

LISTENING AT THE KEYHOLE:
MUSICAL TRACE IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN POETRY

Charlene Diehl-Jones

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Manitoba
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**LISTENING AT THE KEYHOLE:
MUSICAL TRACE IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN POETRY**

BY

CHARLENE DIEHL-JONES

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Listening at the Keyhole: Musical Trace in Contemporary Canadian Poetry concerns itself with musical dimensions in poetic language. I trace three zones of inquiry: poetic resonance, silence and noise, and improvisation. Poetic resonance, which I track through Paul Dutton's Aurealities, describes the tendency of language, from small-scale phonemes through large-scale discourse patterns, to reverberate, to excite aural sympathies either literally inside the text or more figuratively inside the response of a reader. I consider silence and noise as delimiting bounds of a range of sensible information; Douglas Barbour's use of silence in "Story for a Saskatchewan Night" and George Bowering's use of noise in "Allophanes" help to tease out the implications of interference in the constitution of a reading subject. Finally, I explore how improvisation figures in the writing and particularly reading experiences of Gil Adamson's Primitive and Fred Wah's Music at the Heart of Thinking: by resisting the conventions of syntax and story, these writers press the reader into a more performative engagement with text. Musical readings of text, particularly texts that inscribe a fractured and dialogized subject position, can address the potent effects that more traditional interpretive constructs tend to efface or dismiss.

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Nonsufficiency, the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness. (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 287)

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as I attempt to grow up and move into my own life and work. Nicole Markotic, the Huebners, Janet Smith, Barb Schott, Tannis Sprott, Steven Smith, the Wiens family, Doug Reimer, and others kept loosening knots. The St Cecilia Singers have been an absolute pleasure: I laughed well and often with them, and rediscovered that rare satisfaction in fine music-making. Cliff Lobe, e-mailer extraordinaire, has invented whole new meanings for correspondence; he saved me more than once with a spectacular message, well-timed and pithy. Also on the e-mail web, my brother Mike, George Bowering, Ashok Mathur, Pamela Banting, Susan Rudy Dorscht, Doug Barbour, and others: for good company during extended periods of isolation, I am thankful. In the more material world, Larry Dueck teased me out into the sunshine for lunch, Jeff and Ingrid and Anna and Niko offered moments of sanity and joy along with fragrant sweet peas, Rosa doled out huge quantities of undoubtedly the best gelati in Canada.

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critical acuity, her wildly playful sense of humor, her love of language and difficulty, her courage, generosity, intelligence, and care, all make her a trusted companion for clambering around in uncharted territory; they also make her a vital friend of my heart.

The old hags are laughing, Margie, and yes: this one is for you.

*It is in the continual and violent refreshing of the idea that love
and good writing have their security.*

(William Carlos Williams, "Prologue to Kora in Hell"
quoted in Bowering, Imaginary Hand 139)

Music, then, is what struggles with writing.

(Barthes, The Responsibility of Forms 308)

There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.
(Derrida, Positions 26)

A prelude might, in its free-wheeling way,¹ pull into the orbit of its force field bits of matter that haven't yet presented themselves, shards that constellate and reconstellate in the shifting configurations of the play that will follow.² It might tease you with promises, might prompt you to lay onion skin over old maps of jagged coasts and skies, to trace those traces of traces, to

¹ Musical preludes, especially in their early incarnations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, tended to be short and freely styled, often not even fully notated, usually in contrast to the formality of the material they introduced. (Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music 401)

² Prelude: L. *praeludium* (prae-, *ludere*, to play). A prelude comes before the playing, a prelude plays before, dances toward. A prelude carries in it the ludic traces of active pleasure, inscribes the heart's desire.

render a score that is nearly legible, a score that might admit a different music.³

A text, Derrida says, is a "tissue of differences" (Positions 33), a weaving (and unweaving) of fibers, strands, traces of traces. Text, textile, tissue.

Roland Barthes:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked

³ John Cage has actually produced compositions which score star maps ("Tokyo Lecture" 8): as a strategy, it is less a contrivance or transliterative trick than a means of resisting the habituated pressure toward *self*-expression in writing. Aleatory writing. Charles O. Hartman considers Jackson Mac Low's analogous poetic project, his similar resolve to displace the ego as a pivot of expression:

Transcendence of the ego makes art deeply problematic, as long as art is defined by a very popular set of assumptions about lyric self-expression. Quite modern post- or anti-Romantic people find themselves implacably ruffled by the idea of computer poetry, or any other challenge to the poet's egoistic control of the work. . . .

