and some build it back up (enhance, find story etc). The text is pushed through gate after gate, travelling along a signal pathway. At some point, and this always happens, something will jump out of the text at you, some phrase, image, theme etc. ... So, there are two broad phases: the initial exploration up to the signifying detail, and then a more considered use of the filters, towards the output text.[169]

In terms of Noon's body of work, the *Cobralingus* framework counts as a novel development that allowed the author to incorporate variegated textual materials into a single piece. As a result, the stylistic net thrown by *Cobralingus* is quite wide, even if many of the reworkings take the shape of conventional short stories and poems. (Noon's poetry, in particular, is purposefully anachronistic in its formal lyricism.) The step-by-step process of improvisation welcomes moments of elegance and coarseness with equal interest, but the text-as-signal metaphor underlines the fact that the ultimate goal of this finite procedure is to arrive at an end-result which Noon couldn't have written without the preceding reworkings or quoted texts. The "interim texts" are like stepping-stones whose expressive contrasts and differing visual patterns tend to give the pieces, at least superficially, a somewhat disorderly character. But Noon is not interested in allowing "the way stations of random

168 Amerika 2007, 239.
169 Ibid., 239-40.

noise", the reworkings with fragmented or indeterminate meanings, to dominate the proceedings. Instead, most of the reworkings (and, crucially, all of the "outlet texts") aim at clarity of expression in terms of both the organization of the verbal material and the range of plausible interpretations invited by the texts.

One curious consequence of the *Cobralingus* framework is the phenomenon of "illusory metamorphosis": the reader who follows the Instructions and tries to imagine a given *Cobralingus* piece as a single text undergoing a process of "metamorphiction" will soon be stymied in his or her efforts. The reason for this is obvious: the transforming "text" is wholly virtual, since all the reader has access to is a sequence of texts with shared characteristics (word choice, imagery, and so on). Reading the connected texts from start to finish is rather like watching a time-lapse sequence: the book's formal framework provides the reader with an omniscient overview of the "Cobralingus Engine" in action. Each new text marks a change in narration, and the reader has to keep up with the various narrative voices and poetic speakers to avoid conflating the separate, yet formally and expressively related, texts. According to the conventional view which considers writing as a kind of unproblematic window connecting the reader's reality and the text's fictional world, a word "directs the attention of the reader or listener through the word onto the denoted object; it acts as an intermediary lens, allowing the reader to peer into the fictional world of the representation".[170] This traditional understanding of mimesis applies well to the complete short stories, poems and extensive quotations, but encounters a snag when called to explain the erased reworkings and text clusters. These by-now familiar features of "fractured mimesis" demand that the reader views the fragmented texts as inscriptions (i.e. he or she has to consciously step out of the "text-as-window" mindset and construct something sensible out of the textual debris) or accepts them as essentially non-representational (or, more weakly, simply non-narrative) moments, as is the case with the word clusters. The *Cobralingus* framework simultaneously guarantees that the reader inhabits a sort of Archimedean point from which to understand the textual transformations *and* makes him or her

170 Prieto 2002a, 246.

acutely aware that there is no single fictional world for the reader to immerse into. Both "dub fiction" and "metamorphiction", the two labels Noon applied to *Cobralingus*, stress that each piece consists of a sequence of striking transformations which nonetheless form, at another level, a continuous narrative about the writing process of the texts.

Comparing the *Cobralingus* framework with the content of the reworkings soon makes clear that there is a telling paradox at the heart of the book: a casual reader may find it hard to square the impersonal, technical framework with the value Noon places on the expression of personal, even highly autobiographical responses to the texts. Noon was conscious of this contradiction: "I'm using terms such as *input/output*, *signal path*, *filtering system*, etc., in order to create something that is incredibly personal. I like the paradox; but I know the presentation has confused some people".[171] The writing methods hinted at by Noon's chosen terminology (and the text-as-signal metaphor in general) are only one part of the story. Noon's expressive intentions for each piece (the choice of quotations; the selection of sustained themes and motifs) are frequently profoundly autobiographical.[172] In addition, the reading experience can, to varying degrees, be about the following of two narratives: the explicit continuity of reworked texts and the implied narrative of Noon devising and reacting to the unfolding piece. The following analysis of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", however, will only concentrate on the former of these.

Start - Inlet (C, 27). With emotively colored language, the opening paragraphs of Michael Bracewell's 1999 short story describe a Mancunian suburb as a place that is not only cold and damp (due to the winter weather and the passed "November storm") but also physically marked by decay and disorder (the upturned bins, the shattered glass, and so on).[173] The sorry material state of the suburb is a clear symptom of the psychological and social unease of its residents. This opening

171 Amerika 2007, 239.

172 In the case of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", Noon found that the mental atmosphere of the Mancunian suburbs evoked by Michael Bracewell's prose chimed with his own childhood memories (Noon 2001e).

