RECONSTITUTION

All systems that start at far-from-equilibrium states eventually lose their potency. The principles of liquid life enable their reinvigoration through acts of composting where organic matter may be returned to non-equilibrium states through the metabolic networks of the living. This section embodies such a restorative process through literary composting, which distils and transforms arguments already proposed throughout the book, so they may be (re)combined, (re)invigorated and (re)encountered as new narratives and alternative sets of discourses, adjacencies, and juxtapositions.
Hiatus

Darkness is not nothingness. Something always happens. Your retinal discharges become fireworks, the squirming of your innards feels like a voluntary command, your skin becomes a sudden expansion of your brain. Nothingness is not absence, but many actualities that negate one another. In this realm of sensory deprivation, 50 metres below the ground, our senses are reorganised through dreams, neuroses, and desires that are no longer hidden. It is impossible to tell whether we are within inner or outer space; if we are still or in transit, or which way up we are. Gradually, we acquire alternative registers from which we make new sense of our chthonic existence. The dripping of groundwater is the beat of life reconfiguring itself, but we do not yet recognise its patterns or rules, and so this slowly leaking broth remains pluripotent — unpredictable.
14.2

Performing Liquid Life

It is not sufficient to bring about change in the way we inhabit the world by theorising the existence of liquid life. Nor is it adequate to stand outside its operations and objectively observe its field of influence through technological mediation and laboratory-based experiments. Narrative-making platforms and immersive performances are required to produce *lived experiences* of liquid life, which provoke the senses and generate unfamiliar encounters with reality.
Cthonic

The following text in 14.2.1.1 was first performed by the Experimental Architecture Group (Rachel Armstrong, Simone Ferracina and Rolf Hughes) for the Cthonic workshop on 20 July 2017 at Allenheads Contemporary Arts, Northumberland. The work responded to Cthonic, a 72-hour subterranean experience in which John Bowers, Alan Smith, Louise K. Wilson and Peter Mathews entered Smallcleugh mine in Nenthead, Cumbria on 20th April 2017 to settle into the vast cavern now known as the Ballroom. During this time, the Experimental Architecture Group travelled into the mine to meet them (ACA 2017a) and responded to this extraordinary event through situating an exploration of liquid life — and characters such as droplets, quantum foam, and angels — within this uninhabited and bare space. A second version of the reading was (re)worked into a new form and performed at the Beyond symposium held at the Mining Institute, Newcastle, and Culture Lab, Newcastle University, 5 October 2017, which invited its audience to consider what lies beyond our current knowledge sets and imagination (ACA 2017b). The version published here is the third textual incarnation of the text (the compost has been turned over by Rolf Hughes and some gentle warming applied).
Compost

Darkness. Retinal discharges.

Nothingness is less absence than presences cancelling each other out.

A form of dripping. A slowly leaking broth of light. Cleft. Patterns or rules, they say.

Bitter slope. Damp black stone. As above, so below.

One moment we are blinded, plunged into a darkness where something nonetheless happens. It arises from a soup, smog, scab, fire — molten rock and alkali meeting oil; a metabolic choreography sucking gas clouds, dusts, obfuscating light, a gruesome purplish hue — muscle fibres locking into a fixed position — scum and crust.

We are eyelids, jaw, and neck, trunk, and limbs — puppets with a watery heart, energetically incontinent. Liquid eyes, lensing errant light into dark thoughts. Structural disobedience, misshapen mass; poles of oblivion.

Our world is not fully formed. This means there are plenty of other bodies in what happens next. Unlike us, they are alive and concerned with transforming the world into magnificence — their molten hearts are manifest on our bloodied hands.

We are all monsters now. What is the point of being static, patient, and silent? Oscillation is the basis of the dissemination of power. Vector and trace — sites of non-orientation — liquid infrastructures streaming through the material fabrics of the world, carried by the turbulent waters of life itself. We hunker down in a dream house made of canvas and wax. Contact light. A maze. A market. A city. A sewer.
Letting go becomes harder and harder.

There is a line to a tree bouncing me gently between earth and sky. As above, so below: in that darkness, that landscape of flotsam and flow, there is nothing human, only a figure made of wood and silicone, filled with spider webs and bird song. The world feels warmer, kinder, and more familiar than it used to be. Bless this weather. It is as if we have become semi-permeable — liquid scripts, frozen in durational accretions, transitional constellations. Signals appear, disappear, reappear. Something trying to say something. It happens.
14.2.1.2