Chance, as a way of defeating the ego's control, entails giving up the authority of authorship. Ego is not self, but the insistence that self be unitary. When its control over the poem is sufficiently complete, it will shut out any experience or impulse, internal or external, that threatens to be destabilizing or alien or simply unfamiliar to the ruling party. (Jazz Text 156-58)

I am not, in this thesis, engaged in charting the terrain of writing that works off random or arbitrary generative models; still, as a limit case, such writing foregrounds issues critical to our understanding of the crisscrossed field of contemporary writing. Self, expression, authority, intention, discipline, contingency: in our postmodern context, these are among the traces -- the traces of traces -- that comprise our star maps, our tentative readings of cultural constructs that tell us where we live.

out in a perpetual interweaving. . . . (The Pleasure of the Text
64)

A prelude might trace this perpetual interweaving, might sketch out the motifs that will recur in increasingly elaborate figurings; a prelude might be a trace, too, as *priority* becomes problematic. What pre-cedes what, in a Derridean *always already* landscape of traces of traces? A prelude is ambivalently positioned: entangled in and distinct from the text-ure it introduces, it both claims and denies its power. It defers our entry into that (other) perpetually interwoven tissue, detaining us, making us wait. At the same time, it assumes a certain self-effacing character, names itself pre-liminary; it defers to what will follow.⁴

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her preface to Derrida's Of Grammatology, examines the fictions of pre-dic(a)tion, and the convolutions of priority and consequence fostered by prefatory discourse and positioning:

The preface, by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, merely enacts what is already the case: the book's repetitions are always other than the book. There is, in fact, no "book" other than these ever-different repetitions: the "book" in other words, is always already a "text," constituted by the play of identity and difference. A written preface provisionally localizes the place where, between reading and reading, book and book, an inter-inscribing of "reader(s)," "writer(s)," and language is forever at work. . . . The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the "text" is a preface to the next. The reading of a self-professed preface is no exception to this rule. (xii)

Charles O. Hartman proposes that "Written poetry is in a state of yearning for its lost sound, for its voice" (Jazz Text 149); that lost sound might serve as a designation of what I am calling *musical trace*. A Derridean trace of a trace, a supplement, the musicality of poetic language pushes into our ear, alerting us to the perpetual play of difference (differentness, *différance*) that infuses the tissue of text, the perpetual interweaving of active threads that comprise the text we recover in our reading.

I am perplexed by how we read, how our reading habits tend to obscure or dismiss musical trace, that shot of aural silver in the tissue we weave and reweave. Because if written poetry is in a state of yearning, as Hartman suggests, then our strategies of textual reclamation never quite accommodate the compulsion of that yearning: if we speak of the musicality of a text, we are more than likely to be straining after some notion of mellifluousness, conforming to, and confirming, an abstract (and Romantic) conception of *musical* as somehow synonymous with *pleasing* or *harmonizing*.

Such a habit, of course, has implications that reverberate on several levels, from the textual to the political. For one thing, it entrenches a certain blindness (or more precisely, a certain deafness) to *effect* in poetic language, making particular kinds of texting hopelessly opaque, unlistenable. It disqualifies certain types of writing from serious consideration. And to the degree that it can acknowledge the aural activity in a text, it then insists on subjugating that effect, making it expressive of some other (higher status)

intention of the author, somehow illustrative of *meaning*. To read with that hierarchized set of assumptions in place, it seems to me, functions finally to protect the notion of an *author* whose relation to (his) text⁵ is authorial, authoritative, authorized. Extrapolating from there you encounter sets of (unstated, and generally unadmitted) assumptions about what kinds of writing may be authorized, what texts we will allow to stand as indicators of our cultural conditions.

It is precarious to play one discipline up against another; border territory is always fraught. Still, our tendencies for locating musicality in text function both to assert a relationship between the two, and to reduce that relationship to a metaphoric game of spelling out equivalences. It is possible, of course, to perform other kinds of musical reading, readings that are more

⁵ Another project -- or another writer -- might have traced gendered fault lines. The kind of reading for musical trace I propose in this study bears inscriptions of feminist theoretical concerns, and certainly advocates the alertness to linguistic and cultural codings that an awareness of gender issues demands. Still, I am more explicitly interested in the shifting dynamics at the surface of a medium heavily imprinted with (patriarchal) assumptions about logic and value. One of the ways one might write/read alternate constructions of self and world and language inside such a constrictive environment would be to allow language to *be* sense, as well as (or instead of) to *make* sense. That kind of project, of course, is available to anyone engaged in using language, and is important for releasing both female *and* male writers from strangulation by the phallogocentric dictates of what can/may be uttered.

responsible to the potential both within each discipline and along the border zone between them. One possibility is to examine in some detail analogous *effect* in particular compositions -- textual and musical -- or in compositions grouped according to period or genre or styling. Lawrence Kramer's Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After and Charles O. Hartman's Jazz Text: Voice and Improvisation in Poetry, Jazz, and Song are two superb examples of this kind of study.⁶ These writers exercise an intimate knowledge of the particular signifying capacities of each discipline⁷ to examine what you might call common *gestural patterns*, consciously cultivated or coincidental.⁸

Such studies focus their attention on convergence of effect. I wish to

⁶ Most of the valuable music-literature studies available are of this character: James Anderson Winn's Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music is another, as is John Hollander's The Untuning of the Sky, and Stephen Paul Scher's "Literature and Music."

⁷ As well as the vocabulary to speak that knowledge too. Every discipline, every critical positioning, demands a specialized discourse, and much cross-disciplinary work suffers because one or other body of work is under- or misrepresented. Complexity and nuance are the first casualties of a writer, no matter how well-intentioned, who has insufficient information and familiarity with a field of inquiry.