173 "[B]orn in London in 1958", Bracewell is Noon's exact contemporary whose "fiction takes metropolitan alienation as its theme" (Holcombe 2006). In this regard, "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey" with its intelligent yet lonely protagonist explores familiar thematic territory.

quotation is notable for its lack of human figures: "a mongrel dog" is the first living thing mentioned in the text; the final paragraph depicts the "[l]ank and dark-eyed children" playing on the streets. Adult characters are completely absent: "the people" who seem to "have locked themselves away from their neighbours" (just like the unmentioned bus driver) are kept strictly out-of-focus. The playing children, then, are the central characters of this short prose segment.[174] The importance of childhood is reinforced by the mention of the new estate looking like a "child's drawing", and in light of the later reworkings, it is safe to say that it was the coupling of gritty suburban experience and child-like creativity which drew Noon to Bracewell's text. Noon has stated that "the [*Cobralingus*] work is being drawn from areas of my own life, my psyche, my past, my emotions"[175], and aspects of the Bracewell text clearly had a strong autobiographical resonance, since Noon himself had grown up as an artistic boy in a working-class Mancunian housing estate.

What Noon mainly reacts to in the quotation is a representation of a social environment so recognizable and imaginatively potent as to trigger emotional recollections and new fantasies. In other words, the mimetic dimension of the text is supremely important, since for Noon *Cobralingus* is not simply an exercise in crude textual manipulation: "I actually see the pieces in very personal terms, on two levels: 1. what the words, ideas, images mean to me in terms of personal history/interests; and 2. a memory of what I was feeling at the exact moment of creation. I think this last is the best clue; that *Cobralingus* records (and magnifies) a natural creative process".[176] In formal terms, Noon was undoubtedly drawn to the materiality of description evident in Bracewell's prose. In the small space of the quotation, Bracewell goes through a number of visual, aural and haptic textures, as when "some stacked timber, swollen with damp" is described "catching the pink light of the afternoon sun". Elsewhere, the third-person narration is preoccupied with sound: "The male exhalation of a bus's brakes gives way to the rising drone of its engine, then a pause for the

174 Noon cuts off the quotation before Bracewell's protagonist is introduced after a few more scene-setting paragraphs about the estate's children.
175 Amerika 2007, 239.
176 Ibid., 238-9.

gears to change and the hiss of heavy wheels advances into silence". As a final preliminary note before we move on to look at what Noon does with Bracewell's text[177], it is good note that the quotation strikes a contrast between the "dust-coloured tower blocks" and the "pale blue sky". Despite the melancholic clutter of material disarray and social dysfunction which has taken root on the ground, the clarity of the untouchable heavens offers an alternative, inhuman perspective ("The sky looks vast above them.").

Purify (28). The reworking selects and recombines fragments of the quotation into a poetic text in four sections. The second section reads:

> A child's drawing of Manchester,
> cut from shattered glass.
> A rising drone and hiss of heavy silence.
> The estate has locked itself away.
> Thin cold streets, hiding their colour
> behind blown dust.

The words come mostly from Bracewell's first and second paragraphs. The elements of a given line are typically located very near each other on the page, but it is clear that Noon formed the reworking by using the whole quotation as a textual resource. He jumped from paragraph to paragraph, picking out words and phrases whose reordering yielded attractive imagery. Noon frequently inserted articles ("a", "the") and prepositions ("of") where they were needed (as when the addition of the indefinite article is used to unite "swollen with damp" and "pink light" into the phrase "swollen with a damp pink light"). Sometimes he slightly rephrased the quotation; the sentence "The estate has locked itself away", for example, comes from "the new estate" and "the people have locked themselves away". At other times, Noon dropped letters from certain words to create new ones ("cross" from "crossing"). Each of the four sections begins with enigmatic lines

177 In fact, the quotation itself contains Noon's editorial fingerprints: 1) He omits a word from the description of timber ("stacked *waste* timber" (Bracewell 1999, 114)), and 2) "*Here are* quiet streets of descending terraces*: they fall away* to the floor of the shallow valley *from a kind of civic campus*, where..." (Bracewell 1999, 115.) is changed into: "Quiet streets of descending terraces, falling away to the floor of the shallow valley, where...".

(e.g. a “drawing ... cut from shattered glass”) that are followed by evocations of noticeably more mundane matters (“The estate has locked itself away.”).

