Tongues turning to chalk: Scott Walker's (sonic) geopoetics

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In this article, I explore the *geopoetics* of Scott Walker's lyrics and sonics, where the term *geopoetics* is construed as a concern with the geographical, geological, ecological and cosmological in relation to the aesthetic. I specifically utilise concepts extracted from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980 /2013) to form generative alliances with Walker's work; examining lyrics pertaining to tongues that are becoming chalk (Walker, 1984) and a body that grows calcium planets (Walker, 1995), with reference to 'becoming' as affective exchange (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 299) and the 'body without organs' as process of desire (p. 192) that corresponds to so-called *nature*. With regards to Walker's sonics, I suggest that they are non-representational sonic landscapes that can also be interpreted as a *mood* that constitutes the polyphonic sounding of shifting relations; and discuss their rhythmic qualities that oscillate between chaos and order. Addressing both Walker's lyrics and sonics, I situate them between the two temporal modes of 'Chronos' as conventionally structured, formal time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 305); and 'Aeon' as the temporal mode of 'becoming' (p. 307). In this manner, I demonstrate that Walker's (sonic) geopoetics is a poetics of immanence that complexifies crude oppositions between human and non-human, interior and exterior, emotion and affect; recognising its *inhuman*, world-generating capacities.

Keywords: Scott Walker; Deleuze & Guattari; (sonic) geopoetics; becoming; body without organs; affect

Introduction

When considering Scott Walker's lyrical and sonic poetics, the term *geopoetics* may appear to be a strange description, a tenuous extrapolation. A poetics of terror perhaps, an existentialist poetics or a poetics of the darkness of the human soul, may seem to be more apt categorisations. However, the purpose of this article is to explore how Walker's work surpasses such anthropocentric tropes.

Writing for *The Guardian* in 2008, Sean O'Hagan reveals that Walker's father was a geologist. I mention this here, not to suggest that this necessarily had any direct

influence on Walker's work, but to highlight a resonance, a potential or possibility that this might in some way have informed Walker's poetics tangentially, *almost* imperceptibly. In an article following his death, Eimear McBride writes, 'his work is deeply, unliterally personal and therefore capable of touching the universal' (McBride, 2019). Indeed, his lyrics and sonics both contain and exceed the human – such is the power of what I will refer to as Scott Walker's *(sonic) geopoetics*.[1]

The term *geopoetics*, apparently first coined by Scottish-French writer and theorist Kenneth White (1989), has various uses that have similar objectives. The prefix *geo-* is used to denote geographical and geological, but also ecological, and cosmological concerns in conjunction with the aesthetic. Geopoetics marks a concerted move away from Western anthropocentrism, seeking to interrogate our relationship with so-called nature, and propagating the notion that we are not actually fundamentally distinct from the world that we inhabit. It encourages a poetics that confronts our radical inseparability *from*, and seeks generative affective encounters *with*, the earth and indeed the universe in general.

I am more-or-less applying the term in this manner to Scott Walker's later work. First I will explore selected lyrics and then Walker's sonics, having chosen this approach of considering lyrics and sonics predominantly separately (despite its limitations) for clarity of discussion, to provoke the exploration of different aspects, and for other more abstract reasons that might become clearer as we progress. However, I will address *both* lyrics and sonics adjacently, in relation to time toward the end of the article. I will primarily be considering Walker's geopoetics refracted through the prism of some of the geo*philosophical* concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980/2013), from their work *A Thousand Plateaus*. This is itself, an expansive

geopoetic text, the authors of which, as Brian Massumi tells us in his foreword, 'recommend that you read it as you would listen to a record' (vii).

Walker's lyrical geopoetics

Locating the geopoetic

At a first glance or rather, *listen*; Walker's lyrics might not seem to be especially geopoetic, but upon closer consideration, reveal themselves to be quite remarkably so. *Climate of Hunter* (Walker, 1984) is an album rife with geopoeticism, even in its title, with Walker's use of the word '*climate*' setting the tone for the lyrics to come. There are a number of geopoetic lines, verses and events within this album, with some of the most notable lyrics being:

i. From 'Sleepwalkers Woman' – 'With your voice shining sea/ In his fractures and skies.'
ii. From 'Track Five' – 'Pain sonics eternities/ . . . In your dimmed latitudes.'
iii. From 'Track Six' – 'Peeling tongues from the ice hums.'
iv. From 'Rawhide' – 'A last grain of dust lands in the darkness/ On tongues laid bare and turning to chalk.'

(Walker, 1984)

Elsewhere, in 'The Cockfighter' (from *Tilt*), we come across 'calcium planets' that begin springing up on a body shrouded 'in darkness' (Walker, 1995). In 'SDSS1416+13B (Zercon, A Flagpole Sitter)' (from *Bish Bosch*); Zercon, the deformed dwarf jester of Attila the Hun, *becomes* the brown dwarf star SDSS1416+13B, dying slowly, burning-out, alone in the vast cosmos (Walker, 2012). Meanwhile in 'Dimple' (*Bish Bosch*), 'stars fall in thuds' (2012).

