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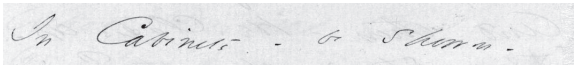
Rassegne

«IN CABINETS – BE SHOWN – »: THE TEXTUAL SCHOLAR AS CURATOR NOT EDITOR

MARTA WERNER

FIGURE 1
Emily Dickinson, *He parts Himself – like Leaves* –, ca. 1863, detail. *The Emily Dickinson Archive* @ edickinson.org.



Anteroom / Prologue / Prelude / Preword

Some years ago, James Maynard, then associate curator of the Poetry and Rare Books Collection at the University at Buffalo Library, gathered together in an afternoon colloquium a group of archivists, cataloguers, poets, and editors to discuss – in Maynard's's words – the «curating of poetry and the poetics of curating». In his invitation to reflect upon this provocative topic, he recalled that the word 'curation' derives from the Latin curo, *curare* – a term itself historically problematic and rich – 'to care for', 'to look after'; it is this first but sometimes seemingly forgotten application that served as a recurring leitmotif in many of the panel's presentations. I was struck both by how in our discussion we kept 'coming constantly so near' an articulation of a poetics of curating, and by just how elusive such a poetics may be when coupled with the actual practices of curation.

The original organization of my essay was guided by the questions posed by the moderator: «In what ways do you 'curate' poetry? And for

whom? How would you define your own curatorial poetics? How are different acts of curation a product of their historical moment? From what sources – canonical or otherwise – do you derive your thinking about curating?». Each question offered me the opportunity to reflect on what my approaches to and work on Dickinson's writings seem to propose about a poetics of curation. In such a retrospective exercise, it might be presumed that I am tracing a *via dolorosa* – the scholar's way of sorrows that acknowledges the necessarily unfinished nature of her work and the continual unsettling of her conclusions. But the questions' tendency to resist quarantine, a resistance that registers the scholar-curator's restless need to travel across the disciplinary boundaries within whose limits she has been trained to work, even as it reflects the drift of the contents of the archive itself, creates a new dialectic between past *agones* and future *anagnorises.* In this dialectic I answer with more questions, more applied urgency: Is the trajectory I have taken through Dickinson's writings only a singular, perhaps eccentric path, or is it the 'wide way' of the times I live and breathe and think in? Are questions about curation becoming more urgent in the digital age, where the identity of an 'object', textual, material or conceptual, is subject to multiple transformations or changes in form? What risks attend curation in the era of the Anthropocene, where all that is created (curated) may be subject to a loss vaster and more final than we can imagine?

While I pose these questions from within the space of the archive, I am aware that this is only one of many sites from the museum to the Cloud itself from which meditations touching upon the practice and poetics of curation arise and circulate. The following essay is a fragment fallen from a sky full of questions.

I. In what ways do you 'curate' poetry? For whom?

Perhaps there is a question before this question; namely, how do poems propose themselves as objects or subjects for curation? Some recent, beautiful fables – those, for example, by Arlette Farge and Carolyn Steedman – have reminded us that the scholar who undertakes an errand in the archives does so for many reasons, some strictly intellectual or institutional, but others of a more opaque and private nature. The common lure is that of the material document. And while sometimes, perhaps more often than we would like to admit, the material documents that have lured into the archive refuse to disclose themselves under our gaze

and glow only with their own sovereign silence, sometimes they seem to have been waiting for us to summon them from their quiet gray acid-free folders and touch them into life again. «The archival document», writes Farge, «is a tear in the fabric of time» (Farge 2013 p. 6). And so the encounter between the scholar and the archival document is experienced also as 'untimely'; it disrupts her orderly research plan for the day – it may alter the course of her life.

FIGURE 2
Document stacks in a section of The National Archive.
Wikipedia Commons @ commons.wikipedia.org.

I myself experienced just such an untimely encounter more than twenty years ago when I first entered the archives of the Amherst College Library. I had traveled there on the meager budget allowed to graduate students, and I had planned to examine a series of poem manuscripts I believed would further my research on Dickinson's fascicles. But once I was in the archives, Dickinson's fragments – a problematic term if ever there were one, but one I take provisionally to include the lyric ends of poems as well as Dickinson's brief writings that shift uncertainly between prose and verse – entreated me and demanded my attention. It is very likely that Dickinson's fragments drew my attention in part because the postmodern age favored their 'discovery'. For while the frag-

ments may in the end prove to be exceptional cases within Dickinson's *oeuvre*, they are ideal cases for our age, from which we inherit an already interpellated sense of self, a fragmenting at the psychic level. While these whispers of works that seemed to be in the process of discarding their identities belonged to the archive in some sense, they also resisted a full integration within it. Their very homelessness – the stakes they seemed to have in homelessness *as* their condition – pressed me to imagine an alternate home for them.

And then another home, and another and another. For since my initial foray into the archives, I've been experimenting with different structures for representing these late works – first binding some of them into a codex book paradoxically titled *Open Folios*; then summoning others – or, rather, their digital surrogates – into an electronic archive fueled by millennial energies and called *Radical Scatters*; and most recently, in *The Gorgeous Nothings*, collecting (re-casting?) the poems Dickinson wrote on envelopes to give them new homes, a new dissemination. This last, collaborative work with the artist Jen Bervin appears in two different iterations: first, in the form of an archival box filled with loose, full-scale facsimiles and transcriptions of the works; and later, in an oversize volume that preserves to some extent the *sui generis* nature of the poems by arranging them not in a chronological order but on the basis of their visual correspondences and rhymings.

