Significant Intervals Between Print and Video Poetry

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In a recent work, American poet Kate Greenstreet's combination of printed text and digital videos calls into question the identity of poetry and, more broadly, the tradition of literature and memory-making practices. *The Last 4 Things* (2009) reveals how technologies of memory, from writing to photography to film, change the way we record, retrieve, and remediate memories. Greenstreet uses print and video poems[1] to reflect on different technologies of memory in order to elucidate a common element between literary forms (such as poetry) and nonliterary forms (such as film, personal diaries, letters, and miscellaneous author's notes): regardless of the technology used to record events, the record will necessarily be fragmented and incomplete, and it is actually in these flaws that we can derive meaning.

The Last 4 Things invites readers into the intervals, the "in-between times […] of undetermined duration and unspecified significance," as literary critic and media theorist Katherine Hayles puts it in "The Time of Digital Poetry" (205). Yet, the significance of the intervals does not exactly remain "unspecified" in *The Last 4 Things*. It is at the moment of the "cut point" (see Figure 7) between print and video, video and print, that the real work of memory happens. Between versions of Greenstreet's text, reading becomes a process of remembering, as we constantly must recall one version when we are engaging in the other. Thus, readers are always between versions even when immersed in a single version.

Just as the memory of the narrator cannot be recorded clearly, the poetry cannot be located clearly in one medium or the other. Between mediations is a significant interval or transition, and "The most vulnerable moment is the moment of the change" (Greenstreet 55). The interval is charged with tension, since it is part of a "reading" process that is neither reading nor viewing. It marks the point at which we begin to realize that *both versions* of the text constitute the text's identity. Poetry, as *The Last 4 Things* helps us realize, is in the interval of remediation's oscillation between textual technologies

and in the work we do as individuals to find meaning in the text—which is to say "poetry" is a conceptual framework. Greenstreet takes a radical step in exposing a vulnerable ideological cut point between what *is* and *is not* literature. Such exposure is all the more critical as today's electronic literature strives for validation as a literary genre while simultaneously disrupting and even challenging the category of literature itself.

The Last 4 Things is an ambitious project in poetry and media production. As the first book of poetry to be sold with original films on a DVD,[2] *The Last 4 Things* resists a singular medium, but it also resists a clear understanding of what counts as a poem. Greenstreet challenges readers with unidentified and layered voices, unclear poem boundaries (where does a "poem unit" begin and end?), as well as jarring and sometimes frustrating line breaks. However, the biggest challenge for literary scholars, especially those coming out of a print-based definition of "literature," might be the hybrid form we find in *The Last 4 Things*, both a book and video series. Such hybridity seems to be the necessary condition of a text that is in so many ways caught between times, between genres, and between forms. In her poetry, primarily through the motif of photography, Greenstreet develops an account of the complex act or process of remembering and remediating some past event. This thread gradually emerges from careful reading/watching, though even it falls apart as the text tempers representation with abstraction. In the print version, the unsystematic placement of blank pages and the long sequences of verse with no titles; in the video version, the decoupling of written text and spoken words and the drastic rearrangement of the printed order of poems—these are among the devices that challenge the traditional boundaries of the poem and begin to represent the disconnects between reality, occurrence, and memory. The print text at times resembles a list of miscellaneous fragments or memories pulled from a notebook; the films occasionally lapse into a painterly style (Figure 1) or intentional distortion (Figure 2). The impossibility of representing memory without distortion, in fact, is one retrospective impression the text leaves on the reader.

The Last 4 Things can be read as a record of fragments from the past. These fragments refuse a stable narrative or determinate meaning, and thus the text self-consciously questions the nature of human memory as it becomes increasingly mediated by the layering of old and new recording technologies, an increasingly common phenomenon in our culture.[3] While Greenstreet's print poetry explores the process of recording memory in writing and photography, the videos[4] introduce a third technology of memory—the moving image—which perhaps responds to (without answering)

a question we find in the book: "What would illustrations of the inner life tell?" (29).

Both the DVD and the print book contain two long poems or sections entitled "The Last 4 Things" and "56 Days."[5] "The Last 4 Things" film is actually an eclectic series of 18 short (one to three minute) "video experiments," as Greenstreet calls them, each created after the written poem was completed. For "56 Days," however, the poet created a 10-minute film, shooting video and still shots *while* writing the poem.[6] "56 Days" is in a diary format, with one poem for almost all 56 days between December 3 and January 27. Greenstreet writes that "56 Days" is "what a diary might be like if one weren't attempting to explain a day's meaning or describe events. Just noting—something seen, heard, remembered" ("Author's Statement"). In this same statement, Greenstreet goes on to say, "That led to the kind of familiar idea of shooting one view every day, imagining she [the central speaker in the poem] did that. I thought I'd do it for 56 days. It almost worked" ("Author's Statement").
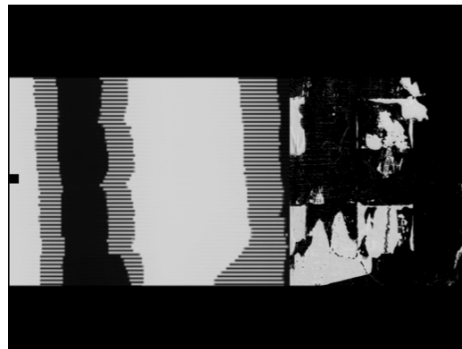