The opaque lines introduce a hint of the fantastical to the reworking, but many of them are also paradoxical in nature: how can, after all, a “heavy silence” nevertheless have “a rising drone and [a] hiss”? In keeping with “fractured mimesis”, this kind of oxymoronic imagery cannot be rephrased using a more rationalistic vocabulary – a fact which remains unchanged after descriptive tags such as “fantastical”, “nonsensical” or even “non-semantic” are applied to the sentences. The frustrations which accompany the extreme cases of “fractured mimesis” originate from the way that the text thwarts the reader’s desire for a meaning that is realistic, or at least securely denotative. The meaning often slips out of the reader’s grasp in the course of a single sentence: “A rising drone and hiss of heavy *silence*.” The final word introduces a paradox which sends the reader back to the beginning of the sentence, albeit with the inkling that the re-examined sentence will not provide an interpretive key.

What expressive concerns do Bracewell’s text and the first reworking share? First of all, a sense of progression seems to be lacking from this descriptive sequence. In part, the thematic and narrative listnessness reflects the theme of alienation which continues to dominate the imagery. Each sentence, as it were, holds its own court, but the reader senses that all the lines – whether fantastical or conventionally realistic – are status reports from the same fictional locale and emotional state. Noon reuses a number of unedited longer quotations from Bracewell’s prose, and these central borrowings touch upon the overwhelmingly melancholic ambiance (“Sunday lays sorrow on the heart”), artistic creativity (“A child’s drawing of Manchester”), the future (“Dusk, the near future.”), and the importance of the heavens (“Clouds” (strikingly used as a one-word opening line); the later mention of “a church of sky”). The primacy of these phrases is confirmed by the next reworking.

Randomise - Enhance - Sample (29). The text, which consists of a naturalistic narrative

interposed with Manchester street names, retains and reorganizes most of the previous reworking. The central borrowings survive mostly intact and assume significant narrative functions. “Dusk, the near future.” announces the temporal setting of the story. “Sunday morning lays sorrow on the heart.” is used as a refrain that creates a parallel between the adults at the Rust Club and the boy at the churchyard. The artistic boy’s “drawing of Manchester” becomes the story’s main pivot. While spending time at his sister’s grave, the lonely kid draws an image of his city. Unlike the adults at the Rust Club, where the music only seems to create a passive, mournful atmosphere, the churchyard boy uses his own imagination to deal with the dour environment. The description of the drawing stresses that the boy has not made an accurate representation but a fantastical recreation filled with “crazy angels and swollen clouds”. In line with the Bracewell quotation, Noon continues to distinguish between earthbound existence and the vast sky. In the final paragraph, the boy burns the artwork; “mailed to the stars”, the destroyed drawing links the earth and the sky. Although the boy remains physically and emotionally constrained within an unresponsive social environment, he continues to be able to exercise his imagination. In the boy’s vision, a fanciful flying machine escapes the gritty streets.

Like the boy’s drawing, the listing of Manchester street names brings together creativity and notions of place. The streets, bookended by Shakespeare Walk and Chaucer Avenue, bear the names of English-speaking writers. There is an intensely autobiographical basis for Noon’s interest in street names: “I was brought up in Ashton-Under-Lyne, just outside Manchester, and the nearby housing estate was called Crow Hill, and all the streets were named after areas in the Lake District: Penryth Avenue, Windermere Crescent, Keswick Avenue etc. Just these really downtrodden working class streets, named after these beautiful lakes!”[178] In part, what interests Noon about streets such as Keats Crescent or Ruskin Road is the ironic or incongruous clash between the name and the locale. On a more general level, the traditions of street naming are just one example of the

178 Noon 1999b. Fictional street names also feature prominently in the many *Pixel Juice* stories taking place in the Shakespeare Estate. Similarly, the musical legacy of Manchester has redrafted the city’s street map in *Needle in the Groove* (examples include Ian Curtis Boulevard and State 808 Street).

way that cultural practices often promote juxtapositions between wildly disparate domains of experience. This concern with naming as a vehicle for organizing and spreading information while creating new connections between things is raised again in the “constellations” interim text (30).