Walker's lyrics express a particular concern with time and space, temporality and spatiality. They oscillate between a deep time, that which operates on a planetary and geological scale that we cannot properly comprehend ('eternities' (1984), falling or slowly dying stars that are light years away (2012)); and a diurnal, more human time ('midnight' (1984) and day or 'darkness' (1984 and 1995) and light). He incorporates spatial coordinates and geographical features ('latitudes', 'valleys' (1984)), geological materialities ('chalk' (1984), 'calcium' (1995)), thalassic-fluidities and hydro-stagnancies ('sea', 'ice' (1984)). Walker twists language in unlikely directions, away from the human and then back again, a geopoetic blurring technique that willingly obfuscates what is human and what is not, with wild motions that blend elements of the human with the so-called natural (a 'voice shining sea' (1984), a man that is also a star (2012), a 'communication' that frees itself and swims as though an animal, only to be trapped within psychological 'latitudes' (1984)). This technique extends beyond motifs or just metaphor alone, employing a 'gaze' that appears to be omniscient but seems more concerned with strange affects, one that *feels* but does not qualify these feelings, appearing to come from both within and outside a human narrator. Indeed, this is a 'gaze' that is not just that of a watchful human eye conferring knowledge from a privileged position of detachment, neither is it one that situates itself as central subject, distinct from the objects on which it opines. Perhaps we can even say that it does not entirely belong to Scott Walker alone as a discrete human subject, but is instead a sensing-feedback loop. The voice of Scott Walker as narrator drops in and out, disappears and reappears, words gesture beyond themselves, other 'gazes', other voices intrude.

Tongues becoming chalk

Now I will return specifically to *tongues* and *chalk*, the lyric from 'Rawhide', 'tongues

laid bare and turning to chalk' (Walker, 1984), this chalk being (presumably) that of the valley that constitutes one of the multiple spatial coordinates of the song. The *tongue*, on the other hand, is a vital instrument of human orality. It is (along with the vocal folds, the larynx and so on) a component of the primary human music-making machine; but more specifically, it is the orator of song. It is the tongue that comes into its own at the point of *articulation* (in combination with the soft palate and lips), specifically the final step in the spatiotemporal progression of sound through the body and out. It is at this point where the malleable sound meets the tongue, that it is moulded into words – given anthropocentricity through meaning. The tongue acts as the sculptor, instructed by the brain, imbuing sound with the hubris of our complex semantic systems. Indeed, Walker seems to be obsessed with tongues, tongues that become the somatic point of encounter with so-called nature: 'peeling tongues from the *ice hums* [*my italics*]' (1984), and in 'Zercon', 'the *brown slug* of your tongue [*my italics*]' (2012). In his tongues-become-slugs, or more importantly *becoming*-chalk, the ultimate move of humanity to shape the chaos of unbridled sound, faces a confrontation with the *non-human*. There is a perversion of the tongue's utility, its instrumentality in the production of comprehensible speech. It becomes something of a vestige that no longer *articulates* as such, but instead begins to reach toward the unnameable. We might imagine that if it attempts to speak, it does not speak any discernable language but rather, pushes out swathes of geo-glossolalic sound. (What does it mean to 'speak in tongues' that are *becoming-chalk*?) The human subject becomes *partially object*ified, as especially emphasised in the manner in which Walker catches the tongue *mid*-becoming-chalk, where the lyric is not 'tongues . . . *turned* to chalk', but '*turning* to chalk [*my italics*]' (1984); something in-between the bodily and the geological, flesh and stone. Not human and not non-human, a perpetual intermediary process otherwise known as the *inhuman*.

But what is this *becoming*-chalk exactly? To explore further, I will briefly examine Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/2013) concept of 'becoming'. They state that:

> A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification . . . Above all becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level . . . [Becomings] are neither dreams nor phantasies [*sic*]. They are perfectly real. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 277)

Of course, that is not to say, when they refer to 'becomings-woman', 'becomings-animal', 'becomings-mineral' and so on, that Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting that we necessarily *materially* become what we are encountering or take up its form and characteristics (p. 277). Similarly, we know that a tongue does not become chalk in this manner, but neither is it just pure metaphor on Walker's part. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari tell us that, 'what is real is the becoming itself . . . not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes' (p. 278). 'Becoming' is affective exchange (p. 299), through profound connection, a 'becoming-other' to oneself (p. 278). Furthermore, it works both ways, so to speak – also affecting that which is encountered just as much as the human that encounters it (pp. 277, 355). We can no longer say that the tongue is a tongue (or in any case, even less so than we could before) but importantly, we can no longer say that the chalk is chalk.

Walker's tongue-becoming-chalk initiates what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'block of becoming', where one 'becoming' is 'taken up in another becoming . . . which coexists, forms a block with the first' and so on (p. 278). Although until now, we have taken the tongue to belong to a human; it should be said that it is actually unclear whether the lyrics refer to the prehistoric human herders or herd (most likely, of bison) featuring in the song, or to the unnamed individual who creeps out at night to graze with the herd – the loner, the 'insomniac' (Walker, 1984), by all accounts Walker himself

and also, perhaps, the listener. In some respects it is not relevant, because the 'block of becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 278) encompasses all. The *ambiguous* tongue-becoming-chalk (that is neither tongue nor chalk) constitutes a *threshold* passed where, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari,

> becoming itself becomes, and where one changes becoming depending on the 'hour' of the world, the circles of hell, or the stages of a journey that sets scales, forms, and cries in variation. From the howling of animals to the wailing of elements and particles. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 290)

Instead, the tongue-becoming-chalk is *n* 'dimensions' in a multiplicity (p. 290), that is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, 'composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis . . . continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds' (p. 291). A multiplicity is symbiotic in the sense that 'its becoming ties together animals, plants, microorganisms, mad particles, a whole galaxy' (p. 291). In 'Rawhide': tongue – chalk – valley – bison – prehistoric-man – constellations – Walker – ourselves – that 'last grain of dust' (Walker, 1984) and so on. The tongue-becoming-chalk is located just beyond the threshold of the somatic, beyond the limit of the discrete *self* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 291), that is shown to be an inadequate representation of subjectivity.