⁸ Many writers, of course, invite such comparative readings. Louis Zukofsky, for instance, explicitly imitates fugal and tone row structures in sections of A. T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, Gertrude Stein's "A Sonata Followed by Another," John Ashbery's "Grand Galop," Fred Wah's Music at the Heart of Thinking all intrude their musical affiliations into our reading awareness; musical titling impacts on our retrieval of textual information. Kramer's study examines works with less conspicuous musical genealogies, suggesting that proximate readings/hearings of (for instance) Chopin and Shelley can illuminate similarity in gestural patterning. Hartman works from a jazz aesthetic, analyzing jazz compositional technique to access certain textual strategies.

begin from a different site: I am interested not so much in *analogous expression* as in *shared resources*. I wish to take one step backward and sound what you might call the musical *environment* which incorporates and sustains particular expressions. Both musical and textual composition channel response through an elaborate system of signification, much of which has become invisible through habituation. Both share a common resource -- the ear, the responding/responsive body: both excite an embodied response.⁹

⁹ Susan McClary, undertaking a feminist analysis of music-making and music criticism, writes:

Music is . . . very often concerned with the arousing and channeling of desire, with mapping patterns through the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality. . . . Because [certain] pieces influence and even constitute the ways listeners experience and define some of their own most intimate feelings, they participate actively in the social organization of sexuality. Thus, one of the principal tasks of feminist music criticism would be to examine the semiotics of desire, arousal, and sexual pleasure that circulate in the public sphere through music. (8-9)

A *semiotics of desire* is an evocative labelling for the motivation of much textual practice too as it channels a body's response through its system(s) of signs. McClary's concern is a feminist critical enterprise, so her focus settles on the social organization of sexuality. My concern is somewhat tangential; I might rather identify the social (and private?) organization of *subjectivity* as a persistent knot in my considerations.

McClary's work is a daring departure from the investigations that typically constitute critical concern in the music field. Apart from a belletristic tradition of subjective response, most of the energy in music criticism has been devoted to harmonic and structural analysis. Even Schenkerian analysis, which would apparently open the analytical enterprise considerably, analogues roughly with a deep structure analysis introduced by linguistics; it is finally, I would argue, a conservative undertaking. Peter Rabinowitz writes:

as Robert Morgan points out, "most analysts, at least in the United States, seem uncomfortable with larger questions of intentionality, social and psychological context, or supra-musical influence," and hence remain stubbornly formalistic. Specifically, the hegemony of Schenker's formalist teachings has meant, in Leo

What might comprise a musical environment where text might flourish?

I have carved out three conceptual spaces, three territories that all entail different aspects of musical experience. First of all, I am acknowledging the sounding potential at the surface of the language -- language is, after all, a sounded medium. I have trained my ear on one way of naming that blur of sound: resonance allows access to issues of sound production and reception, how our aural perceptions might bloom out from the information coded into text. To read for resonance is to assume, against all odds perhaps, that the aural profile of a poetic text is an integral aspect of its functioning, that it is critical to our reading. At the outer bounds of a musical environment we might label the unhearable -- silence -- and the unlistenable -- noise. Silence and noise serve as limits to demarcate the bounds of a sounded experience, whether musical or textual, helping to specify our strategies for deciding how much unintelligible information we are willing to accommodate into our apprehension of musical stimuli, and how that might differ with the particular experience. I am suggesting that we understand silence and noise as versions of interference in our processing; interference translates provocatively in

Treitler's words, that the "point of view of an auditor has not been much of a factor in the practice and teaching of analysis in this country." (160)

McClary and Rose Rosengard Subotnik, following Theodor Adorno for example, rupture the music criticism tradition in their willingness to engage the ideological implications of musical practice; Rabinowitz unsettles the score by attending seriously to reading/auditing response.

textual terms, and suggests how much our subjectivity is invested in protecting clear boundaries between sense and nonsense. Finally, the musical environment helps to point up the temporality of both musical and textual arts,¹⁰ and prompts a consideration of how we activate a text. To be positioned in an unrelenting present, performing the verbal gymnastics as the text demands, is to be engaged in an improvisatory act: improvisation pulls into the texture of inquiry issues of structure and time, practicalities of the making process that impinge on performers of both music and text. Improvisation refigures the artificial distinctions between performers and audience (in textual terms, writer and receiver) and makes us all, in our various positionings, *players* of/through the text.

Resonance, interference, improvisation: these are musical inscriptions I am pursuing across various recent poetic texts.¹¹ What registers, what becomes audible in textual functioning when you assume a theoretical positioning that gives credence once again to the often disruptive activity of musical trace, is often surprising, & endlessly textures the reading moment.

¹⁰ Kramer: "music and poetry, more than any of the other arts, define their formal shape as a function of rhythmically integrated time" (Music and Poetry viii).

¹¹ These are three of a multitude of functional musical traces that may animate any particular text, and even these three are less discrete, less *exclusive*, than my labelling will allow. Resonance, for instance, insinuates itself into a consideration of noise, of aural interference; textual silence and noise might be reconceived in terms of the improvisatory dexterity they require of a reader. And, in my considerations at least, all these several traces keep converging around issues of subjectivity, difficulty, and desire.