FIGURE 3
The Gorgeous Nothings, Granary Books, 2013.

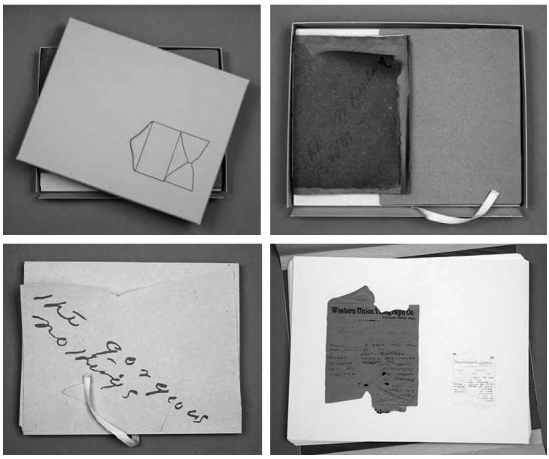
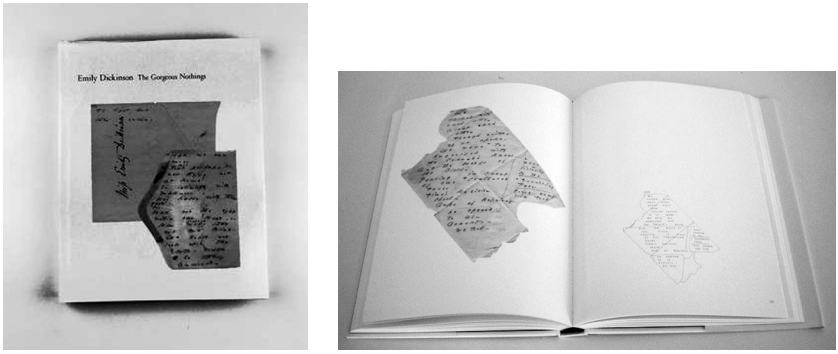


FIGURE 4
The Gorgeous Nothings, New Directions, with the Christine Burgin Gallery, 2013.



In book and library catalogs alike, *Open Folios, Radical Scatters*, and the second iteration of *The Gorgeous Nothings* are invariably classified as 'editions'; but I've always imagined them as autonomous but related exhibitions linked by their shared interest in those documents in Dickinson's *oeuvre* associated materially and/or linguistically with hazard and marked by qualities of lateness in the Adornian sense – i.e., with dissonance and departure. Singly and collectively, they represent my repeated attempts to map out the *topos* of Dickinson's unbound writings and my recurring experience of losing my bearings within her work. Unlike what we commonly define as the 'edition', especially the variorum and critical edition, which labor under a cultural perception of definitiveness and closure, the exhibit imagines itself only as a temporary sanctuary for the works it displays. Most akin, perhaps, to the cabinet of curiosities from which it descends, the exhibit is invested not only in what is and can be known about the works but rather in what remains unknown and unknowable about them. Many years ago, one of the deans of textual editing, Gianfranco Contini, defined the critical edition simply as «a working hypothesis».[1] It is by this wise caution, not by a convenient belief in the 'authority' of the editor and the edition that I return.

[1] Translated in P. Pugliatti, «Textual Perspectives in Italy: From Pasquali's Historicism to the Challenge of 'Variantistica' (And Beyond)», *Text,* 11 (1998), p. 163. See also G. Contini, «Ricordo di Joseph Bedier», in *Esercizi di lettura sopra autori contemporanei con un'appendice su testi non contemporanei*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974, p. 369.

While the edition most often puts the poems in the world to 'say what they are', the exhibition does so to 'see what they might be', especially as we reorder them, making them visible from new angles.

For me, the poem or fragment does not summon the immaterial world into the material one for a brief, still moment outside time, but exists as a profoundly earthbound, ever-changing carrier of meaning, a 'fallen' object or body, beautiful – shimmering – precisely in its fallenness. My point of departure for each exhibit of Dickinson's works has been an exceptional manuscript – very often a bibliographical fugitive or outlier – and the work of curation has involved revealing the 'coming into visibility' of that work and its carrier as they travel within the terrestrial realm. I am keenly aware of the ways in which collecting and curating can destroy provenance, or, in Donato's view, the ways in which the «repeated metonymic ... produces a distorted understanding of the world: the displacement of fragment for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels» (qtd. in Stewart 1992 pp. 161-162). And so while I have sought to counter the potential forces of destruction inherent in the act of curation by displaying as far as possible the history of the works' composition, revision, and circulation and by charting the post-histories of the works – the points of their many irruptions and vanishings – I have never presented the works as anything other than fragments.