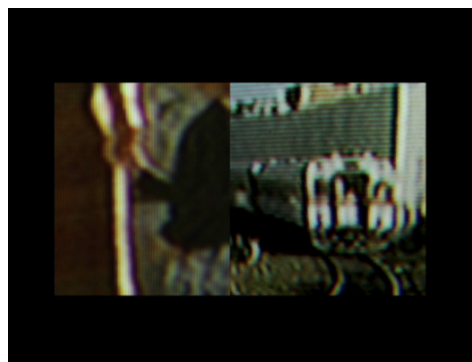Figure 1: "The Last 4 Things" (2009). Screenshot of video for page 33.

Figure 2: "The Last 4 Things" (2009). Screenshot of video for page 39.

In the "56 Days" video, shots of the same rooftop through the same window repeat with insistent loneliness as the weather changes and wild birds—never people—come and go (Figure 3). Sometimes the camera ventures outside, but the repetition of the neighboring rooftop weaves a sense of time through the poem's words, which are likewise woven throughout the film. In the video version of "56 Days," the viewer seems to stand in the room represented in the film, sharing the space of the speaker as author, filmmaker, observer. As Greenstreet puts it in an interview, "In '56 Days,' you see a consciousness looking out. It's looking out and you're looking *out* too, seeing what it sees." Readers see the recording process in the making, and likewise the written poems unfold as part of that experience.[7] The "56 Days" video, then, cannot be described as a mere supplement to the printed text; the video is a part of the composing process and permeates both versions.

Figure 3: "56 Days" (2009). Screenshot of video from 25 January, looking out the window.

Even though the composition of "The Last 4 Things" is not as intimately tied to the filmmaking process as "56 Days" is, this poem is acutely aware of lens technology (photography) and also self-reflectively treats writing as a technology. What gradually emerges in "The Last 4 Things" printed text is an interrogation of, resistance to, or anxiety about the process of making written and visual records, a process that always seems to yield ambiguity more than conclusive documentation. Similar to H.D.'s "Projector" poems and Marianne Moore's filmic mode of composition, Greenstreet does not represent a completed record or crystallized recollection, but rather it is the making of records and memories amidst so many imperfections and distortions that builds the tension between time

as lived experience and time as a mediation in different technologies of memory—writing, photography, film. Memory is "A condition formed/by countless mysterious malfunctions" (Greenstreet 14). The print poems together with the video poems vividly show the reader that these malfunctions are not meaningless symptoms. In fact, malfunction and indeterminacy, particularly in relation to mnemonics, constitute the most fundamental unit of meaning in the text. From within the gaps or intervals between remembering and forgetting, presence and absence, clarity and obfuscation, seeing and reading, print and video, we actually find a way to read this multi-version text without privileging one mediation over another. Because the print and video versions of *The Last 4 Things* are distributed as one work under the banner of poetry, each mediation is given equal footing, subverting any reading that hopes to situate print as a reference point while toggling between versions.

Marjorie Perloff has used the term "differential texts" to reference "texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one" (146). Both poems in *The Last 4 Things* are differential texts, since there is a print version and, for most of the text, a video poem. Perloff helps to remind us that, although "each reader may well prefer one mode of production over the others" (146), each version has no inherent value over another. But what is it like to actually read a differential text as one text, how do we alternate between versions of reading, and what happens *between* each version? In a text that is neither here nor there, so to speak, the intervals between the *here* and the *there* are laden with meaning and seriously challenge traditional reading practices. These intervals, particularly those between print and electronic versions of a text, merit incisive analysis from Hayles.

In "The Time of Digital Poetry" (2006), Hayles analyzes the "in-between space" of differential texts that have a print version and an electronic version. One of her examples is Stephanie Strickland's *V*, which has different forms online and in a print book. Hayles claims that "when read alongside each other, the print and electronic texts offer a remarkably rich matrix in which to explore the varying dynamics of freedom and constraint produced/performed by durable marks and flickering signifiers" (187).[8] Hayles then goes on to analyze what it is like to be a reader of *V*, in the matrix or the "territory" signified by the *slash* between "seeing/reading, presence/absence, stability/decay, image/word, part/whole, time stopped/time passing […] the space *between* the print book and digital Web site" (204, original italics). This emphasis on the in-between space, as well as the "in-between time" (205), of differential texts provides an incredibly useful theoretical approach to Greenstreet's *The Last 4 Things*. Like Strickland's *V, The Last 4*

Things has a distributed existence across materialities with key variances surfacing in the midst. While Hayles concludes that the suspended time/space in *V* "[reminds] us that gaps, ruptures, and fissures of undetermined duration and unspecified significance puncture our reading experiences" (205), such ambiguous intervals bear even more weight in a text concerned with problematizing memory as a sort of technology that, in the end, fails to deliver a whole or coherent past.