"[F]rustration can be acclimatized," Jonathan Goldberg writes (24),¹² and acclimatized frustration is perhaps an appropriate description of the reading encounters that have consistently provoked me to track these musical traces.¹³ In a way, texts that stubbornly intrude their auralty into a reader's awareness inscribe a whole other orientation toward text; you get this feeling that here language runs away with the writer, and it runs away with the reader too. There is something unauthorized, perhaps, and unfinalized too: Echo still inhabits the woods, her vocalic wondering presiding over our reluctant re-marking of the audible in the visible. In these texts, the text-maker

¹² I have wrenched Goldberg's comment from the midst of his subtle and textured raids on Marvell's "A Nymph Complaining"; I have given it a different connotation, a different weight. Or perhaps it has detached itself from its context and entered the web of traces that comprise *my* text, written and unwritten. Patterns of language are hopelessly indiscrete: multiple and disparate texts track (across) this discursive field I am attempting to chart. Everywhere, traces of traces.

¹³ A whole battery of texts have perplexed me, involved me, wound me in unspeakable traces: I couldn't quite grasp them, but I couldn't get free either. George Bowering names this predicament *dis-understanding*, and writes, "I know that my favourite books have always been the ones I could not really understand but which I could see immediately and could immediately see would last all through my life" (Errata 17). I have been simultaneously baffled and compelled by all of the poetic texts I consider in the course of this study, and many others as well, all of which have shaped my emerging sense of this territory. *Frustration* is clearly only part of the picture, because these texts also occasion a potent response; and frustration issues partly from the inadequacy of a critical vocabulary to snare the complex activity they engender.

doesn't only pay attention to language¹⁴ but s/he accords language a certain agency of its own. These texts are often noisy, and disturbing, they ask a kind of performative engagement we may be shy or dubious to provide. They are, you might say, scores of/for textual events.

And if you do enter the musical spirit of this kind of textual inscription, if you register that odd mix of pleasure and distress in an altered linguistic playing field, it still remains to translate that experience into an other language. If the drive is no longer to spell out (a) *meaning* as an endpoint of a reading exercise, what might you speak of, what might you tell? The challenge is to encounter the demands of an analysis that respects a processual dimension in text, to read Barthes' tissue-text that appears only in its perpetual interweaving. And still, to analyze and describe, to texture your encounter with the rigor of some sort of critical enquiry: *what I do and why, what and how it might signify*. The questions assume a different bearing, articulate different points of textual attachment. Ideally, I would recognize the impetus acclimatized confusion might engender; then I would read what these poetic texts -- even when (or because) they confound -- might suggest about their own inscriptions, their own functioning. And, in the midst of tangled traces, I would read myself reading.

¹⁴ Hartman: "A poem is the language of an act of attention" (Free Verse 12).

I have settled on -- or hovered over -- five texts, all quite different from one another in styling and intention. Paul Dutton's Aurealities (1991) deliberately foregrounds the sounding and signficatory potential of especially the phoneme. His language is textured and often outrageously playful, and demands an engaged reader. Reading Dutton presses me to examine and clarify my notions of poetic resonance, my sense of an expanding aural universe that is roughly coded into the written texts we receive and animate.

Doug Barbour's "Story for a Saskatchewan Night," the lead poem in his 1990 book by the same name, is quiet and introspective, closer to story (or anti-story) than the other work I consider in this thesis. It grapples with the incisions that silence and resistance carve into a languaged context. Barbour's long poem performs in counterpoint here with George Bowering's "Allophanes" (1977): in Bowering's poem, extravagant noise -- polyphony verging on cacophony -- is critical to the mapping of poetic effect. Barbour and Bowering both interfere with our reception of textual information; their inscriptions (and our receptions) of textual silence and textual noise frustrate any ready assimilation of text, and suggest how proximate these alternatives might be, how implicated in our configurations of a reading subject.

The pieces in Fred Wah's Music at the Heart of Thinking (1987) slur the distance between critical and creative texting, charting a thinking mind reading and responding. Although especially Bowering exercises his metatextual muscle, Wah's book might be marked in this grouping by the degree of its

recursiveness, its persistent contemplation of its own project, its ready access to a critical vocabulary. Wah makes perplexing demands on a reader, requires a certain improvisatory virtuosity to execute the twists & loops scored by the text. A similar deftness is requested, however deviously, by Gil Adamson in her 1991 volume of poems, Primitive, the only book in the collection that flirts with a familiar, anecdotal (read *realist*, *lyric*) poetic model. Adamson's and Wah's books are an unlikely but mutually revelatory pair, and help to chart, from different angles, the dynamics of a reading encounter charged by improvisatory dexterity.

Each of these five texts is distinct. Each carries its own voiceprints, its particular tangle of textual concerns, textual habits, textual innovations. Still, all five share a certain positioning in what you might call a textual economy: each is interruptive, surprising; each stubbornly frustrates the entrenched economies of signification which consistently allow confusion, excess, and conspicuous auralty to be recuperated within extant interpretive frameworks; each, however playful, takes itself seriously, is exacting in its demands on a reader.