Decay - Control (30). The erased text invites the reader to reconstruct a cohesive meaning out of the linguistic fragments. In this, the previous reworking serves as a reliable thematic guide. Even though the fragmentary text as a whole produces jarring bits and pieces – making the attempt to picture a stable representational situation of agents, objects and actions all but futile – it does yield material that sustains and elaborates on the expressive aims present in the earlier text. The significance of “the sky” is the most prominent, beginning with the opening sentence: “Dusk, the near future, Satur n.” (from “Saturday night”) picks up the science-fictional implications of “near future” and creates a fragmented story set far away from the suburbs of Manchester. A variant of the artistic boy is featured in this narrative as well: “child ... makes a wing man, a crazy angel cloud flow”. This “blank child of petrol” is engaged in an act of creation, one which is once again intimately related to the heavens. Reinforcing the connection between creativity and the sky, the “wing” of the angel, the means of escape from the ground, is derived from the word “drawing”. Another weighty sentence, in conventional punctuation, reads: “Ordain the state of love, cut from heaven, descending”. The source of love lies in the heavens and its trajectory is unambiguous. Love descends solely because it has been (violently?) separated from its original abode. Besides these sky-related fragments, the method of erasure results in fantastical imagery (“rel_ic songs”, a “dog man”, “d_ence t_igar smoke”). The recombinations necessitated quite inventive feats of erasure. For example, the words “rain” and “ordain” were produced by carefully selecting letters in a purely linear manner: “*the*i*r* p*ain*” produced “the r_ain”, and “Or_d_ain”, rather ingeniously, originated from “n*or*thern *d*ay’s p*ain*”.

Sample (30). The “Sample” filter gate momentarily interrupts the organic sequence of reworkings, albeit for the purpose of introducing material helpful for the next stages of the process.

The quoted list expands on the astronomical motif ("Saturn", "stars") by cataloguing twelve of the 88 modern constellations. As a stand-alone text, the cluster of items has no mimetic or narrative function: the words are instances of sheer denotation. Here, however, the denoted "objects" are arbitrary formations of prominent stars named after nature and technology (as well as alluding to Greek mythology). Each name invites the reader to picture both the constellations and the things mentioned in their appellations. The words refer to animals (the bird of paradise, the dove)[179] and biological conditions (the twins, the virgin), as well as technical equipment ranging from the lyre to instruments of navigation (the compass) and timekeeping (the clock).

Mix - Increase Sense (31). In retrospect, the previous prose reworking (29) can be seen as a rudimentary draft of the present one. The sequence induces a kind of "palimpsest effect" where the reader feels that the basic ingredients of the story, the archetypal narrative situation, are given a new spin by each variant text. Here, the earlier piece has been given a wildly fantastical reworking. Both stories provide a peek inside the head of a lonely kid. The church setting, the dead sister and the child's desire to create art are present in both texts. Noon's Saturn is not only an imaginary one, but has a near-allegorical dimension: the story's setting is literally "saturnine". The first paragraph is preoccupied with ritual. The people of Saturn collect the mysterious "relic songs" (presumably artifacts and fragments made of sound; useful remnants not dissimilar to the products of "fractured mimesis") as offerings to the "engine of balance". The "dogman", a shaman-like figure, orchestrates the prayer with his "gentle word-sword". Is this sword, like the songs that hover in the mist, some strange type of vocal artifact, a weapon used in this ritualistic attempt at communicating with a celestial authority?

Just as the earlier, naturalistic story spent the first half with the grown-up figures before closing with the artistic boy, the fantastical variant is divided into two paragraphs. In the second one, the "silent child" (another dead ringer for the lonely kid) constructs a "wingman" and sends it

179 The first constellation/bird provides the main inspiration for Daniel Allington's illustration (C, 25), while "the serpent" keeps *Cobralingus*'s serpent imagery in the reader's mind.

toward Earth in a ritual of his own making. The materials for the boy's angelic creation, including "drone petals" surely nipped off from the wild drone flowers, are the sort of odd assortment familiar to the readers of Noon's earlier work (cf. Pablo Odgen's creatures in *Automated Alice*; the invented machines of "Crawl Town" (*Pixel Juice*), etc.). (In general, Noon's earlier fantastical work opens up a context in which to see *Cobralingus*'s obscure coinages and strange subject matter as characteristic preoccupations.) Paralleling the adult ritual, the boy has no way of knowing whether his actions will have a beneficial impact.

Formally, the story follows the order of events of the fragmented reworking (30). There one may find the ungrammatical antecedents of certain words – e.g. "glaze" (from "g_lays"), "dawn" (from "dorning"), "tongue" (from "ton_g") – while in other cases new imagery has been created by expanding on the earlier fragments, as when "bouquets of drone" develops into "wild drone flowers", or the suggestive "the s_ea" leads to "the lakes of aroma" with "mist" and a "parched shoreline". The constellations are also mixed into the text in various ways. To take just one example, the sentence "In the boy's skull, a *serpent* girl *sails* a river of dreams, the ghost of his *twin*." we can see the creation of a fantastical creature (simply by juxtaposing two nouns), a noun used as a verb, and a plural noun becoming singular. In all cases, the astrological significance of the words is only a background consideration for the expressive purposes of the narrative.