If the tools we rely on to record history and memory have "gaps, ruptures, and fissures," what sort of "record" do we have? While it may seem problematic or restrictive to think of poetry in this way, as a record flawed by variances between mediations, *The Last 4 Things* seems to suggest a sense of contact with the past that cannot be labeled as a conclusive testimony nor an artistic expression. As Greenstreet writes in her author's statement, "Photography can be an art, also a form of record-keeping." By extension, *The Last 4 Things* dwells in a gray space between poetry and record-keeping. In the final analysis, we confront an always partial and discontinuous archive dispersed across different technologies of memory.

In the following three sections, each predicated on a key passage/screenshot from Greenstreet's text, I want to explore more fully the implications of memory as a multimodal record, and through this exploration, outline more concretely the toll that differentiation takes on the identity of poetry and literature as stable categories in contemporary literature. From within the interval, that in-between time/space that is neither print nor video, we may discover a new awareness of the identity of the poem, and, as Hayles puts it, "extend the interrogations of the literary into the digital domain" (*Electronic Literature* 5).

1. "Stand there. / I'll take your photograph" (56).

Both sections in *The Last 4 Things* end with someone taking a picture. This final deferral to photography, however, does not mean that visual records are any less ambiguous or open-ended than writing. Photography has the last word, but ultimately the event of the photograph (at least in the print version) is literally and only *recorded in the words* of Greenstreet's poems. The photo is not an object or an image but an ongoing process of remembering. The video version varies from the print version in this way, since one of the videos shows old photographs, pinned like biological specimens on a board (Figure 4). In a significant contrast to this shot, the print version of *The Last 4 Things* trades the poem-as-object for the poem-as-process, and likewise represents photography not

Figure 4: "56 Days" (2009). Screenshot of video for page 23.

in the form of reified artifacts but rather as a process of memory-making.

New technologies have a long history of influencing writers and artists who become captivated by the functions and operations of machines. In *Cinematic Modernism* (2005), Susan McCabe deals directly with how the rise of film as the dominant metaphor and medium for cultural experience affected poetic practice in the early twentieth century. In her analysis, which illuminates the "crosshatching" (7) between avant-garde film and modernist poetry, McCabe focuses primarily on how poets experienced early cinema and then absorbed that experience, transforming it into poetic techniques. "The medium of film," she writes, "opened up a new vocabulary for modernist poets" (3–4). Film as a machine for representing time and movement crystallized the modernist fascination with the past and with mechanical reproduction.

In one dimension of her study, McCabe explores how the *materiality* of film and the process of filmmaking actually played a key role in the emergence of innovative poetic practice. In other words, it was not only the completed movie that engaged poets, but also to some extent the "flammable materiality (literally cellulose nitrate)" (9) of film and the *process* of creating and projecting moving image sequences that paralleled the composing processes of poets. In her "Projector" poems, for instance, H.D. adopts the cinematic medium as a "material metaphor" (to use a term popularized by Hayles) for

poetry, identifying herself as a film projector and "imagining herself behind the streaming light" (50). William Carlos Williams links Moore's composing strategy "to photographic development and projection of film as acts of dislocation and embodiment" (McCabe 197). McCabe cites Williams here to show how Moore foregrounds the materiality of words on the page like film strips "washed, dried and placed right side up on a clean surface" (Williams qtd. in McCabe 197).

In some sense, then, the physical properties of media reveal a new aesthetic and, in turn, shed light on the printed page as a material artifact or technology with its own conventions and semiotic elements. This media-specific analysis highlights the rich interplay between page-based poetics and film as modernist poets adapted not just the cinematic effects of completed films, but more radically the very inscription processes that record and perform cinematic representations for viewers. As Michael O'Pray observes, "Modernism was not simply the organisation of certain images, but a laying bare of the image-making process itself, incorporating it or leaving its trace in the resultant film" (97). Likewise, poets influenced by film shared this process-oriented aesthetic, a key cultural undercurrent.

Just as the emergent practice of filmmaking and the general cinematic experience gave some modernist poets a rich understanding of how different media make transactions in meaning, contemporary poets like Kate Greenstreet continue to make readers aware of literary texts as material artifacts invested with meaning in language as much as the inscription technology used to present the language. Critic and new media poet Loss Pequeño Glazier argues that "This concern with the material has been a constant element in modern and contemporary innovative literature and is highly relevant to e-poetry" (23). In *Digital Poetics: The Making of ePoetries* (2002), Glazier maintains that digital poetry (or "e-poetry") asks readers "to see through a new lens, one with expanded focal points" (5). His work explores "the idea of the digital poem as the process of thinking through [the electronic medium], thinking through making" (6, author's italics). Glazier's comment, including his "lens" analogy, underscores the power of material metaphors for both readers and poets. *The Last 4 Things* provides an opportunity to engage the set of concerns I have articulated under the rubric of modernist experiments—the same set of concerns which Glazier and other critics have aligned with today's new media poetries.