Calcium planets and the body without organs

Returning to 'The Cockfighter' where 'calcium planets' begin 'growing' on a body; the body is exposed as 'flapping' flesh, being colonised by these 'calcium planets' (Walker, 1995), calcium being a major component of calcium carbonate or *chalk*. This is a body becoming-'territorialized' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) in a sense or in a state of partial terraformation; but also 'deterritorialized' (1980/2013) from its initial state as functional human flesh, as the confined self. Instead, it becomes an *intersectional locus*

or ‘zone of indetermination’ (p. 319) between the human, the terrestrial, and the cosmic, where all these modes of ‘becoming’ collide and are transformed into something-else altogether. A nameless multiplicity, aggregate or ‘*assemblage*’ that exceeds the human body; as Deleuze and Guattari describe, ‘a circulation of impersonal affects, an alternate current that disrupts signifying projects as well as subjective feelings’ (p. 272). Walker’s lyrics expose this circulatory dance of inhuman desire, taking the place of the thing that once thought itself a human body. Calcium looms large in one form or another in much of Walker’s lyrical writing, whether he sings of ‘teeth’ (2012), ‘chalk’ (1984, 2012), or bones (1995, 2006) – it is always there, a reminder that this non-human earth-element is always on, within or a part of us. Without saying explicitly, he gesticulates at our inhuman core with his terraformational ‘*de*territorializations [*my italics*]’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) that come from outside and within, or the outside within.

In the Stephen Kijak (2006) documentary on Walker, *30th Century Man*, Michael Morris remarks that Walker’s work is concerned with ‘interior landscapes’. While this may be the case in part, it is perhaps more apt to say that Walker’s work functions at the *confluence* of interiority and exteriority, complexifying this binary. In their use of the geological schema pertaining to ‘strata’, Deleuze and Guattari offer a geopoetically expounded conceptualisation of the organisation of the universe, thinking through many kinds of relations in the process of doing so (1980/2013, pp. 45-86). Whilst I will not explore the whole of this conceptualisation, it is worth addressing the relevance of the ‘crystalline stratum’ (p. 57) to the interior/exterior relation with reference to Walker’s lyrics. On this ‘crystalline stratum’, the proto-crystal ‘seed’ is surrounded by an exterior ‘amorphous milieu, or medium’, which the seed draws into itself ‘incorporating’ formerly external material to form the crystal (p. 57). However,

this mechanism is bi-directional in that ‘the interiority of the seed of the crystal must move out to the system’s exterior’ in order to crystallise the ‘amorphous medium’ (p. 57). The interior becomes exteriorised and the exterior becomes interiorised, such that both the seed of the crystal and the ‘amorphous medium’ can ‘switch over to the other form of organization’ to such an extent that, ‘the seed itself’, that very superlative example of interiority, actually ‘comes from the outside’ (p. 57). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari remark that, ‘interior and exterior are relative; they exist only through their exchanges’ (p. 57). Furthermore, as in the case of the ‘crystalline stratum’ (p. 57), it is this very exchange that, in its bi-directionality, subverts notions of interior/exterior, internal/external and renders all an interstice (p. 280). This interstice is the aforementioned ‘zone of indetermination’ (p. 319), which constitutes Walker’s tongue-becoming-chalk or body being colonised by calcium planets where previously formalised relations are being progressively uprooted and altered, caught at a point before they have been cast anew, as new relations with some level of transient stability. A tongue inside a human mouth, the very *insideness* of the human itself is turning outward, toward the *outsideness* of chalk as inorganic matter. (Coincidentally, the formation of chalk, which consists of calcium carbonate arranged in calcite crystals, involves a ‘transient amorphous’ phase from which the calcium carbonate then becomes crystalline (Gebauer et al., 2008).) The same occurs with the body that is being taken over by calcium planets, in a sense, turning itself inside out with a kind of non-conscious intent. Simultaneously, the chalk or calcium streams inward, becomes quasi-somatic, *affectively* (but not *necessarily* materially) connected to bodies that are unlearning their own physiology. The human is becoming-landscape, but the landscape is also becoming-human. At the point at which Walker catches them, they are just about discernable as separately qualifiable but merging entities, but we could assume that they

might become progressively indiscernable, that the body might become what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'body without organs' (1980/2013), that which becomes a 'circuit of intensities' (p. 181).