Yet I do so not – as Donato cautions – to call attention to the fragment's failure to be representative of the whole, but to acknowledge how the whole can be fragmentary. For when we ask the question, «What would compose the 'whole' Emily Dickinson?», we must admit that no representation – not the richest biographical narrative of Dickinson's life, nor the broadest gathering of her works – can conjure her in all her fullness again. She survives now, if at all, as a textual body, and, necessarily, as a body in pieces. Although we cannot figure precisely how many writings by Dickinson have been lost, losses – and quite vast ones – are certain. The editor of the 1998 variorum, Ralph W. Franklin, not a scholar given to exaggeration, estimates that as many as 5,000 poem manuscripts may once have been part of Dickinson's *oeuvre* that today contains only approximately 2,500. And scholars imagine still more far-reaching losses in Dickinson's correspondence (Franklin 1998 p. 28). Under these circumstances the principal danger of the exhibit – i.e., the danger of misrepresenting the *oeuvre* by presenting only shards from it – may be less significant than its most salutary prospect – i.e., the

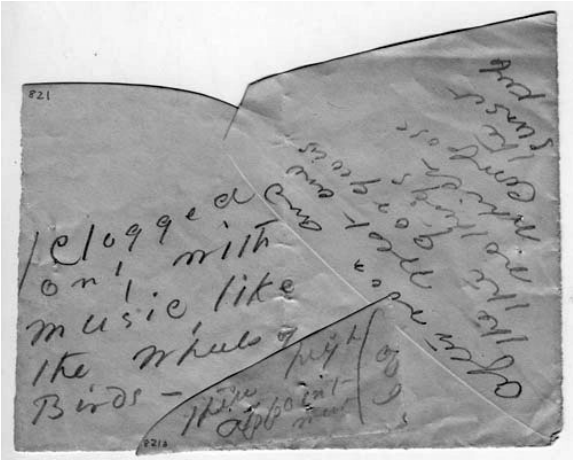
re-presentation of those remnants that resonate most fully in our time. For unlike the variorum edition, which remains nostalgically focused on the restoration of a lost whole it never fully acknowledges as lost, the exhibit compels us to come face to face with these losses and the disruptive history that has led to them. By acknowledging – making manifest to the senses – the limits of contextualization and our inevitably fragmentary, transient, and diminishing connection to the past, the exhibit paradoxically encourages a more acute probing of our own cultural investments and our engagement with the past's shattered remnants.

The emotion I associate most profoundly with the exhibit – and specifically with the exhibits of Dickinson's writings I have had a hand in editing (that is to say, curating) – is 'longing', or what I believe the Greeks called *pathos*, and of which Socrates says in the *Cratylus*: «The word pathos [yearning] signifies that it pertains not to that which is present but to that which is elsewhere [allothi pou] or absent» (Fowler 1926 p. 420a). The exhibit evokes a longing for a being, a time, and a culture we cannot ever know even in the fullness of time but that we never stop seeking to know as fully as possible in the moments given to us.

The curator is the first beholder of the exhibition, but in most cases, not the last one. The question put to us, «In what ways do you curate poetry?», was thus followed by another: «For whom do we curate poetry?» In my case, I must confess that I am not sure. Often, the viewers I have imagined I am addressing as I prepare an exhibit fail to come or do so only very belatedly; but just as often, hitherto unimagined interlocutors appear in their places. At the risk of turning the answer to this question into a fable, I am tempted to say that many who come to the exhibits I have curated arrived by chance. They were on their way to see something else. They were passing by. Their condition is the very condition of the exhibit itself: in transit. Perhaps, then, I can say that I curate poetry for strangers and wayfarers.

In no exhibit was this sense of an audience of strangers and wayfarers so acute as during my work on *The Gorgeous Nothings*. In the early phases of this 'reconstruction', Jen Bervin and I often spoke of the reasons we were drawn to these poems written on envelopes in the latter days of the nineteenth century, why at this moment they seemed 'addressed' to us.

FIGURE 5
Emily Dickinson, *Clogged only with Music*, ca. 1885, composed in pencil on the inside (back) of an envelope and on a fragment of envelope seal, pinned together. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.



Of course, the beauty of the material documents, as well as the exquisite qualities of many of the poems and fragments composed on them, seemed reasons enough to bring them newly to light. But a still more urgent reason pressed us – and not only us but also our fellow inhabitants of the digital age – to realize the exhibit. As media historian John Durham Peters reflects, our obsessive seeking through the new technologies available to us – the most pervasive of which is of course the internet – to collapse the distance between public and private, inner thought and outer expression, self and other – began in the late nineteenth century when we first «defined ourselves in terms of our ability to *communicate* with each other» (Peters 1999:1). While we exist seemingly at the end of this age, Dickinson lived at its beginning. In her century, the advent of new tele-phenomena such as the photograph, telegraph and, later, the telephone, like the advent of the internet in our own age, seemed to overcome the barriers of time and space. And yet, it was in this century that saw unprecedented transformations in the means of human contact that we also first encountered the new and frightening horizons of incommunicability that haunt us today. New media «always yield ghost phenomena», said Friedrich Kittler (Kittler 1986:22). It was not only the telegraph office but the Dead Letter Office that came into being in

the nineteenth century, when it was not uncommon for clerks in this strange place to handle as many as 23,000 pieces of 'dead' mail daily.