In The Last 4 Things, a material metaphor is most explicit in the 23 December entry from "56 Days." In this entry, the speaker recalls a memory of developing photos in the tiny bathroom-turned-darkroom of her parents' house. "My father gave me my first

camera. That's how I started taking pictures" (71). In the speaker's memory, what appears to stand out is not the images themselves but the process by which the images become married to their material: "I was enthralled with my black room, and the equipment and the chemicals. […] Shaking the tray in the safe red dark, I was happy—watching the image come up—gray shapes collecting into streets or faces" (71). This narrative—atypically complete compared to the other poems in the collection—is not a type of writing interested in visually arresting images or presenting memories that are "like" photographs. On the whole, the mode of writing is not intended to foreground *visually arresting images*, but instead the process of *arresting the visual image* comes to center stage. The speaker's vivid memory of the tentative, developing image in the 23 December entry is akin to the experience we have of reading the print version of *The Last 4 Things*. The process of taking pictures is a material metaphor representing, among other things, the way that memories, observations, and scenes actually get recorded in the mind.

Though it would not be accurate to say that we can make sense of the poetry with this metaphor of taking and developing pictures, we *can use* it to learn something about the speaker's consciousness, which is not unlike the gray image that comes up in the dark room chemicals of her past. It is a tentative knowing; there are shadows of narrative, but never any explanation. "Narrative," writes visual culture theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, is "a mode of knowing and showing which constructs a region of the unknown, a shadow text or image that accompanies our reading, moves in time with it […] both prior to and adjacent to memory" (190). Throughout *The Last 4 Things*, narrative moves "like a shadow text or image," as Mitchell puts it, in and out of the memories that appear, developing in the poem's dark room. Anyone who has spent any length of time in a dark room knows this half-lit, quiet, closed-off space that Greenstreet writes about and writes within. In this "region of the unknown" (Mitchell 190), the image is never completely developed, but it is necessarily arrested in the words on the page. Like the photographic image over time, like the distorted or shaky images in the video poems, memory is vulnerable and ephemeral, but its ghost-narrative carries us, "And it seemed that we were held somehow," Greenstreet writes (7). *The Last 4 Things* bears out the theories of O'Pray, Glazier, and Hayles in exploiting its mediated condition to imbricate meaning over and under the already rich poeticfilmic language and imagery of the text.

The 23 December entry, from which I have drawn the photographic metaphor, ends unexpectedly: "I'm not sure I can give you these sentences" (71). In this closing gesture, we are shaken out of the immersive memory of the speaker's past and reminded bluntly

that this memory is only a material inscription—words on a page. The speaker's hesitance to "give" the words to their reader shows an ambivalence about the recording process and an awareness of a potential future reader, someone who is another, who will come and inherit the speaker's memory through the very act of reading. But whose memory are we really talking about? Greenstreet's narrator? A plurality of narrators? Greenstreet herself? When someone in a poem asks, "What would illustrations of the inner life tell?" (29), who or what is doing the telling? In one sense, there is a concern with representing a human "inner life" (consciousness?) or impossibly, a *seen thought* or a "telling" illustration of the self. However, in another sense, there is a concern with the human self as it is infiltrated by technologies, in which the inner life of a remembered past is more posthuman than human.

One striking instance of techno/human confusion (one of many) comes at the beginning of "The Last 4 Things." The first page of the poem, which is page 3 of the book, is almost blank save for two lines: "The first leaves fell this morning / (my own eyes)" (3). We might ask, whose eyes? In the next segment of the poem, which begins on page 5, we have some clues that this is not a world of any known reality, and it is not a world in which sight is wholly human. Integrating a passage from Emily Dickinson, "*I have had a letter from another World...*" (5, author's italics), the poem signals a reality we may not recognize, and this is a clue about how to read. The next lines are typical of the rest of the book, and they frustrate any linear meaning-making process:

> To speak of method. Empathy. Our times, time.
> Disappears with me. Sleep a minute.
>
> Empathy is marked with
> incomprehensible corrections. The camera must be open.
>
> I know what I tell myself. Sometimes he seems to be the
>   camera. (lines 6 – 10)

In this passage, "he seems to be the camera," but a few lines later, "the camera turns the corner. We're never any closer. / Sometimes he is the camera" (lines 17 – 18). These lines suggest a thoroughly technologized subjectivity in the "he" who seems to be and then is the camera. This is strangely reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's experimental film *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), in which Vertov enacts his Kino-Eye (camera-eye) theory of the movie camera as the ultimate tool for vision, invested with agency as a recording device in the city and far exceeding the human eye's ability. Once we realize, as Hayles asserts in *Writing Machines*, that "consciousness alone is no longer the relevant frame but rather consciousness fused with technologies of inscription" (117),[9] the

heterogeneity of the speaking voice and the reality represented as half human/half technology must be a consideration for the rest of the book.

"Stand there. / I'll take your photograph" (56), writes Greenstreet… but stand *where*? The search for a viable subject position, a place to stand and read the poems so that they "make sense," is an ongoing struggle in *The Last 4 Things*. It appears that we have no place to stand and no certain meanings to find. However, it is precisely within this uncertain interval—an echo between points in time or limits in space—that we have to stand when we are at a confluence of analog and digital technologies. The condition of reading *The Last 4 Things* is much like our condition of being in the world. We are no longer in the past, not yet in the future, but never really in the present long enough to realize it. The significant intervals in the text are the in-between times of turning pages, the negative space between lines, and the suspense of the moment "the camera turns the corner" (5).