As well as undermining notions of a fixed, discrete and internal *self*, the 'unnatural participations' of Walker's lyrics, as Deleuze and Guattari might call them, also reveal so-called nature to be operating 'against itself' (p. 282). Deleuze and Guattari speak of nature as 'a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities', or 'an immense Abstract Machine' that is nonetheless real, the pieces of which 'are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations' (p. 296). Importantly, they tell us that, 'there is therefore a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the *artificial* [*my italics*] and the natural' (p. 296). On this 'plane of nature' or 'plane of immanence', 'things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness' (p. 297). Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, nature constitutes the *whole* of a self-organising and *dis*-organising universe (pp. 45-86) or 'chaosmos' (p. 364) that operates at simultaneous differential rates, registers and scales, some of which are relative and some of which are absolute. This is a universe in which we all play a dynamic part, a universe that we are not separate from, that is not outside of us but rather, one we are immanently entangled with/in; such that the terms with which Deleuze and Guattari often describe matters – as 'speed and slowness', 'affects', 'deterritorializations' and 'reterritorializations' (1980/2013) – undermine any fixed boundaries between what is human and what is not, organic and inorganic, man and mineral. They address these categories as real, but at the same time not entirely adequate; existing in the world on a structured, hierarchised *actual* 'plane of transcendence' but not as-such on the *virtual* 'plane of immanence' or

‘plane of nature’ that encompasses and exceeds it (1980/2013). This is also Walker’s universe, Walker’s ‘chaosmos’ (p. 364), in which order is pushed to the brink and the human can instead *become* ‘a climate, a wind, a fog’ (p. 306).

It is in considering Deleuze and Guatari’s ‘body without organs’ (1980/2013), that we are able to think the connection between the geopoetic – the tongue-becoming-chalk (Walker, 1984) and especially the body-becoming-calcium planets (Walker, 1995) – and *desire*. Indeed, in *Scott Walker and the Song of the One-All-Alone*, Scott Wilson specifically relates ‘The Cockfighter’ (Walker, 1995) to ‘obscure desire’ (Wilson, 2020, p. 51). According to Deleuze and Guattari, ‘you can’t desire without making’ a ‘body without organs’ (1980/2013, p. 174). But what exactly is this ‘body without organs’, if as Deleuze and Guattari tell us, it is not literally a body that lacks organs (p. 184); and what does it mean by *desire*? A ‘body without organs’ is that which brings about and constitutes an alteration in modes of relations within and between organs that defies the ‘stratified’, conventional ‘organization of the organs called the organism’ (p. 184). It is also ‘a fusional multiplicity that effectively goes beyond any opposition between the one and the multiple’ (p. 179), in the sense that it is ‘intense matter’ that involves ‘energy transformation and kinematic movements’ (p. 178), that can no longer be described formally. Deleuze and Guattari state:

> The organs distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; forms become contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients. ‘A’ stomach, ‘an’ eye, ‘a’ mouth: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference. The indefinite article is the conductor of desire. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 191)

The tongue-chalk of ‘Rawhide’ (Walker, 1984) and the flesh-planet loci on the body of

‘The Cockfighter’ (Walker, 1995), constitute these points of conduction of desire. However, this desire does not involve lack, neither is it relieved by pleasure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 179), nor does it contain within it, ‘the transcendent ideal of phantasy [*sic*]’ (p. 180). Instead, it is an intensive ‘process of production’ (p. 179) which Deleuze and Guattari also refer to as ‘becoming’ (1980/2013). The ‘body without organs’ is revealed not to possess or express desire, but to *be* desire itself as process (p. 192). Tongue-chalk, body-planets; both are vectors of this process of desire. The tongue and the chalk, the body and the calcium planets are becoming indiscernible from one another as two *ontologically* distinct entities and instead ‘gradients and thresholds’ (p. 178) describe the differentiations within their ‘assemblages’ (1980/2013). Indeed, bodies without organs are ‘*the field of immanence* of desire [*italics in original*]’ (p. 179), which is to say that they refer specifically to the ‘plane of immanence’ in relation to desire (1980/2013); desire as immanent process that incorporates self and other, interior and exterior, simultaneously doing away with these categories (p. 182). According to Deleuze and Guattari:

> The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they have fused. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 182).

It could be said that desire is the process proper to nature, that desire is nature itself as immanent process. However, this also includes the self-organisational aspect of nature; that which ‘stratifies’ and ‘reterritorializes’, establishing ‘a formal multiplicity of substantial attributes that, as such, constitutes the ontological unity of substance’ (p. 179). There is a part of the ‘body without organs’ (1980/2013), a stratum that constitutes the *organism* where signification and subjectivation occurs, where the tongue, the body are organised, hierarchised and put to work (p. 184). Deleuze and

Guattari describe this remarkably geopoetically, as a ‘glacial reality’ of ‘alluvions’ and ‘sedimentations’ (p. 185). Importantly, the ‘body without organs’ swings between the ‘two poles’ of the ‘stratified’ ‘plane of transcendence’ and the ‘plane of immanence’, a perpetual ‘violent combat’ (p. 185). This might be the quiet violence of the tongue-chalk or the more obvious violence of the body-planets, ‘The Cockfighter’ (Walker, 1995) being a song that involves various modes and fragments of scenes of combat. The aforementioned manner in which Walker catches them on the move, mid-becoming, between human and non-human; also evokes this uneasy to-ing and fro-ing, a back and forth motion between poles, internal and external, the organism and the ‘body without organs’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) freed. Wilson notes this motion in ‘The Cockfighter’ (Walker, 1995), which propels the listener outward, only for us to be repelled by ‘an impenetrable wall … back into the interior prison of our own darkest fantasies’ (Wilson, 2020, p. 56). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari sometimes describe the ‘body without organs’ (1980/2013) as a limit that we are perpetually attempting to attain (pp. 174, 185).