Purify (32). The cluster contains many unique word combinations (such as "violet drone", "compass lyre" and "cloud flow") which trigger imprecise mental imaginings without coalescing into a poetic narrative. The opening lines – "gather songs / soft in a stillness of / parched skin" – exemplify the clash between legible syntax and challenging content characteristic of the text. The cluster's many verbs point toward the "Outlet" text, particularly the repeated use of the word "allow" ("allow dark sky words" and "allow stars").

Control - Outlet (33). The "Outlet" text is a sonnet which offers a final reinstatement of the relationship between melancholy and creativity by enacting a universal plea. The change in genre

does not affect the text's central argument or imagery. The poem's speaker asks the obscure addressee to allow unspoken thoughts and feelings to be expressed by "every child of dust". The dichotomy between the earth and the heavens is still maintained: "the sky" provides the inspiration and means for the speaker to break out of his or her passive state. Just as the "sun" overcomes the "sorrow's cloud", saliva is likened to "a rain" that rejuvenates the "parched-out mouth". In part, these grandiose metaphors dramatize the gap between an acutely felt need for self-expression and the distancing effect of the sonnet form itself (i.e. what is gained and lost when the sentiment "I want to speak my mind" is presented in the format of an anachronistic sonnet?). But the metaphors also anchor the struggle between melancholic powerlessness and creative renewal in the body: "Along the crescent of the tongue allow / These words; allow the skull's incessant drone; / Allow that thought be conjured in the flow; / Allow that heaven twin the rounded bone."

The speaker first asks permission to speak aloud the words which make up the sonnet. As the pleas for consent pile up in the course of the poem, it becomes less and less clear whether the speaker believes in an exterior source of authority or whether the entire sonnet ought to be taken as a monologue attempting to bridge conflicting impulses within the speaker's mind. The "skull's incessant drone" applies equally to both thought and speech. On the one hand, the phrase can be seen to refer to the physical vibrations one feels while making sounds (here, the "rounded bone" of the quatrain's last line is interpreted as the top of the skull). On the other, the drone could also be read as an acknowledgment of the drifting, unceasing thoughts which accompany everyday existence. The flotsam and jetsam of consciousness ensure that there is always something, no matter how banal or nonsensical, to say. The third line ("Allow that thought be conjured in the flow") hopes that out of all this cognitive "flow", focused thought might arise. The quatrain's final line links the body with the symbolically charged "heaven". The sonnet proposes that melancholy, a state of being "soft in sorrow's cloud", can be conquered with imagination and creative activity, and thus allow "silent lips" to burst into "song". In this, "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn"

follows a trajectory common to many of Noon's stories – a trajectory identified by the author himself when he calls "Solace" (*Pixel Juice*) a "'typical' Jeff Noon story, in that it takes a mundane surreality, follows the consequences of it all the way through the darkness, and ends up (in the last sentence) reaching for the stars".[180]

Although the meaning of three lines ("In raven's ink the shine of stars outrun; / Allow the ghost, the skin, the sky inspire"; "Allow that wings be fixed to every brow") is anything but transparent, they all contribute to the sky imagery. Their inclusion is perhaps the starkest reminder that the cohesive poem has been created largely out of the words contained in the previous reworking. The sonnet introduces several new words, many of them for the purposes of rhyme ("hoarse", "outrun", "inspire", "brow", "endow"). Tellingly, all the new nouns relate to body parts ("mouth", "lips", "brow") and corporeal phenomena ("thought", "voices" and their "fluid tones"). As we saw in Chapter 4.1., the depiction of embodied experience has been one of Noon's central concerns throughout his writing career. The priority of sensation (as bodily perception; as a state of heightened emotion) comes through in both the descriptions of sensual detail found in the texts as well as in the formal devices and shifting stylistic registers which showcase the sensuous, cornucopian richness of language (as writing and as spoken sound). In the sonnet, "the state of love" is to be ordained by "fluid tones": the emphasis is on the physical act of utterance at the expense of the words' semantic content. In Noon's writings, and especially in *Cobralingus*, the literary style frequently works against the grain of the habit which sees language as a vehicle of emotionally neutral denotation and rational explication. His main strategy is to measure language against subjective, embodied experience, and then try to see if he can somehow bring linguistic expression closer to felt sensation. At least, this is the utopian goal sketched in Noon's discussions of art and writing in their "liquid state" (C, Blurb). The reader sensitive to Noon's conception of

180 Noon 1999b. Cf. "Organic Pleasure Engine", where the life-affirming and melancholic impulses are held in a likewise tension: the carpe diem theme (even when the amotory connotations are downplayed) involves both an awareness of the passage of time (that is, of life as a passage to death) and of the necessarily ephemeral joys of the present.