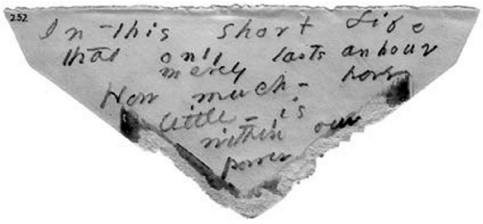
FIGURE 6
Dead Letter Office, September 22, 1922. Glass negative. Library of Congress. Digital ID npcc 07069//hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/npcc.07069.

Dickinson's envelopes instill in their viewers a plangent loneliness. To me, they are lonelier than the poems bound in fascicles, who have at least each other for company, and lonelier, too, than the drafts of letters that lay in Dickinson's desk, which, though forever unsent, still may have been directed towards living beings, and still may have been imagined as part of a correspondence. The poems composed on envelopes, in contrast, seem to be missed or withheld messages. Their contingency, vulnerability, and hope for a future reading inspires care – a tending to, a tenderness towards them, whose lost histories and longings have summoned us by resonating with our own.

Today, an exhibit need not be a singular event confined to a particular site and shared uniquely by those who gathered to see it, but it may

be disseminated to an audience scattered widely across time and space. Sometimes, this dissemination feels like so many kinds of silence, leaving the curator strangely alone with her cabinet of curiosities. But sometimes a signal comes. I am always amazed and deeply touched when a stranger sends word that an exhibition I've curated has reached him or her. Some time ago, Robert K. Elder, the editor of *Last Words of the Executed*, a collection of death-row prisoners' final statements, sent such a signal. He had bought *The Gorgeous Nothings* as a Christmas gift for someone else, but he was now reading it himself. His first message read: «I love your Dickinson book – it's on my coffee table now and is an object of fascination for visitors. May I ask, though, how did it get to be a book? Did it start as an exhibit first, just bits of an archive» (personal correspondence with Robert K. Elder, private email message, August 26, 2014).

FIGURE 7
Emily Dickinson, *In this short Life*, ca. 1873, composed in pencil on the inside the flap of a previously sealed envelope. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.



«I see it now, it is all bright.»

From the final statement Hiram Reynolds, convicted of murder, Tennessee. Executed August 12, 1863, in *Last Words of the Executed*, ed. Robert K. Elder

II. Reversals: An Uncanny Encounter

The preceding remarks focus largely on *The Gorgeous Nothings* partly because it is one of the last works on Dickinson's late writings I have been engaged with, and partly because it began as an exhibition and only later became a book. This transformation, though, can happen in reverse, as I recently discovered when the terrifyingly accomplished artist and scholar Janet Malcolm sought my consent to cut apart the

leaves *of Emily Dickinson's Open Folios* in order to use fragments of my diplomatic transcriptions in a series of her original collages:

> 9/29/12 Dear Marta, Many things in your letter – especially the mention of decontextualization – tell me that the time has come to tell you of the special reason why I wanted a copy of your book – namely, to cut some pages out of it and put them into collages. When I saw the book at Sharon Cameron's house, this desire formed itself in my mind – I began to "see" the collages. It was the typewritten transcriptions rather than the handwritten originals that stirred my imagination. The series I want to make will also use images and charts from astronomical texts. Before starting the "cutting" and "scissoring" (the words leaped out of your text) of your precious only copy, I want to have your permission to do so. I will completely understand if you would prefer I not do so, and will continue my search for another copy... Your use of the word uncanny resonates with me. Doesn't it apply to our encounter? All my best, Janet"
>
> (Private email correspondence; published in part in *Granta*; see Malcolm 2014:129-151.)

Although Malcolm feared I would be disturbed by her plan, nothing could have delighted me more. I had already sent her my only copy of the book – the book of my scholarly childhood, written in Buffalo, NY – and now I waited: waited to see which pages would be chosen and in what order they would return, to see how they would be illuminated and transformed in the collages Janet Malcolm was making.

The forty documents I had gathered years earlier in *Open Folios* are the record of a secret love. One story that stretches back to the late 19th century claims that in the final years of her life on earth, Emily Dickinson fell in love with Judge Otis Phillips Lord of Salem and composed these secret messages to him. This is possible. When we see the letters lain in the early print editions – Bingham's *A Revelation*, Johnson's *Letters* – the story almost comes true. When we encounter the documents in the archive, undressed and sans salutations and signatures, however, they seem to tell another story. This different story is also a love story, and one still more secret than the first. In this story, Dickinson falls in love with the trial of writing – with writing's wager: «Avalanche | or Avenue – Every | Heart asks which» (A 637).[2] The ontological status of the documents is swept away in the 'waylaying' rapture of writing, in the

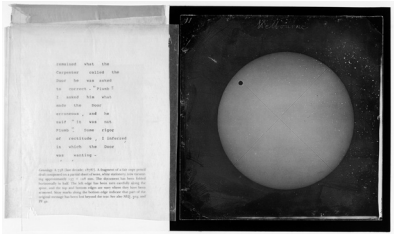
[2] Parenthetical references to Dickinson's poems note the MS catalog number of the library where they are housed. 'A' designates a manuscript housed in the Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

roaming that is drafting. What love holds – or tries to hold – is the hand in the present tense of writing, the hand as it forms letters, as it comes again and again to an edge. Writing, love, the hand: errant, as always.