Wilson writes of how Walker describes ‘The Cockfighter’ (1995) as an impression of a nightmare, that of a hybrid character that is partly also Walker himself (Wilson, 2020, p. 52). It is a song that Walker defines as based upon ‘“an internal struggle”’ (Kijak, 2006, Bonus interviews, as cited in Wilson, 2020, p. 52), which Wilson remarks, ‘seems to bear on the man’s relation to his sexual desire’ (Wilson, 2020, p. 52). As we have ascertained, this tussle is not strictly ‘internal’. However, when they construct and inhabit an inside, loose desires become tied down and sexualised, organised according to the somatic and psychological logic of the organism. This is the point at which desire becomes pinned to its object, and as Wilson points out, this might be an inappropriate object that one does not consciously intend to desire (p.

51). Wilson demonstrates that the associated guilt and self-hatred, the nightmarish 'internal' element, makes for a song that is (although I am focusing here on *lyrics*) both lyrically and sonically masochistic (pp. 51, 58). However, Wilson also suggests that Walker goes beyond a crude psychologised masochism, referencing Walker's (1995) allusion to the starry night that Camus' protagonist from *The Outsider* (Camus, 2012, p. 110, as cited in Wilson, 2020, pp. 55, 58), gazes up at, in an affirmation of cosmic indifference (Wilson, 2020, pp. 55, 58); veering toward that which eludes knowledge and qualification (p. 53). Perhaps this is the first step, an initiation that heralds the body's subsequent becoming-calcium planets, an affirmation that becomes an intensive journey.

At the point in 'The Cockfighter' (Walker, 1995) where the calcium planets spring up, we reach the subject of the nightmare's climax of so-called *outward* movement toward a 'body without organs' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) via a masochism that involves an interlocutory bestial dimension. Wilson writes that the eroticism of the song 'continually moves into an animality in which man and cock become indiscernable, fingers growing feathers exposing nerve endings to the outside' (Wilson, 2020, p. 52). Indeed, 'becoming-animal' (1980/2013) is necessary for a Deleuzo-Guattarian masochism (p. 181), to move toward that 'absolute Outside' that is the 'plane of immanence' (p. 182). This is not at all an internalised, psychological masochism, but a breaking of the organisational bonds of the organism via a relational animality. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the masochist does not seek pleasure through pain and humiliation as is commonly thought, but instead suffers in order 'to untie the pseudobond between desire and pleasure', the latter being that which halts the process of desire (p. 180). In the case of Walker's dreaming protagonist, his becoming-cockerel begins a re-routing and accumulation of forces that form a positive feedback

loop (p. 180-181), gaining power, shooting outward into the cosmos to constitute that 'body without organs' (1980/2013) dusted with calcium planets. Aptly, Wilson states: 'The fighting cockerel is also an angel that mediates between the man and the cosmos' (2020, p. 53).

Walker's sonic geopoetics

Sonic landscapes and mood

Turning now to the *sonic* aspect of Walker's geopoetics, I have considered this separately from the lyrical for the reasons stated at the beginning of this article, but also because the sonic landscapes of Walker's music are not just crude representations of the lyrics. They work in conjunction with the lyrics in a complex manner, but not simply as sonic depictions. For example, in 'The Cockfighter' (Walker, 1995), despite its moments of lyrical geo-*cosmic* poetics; *sonically* the first verse and the end of the song, are instead pyroclastic flows of percussion cascading from a volcano, incinerating, sweeping up human debris, bits of metal clanging rhythmically as they tumble in hot percussive clouds. 'Clara (Benito's Dream)' from *The Drift* (Walker, 2006), which is lyrically ostensibly a love song about Mussolini's lover Claretta Petacci going with him to their deaths, is *sonically* at both first and second iterations of the refrain; water dripping in a subterranean cavern amidst the deep machinations of the earth, sending out chthonic echoes into the abyss. Indeed, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the refrain 'always carries earth within it'; that is to say, it contains within it, a point at which 'forces of chaos, terrestrial forces [and] cosmic forces . . . confront each other' and are partly bound, pinned down by the 'territorial refrain' (1980/2013, p. 364).

In Kijak's documentary, referring to *The Drift*, Walker himself says, 'everything in my world is big . . . it's big blocks of sound' (Kijak, 2006). This is reminiscent of

Deleuze and Guattari's 'blocks of becoming' (1980/2013, p. 278), and the latter conceive of music as especially riddled with myriad 'becomings' (pp. 317, 348-349). Walker's later output is a superlative case, where the sound is often gargantuan, seeming geological in scale. He describes his own voice spatially, in its uncanny undulations, as 'pitched . . . vertiginously' (Kijak, 2006). Furthermore, he pays attention to its materiality, treating his voice almost like bronze or *chalk*; a sculptural material, which in his own words he is 'honing, honing things and honing things down' (Kijak, 2006). By Walker's own admission (Cocker, 2013), this is somewhat like the artist Alberto Giacometti, who having in his youth, created classical sculptures; would go on, in bursts of existential frenzy, to continuously rework his later sculptures such that they became increasingly smaller or thinner, but somehow larger in their intensity, their capacity to affect. Similarly Walker's voice underwent its own process of transmutation, moving from a 'pop' or 'middle of the road' voice to what it became; both Walker and Giacometti treading, vibrato-like, that wavering *inhuman* line between human and non-human. Deleuze and Guattari state that, 'music is a deterritorialization of the voice, which becomes less and less tied to language' (1980/2013, p. 352). Pertinently, Walker also remarks that, 'there's less personality as the years have gone by, in the singing' (Kijak, 2006). As with his tongues-becoming-chalk or bodies being colonised by calcium planets, the forces at work in his *sonic* geopoetics also extend through and outside the borders of the subjective, internal human and its emotions.