"liquidity" may imagine "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn" as an instance of "metamorphiction", as a shape-shifting living text.

Save (33). The relevance of Michael Bracewell's short story to Noon's piece goes beyond the opening quotation. Beginning with the main character, Noon mirrors numerous themes and images of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey". Both Noon's "kid" (in his various guises) and Bracewell's teenage Mark are withdrawn, sensitive youths trapped in Manchester's suburbs. On a whim, Mark decides to take part in a night excursion by a gang of youths during which his initial feelings of boredom and regret are replaced, briefly, by a "child-like wonder"[181] at seeing a white swan trapped in a lake. This feeling of exhilaration is almost at once supplanted by one of horror and disgust as one of the other boys sets the swan on fire. At the close of the story, Mark returns home with a new sense of purpose driving to the surface of his consciousness. The events of the night serving as his point of no return, Mark begins to write about his suburban existence for the first time: "the streets of north Manchester ... were taut with some new meaning he had never felt before ... He reached for his old exercise book, and picked up a pen from the top of the bedside cabinet".[182] This concluding act of creative reflection links Mark to Noon's artistic "lonely kid". Earlier in the story, the narration relates place and personality in a manner which Noon must have found congenial: "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey: the districts of his home, those flat, familiar names, could often seem like regions of himself".[183] Reading the story after the *Cobralingus* piece is apt to provide the reader with many moments of déjà vu, since Noon seems to have picked up from the elaborate texture of Bracewell's prose many small details which he chose to develop in his own piece. For example, the description of the "UK headquarters of a petro-chemicals company" as "brooding like some alien pyramid in a science fiction story"[184] may well have influenced Noon's decision to set his fantastical story in an imaginary Saturn (C, 31).

181 Bracewell 1999, 123.
182 Ibid., 125.
183 Ibid., 117-8.
184 Ibid., 118.

Bracewell and Noon's stories originally appeared back-to-back in *The City Life Book of Manchester Short Stories* (1999). "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn (Cobralingus Remix)"[185], as the piece is called in the Ra Page-edited collection, therefore predates the final *Cobralingus* version by more than a year. A comparison between the two versions unearths a number of insightful differences. To begin with, the 1999 variant does not provide the reader with any contextualizing Instructions: the *Cobralingus* framework (and the very term "Cobralingus") is left completely without explanation. In addition, the variant does not include Daniel Allington's illustration, thereby confirming that the illustrator created his images only after Noon had completed the *Cobralingus* pieces. The graphic design of the piece also shows subtle development from one version to the next: the "filter gates" sport an alternative design (one not created by Peter Pavement, the designer of Cobralingus) without connecting lines between the boxes; the "constellations" sample[186] is presented as a vertical list with one item per line; and, finally, the cluster shape of the penultimate reworking[187], while patently the template for the final version, contains some minor changes in the position of certain phrases. All these design factors offer proof that while Noon had already made firm decisions about the general layout of the piece, he remained open to altering minor details (as when "Manchester streets" changes into "Manchester Street Names"[188]) and even an overhaul of the "filter gate" design. But the minute differences between the two variants only help to hammer home the guiding role Noon must have had during both design processes. The substantial text of "Blackley, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Saturn", as well as the processual *Cobralingus* framework, is identical in both versions, providing further evidence for the argument that the visual look of *Cobralingus* was not an after-the-fact interpretation carried out by the graphic designer, but featured in Noon's manuscript as an integral part of the writing.

185 Noon 1999c, 126.
186 Ibid., 132. Cf. C, 30.
187 Ibid., 134. Cf. C, 32.
188 Ibid., 129. Cf. C, 29.

5. Conclusion

If the Introduction set the tone for the subsequent chapters by jumping right into a relatively intricate discussion of Noon's "dub fiction" and its immediate musical influences, it is only fitting that these concluding remarks follow the same compositional policy. So then, what critical discoveries about the musico-literary features of *Cobralingus* were made during the writing of the present thesis? As outlined in the Introduction, my thesis sought to demonstrate 1) how profoundly the central musical model of "dub fiction" draws inspiration from dub reggae and glitch electronica in formal and expressive terms (Part 3), and 2) how extensively the text-as-signal metaphor of *Cobralingus* both guides and simplifies Noon's actual writing techniques and expressive interests (Part 4). In other words, I wanted to pinpoint and analyze Noon's principal musical sources and literary practices, while also making the reader conscious of the role that *Cobralingus*'s paratextual Instructions and the author's non-fictional statements play in mediating the reception of this substantial intermedial exchange.