These were some of my thoughts, in any case, while I waited for the next communication from Malcolm. Months later, on August 1, 2013, at night, I opened another email from Malcolm's studio. The body of the message was blank but the heading displayed five attachments ready for remote access. My first sight of the collages – my second-sight of a few random pages of *Open Folios* – came through a screen darkly.

Of the images – still then works-in-progress – that floated in the night sky of my computer screen, three featured vintage photographs, perhaps from collodion wet plates, of a white orb or planet at night, a fourth offered a crude drawing from an old astronomy primer, and the fifth, another photograph, this one washed in sepia, showed what appeared to be a telescope in an empty field. The stereoscopic rhyming of several images across the collages suggested, furthermore, their awareness, perhaps even their memory, of others. Yet each collage also seemed to be surrounded by a strange force-field isolating it within a discrete moment. From under veils of the thinnest interleaves laid over the photographs, the typed transcripts of Dickinson's messages appeared here to emanate from a spectral world. The impression communicated was of a resonant introspection, an unearthly beauty – the work, perhaps, of the optical unconscious.

FIGURE 8
Janet Malcolm, *Melbourne (from The Emily Dickinson Series)*, 2013. Paper collage, 9 x 15 1/2 inches. BookStein Projects, Gallery II, January 9 – February 8, 2014.[3]



[3] Janet Malcolm's *The Emily Dickinson Series* was exhibited at the Lori Bookstein Fine Art Gallery, Gallery II, January 9 – February 8, 2014. The collages are now part of the gallery's online archive @ http://www.booksteinprojects.com/archive/janet-malcom-the-emily-dickinson-series?view=slider. Selected letters from our correspondence from the summer and fall of 2013 were published in *Granta: The Magazine for New Writing,* 126 (Winter 2014), pp. 129-152.

FIGURE 9
Janet Malcolm, *The Perils of Magic (from The Emily Dickinson Series)*, 2013. Paper collage, 9 x 15 inches. BookStein Projects, Gallery II, January 9 – February 8, 2014.

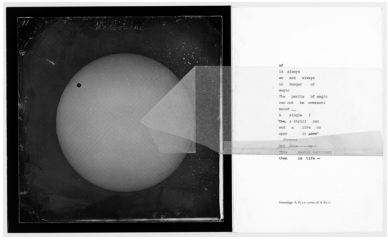
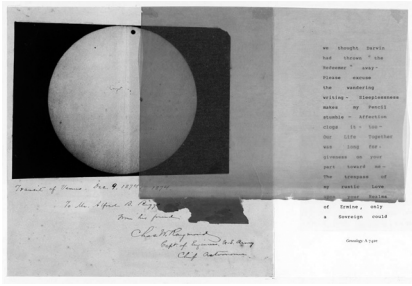


FIGURE 10
Janet Malcolm, *Ermine (from The Emily Dickinson Series)*, 2013. Paper collage, 9 x 14 3/4 inches. BookStein Projects, Gallery II, January 9 – February 8, 2014.



Only after I had studied the faint archival markings on the photographs for a long time was I able to identify the rare astronomical event captured by the camera: the transit of Venus across the solar disk on 9 December 1874. In Melbourne, Australia, the location from which the photos were taken, early rain marred the day of the transit, but the planet's crossing of the sun could still be observed until shortly before last contact, when clouds once again obscured the sky. The entire crossing, from *ingress exterior* to *egress exterior*, spanned a little more than four and half hours, with the transit center occurring at exactly 16:03:48.

While Venus transits happen only once every hundred years, they always occur in pairs: between December of 1874 and December of 1882, Venus completed its pentagonal cycle. In the mysterious space-time of the tran-

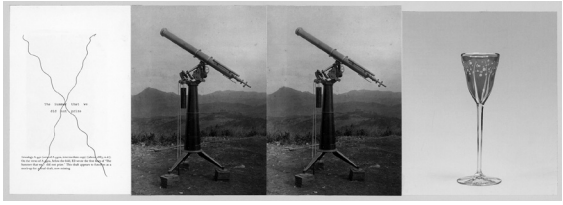
sit, strange crossings and random connections seem suddenly possible. Was it coincidence that David Peck Todd, the Massachusetts astronomer married to Mabel Loomis Todd, Dickinson's first editor, took 147 photographs as the 1882 transit unfolded on December 6 under near perfect skies? And was coincidence at work again on 8 December 1882, when, just two days after the transit's conclusion, Judge Otis Lord fell ill, resigned his position in the Superior Court, and returned home to await his death? Like David Todd's beautiful glass negatives, stored in a mountain vault where they lay untouched and virtually forgotten for a century, Dickinson's enigmatic messages associated with Lord remained undiscovered, saved from the glare of print until the middle of the twentieth century.

At last, the other-worldly beauty of Malcolm's fluctuant mirages arises most of all from their quiet intuition of entropy. The original photographs of the Venus transits of 1874 and possibly 1882, the messages that Dickinson may or may not have written to Lord during these very same years, have both drifted from their orbits, initiating in their wakes still further drifts: the drifting of lover and beloved, the loosening of ties between writer and reader, the letting go of words so they may row far out on the ecleptic of their own longings, returning to us, if ever, as dark alphabets of energy, as glittering, atonal stars.