In the preceding, I can be accused to some extent, of over-aestheticising Walker's sonic landscapes, which are *in actuality,* landscapes that elude representation; indescribable landscapes, malleable landscapes of desire. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari remark:

> There is a rhythmic character when we find that we no longer have the simple situation of a rhythm associated with a character, subject, or impulse. The rhythm itself is now the character in its entirety; as such, it may remain constant, or it may be augmented or diminished by the addition or subtraction of sounds or always increasing or decreasing durations, and by an amplification or elimination bringing death or resuscitation, appearance or disappearance. Similarly, the melodic landscape is no longer a melody associated with a landscape; the melody itself is a sonorous landscape. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 370)

These sonic landscapes constitute what Deleuze and Guattari call 'a diagonal or complex space', that which melds together different rates, registers and scales, combining both the 'elementary and the cosmic' (p. 360). At times, in their attention to numerous relations, complexification of binaries and subversion of linearity, Walker's sonics seem less like *music* and more like *mood*. They continue to reverberate – atmospherically, affectively, psychologically – long after the song itself is over, spreading in their entropic engagements. Sara Ahmed writes that 'a mood can be what assails from the outside . . . can imply something that hangs around' (2014, p. 13). As I have discussed with Walker's lyrics, his sonics also 'assail' as vectors of that 'absolute Outside' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, p. 182), assailing the interiority of the human and moving toward the inhuman, that 'body without organs' (1980/2013). Wilson also notes that mood, as 'an indefinable unity' acts as a continuous thread connecting Walker's works (Wilson, 2020, p. 4). According to Ahmed, 'the languages around mood . . . imply a relation to mood such that moods can even *become* those relations [*my italics*]' (2014, p. 13). We can extend this to conceptualise mood with regards to Walker, not only as relations to language but as a polyphonic *sounding* of *all* relations involved, as the combination of interconnected 'becomings' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013), that implicates more than just the human. The sonics interact with the lyrics to sound relations between the human, the emotional, the geographical, geological,

ecological, cosmological and so on. This in turn, forms new relations with the listener and all that they entail as multiplicitous inhuman, continuing an a-sonic sounding when the song is over, that sweeps through the human into the animate and inanimate non-human 'listeners' that the human interacts with. The mood may seem to linger, but it is not *still*. This sounding of relations can be located phenomenologically – *felt*, *experienced*, *intuited* perhaps – as something that is unqualifiable. In *30th Century Man*, Morris describes his affective response to Walker's later output as, a 'feeling . . . [that] hasn't quite got a name yet' (Kijak, 2006). Indeed, Ahmed describes moods as 'vague', explaining that 'the word vague has certain "stray" qualities, deriving from the same root as vagabond', she states that these qualities do 'not quite become clear or distinct' (2014, p. 14). It is not that the shifting relations that comprise a mood are undifferentiated, rather that they evade human epistemological capture, once again evoking Deleuze and Guattari's 'zone of indetermination or uncertainty' (1980/2013, p. 319). Importantly, Ahmed suggests that moods have 'wordly orientations' as opposed to fixating on 'specific objects or situations' (2014, p. 17). Whilst Walker does focus on specific scenarios (albeit in a lyrically complex manner, often meshing together a multitude of scenarios and speakers in a 'cut-up' style), the sonics often extend outside of these. Furthermore, if we are to take mood as a continuum that runs through the entire breadth of Walker's work, it becomes clear that it is not just a sonic landscape, but an entire sonic world.

Rhythm between chaos and order

In Kijak's (2006) documentary, Brian Gascoigne remarks that Walker's sonics are 'half-way between a chord and a discord', adding that they occupy 'the no man's land between melody . . . and the squeaks and grunts of the avant-garde'. Indeed, Walker's sound world oscillates between chaos and order, for example, and as Wilson notes; in

‘The Cockfighter’ (1995), Walker alternates between extreme percussive noise and periods of quieter sound or silence (Wilson, 2020, p. 51-52). Wilson describes this noise as ‘the cracking open of the moulds or laws of nature, its fundamental elements smashed into the smallest of fragments’ (p. 58). Via Deleuze and Guattari, we can consider this to be ‘a becoming-molecular’ (1980/2013), where the ‘properly musical content of music’ breaches a threshold, past which ‘the inaudible makes itself heard and the imperceptible appears as such: no longer the songbird, but the sound molecule’ (p. 290). This ‘becoming-molecular’ entails a ‘dissolution of form that connects the most diverse longitudes and latitudes, the most varied speeds and slownesses, which guarantees a continuum by stretching variation far beyond its formal limits’ (p. 359). Walker sounds this going-beyond, nature working ‘against itself’ (p. 282); for Wilson, the descent of nature into ‘an utterly lawless state of contingency and disorder’ (2020, p. 58).