Since the intermedial claims of every literary work with a musical model rest on a purely metaphorical relationship between the two arts, *Cobralingus*'s so-called "musico-literary features" – if they are not dismissed as a mere chimera – do not serve to distinguish a set of elegant parallels or structural symmetries, but rather alert the reader to textual details and interpretive complexities which the musical model in part functions to understate. A neat dovetailing of *Cobralingus* and its musical model is, then, an impossibility. Or, more positively, the imprecision and suggestiveness of the metaphorical relationship guarantees that the process of interpreting the work will remain, in important respects, provisional and open-ended. Certain aspects of dub and glitch music have undoubtedly influenced the shape of *Cobralingus*, but even the most musically indebted features cannot be analyzed apart from the text's other elements.

By design, *Cobralingus* is a Protean work, and consequently many critical holds were tried

during the course of the thesis.[189] Since the thesis deliberately sought to explore those facets of the work which occupy analytical "grey areas" (such as Noon's use of musical metaphors, neologisms and liquid imagery), the writing at times wavers between precise description and guesswork. This tendency is perhaps most visible in Chapter 3.3., in which an exposition of some fairly subtle points concerning Noon's terminology is followed by a brief coda that tries to show how *Cobralingus*'s musical model interacts with the author's "liquefied" view of language. The pervasiveness of this liquid imagery in Noon's work is picked up again in Chapter 4.1., this time with the goal of tracing internal allusions to liquids and fluids in a set of *Cobralingus* narratives. The conclusion of the chapter, in which the difficult issue of Noon's fantastical dream of a language in its "liquid state" (C, Blurb) is broached a second time, vividly illustrates how many of *Cobralingus*'s central features evade analytical paraphrasing.

Far from being only a minor *idée fixe* of a charmingly wayward book, the centrality of liquid imagery to Noon's aesthetic thinking receives ample confirmation from his other fictions. The protagonists of *Vurt* and *Nymphomation*, for example, frequently resort to using Vaz, a fantastical liquid which allows the characters to radically manipulate the properties of their fictional worlds. A character in *Vurt*, for example, steals a car simply by pouring Vaz into the door lock[190], while *Nymphomation*'s narrator Jazir introduces the liquid to a friend (by making an electric clock run without batteries) and muses about its commercial possibilities: "All I need is a name for it. The stuff that opens anything! The universal lubricant. The oil of the world! ... Puts Vaseline and KY in their place, don't you think? Jaz vaz!"[191] In both novels, the "universal lubricant" consistently brackets heightened sensual experience (including sexual arousal) with the fantastical manipulation of the world. At a reflexive level, of course, Vaz reinforces the connection between liquidity and storytelling in ways that makes the substance seem a kind of pre-echo of *Cobralingus*'s

189 The irony is that the current thesis aims to be insightful about a work that is, at the moment, largely out of sight. Until a second edition of *Cobralingus* appears, critical attention is one way to stop the work from dropping out of view altogether.
190 Noon 1994, 112.
191 Noon 1998, 143.

"metamorphiction": the primary function of Vaz is to help Noon the self-styled improviser out of narrative ruts by keeping the very world of the story effortlessly changeable. In Chapters 3.2., 4.1. and 4.3., I suggested that the expressive goals of *Cobralingus* continue many of Noon's earlier preoccupations: the work's serpent imagery would be another example of a robust motif which can be found in most of Noon's fictions from *Vurt* onward.

Chapter 3.2., which is essentially a sampler of the various uses Noon has put the "dub fictional" musical model, introduces the key concept of "fractured mimesis" which is further clarified in Chapter 4.2.'s investigation of Noon's writing techniques. The upshot of the latter chapter is that while practically none of Noon's individual techniques is unprecedented, the *Cobralingus* framework built around the text-as-signal metaphor provides the work with a distinct formal identity. The *Cobralingus* framework – by presenting the reader with ten chains of short, complete texts with definite starting and end points – helps to manage and contain Noon's desire for improvisation, wordplay and elusively fantastical imagery. The musical model, as implemented by the framework, both enables and controls the work's creative exuberance: the text-as-signal metaphor is a formal device for mastering the flow of imaginative associations and emphasizing the unruly nature of the writing process.