These texts make a reader *work*, and the nature of that work is

intriguing partly because it is also unfailingly problematic.¹⁵ Goldberg writes:

The possibility of criticism rests on the most insecure of bases, the endless decipherability of texts -- and their endless withholding of ultimate answers. Texts are as unreadable as they are readable. To write permitting bafflement, acknowledging the excesses and outrages of texts (courting them, even, if only to refuse the containment of formalistic procedure) means a practice of a certain *impertinence*. (7)

Texts which provoke and entrench frustration, I would suggest, are not texts with a wish to efface their unreadability: on the contrary, they press a reader

¹⁵ It seems to me that no reading is innocent of a whole array of theoretical assumptions: this is one of the crucial things we've gained from deconstructive praxis. As Andrew Ross writes, "No one is able to read or interpret the *text* -- social, historical, or cultural -- in quite the same unmediated way, and with quite the same confidence, after the poststructuralist revolution" (ix). One's suppositions, then, since they will inform a reading, need to be theorized, made visible and accountable. At the same time, it seems inappropriate -- and probably damaging -- to negotiate the subtle twists of a theoretical construct for reading certain texts without respecting the intricacies and demands of the texts being read. Texts generate theoretical positioning, theoretical positions generate readings: theoretical and other discourses, then, are suggestible, interanimating, they engage in Bakhtinian dialogic freeplay. *Trace*, after all, problematizes the whole notion of priority.

Which means that the readings I offer are in no sense prescriptive. I am proposing here a reading strategy, or more precisely, a reading *strategy* (how one might read) and a reading *chart* (how I am reading), neither of which is ultimately finalizable.

Spivak, reading Derrida, writes that the assumption of responsibility for one's discourse leads to the conclusion that all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity. . . . (xiii)

to admit their excesses and outrages. I am suggesting that musical trace is a conspicuous textual excess and outrage, stubbornly resistant to a recuperative logic that would neutralize it. Musical texts refuse to perpetuate a simple project of decipherability.¹⁶ Which complicates the whole critical practice, makes it *impertinent*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Partly because there is a way in which musicality is always indecipherable: it cannot finally be *translated*. As Daniel Fischlin argues, music exists as a counterpoint, a *countervoice*, in language; *melos* and *logos* are wound up together -- Barthes' perpetual interweaving -- and neither one can contain, or negate, or even *speak*, the other.

¹⁷ Goldberg's impertinent critical project aligns roughly with Barthes' notion of interpretation: Barthes distinguishes between *criticism*, a "singular system . . . which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages," and *interpretation*, whose goal is not to assign meaning but "to appreciate what *plural* constitutes [a text]" (S/Z 5). Critical endeavor which seeks to engage the text as "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (S/Z 5) -- Goldberg's *endless decipherability* -- cannot comprehend the boundaries drawn by *criticism*. Still, as Barthes argues, The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal: it is not a question of conceding some meanings, of magnanimously acknowledging that each one has its share of truth; it is a question, against all in-difference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible. (S/Z 6)

The unliberal, plural activity Barthes recommends intersects provocatively with the political perspicacity Chantal Mouffe argues is critical to the responsible functioning of the postmodern subject and the constructs that encompass that subject:

To be capable of thinking politics today. . . , it is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a decentered, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject-positions between which there exists no a priori or necessary relation and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices. Consequently, no identity is ever definitively established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject-positions are articulated. What emerges are entirely new perspectives for

Criticism, in Goldberg's sense, is a *reading performance*: it is an interactive engagement with a text, a nexus where writer and reader and text encounter one another, configure one another. And texts overlaid with traces of musicality are only more implacable in insisting on the performative function of the text activator. Barthes:

I read the text. This statement, consonant with the "genius" of the language (subject, verb, complement), is not always true. The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it; I do not make it undergo a predicative operation, consequent upon its being, an operation known as *reading*, and *I* is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. (S/Z 10)

The text, then, is not discrete: it blurs into the reader who limns it. The text is not discrete, and neither is the reading subject; priority and positioning are always suspect, always shifting and unstable.

Once you have problematized the subject, blurred the boundaries that enclose it, that secure it from impinging experience, once you have refigured

political action, which neither liberalism -- with its idea of the individual who only pursues his or her own interest -- nor marxism -- with its reduction of all subject-positions to that of class -- can sanction, let alone imagine. (35)

Reading, even the *act* of reading, has political implications: reading (re)configures a subject who will exercise political will.

the subject as complicitous, as a *player* in the production of meaning, reading assumes a somewhat different cast. Barthes names reading

a form of work (which is why it would be better to speak of a lexeological act – even a lexeographical act, since I write my reading), and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the "I". . . . To read, in fact, is a labor of language. (S/Z 10-11)¹⁸

This subject is no longer the reader *of* the text: this is the reader *in* the text,¹⁹

¹⁸ And further:

To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept toward other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor. (S/Z 10-11)

Reading as tireless approximation recalls the critical impertinence Goldberg labels: there can be no settling, no final assurance of what is pertinent, when the exercise exceeds itself, when it has been unbound.