Similarly, in ‘Clara’ (Walker, 2006), there are points at which some semblance of tuneful emotion begins to surface, only to veer away again into chaotic chthonic sirens sounding at the refrain, moving the listener away from the emotional just before it surfaces, to delve into the purely affective. ‘Farmer in the City’ from *Tilt* (Walker, 1995), another song concerning love (that between Pasolini and his lover Ninetto Davoli) and death (Pasolini’s) demonstrates a subtler method. It begins with a refrain that, sonically, shimmers ambiguously below a surface of dolour, to break into full sadness as the song progresses in the first verse, sliding back into ambiguity in the second iteration of the refrain, to rise again to a crescendo of lachrymosity; only to divest itself of the reifications of emotion at the point at which, ‘it was the journey of a life’ (Walker, 1995) is sung, as if announcing its final sonic sinking back to unknown depths – toward the chaotic side of nature but a slow, dark kind. Deleuze and Guattari

state that, ‘in this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm’ (1980/2013, p. 364). The rhythmic character of Walker’s sonics lies in its mediatory unfurling, between chaos and order, affect and emotion. This rhythmic character is not the conventionally metered but rather, that connective continuum that ‘ties together critical moments’ (p. 365). These moments are not those of a ‘homogeneous space-time’, but instead rhythm connects them as ‘heterogeneous blocks’ (p. 365). Rhythm concerns the difference produced by repetition (p. 365), it is ‘becoming’ (1980/2013) or the process of desire that permeates Walker’s work.

Walker’s (sonic) geopoetics

Temporality from Chronos to Aeon

At this point, in order to explore time and temporality with regards to Walker, I will consider both lyrics and sonics. Returning to ‘Rawhide’ (1984), lyrically, Walker arranges numerous temporalities side-by-side, creating a generative proximity that enables their interaction with one another, their repetition and ‘becoming’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) of something-other in their sounding as shifting mood-mesh that also engulfs the listener. There is the anthropocentric temporality of the human that creeps out in the night, perhaps Walker or the listener, or both. This character is ‘called up’ (Walker, 1984) by chalk valleys with their deep time temporalities, stars with their cosmic temporal cycles, prehistoric herders and their herd of bison all living at a time long before that of the contemporary character, Walker or the listener. The American bison to which Walker is most likely referring, was hunted to such an extent by non-indigenous settlers in the 19th Century, that it almost became extinct in twenty to thirty years. This may be something that Walker alludes to in an oblique manner in ‘Rawhide’ (1984) – perhaps suggesting the loading of a gun trained on the most prime example of

an animal that, before the 19th Century, had been tended to and hunted sustainably by America's indigenous inhabitants, from prehistoric herders to the Native peoples that first encountered European settlers – again, tying in these different temporal schema. There is then of course, also Walker's honing in on tongues, possibly of numerous types of creatures, which are 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) chalk. This conjoins the temporality of the somatic and linguistic with that of chalk, compacted deep time that holds the temporal spectres of thousands of calcified creatures as well as the ancient sea in which they lived, died and formed the layer of sediment that eventually became compressed into chalk strata. Again, it perhaps also gestures toward extinction, the end of the era of bison, where after millennia roaming the plains, they are slaughtered in their droves within decades, with their material components eventually becoming part of the land. J. M. Baltimore, writing toward the end of this period of mass slaughter notes:

> Many thousands have been ruthlessly and shamefully slain every season for the past twenty years or more by white hunters and tourists merely for their robes, or in sheer wanton sport, and their huge carcasses left to fester and rot, and their bleached skeletons to strew the deserts and lonely plains. (Baltimore, 1889, p. 515)

If Walker is also referring to human tongues, we are reminded that we too will one day become part of the land in a *material* sense, folded into great swathes of earth; our frenetic, measured human temporalities becoming languidly geological. Deleuze and Guattari contrast these two temporal modes in their conceptions of time as both 'Chronos' and 'Aeon' (1980/2013, pp. 305, 307). 'Chronos' refers to 'the time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject' (p. 305). Conversely, 'Aeon' is 'the time of the pure event or of becoming' which importantly, 'articulates relative speeds and slownesses independently of the chronometric or chronological values that time assumes in the other modes', which

belong to ‘Chronos’ (p. 307). Walker operates between ‘Chronos’ and ‘Aeon’ (pp. 305, 307) in his inhuman lyrical oscillations between chronological human time and a non-human time of cosmic, geological and ecological events.

‘Aeon’ as the time of ‘becoming’ (p. 307), that is not outside of a multiplicity, but rather a dimension of it (p. 306), can also be read as the temporal mode of rhythm, that continuum that connects all multiplicities. With regards to Walker’s rhythmic sonics, there are numerous instances of its situation between ‘Chronos’ and ‘Aeon’ (pp. 305, 307), meter and a ‘floating, nonpulsed time’ (p. 307). This might be in the form of unpredictable changing tempos and strange time signatures, structured instrumentals with bursts of unstructured sonics or errant sounds that suddenly appear (that may often seem to sink to abyssal depths rather than to *float* as such). In ‘Pilgrim’ from *Bish Bosch* (Walker, 2012), this frisson between ‘Chronos’ and ‘Aeon’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013, pp. 305, 307) is subtler, with metered repetitive vocals over uneven percussive waves (and creaking) that confound the spatiality of the song, inducing a kind of sea-sick affect. These percussive waves simultaneously roll and undulate; when the rolls increase in frequency, so too does the amplitude increase and the pitch become higher, only to decrease again and so on. Energetically, this creates a wave cycle like that of a body of water, but we can hear both the water molecules cycling *and* the overall surface of the water rising and falling in waves. The ‘molecular’ (1980/2013) ‘deep’ communicates with the ‘molar’ (1980/2013) ‘surface’. We hear *both* simultaneously in what at first, may appear to be regular swells but, in contrast to Walker’s vocals, are actually just outside of regular meter, often a little too slow or a little too fast. The bursts of metered vocals give themselves up to the unrelenting waves. ‘Aeon’ takes over as temporal mode of the ‘plane of immanence’, and shows all to belong to it, even ‘Chronos’ (p. 306).