The last image I opened on August 1, 2013 was an image of a telescope posed eerily like a person both scanning the emptiness of the daylit sky and gazing back at us. This strange and lonely instrument for seeing into the distance – it is, in fact, a photoheliograph – appears to have crashed into the earth from the future. Belonging at once to the past and the yet to come, it reminds us of our age-old desire to see into a hidden world beyond us, of our eternally unfulfilled wish to encounter the still more infinitely hidden within ourselves.

FIGURE 11

Janet Malcolm, *The summer that we did not prize (from The Emily Dickinson Series)*, 2013. Paper collage, 9 x 26 inches. BookStein Projects, Gallery II, January 9 – February 8, 2014.



The invitation to think about curation allowed me to recall this experience again and to see its significance. What had Malcolm wrought? Were her collages, as one reader of this essay has suggested to me, a materialised form of reception that allows us to encounter anew the original works that were their inspiration? I believe they are. Just as every act of conversion must involve a «mysterious leap of love» (Howe 2014 p. 25), so through Malcolm's textual-graphic agency her collages give us a view of Dickinson's messages from somewhere else – somewhere lightyears away yet also somewhere very close. «Ich fuhle Luft aus anderen Planenten», «I feel air from other planets», wrote Stefan Georges in his poem *Rapture*. In Janet Malcolm's rendering of *Open Folios,* the contents as I had assembled and fastened them in an argument anchored between black casings, and as others before me had catalogued, edited, and in all manner of ways bound them, were almost free again, part and parcel of the scattered, unauthorized estate Dickinson left to chance under the open sky of the 19th century: «The Twilight says | to the Turret | if you want | an Existence» (A 132a).

We – a 'We' that includes authors, artists, editors and curators – know not what ends our work will come to – or when it will stop being 'ours' at all.

III. How would you define your own curatorial poetics? In other words, what critical and / or creative principles underlie or inform your work as a curator? Do you see your poetics in contrast or distinction to others?

I allied myself with the figure of the curator in the moment when my affiliation with the figure of the editor no longer seemed fitting or justifiable. Yet the epithet of 'editor' has followed me, nonetheless, even to this very moment, so perhaps I must consider my transformation incomplete...

Of course, the curator and the editor share many of the same responsibilities: both may be said to collect, exhibit, interpret, and even protect objects of historical and aesthetic importance; and both almost always have a sense of connection to the beauty and current of history expressed through those objects. But there are perspectival differences between curating and editing that are perhaps inherent in their etymological origins. In proposing this conversation on curation, James Maynard drew our attention to the Latin roots of the word 'curate',

meaning 'to care for'. When I search out the roots of the word 'edit', also Latin roots, I find a different meaning: 'to put forth'. And if I am permitted to proceed associatively, I can say that a sense of forcefulness attaches to the action of this 'putting forth'; moreover, the emphasis suggested in the etymology, while partly on the object published to the world, is largely transferred to the subject whose forcefulness – power, persistence, often academic status – has brought that object to light. Consider the reversal of the places of object and subject implicit in one definition in the *OED* of 'edit': «To prepare an edition of (a literary work or works by an earlier author); so with the name of the *author as object* [my emphasis] 'to edit Horace, Shakespeare, etc'». Here the prime actor in the scene is the editor; he or she alone has agency, while the object edited is motionless, inert.

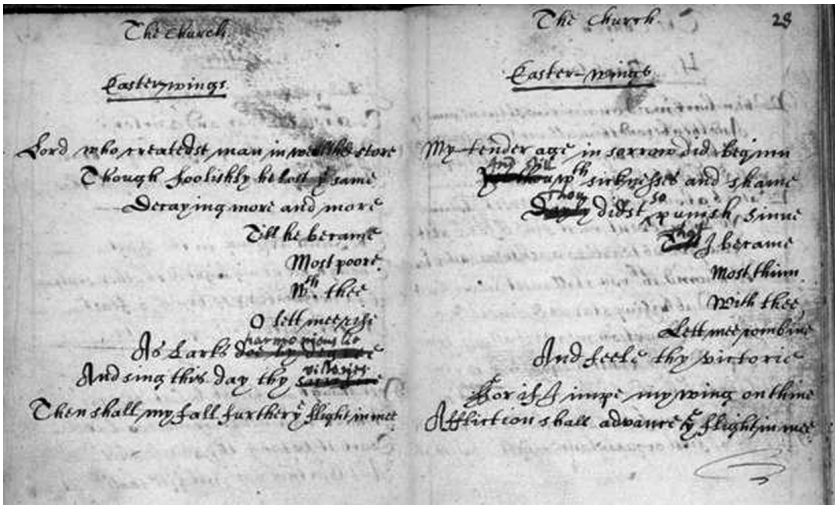
But enough! I have no wish to disparage editors. They have been my most encouraging company; among them, I find dear friends and my most beloved companion. And who among us is not grateful for their labor and for all they have salvaged for us from the time of antiquity to the edges of the 21st century? The best of them do not only bring order to the textual objects before them, but a still greater measure of wonder. For those editors, moreover, whose province is the manuscript – that stone, clay, wax, skin, bark, metal, cloth, or paper intermediary between author and reader – the first orientation to the text is to its body. They are attuned to its weight, and to where it has been worn thin; they see how time and the elements have faded or darkened it; they see what damages it has suffered. Who can blame them for striving to imagine it in its original, undamaged condition, or even for trying against all odds to restore the text to a more perfect state?[4]