¹⁹ I've lifted this evocative phrase from Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman's book, The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation. In their preface, they write:

Artistic texts invariably contain clues as to how they are to be interpreted: audiences are evoked, or, often enough, represented in the text. But the actual audience, no matter how willingly it follows such clues, remains irreducibly itself, appropriating the text for its own tastes and purposes. If a reader may be "in" a text as a character is in a novel, he or she is certainly also in it as in a train of thought -- both possessing it and possessed by it.
(vii)

wound into its traces, weaving and woven.

Barthes locates the reader as "a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite, or more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (S/Z 10).²⁰ In exploring the musical manifestations of language, you produce a slightly different reader, a reader who is not only a plurality of texts, but a performing body. Because musical texts excite a kind of somatic engagement, they play the body. Garrett Stewart, in his considerations of what he calls the *phonotext*, emphasizes the significance of

the body as site -- what we can call writing's *productive supplement* in becoming text. Neither authorial source, on the one hand, nor envelope of identity, on the other, this is the bodied site as heterogeneous locus: the body before the book, the body in place. (137)

Musical trace, it seems to me, insists on an activated body, it scores an embodied reading. And the repercussions of this shift toward acknowledging a vital body as the locus for the reading occasion spill in curious directions, reconfiguring our notions of text and subject. Texts can be endlessly read and reread, replayed through the responsive body: they are necessarily unbounded, then, their printed form a score for a reading performance. Which

²⁰ "*Objectivity and subjectivity*," Barthes writes, "are of course forces which can take over the text, but they are forces which have no affinity with it" (S/Z 10): once introduced into the reading equation, destabilization rocks the entire contractual network.

makes striving for definitive readings, teasing out hidden meanings, an untenable goal. And as *subjects*, as *subjects who read*, we are pressed to admit the flurry of positionings that every moment make and unmake us. Not only are we conscripted by the (various and several) encoded readerly sites, narrated positions²¹ which inscribe us in the text,²² but we are engaged by the demands of a writerly activity of re-constructing the scores at hand.²³ And underwriting this scramble of demands on the reading self is the responding body, which, conventionally, has served to secure limits to the

²¹ Gérard Genette, for instance, considers the constitution of the *narratee* in his Narrative Discourse; Wayne Booth figures an *implied reader* in his The Rhetoric of Fiction.

²² I say *inscribe us in the text*, but it is possibly more useful to suggest that the text inscribes itself *on* the reading subject, carves initials into the site left blank when/as the reader's ego relinquishes its authority in (to?) the moment of reading. Coleridge advocates *a willing suspension of disbelief* (314) as an appropriate reading orientation; especially in a postmodern context that consistently problematizes the subject, we might reconceive his recommendation to read *a willing suspension of my I*.

²³ We act, then, at several textual contact points, most of which have been theorized: we are comfortable with notions of ideal and real readers of text, encoded and resistant to textual demands, and we are familiar also with Barthes' writerly reader who actively rebuilds text, who plays across textual fissures. In some sense, all these selves, though written or demanded by the texts in question, are distinct from the body in-forming (and in-formed by) the reading activity. Stewart:

Between *epos*, as voice, and *graph*, as mark, we need a third term, a third position -- a site, all but a breathing space, for the reader's silent voice. . . . It is a voicing generated from his or her (if there is gender left at all in the reader as voice rather than person) -- we had better say from *its*, from *my* -- shifting stance toward the writing it activates. It is a stance taken up in part by my upper body's perch over the page -- in other words, in the readerly epicenter of the decentered text. (139)

blurring edges of subjectivity. Stewart:

Though our body is not a subject, nor even the outer form of one, it is often most of what we think we can demonstrate of one, as proof of one. This assumption, too, must no doubt be resisted. But it must also be recognized as a particular chimera of reading. The body is our guarantor, especially the "going out of ourselves" (never quite) in reading the words of another, the Other. Situated before a text, whatever its "voice," I have *mine*, whether I activate it or not; and if what I think I am reading is sayable (that is, meaningful), out loud or not, then it easily confirms my powers of reception as those belonging to me, to an I. The readerly leaves me be, comfortable in my mastery of it. (137)

Texts, then, can be even conspicuously aural without challenging the security of a subject. Stewart would argue that any reading occasion beguiles the voice into action, however silently, but even that *going out of ourselves* that marks our entry into the (aural) universe described by a text may finally reassure our subjectivity; if the text is sayable, if the text can be mastered, we remain secure.

When trace becomes *musical* in the way I am deploying that term, then it becomes an erosive (or corrosive) agent in the gradual or dramatic breakdown of the coherency of the lingual expression and the subject who

engages it. Musical text approaches Barthes' writerly²⁴ text, and abrades the reading subject. Stewart:

The writable . . . -- the text in whose production I participate -- instead exposes me to incoherences, exposes my own, or that incoherence which is no longer to be called "me" at all. The body's vocal apparatus thus colludes in a reception of texts in a manner that keeps that body in its place, no longer coincidental with person, no longer *identical*. Just as the phoneme, properly recognized, can assist in the deconstruction of the Voice, so can the body (as the site of a voicing), properly occupied in reading, attend at the decentering of the very subject whose warranty it ordinarily provides. (137-38)

It seems to me that the traces musicality scratches into textual surfaces always introduce uncertainty into that moment when the *I* is deciding whether or not what it is reading is *sayable*: in a way, a musical text is never sayable, it is always confounded by a countervoice. And when text is unsayable, when it interferes and interrupts, when it surprises and exceeds and sings its way into decay, it unseats that positioned subject, refuses to confirm the powers of reception belonging to an *I*.²⁵

²⁴ Barthes' term *writerly* is also occasionally translated as *writable*; this is the usage that Stewart adopts.