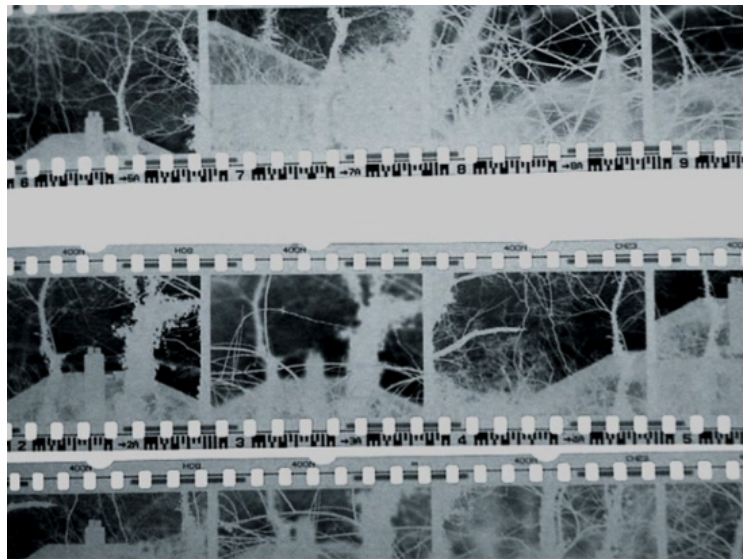## 2. "The flashbacks will remind us" (26).

Figure 5: "56 Days" (2009). Screenshot from the introductory sequence.

While photography is a key material metaphor in the print version of *The Last 4 Things*, the presence of the moving image is always there, in the material form of a DVD and through occasional allusion to video in the poetry. One key allusion to video is in the 4 January entry in "56 Days": "I had a few things from our life. I had the old reel-to-reel and I thought possibly, just with things I had, I could make a tape" (78).[10] Here the representational object

gives way to an exposure of the backstage moments prior to the representation. The speaker wants to preserve recollections from the past life with this visual medium of video. Like the film strips laid out in the introduction to the "56 Days" video, the speaker's process of recording memories is laid out on the page (Figure 5).

The video version of *The Last 4 Things* is heavily remediated, much more so than the print version. Not only are other media (such as books, photographs, and film strips) frequently shown in the videos, but as readers, we find our memory of print poetry (whether it is of Greenstreet's printed text or any other page-bound book of poems) remediated as well. Remediation, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin formulate one dimension of this concept, is the process by which media evolve and refashion each other. Old media try to represent the values of new media and vice versa, so that remediation entails a recursive cycle of improvement and change. Remediation works through a dual logic that simultaneously wants to make the medium transparent and also bring it to the surface to make viewers or readers aware of "the new medium as medium" (19). The oscillation between these logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, Bolter and Grusin write, "is the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessors and other contemporary media" (19). Remediation, when it becomes part of the process of recording memories, gives new meaning to the term "flashback." In remediated memory, the past has been inscribed on a technological prosthesis, and what we flash back to is no longer our own memory, but the memory as it is distributed across and at least partially authored by a network of media. Cultural and even personal memory necessitates preservation, but the means of preservation becomes a way of knowing and of constantly constructing and reconstructing "memory." Remediation as record-keeping is no passive process.

In complex and not totally explicable ways, *The Last 4 Things* explores what is gained and what is lost when memory is remediated in different and changing technologies. For instance, the "56 Days" video includes spoken and written text. The spoken words of the poem, however, do not match the lines that appear at the bottom of the screen. For example, in the entry for 23 January, the line "I've seen all a heart could desire" is spoken while the line "You can't ask this of me" is subtitled. In another interesting pairing for 23 December (discussed previously in this essay), the line "I'm not sure I can give you these sentences" is spoken and subtitled with a line that lists the names of liquid chemicals used to develop photographs (Figure 6). One intent of this juxtaposition could be, as I suggested earlier, to underscore the process of fixing memory onto materials—pages or photograph paper. The video adds another

layer of significance, though. It actually unfixes the poem's words from their placement on the page. We still have the diary entries that we had in the print version, but when the poetry is remediated in the video, questions surface about the capacity of the written entries to remain attached to their author's original voice and what the author (in the traditional, literary sense of author as authority) originally intended the words to say.

The meaning found in the interval is a mixed message rather than a unified, continuous message. Generally speaking, the print and video poetry, though joined under the same title of *The Last 4 Things*, operate on different wavelengths. As in "56 Days," the versions clash, derailing consistent readings. In "56 Days," the way we read the print text silently to ourselves is disrupted by the poet's own voice in the video. What makes sense in one version does not persist into the other. "The Last 4 Things" calls for a complex poetic literacy as the reading self is remediated from print to video and vice versa.

Figure 6: "56 Days" (2009). Screenshot of the video from 23 December, page 71.