I remember being palpably struck by a modern facsimile edition of the Bodleian manuscript of Herbert's *The Temple* made at Little Gidding in the months after Herbert's death in 1633. In this case, the

[4] An anonymous reader of this essay insightfully observed that while the distinction between editing and curating still holds, all editions – whether variorum, historical-critical, or critical-scholarly – might be imagined as 'records of curation'; that is, as records of «sequences of letter forms exhibiting the history both of textual development and deterioration». Moreover, the division between curating and editing might be understood 'temporally', as something that is not *a priore,* and also not there from the beginning, but rather something that occurs at a moment in the crossing between the pre-editorial stage of 'caring' for the material documents – searching for them, tracing their lives – and the editorial stage of 'putting forth' a final text, often under external pressure of deadlines.

editor's most moving commentary was his rigorous and austere transcription of the manuscript, page by page, rendering precisely not just Herbert's spelling and punctuation, but also the visual dynamics – the special characters, the corrections and insertions, and all the graphic disturbances on the page. To transcribe a manuscript is to enter into a relation with it as with the 'other'. If the transcription issues from a will to power, it will overwhelm the original, darkening and finally covering it. If the transcription proceeds, rather, from an acceptance that mastery of the original is neither possible nor desirable, it will stay with it as far as it can before at last parting from it, letting the original go on, and going on itself into a different future. In the first case, the transcription operates as a dangerous and distorting revenant; in the second case, it performs as a mortal companion, aware of the contingency and finiteness of all relations in this worldly realm. Here, the private consideration Herbert wishes to give to the readers of his manuscript persists in the facsimile edition. For though this contemporary edition circulates far beyond the intimate sanctuary of Little Gidding, it still functions as a devotional object that must be clutched by the solitary reader who feels its interiority most fully only when he or she holds it close-up. What has mistakenly been labeled 'fetishism' by those who have never worked closely with manuscripts is, rather, 'care'.

FIGURE 12
Easter Wings, Williams MS. Jones B62, 27v-28r.



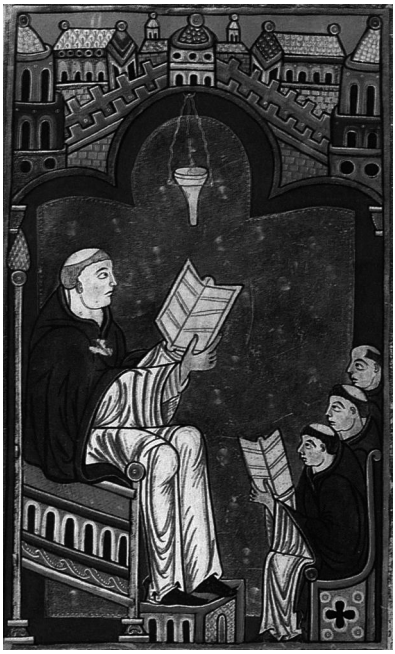
What's in a name? I would call this *editor* of Herbert – and *all editors* whose orientation to editing is compelled primarily by a vision of the text as embodied – *curators*.[5]

Keeping in mind the Latin root of the word,
what does it mean 'to care for' *a book, a text, a manuscript,*
or an archive?

In a book called *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's* Didascalicon, Ivan Illich offers a ravishing description of curation as care: «By the time of Hugh [of St. Victor] (ca. 1096-1141), western monasticism had been guided for over five hundred years by the Rule of St. Benedict. This Rule, still followed today, demands that the monks get up after midnight for more than a full hour of prayer. The rules of St. Victor in their twenty-eighth chapter assign to the book, in persona, the task of awakening the monks. Even small details of the ceremony are spelled out in this chapter. At the appointed hour, preceded by two candles, the book is carried through the dormitories. He who carries it must not lazily push against the heavy volume with his head, nor cradle it negligently in his outstretched arms; he should proceed with great dignity, letting the book's upper edge rest on his chest. At each turn the monks in the small procession sing '*Benedicamus domino,*' and the sleeping novices, at the very moment of waking, will stumble or step into the world of Latin with this answer. '*Deo gratias*.' Even brothers who are sick, and are not compelled to rise, should be gently nudged to acknowledge the nocturnal visit of the book. After fastening their belts, the monks will assemble in the darkness of the choir. The book is placed on the lectern in the middle of the nave. One candle is lighted in front of it» (Illich 1993 pp. 69-70).

[5] It is important to note here another Herbert editor – Randall McLeod – whose extraordinary meditations on *Easter-Wings* in "*fi*at *fl*ux" (*Crisis in Editing: Texts of the English Renaissance*, edited by R. McLeod, New York, AMS, 1993, pp. 61-172) are another inspiration for my thinking about editing as curation.