Being Human

The following text in section 14.2.2.1 was written by Rolf Hughes for an event titled *Unquiet Earth: From Victoria Tunnel to Quantum Tunnelling*. It was performed in the Victoria Tunnel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, between 10.00–11.00h on 17 November 2018, by the Experimental Architecture Group (Rolf Hughes, Rachel Armstrong, Simone Ferracina and Pierangelo Scravaglieri) with sound design by Culture Lab (John Bowers and Tim Shaw) and support from the Ouseburn Trust (Kelly Thompson and Clive Goodwin). The event was part of Newcastle University’s contribution to the *Being Human* festival of the humanities, taking place in around 50 towns and cities across the UK between 15–24 November 2018. Themed on how the North East has been shaped by its rivers, the work was a public exploration of how the material agency of the tunnel could investigate the way the spaces we inhabit can be transformed into experiences that inform new ways of living. Following a site-survey by the participating groups, the complex formations of stalactites and mineral depositions indicated that the structure was actively growing, developing, and — taken to a logical extreme — capable of giving birth. The script drew on themes that run throughout this book — from the primordial iron and calcium laced flesh of the world, to the sounds of cosmic matter produced by Perseid meteor showers, and quantum tunnelling that enables green plants to make biomass from ephemeral substances, as well as the voice of soils. These oscillations were imagined to intersect with the substance of the tunnel and scattered throughout it, to immerse an audience of 15 people within a living-regenerative soil body.
Being (In)human

Set-up: RA and RH, lead the audience through the tunnel, pausing to examine details of the tunnel. Their faces are a mixture of blue and green as if in an advanced stage of mould.

VT staff help audience put on helmets and give instructions that they are to follow their two guides but may not at any time advance beyond them. No torches for audience — only the performers control the lighting.

Duration: 20–30 mins, followed by discussion with audience and return to surface.

1. Introduction
   RH: Into the dark! Leave that slowly leaking broth of light. In a moment we are blind.

   Keep listening! Damp black stone. It speaks!

1. First chamber
   RA: One moment we are blinded — darkness, yes, but so much happening, so much arising from molten rock and alkali, metabolic choreography sucking gas, dust, obfuscating light, a gruesome purplish hue — muscle fibres locking into a fixed position — oh oil, oh scum, oh crust!

   RH: Ssssh!

   [Pause]

   RA: Do you hear something?

2. Second chamber
   RH: Here they come, jaw and neck, spine and pins — don’t ask me how it’s all put together — watery heart, liquid eyes lensing
errant light. Rivets, I guess. Or glue. Structural incontinence. *D-d-disobedience* at the engineering level. It’s our fate. It’s why we need, it’s why, we need, a way … *out-t-t-t … T-t-t-t … T-t-t-tec … t-t-tick … t-tock*…

**RA:** Do you hear it? [Pause] The … *groaning*?

-[Pause]-

**RH:** Our world is not fully formed. This means there are plenty of other bodies in what happens next. Unlike us, they are alive.

-[Pause]-

They are concerned with transforming the world into magnificence — their erupting hearts are manifest on our bloodied hands.

3. *Third chamber* (**RA** goes ahead, **RH** blocks the entrance so the audience cannot follow)

**RA:** Do you hear anything beyond the reverberations of our words?

-[Audience allowed in]-

**Sound actions**

4. *Fourth chamber*

**RA:** What is the point of being static, patient, and silent? We are *all* monsters now! Liquid infrastructures stream through the material fabrics of the world, carried by the turbulent waters of life itself. Here, it’s here, I’m sure it’s here somewhere …

*Yes, here!*

This is the primordial flesh of the world, formed by moultten iron that spilled from Earth’s core and fed upon early life’s first
excrements. Green organisms produced oxygen from an extraordinary reaction that turned the ephemeral matter of light and carbon dioxide into biomass. Seemingly defying the laws of classical physics, they used quantum tunnelling to bypass natural energy gradients and so, turned iron’s green salts into red, fleshy tissues. Oozing from the earth they swallowed minerals and sediments, folding themselves into ever more stratified topologies — first forming tissues, then organs, until — see here, they create tiny calcium bones.

Here, it’s here. This is what we’ve been looking for … Here!

Sound actions

RH: This is a line. It connects me to a tree. Somewhere between earth and sky.

In this d-d-darkness, this landscape of flotsam and flow, there is only … (well, you’ll see).

Don’t ask me how it’s made. I only know it’s filled with spider webs and bird song. When you see it, the world feels warmer, kinder — more familiar than it used to be. It is as if the world has become semi-permeable.

Signals appear, disappear, reappear. Something trying to say something. It happens a lot.

1. Fifth chamber

Sound actions

RA: [halts the group on entering the chamber; whispering]: The sounds, they’re … from some other place … some other place … gut … soil … coal … womb? … Be prepared.

RH: Ssssh!
Sound actions

**RA**: be prepared!

[**Crouching and whispering**] Be prepared ... for a birthing ... a birthing so monstrous ... whatever issues ... this world ... this world ... *this world*

[**Pause**]

It cannot be imagined!

[**Blackout**]

**KT** [glimped momentarily as Pepper’s ghost]: AAAAAAAAY!


*Lights on—**RH** first, then swiftly **RA**, then **KT**, then others: release of tension. Discussion with audience.*