Greenstreet has commented that she had the idea for the mismatched subtitles after viewing a film with this unintentional defect:

> The spark came from a pirated DVD one of my brothers picked up on the streets of Beijing, a movie starring Julia Roberts, featuring English dialogue accompanied by subtitles also in English that had no obvious relationship to what was being said. I loved the effect. ("Author's Statement")

An ambient soundtrack of lazy guitar strings and piano keys is woven throughout the "56 Days" video. As an additional layer of complexity, Greenstreet added audio effects of radio tuner static and distorted clips from foreign language tutorial tapes. The example of the "56 Days" video, in which the poem's words, movie-like

subtitles, and audio clips are incorporated into the video poem, illustrates remediation. "56 Days" repurposes a few media so that the viewer is constantly reminded of the filtering process through which video combines with audio, text, and still shots. The video feels heavily mediated, yet as the viewer becomes immersed in the lapse of time and changing weather or lighting, the experience begins to feel less mediated and more immediate and realistic.

From a wider angle, this technique of remediating print poetry in and through video loosens assumptions about poetry as an object for analysis, since in the video, poetry is an event with duration, unstable and changing over time—like memory:

> Incident, occurrence, happening, chance: the medium of our progress. I see a field and it's full of grain. I look across it, beyond the reach of roads. I can see because it's flat. Trees? No, there's no edge. Yellow. It's a drawing. My sister kept it for me. No, I drew it from memory. I mean—when I drew it, I had never seen a field. (69)

What would it mean to draw something from memory without ever having seen the thing? If we have not realized it yet by page 69, memory is not a stable record of what really happened or what was really there. Memory is generative, hewn out of the incidents that constitute our lives, or formed from other representations—images and stories—that we gather second-hand. In the previous passage, the speaker can "see because it's flat," which appears to reference the field until the field becomes, impossibly, a drawing with no edges. "Everything is in the distance" according to the entry for 16 December. There are moments when it seems we are so close to the speaker's inner life, when perhaps we can meet the request from "The Last 4 Things": "Come this far. Look briefly / into the past" (24), but our depth perception is flawed. The "other" behind the words, behind the camera, is still too far away. "Living in a house inside a house, // you receive a transmission of 'meaning' energy / you cannot decipher" (24). On the inside of the inside, where we should be closest to finding meaning in our brief look into the past, there is only a scrambled message. We can never cross the field to really *remember* what happened because mediation—sense perception, lies, material records—will always interfere. If we accept an epistemology of sight ("The eye fills in what it knows" [67]), *The Last 4 Things* in both versions will only be drawn from our memory, although we have never seen a field.

3. "The most vulnerable moment is the moment of the change" (55).

Figure 7: "56 Days" (2009). Screenshot from 15 January, page 83.

"A new media object," Lev Manovich writes, "is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions" (36). In this sense, then, *The Last 4 Things* is a new media object without a singular material identity. More radically, the text engages in a suturing of analog and digital to create a hybrid form that contaminates the print version with the digital and likewise the digital with the print. The processes that constitute poetic representation can thus be linguistic or filmic, or even a blending of the two, as is the case with Greenstreet's work and many other forms of contemporary new media poetry. While the print version of *The Last 4 Things* is not new media, it does acquire a new media aesthetic when paired with a digital video version. Just as the print version of the poetry is an ineradicable mark on the videos, the videos haunt the print. It is a work that cannot be fully experienced or consumed in one medium; the reading process is not fixed in a single mode. *The Last 4 Things*, taken as a new media object, makes us into new media readers.

The text's differential condition is not simply a matter of preference—of giving readers more options or more ways to encounter a poetic work. Rather, as a material metaphor for the status of memory stored and retrieved in various media, *The Last 4 Things* warrants its dual identity and constitutes itself as a distributed poetic text. Each version is traversed and informed by the other, and, as a consequence, the reader must account for both even as practiced methods of close reading and literary analysis begin to fail. "The moment of the change" (55)—that moment when we are between media and begin to realize that the text asks us to remain there—is indeed vulnerable. The majority of literary texts choose a primary medium of representation, but Greenstreet does not. This fact is

significant because it reveals hidden assumptions about the page. Poetic analysis, with roots running deep in print culture, so often bears a bias toward a text's visual identity on the page. The book form is not simply a vehicle for poetry, but it actively helps us determine and read poetic units. Differential texts like *The Last 4 Things* definitely disturb a page-bound identity and blur the clean-cut codex, and this disturbance happens most significantly in the intervals between media.

"A new media object," Lev Manovich writes, "is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions" (36). In this sense, then, *The Last 4 Things* is a new media object without a singular material identity. More radically, the text engages in a suturing of analog and digital to create a hybrid form that contaminates the print version with the digital and likewise the digital with the print. The processes that constitute poetic representation can thus be linguistic or filmic, or even a blending of the two, as is the case with Greenstreet's work and many other forms of contemporary new media poetry. While the print version of *The Last 4 Things* is not new media, it does acquire a new media aesthetic when paired with a digital video version. Just as the print version of the poetry is an ineradicable mark on the videos, the videos haunt the print. It is a work that cannot be fully experienced or consumed in one medium; the reading process is not fixed in a single mode. "The Last 4 Things," taken as a new media object, makes us into new media readers.