Walker's use (both lyrically and sonically) of numerous temporalities, or 'durations' (pp. 278, 359, 370, 562),[2] belonging to different multiplicities that form a 'block of becoming' (p. 278), also shift the listener from the temporal mode of 'Chronos' to 'Aeon' (pp. 305, 307), even when Walker returns to the 'pulsed' or chronological. Pertinently with regards to Walker, who uses both bird-like and insect-like sonics, Deleuze and Guattari cite the rhythmic 'durations' of *birds*, and *insects* even more so, as possessing exemplary 'deterritorializing' power (p. 359). Birds relate to a 'becoming-animal', however insects push 'becoming' even further, with their 'much more molecular vibrations, chirring, rustling, buzzing, clicking, scratching, and scraping' and furthermore, are 'better able to make audible the truth that all becomings are molecular' (p. 359). Wilson writes that 'Bouncer See Bouncer . . .' (Walker, 1995) includes locust-like sounds produced on a hurdy-gurdy (Wilson, 2020, p. 140), going on to demonstrate how via these insectoid sonics, 'the one' dissipates into 'the innumerable swarm' (p. 143). This is, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, a 'becoming-molecular' of the 'molar' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013), a relenting of the individual to the multiplicity. Wilson also notes Walker's use of bird sounds in 'Clara' (2006) to similar effect (Wilson, 2020, p. 17). Importantly, he highlights the fact that these are also not a field recording but rather sonics produced electronically to mimic bird-sound, 'a flock of mechanical birds' (p. 15). This apparent mimesis becomes a further 'deterritorialization' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) of the bird-like sonics to 'an electronic music in which forms are replaced by pure modifications of speed . . . which affirms a process against all structure . . . a floating time against a pulsed time . . . experimentation against any kind of interpretation' (p. 311). Furthermore, as Jussi Parikka (2015) demonstrates extensively in *A Geology of Media*, the electronic tools used to create Walker's bird-like sonics consist of diverse materials and therefore

multiple compacted ‘durations'. This includes those of minerals that come from deep within the earth, connecting the animal to the mineral to the geological, the human to the so-called natural.

Conclusion

To summarise, we have explored the ‘becomings’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2013) of some of Walker’s lyrics that form ‘blocks of becoming’ (p. 278) and complexify binaries such as interior/exterior, human/non-human; revealing the static, discrete human to be instead, on-going inhuman process, and re-casting the body as ‘zone of indetermination’ (p. 319), toward a ‘body without organs’ (1980/2013). Importantly, we have identified the geopoeticism of Walker’s lyrics to be ‘chaosmotic’ (p. 364), to operate in a manner concurrent with our immanent entanglement in a universe that is self-organising and dis-organising, a so-called nature that also includes the human and the synthetic, and operates ‘against itself’ (p. 282). Through Walker’s lyrics we have understood nature to correspond to the process of desire, in which Walker’s characters are always embroiled.

We have considered Walker’s sonics as non-representational sonic landscapes, ‘a diagonal or complex space’ (p. 360) that can also be interpreted as a *mood* that constitutes the polyphonic sounding of relations, continuing long after a song has finished and highlighting the world-synthesising potentials and action of Walker’s sonics. We have discussed the rhythmic qualities of Walker’s sonics, swinging between chaos and order, pure affect and emotion, structured and unstructured sound. We have also addressed how both Walker’s lyrics and sonics can be understood to operate between the two temporal modes of ‘Chronos’ and ‘Aeon’ (pp. 305, 307), and how the numerous ‘durations’ (pp. 278, 359, 370, 562) compacted into Walker’s sonics

ultimately shift us toward 'Aeon' (pp. 305, 307) as temporal mode of listening and interaction.

It can often be easy to fall into thinking a spatialised ontology of depth, *deep* time, *abyssal* sonics and so on, when it comes to Walker's work. However, in situating Walker's (sonic) geopoetics as a poetics of immanence, it becomes clear that nothing is given precedence or positioned favourably within a hierarchy (high or low, deep or shallow, near or far, dark or light etc.) and nowhere is 'off-limits', no subject matter too difficult or sensitive, no sonics too harsh or difficult to achieve. Indeed, the grand scope of Walker's understated ambition translates as a world-generating desire, not Scott-as-maker, God-like or even a demon that casts illusions, but as an interactive and dynamic component of a world that speaks *with* him. (This is what it means to 'speak in tongues' becoming-chalk.)

Notes

1. '(Sonic) geopoetics' refers to both sonics and lyrics; 'geopoetics' to lyrics specifically; and 'sonic geopoetics' to sonics specifically.
2. I have not considered 'duration' in any detail here and indeed, Deleuze and Guattari do not consider it in detail in *A Thousand Plateaus*. However, Deleuze's study of Bergson, *Bergsonism* sets forth the former's interpretation of 'duration' at great length. See Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism*. Zone.

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Word Count

7981 (Abstract, main text, notes, references)