FIGURE 13
The Rule of St. Victor. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_of_Saint_Victor#/media/File:Hugostv.jpg)



As a medievalist I know[6] reminds me, in a quick correction of Illich, the monks wouldn't have 'stepped into' the world of Latin; they lived in it, night and day. The many elements of the ritual, including the singing or chanting in Latin, the lighting of a specified number of candles, the continual and dignified circulation of the Rule of St. Victor among the brethren for the duration of the service, affirm an experience of the Rule as an object of veneration. The manuscript is not an ordinary object. As my medievalist further observes, what Illich does not mention is also noteworthy: the Rule is opened on a lectern to display a single page, perhaps the focal text of the ceremony. When the flame of the candle placed in front of it burns, it partly blocks or distorts the text, which

[6] H. Wayne Storey, *filologo mio*, editor of *Petrarchive*, and author/editor of many works on medieval Italian literature and visual poetics including *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric* (Garland Press, 1993), *Dante for the New Millennium* (Fordham University Press, 2003), and *Petrarch and the Textual Origins of Interpretation* (Brill, 2007).

lying so deep in the memory need no longer be read at all, while simultaneously catching and igniting the luminous colors – the lapis lazuli, vermillion, and gold-leaf – of the illuminated letters. In this moment, the visual appearance of the manuscript so often overlooked in favor of its linguistic content, reasserts its iconic force. From the perspective of the medieval witness, moreover, the light in the darkness would have seemed to be emitted from the page itself.

Although the nightly procession of The Rule through the halls of a medieval monastery may not literally be the first instance of the manuscript as exhibit, it strikes me as an especially compelling illustration of curation as the crossing of the boundaries between the manuscript as an object of reading and the manuscript as a subject of viewing, as well as of a searching of the relations among memory, the material, and the immaterial.[7]

Coda

These meditations on editing as curation began in the space of one archive; it is thus fitting that they should end in the space of another. Recently, compelling questions on the relationship of curation and care in the 21st century have drifted out of the digital archive. In a tiny, jewel-like essay published in *Debates in the Digital Humanities,* Steven J. Jackson asks, «What does it mean to care for things and not just people?» and «How can we care for things *as* things, and not for the refracted glow of the human that we perceive in them?» (Jackson 2019 p. 427). And in an essay in the same volume Bethany Nowviskie calls for an «appreciation of [the] context, interdependence, and vulnerability of fragile, earthly things and their interrelationships» (Nowviskie 2019 p. 425). These questions also seem to be at the heart of the work of a small group of scholars at the University of Victoria who are thinking about how to care for protean and dynamic digital projects in an age when our

[7] Readers may find jarring the object lessons in curation I have offered here. Yet while Malcolm's destructive appropriation and hauntingly beautiful transformation of a profane edition of Dickinson's writings and the medieval monks' devoted veneration and communal conservation of a sacred book are indeed acts of radically different orders, I believe that both may also be reconciled as species of material care. The artist and the religious both claim an affective attachment to the material object(s) they touch; both, moreover, care for the material object(s) in ways that do not require the abolition of its (their) otherness but accept – even invite – the possibility that the objects themselves have vitality and agency.

production of digital objects far outpaces our capacity to preserve them for the future. Their project, called *The Endings Project*, reminds us that care is not only about attending to the repair and preservation of things, but also about attending to them in their departures and vanishings. While the 'digital dark age' is one horizon of our present thinking about curation, the Anthropocene is another, far vaster one. How might we admit the forces of time – our dark, lovely companion – into the cabinet of curiosities so that we might sense – see, hear, 'feel' – its smoothing and eventual wearing away of the objects featured and of our desire for them? If we let time swirl around in the archive, might the archive itself exponentially expand, revealing our whole fragile planet as an exhibition backlit by the sun, the moon, and the stars?

From what sources – canonical or otherwise – do you derive your thinking about curating?

A short, idiosyncratic, and very fragmentary bibliography of my sources includes the following works:

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The Endings Project @ https://projectendings.github.io/about/
A thousand private conversations.

Acknowledgments

I wish to record my gratitude to Barbara Bordalejo for inviting me to submit my work to Ecdotica, as well as to the two anonymous readers for their generous comments and fine suggestions. All saw my work for what it is: an *essai* more than an article, a scene of speculation rather

than a scientific study; yet all were willing to let it see the light of print. Their attentiveness to my small essay seems especially gracious given the state of emergency that the Covid-19 virus has brought upon us.

ABSTRACT

This essay, composed in the style of a personal meditation, trespasses the disciplinary boundaries generally taken to demarcate the separate roles of archivist-curators and scholarly editors to propose that the work of scholarly editing, or the "putting forth" of the work in published form, is profoundly indebted to the quieter, intuitive and empathetic work of curation, or the "caring for" the constellation of material documents that comprise the work. Originally conceived as a contribution to a symposium on editing and curation, its structure is guided by the following questions: In what ways do you "curate" poetry? And for whom? How would you define your own curatorial poetics? How are different acts of curation a product of their historical moment? From what sources – canonical or otherwise – do you derive your thinking about curating? While the essay's primary examples are drawn from the late writings of Emily Dickinson, it also touches on the collages of Janet Malcolm and the shape-poems of George Herbert. The essay ends with a consideration of new questions about the relationship of curation and care in the 21st century that issue from the physical space the digital archive and the temporal space of the Anthropocene itself.

Keywords
editing; curation; archive; Emily Dickinson, Anthropocene, ethics of care.

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