²⁵ Unsayable texts refuse the comfort afforded by referential inscriptions of the world; these texts do not *mean* in ways that are readily apprehended. In a

In laying out analogous gestural habits in both music and poetry, Lawrence Kramer specifies the beginning of the nineteenth century as a time when new artistic possibilities began to emerge.²⁶ And he locates that

way, the unsayable text is like the responding body: play and performance replace the weight of significance. *Engagement*, then, is reread as a value. A blurring of absolute demarcations has provocative implications for the politics of text: center and margins are exposed as fictions, however necessary, and polemic moves toward advocating an open field.

²⁶ To be clear, Kramer is not arguing that music and poetry only begin to exercise themselves in parallel once we enter the nineteenth century. He writes:

Broadly speaking, the relationship between music and poetry has undergone two major transformations since the Middle Ages. The first and best-known change evolves during the Renaissance along with the momentous shift from linear counterpoint to simultaneous harmony as the basis of composition; it is marked by the development of text-sensitive styles of vocal composition, most notably in the early Italian opera, the Italian madrigal, and the English air. Music during the Renaissance learns to become responsive to poetry, establishing an unprecedented intimacy with the poetic expression of feeling. As a result, music -- and not just vocal music -- expands its connotative range by supporting itself on poetic imagery. In return, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry often associates the voice of the poetic speaker with the singing voice by imitating the expressive effects of certain vocal styles. (Music and Poetry 15)

Kramer's attention in this study gravitates toward "the second large-scale realignment of music and poetry" which he finds to be more elusive, almost subliminal, unaffiliated with any given style. . . . From the standpoint of cultural history, it might best be described as a conviction that music and poetry have the same preconscious sources, that they differ only in the means of representing a primary condition of imagination. (Music and Poetry 16)

initiatory impulse, provocatively, amidst notions of the constitution of self:

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a non-discursive model of completeness appears in both music and poetry and makes convergence accessible to the two arts. . . . Its basis is a historical shift in what might be called the identity of consciousness; broadly speaking, it rests on a surrender of the integration of human inwardness in favor of ontological primacy. . . . One thing to call it is the recognition (or constitution) of the ego as one of the activities of a transcendental subject; another is the discovery of consciousness as an independent entity, a dynamic force set over against both the objects and the subject of which it becomes conscious. (Music and Poetry 18)

This consciousness model has served as a powerful and persuasive framework underwriting our interpretations of texts. Still, by allowing it to persist, however backgrounded, in our investigations into our investigations of contemporary innovative writing,²⁷ we may have consigned ourselves to

²⁷ Kramer suggests that "the model has long outlasted its background, displacing itself through an endless series of reinterpretations" (Music and Poetry 19). His contention is that only "the most extreme avant-garde works of recent decades have managed to work free of it"; he considers John Ashbery in some detail, alongside Elliott Carter, and suggests that what these artists accomplish is often bought at "a very high price" (Music and Poetry 19). The price, I would suggest, is high if we insist on reading against this backdrop that assumes -- and values -- a transcendental consciousness informing the subject. Kramer argues that

the styles of Ashbery and Carter advance, perhaps advance beyond, the visionary tradition of Romanticism by adumbrating a

chronic bafflement and difficulty as our reading experience. Because if, as Kramer suggests, this evolution of a new conceptualizing of the subject has had a tremendous impact on the structuring and direction of art-making from the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is quite possible that we are now engaged in another equally radical shift: our writers and other art-makers may be attempting to express the self at another remove, a kind of metasubjectivity where the self and the self's apprehension of a world have become blurred and indistinct, and subject to the vagaries of its own fractured attention.

This is the self in a postmodern context, a context which admits its indeterminacy. Celeste Olalquiaga, theorizing postmodern art practice, writes:

Despite or because of being profanely ambivalent and ambiguous, rejoicing in consumption and celebrating obsessions, ignoring

breaching of ego-boundaries that is continuous, by positing an ideal reader or listener who has an ego without walls. (Music and Poetry 220)

Although Kramer's readings are generous and intensely engaged, and don't imply the strictures of too high a price, he is quick to point out the exhaustion incurred by this kind of writing. It seems to me that exhaustion, along with the frustration that Goldberg invokes, are precipitated by reading this kind of work within the frameworks it exceeds: we are exhausted and frustrated when we expect (and attempt) to encounter "rhythmically integrated time" (Music and Poetry viii) and find something altogether other.

consistency and avoiding stability, favoring illusions and pleasure, postmodernism is the only possible contemporary answer to a century worn out by the rise and fall of modern ideologies, the pervasion of capitalism, and an unprecedented sense of personal responsibility. (xi)

She acknowledges the fraught territory of our readings and responses to postmodern expressions,²⁸ but refuses to capitulate to the hysterical paranoia that often infects theoretical articulations of the postmodern condition.²⁹

Instead, she positions the postmodern field as an ambivalence,³⁰ a field that

²⁸ In an incisive investigation into the perceptual changes instigated by the proliferation of high technology, in particular the merging of temporal and spatial axes that accompanies rapid change and intense mediation, Olalquiaga articulates the "foremost problem in the postmodern debate" as the clash between reading "a totalitarian politics of surveillance and control" or, conversely, "a subversive dynamic that trespasses boundaries and hierarchies" (1).