The central chapters of the thesis discuss "dub fiction" as a pivotal and invigorating aspect of Noon's work during the 1990s, but consciously avoids relating *Cobralingus* and the other works to broader literary and art-historical trends. To be sure, the pressure applied by various strands of experimental literature on the shape of my general argument can be seen in the modest claims that the thesis makes for *Cobralingus* as a path-breaking work. In terms of future research, the next natural step would be to spell out these implicit assumptions and place *Cobralingus* within twentieth-century experimental art and literature[192], as well as study how Noon's "dub fictions" differ from other literary works with formally significant musical intertexts. *Cobralingus*'s two

192 Such a study might, for example, characterize "dub fiction" as a literary manifestation of the "collage" aesthetic prevalent in contemporary artistic practice.

main visual intertexts also deserve further consideration. Firstly, Daniel Allington's collage illustrations comment on the ten *Cobralingus* pieces and, more generally, Noon's "dub fiction" aesthetic. Secondly, exploring the avowed influence of Tom Phillips's *A Humument* on Noon's use of the erasure method would surely yield rich rewards.[193] Noon's literary debts would also make for a worthwhile study. Here the immediate candidates would be Lewis Carroll and Jorge Luis Borges – the first for his fantastical wordplay and parodic reworking of popular songs, the second for his densely allusive writings.[194]

Many of the issues raised in the current thesis could be profitably pursued even if Noon's works and non-fictional statements were to remain the resolute focus of attention. As Chapter 4.3. demonstrated, Noon's choice of quotations and the fine-grained results of his improvisational approach demand careful attention: sustained analyses of the remaining nine *Cobralingus* pieces would assuredly reveal similar interlockings of technique and expression. The treatment of the "dub fictional" devices of *Nymphomation*, *Pixel Juice* and *Needle in the Groove* could also be greatly expanded. (Additionally, the understanding of Noon's musical model could be further enriched by analyzing the dominant, non-formal role that music has in most of Noon's fiction.) As the final and most experimental work of "dub fiction", *Cobralingus* is dedicated entirely to the reworking of borrowed texts, showing very little interest in plot-based storytelling.[195] In hindsight, *Cobralingus* marks the apex of the "dub fiction" enterprise even as it portends a decisive break in Noon's writing career: the publication of *Falling Out of Cars* (2002) brought to an abrupt end Noon's run as a novelist.

At the start of the new millennium, Noon perhaps began to feel that the intense phase of

193 Noon 2001d. Interestingly, Phillips had been influenced by William S. Burroughs's literary cut-ups (Phillips 2005), while Burroughs, in his turn, had been stimulated by visual collage.

194 Of the latter's collected fictions, Noon has stated: "I see it as a vast storehouse of ideas, the best ideas ever" (Noon 2001d), while the former's *Alice* books have inspired Noon since *Vurt*: "The more I read these books, the darker they shine" (ibid.).

195 It should be noted that the thesis wavers somewhat between seeing all the "dub fiction" works (including *Cobralingus*) as sharing the same musical model and stressing that *Cobralingus* somewhat deviates from the template set by the earlier works. One way to solve this quandary is to suggest that while *Cobralingus* does follow the same basic model, the work also augments it by introducing the text-as-signal metaphor.

literary productivity had run its course and that he needed to take his writing in a new direction. This latest phase of Noon's career is noticeable, on the one hand, for his turn to dramatic and collaborative forms[196] and, on the other, by the relative or total inaccessibility of the resulting works. After the drama *The Modernists* (2003) and the radio play *Dead Code: Ghosts of the Digital Age* (2005; BBC Radio 3), Noon concentrated on the writing of screenplays. The modest prose projects *Mappalujo* (2002; with Steve Beard) and *217 Babel Street* (2008; with Susanna Jones, Alison MacLeod and William Shaw) were collaborations which appeared exclusively online. At present, Noon's work written after *Falling Out of Cars* is either unavailable (the multiple screenplays remain unproduced, the play scripts unpublished) or scattered in anthologies.[197] The productivity of Noon's 1990s heyday turned, in the course of the next decade, to near-silence pierced by sporadic new (and relatively short) prose pieces and rumors of unrealized film projects. For the reader excited by the steady refinement of Noon's prose fiction from work to work (particularly from *Pixel Juice* onward), the author's change of direction, and especially its meager results, can seem frustrating. But it would come as no surprise if Noon's already inconstant (indeed "fluid") career would eventually see a return to prose fiction, perhaps even to the unexplored possibilities of "dub fiction". In the meantime, however, the strange, richly suggestive textures of *Cobralingus* stand as one of Noon's most attractive literary achievements.

196 Or more accurately, a return. Before the success of *Vurt*, Noon had dabbled in punk music, painting and the theater, both as a member of the Stand and Deliver performance group and as the writer of *Woundings* (1986). This first play, about a group of young soldiers taking part in a conflict reminiscent of the Falklands War, stands apart from the rest of Noon's work in all manner of ways, including the drama's complete lack of fantastical elements and wordplay. See Paddy 2003.

197 As is the case with the short stories "Artwork 2058: Probability Cloud" (2008) and "God Save the Queen" (2009). See Morgan 2008 and Wild 2009.

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