The text's differential condition is not simply a matter of preference—of giving readers more options or more ways to encounter a poetic work. Rather, as a material metaphor for the status of memory stored and retrieved in various media, *The Last 4 Things* warrants its dual identity and constitutes itself as a distributed poetic text. Each version is traversed and informed by the other, and, as a consequence, the reader must account for both even as practiced methods of close reading and literary analysis begin to fail. "The moment of the change" (55)—that moment when we are between media and begin to realize that the text asks us to remain there—is indeed vulnerable. The majority of literary texts choose a primary medium of representation, but Greenstreet does not. This fact is significant because it reveals hidden assumptions about the page. Poetic analysis, with roots running deep in print culture, so often bears a bias toward a text's visual identity on the page. The book form is not simply a vehicle for poetry, but it actively helps us determine and read poetic units. Differential texts like *The Last 4 Things* definitely disturb a page-bound identity and blur the clean-cut codex, and this disturbance happens most significantly in the intervals between media.

In addition, this blending, hybridizing process is important because it complicates a literary tradition that has excluded visual media, aligning graphic art and film with their respective traditions and histories. By presenting itself, not just as a differential text in which a user can choose between versions, but more radically a distributed text (neither here nor there), we are compelled to recognize that the poetry is as much the visual medium as the print medium. *The Last 4 Things* embodies the definition from the Electronic Literature Organization, in which Hayles proposes that literature should come to include works that are not primarily textual. This is not a move to increase interdisciplinarity between literature and visual arts, drawing from each but keeping each compartmentalized. Rather, what is implied in Hayles's proposition is a move to incorporate works that do not privilege human language. *The Last 4 Things*, in offering a composite of two media and extending this composite under the rubric of "poetry"—a traditional literary form—begins to realize Hayles's conception. As Manovich suggests in *The Language of New Media* (2001), this realization is in line with a larger cultural shift:

> The printed word tradition [...] is becoming less important, while the part played by cinematic elements is becoming progressively stronger. This is consistent with a general trend in modern society toward presenting more and more information in the form of time-based audiovisual moving image sequences, rather than as text. (78)

The word "information," which Manovich uses in the previous passage, might seem ill-fitting for a discussion of poetics. Poetry does not necessarily aim to communicate information, but rather to represent oftentimes abstract ideas and expressions. However, *The Last 4 Things* asks us to consider poetry as a record of miscellaneous notes and bits of information—data—and in this way it allows us to talk about how the print and video versions each convey the same information in very different ways. Manovich would argue that our culture requires people to develop new information behaviors; these behaviors then become part of our identity and we use them for accessing websites the same as we would when reading poetry or viewing films. In this sense, video poetry (as part of the category of new media poetry) is not just a minor, avantgarde genre operating on the periphery of the institution of literature. Rather, it is a response to and outcome of a larger societal shift, one that incorporates digital technologies into the fabric of daily life. New technologies necessitate new information behaviors; technologies of memory and the practices of literary consumption are no exception.

Yet, is video poetry in the current moment really something new?

In one sense, literary and filmic representation have shared an affinity since the first moments of experimental cinema in Europe and the United States. Video poetry is not an entirely new form—the modernist avant-garde as it developed between the 1920s and the 1970s offers many notable experiments with moving images and language. McCabe, for instance, provides many examples of poet-filmmaker collaborations, including the poet Philippe Soupault's "cinematographic poems" filmed by Walter Ruttmann (1922) and the well-known Fernand Léger/Ezra Pound collaboration on *Ballet Mécanique* (1924). Contemporary video poetry clearly draws from both the tradition of experimental film and emerging forms of digital poetry. However, in the pre-digital era, poets rarely—if ever—acquired movie-making equipment and learned the process to create their own films. Given the dynamic interplay between poetry and film, why were there not more avant-garde poets creating film versions of their own writing at the beginning of the twentieth century? Compact and affordable cameras, such as the Kinamo movie camera for 16mm film, introduced around 1925, made handheld filming a possibility for hobbyists and amateur filmmakers (Buckland 51). Editing film in the pre-digital era was certainly difficult and labor-intensive, but there were even steeper barriers facing novice filmmakers. As Patricia Zimmerman notes in *Reel Possibilities: A Social History of Amateur Film*, distribution of independent films was extremely limited in the 1920s and 30s despite the development of amateur film technology in the United States (71). This obstacle curtailed film experiments, even if one could afford to purchase a camera. Zimmerman also describes an American traditionalist ideology that framed amateur filmmaking as a leisure activity and limited forays with hand-held cameras to home movies (113). It is likely that only established or daring avant-garde poets with connections to the film industry would have tried film experiments.

Today, the rich interplay between poetry and film has been revived thanks to the widespread availability of inexpensive camcorders and video editing software, but most importantly an array of online distribution venues and a greater cultural acceptance of the amateur media producer. The ideological and technological wall between professional and amateur is crumbling. As *Wired* magazine editor Kevin Kelly notes:

> The new cameras/apps are steadily becoming like a word processor—both pros and amateurs use the same one. [...] Filmmaking gear is approaching a convergence between professional and amateur, so that what counts is artistry and inventiveness. ("Extra-Less Films")

The proliferation of new media technologies and an aesthetic that

embraces these technologies has set the scene for poetry and visual media to collide in ways no one imagined possible during the time of modernist experimentation. During the 1920s and 30s (even 15 years ago), it would have been difficult for an individual poet to create poetry in print and film, *while also* making both media versions widely available and of equal quality. Today, however, poets are beyond overcoming such limits and have started to create meaningful poetry that takes advantage of digital video capabilities. These poets use video sharing websites to give their otherwise inaccessible work a public audience as they redefine what it means to compose poetry in print. It is not just the advances in digital technology that separate poetic innovation from that of the 1920s and 30s. The more important change is the way that poets who are not serious filmmakers put the technology to use and leveraged online networks to distribute and market their work.

Greenstreet, as well as other forward-thinking video poets like Zachary Schomburg and Joshua Marie Wilkinson, all have an active online presence that helps build their readership. While Schomburg and Wilkinson have formal training in film, they do not use a film crew or top-of-the-line equipment to create their videos.[11] Greenstreet has no formal training in film, although she was a visual artist before becoming interested in poetry. She learns video and audio editing programs through experimentation and online video tutorials.[12] What is new about the project of today's video poetry is represented by a shift not only in the types of media that poets use, but in the variety of media available for poets who see value in creating multi-version work. Unlike poets who work only in new media, Greenstreet, Schomburg, and Wilkinson work at the conflux of new media and traditional print forms. In this sense, they cannot be described as "adding in" video, as though the video were an extra feature or supplement. Electronic writer and digital artist Talan Memmott asks, "How is meaning made, defied, resisted, and sustained in the digital age, in a culture where media technology for the production of work is easily accessible?" (qtd. in Jaszi). Memmott's question is timely, and I see *The Last 4 Things* as one possible response.

Notes

1. I consider "video poetry" a sub-category of digital poetry. Alternate terms for video poetry are film-poem, poem movie, and cinépoem. Works of video poetry all use video footage as the dominant visual element, and they all combine this footage in some way with words. The linguistic element of video poetry can be written text, spoken words, or both. This definition

excludes kinetic typography, graphic or Flash animation, and photographic montage works that use still images as their primary visual element. Many new media poets use film elements in their pieces, but video poets emphasize the filmic and its interplay with the words of the poem.

2. Other poetry books have included CDs or web versions as digital variations of all or some poems. For example, Stephanie Strickland's book of poems *Zone : Zero* (2008) includes a CD with two digital poems correlating to two poems in the book. Strickland's earlier work, *V* (2003), which has a print and web version, is "the first collection of poems to exist as an integrated work in both media" (Hayles, "The Time of Digital Poetry" 182), although its nonprint version is an interactive web text and not a video poetry DVD like *The Last 4 Things*.

3. Consider the University of Virginia's, *The Valley of the Shadow*, a digital archive of records from the American Civil War, including diaries, letters, photographs, newspapers, maps, church records— all mediated by the interface of *The Valley of the Shadow's* website, <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>.

4. There is a distinct difference between film and video as art forms. In critical discourse about film and video, the distinctions include materiality (film vs. tape) and different cultural readings. In "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form," Marita Sturken notes that film evokes history whereas video's connection with television codes it as a live transmission—as "continuous and immediate" (120). Greenstreet does not seem to highlight these distinctions in her work; she calls them "videos" in her author's statement, but on the DVD she calls them "films." I use the terms "video" and "film" interchangeably.

5. Note the possible confusion between the title of the entire work *The Last 4 Things* and the poem+film also titled "The Last 4 Things." In following convention, I use quotes for poems and italics for titles of whole works, so this formatting difference will indicate when I am talking about the poem or the entire work.

6. See the author's statement, available on the website of Ahsahta Press. I also discussed details of the dual composing process in a conversation with Greenstreet on November 11, 2009.

7. There is a long tradition of photographers taking pictures of the view out their windows. In fact, Nicéphore Nièpce's view of his French town through his window, captured with a camera obscura in 1826, is historically recognized as the first photograph ever taken.

8. The phrase "durable marks and flickering signifiers" indicates the different material embodiments of print and digital formats, respectively. Flickering signifier is a term of some importance in Hayles's work. The phrase denotes the unstable system of signs and referents sponsored by digital texts.

9. In one respect, this condition of fusion is applicable to any inscription. However, in the context of a highly mediated reading environment like that of a differential text, one is challenged to overlook the technology used to record and represent the linguistic content.

10. While it is possible that the "reel-to-reel" Greenstreet mentions is an audio recorder, it is more likely that it is a video recorder, since the text expresses obvious attachment to the medium of video. Reel-to-reel video recorders were widely available at the same time that audio recorders were becoming popular. The Sony CV-2000 reel-to-reel home video tape recorder, for instance, was launched in August 1965. Reel-to-reel was also the standard for artists editing video in the 1980s.

11. About his video poem "1977-2050," Schomburg has commented that "All photography and film footage was captured on a cheap Olympus snapshot camera and edited with an outdated version of iMovie."

12. In a poetry reading on November 11, 2009, Greenstreet spoke about her self-education in technology.

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