²⁹ Kroker and Cook's The Postmodern Scene, for instance, is rife with anxiety; writing on the postmodern body, they skitter across overdetermined surfaces:

Invaded, lacerated, and punctured by vibrations (the quantum physics of noise), the body simultaneously *implodes* into its own senses, and then *explodes* as its central nervous system is splayed across the sensorium of the technoscape. No longer a material entity, the postmodern body becomes an infinitely permeable and spatialized field whose boundaries are freely pierced by subatomic particles in the microphysics of power. Once the veil of materiality/subjectivity has been transgressed (and abandoned), then the body as something real vanishes into the spectre of hyperrealism. (v)

Latent hysteria suffuses the text.

³⁰ Ambivalence: L. *ambo*, both, *valens*, being worth. Systemic ambivalence, then, precludes decidability.

can accommodate Derridean play and Bakhtinian dialogism as textual and cultural re-soundings of/in Einstein's relative universe. It is, I think, possible and even desirable to foster constructions of our time and place in terms that are not shut down with paranoia, that don't insist on reading our present expressions in terms of the logic and valuations of times that are not ours. In a theoretical orientation that embraces the excesses and extravagance of postmodern art practice, we may encounter our own cultural and epochal productions, traces of our knowing here in this country as we teeter on the edge of another millenium.

Olalquiaga labels "the disconcerting quality of postmodernism's continuous transformation of time into space, emptiness into saturation, body into electronics, and absence into presence" (xx): a dramatic erosion of boundaries -- blurring self and other, text and nontext, time and space -- characterizes our postmodern landscape, the cultural circumstance we inhabit. "What is at stake," Olalquiaga suggests, "is the very constitution of being -- the ways we perceive ourselves and others, the modes of experience that are available to us, the women and men whose sensibilities are shaped by urban exposure" (xi).

It seems to me that one of the ways to speak the encounter with dissolution involves reconceiving the functioning of language and narrative, allowing the radical destabilization of musicality to assume a performative function in written text: the writers I read here -- Dutton, Barbour, Bowering,

Adamson, and Wah -- all begin from assumptions of the untenability of a unitary discrete subject, and each one in his or her particular way demonstrates a lively sensitivity to the constructive and erosive potential of musical strategies in texts that are responsible to that elusive subjectivity. I am suggesting that these writers -- and there are others as well, innovators who are willing to press against our acclimatized frustration³¹ -- these writers *deploy* musical trace in their work. Their work bears the traces of musical inscription, apprehends -- *musically* -- the indeterminacy of the writing and reading subject.

If we begin from a position at another lurching remove from Kramer's reading for structural integration, if we proceed from an assumed position of *dis*-integration, we may learn to read and hear -- we may learn to *play* -- the music in these texts.

³¹ The list of possibilities is suggestive, as well as unfinishable: it would have to include Daphne Marlatt (How Hug a Stone, for example, and perhaps especially here and there), bp Nichol, Lola Lemire Tostevin ('sophie tracks the converging, often an explicitly *musical* converging, of subjectivity, relativity, form, and gender), Jeff Derksen, Robert Kroetsch, Marlene Nourbese Philip (especially She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks), Nicole Brossard, Kristjana Gunnars, Michael Ondaatje (particularly The Collected Works of Billy the Kid), Phyllis Webb (Naked Poems is a daring experiment with inscribed silence, Water and Light works from densely textured language and a self-consciously borrowed model).

There are other writers, new and established, one could add to this partial listing, others who share a pressing desire to mine the resources within language for unsettling its (smug and secure) expressive assumptions along with the self-possession of the subject who encounters it.

Excitations: Poetic Resonance and the Aurealities of Paul Dutton

For listening is not the spectator's mode; listening means involvement and entanglement, participation or belonging for short. The ear's mode is always that of conspiracy, that is, of getting caught in something (a tangled plot), being overtaken or taken over and put to use. The ear is exposed and vulnerable, at risk, whereas the eye tries to keep itself at a distance and frequently from view (the private eye). The eye appropriates what it sees, but the ear is always expropriated, always being taken over by another ("lend me your ears"). The ear gives the other access to us, allows it to enter us, occupy and obsess us, putting us under a claim, driving us mad or something like it. . . . Seeing is objectifying and possessive; hearing means the loss of subjectivity and self-possession, belonging to what we hear.

Think of the call. The ear puts us in the mode of being summoned, of being answerable and having to appear. It situates us. It brings us into the open, puts us at risk. . . . (Bruns 127-128)

A bounded space has a resonating frequency, some pitch it enhances through the accident of its size and structure: you notice it particularly in small, live rooms like bathrooms, but you also notice it occasionally in stringed instruments, violins and cellos especially, where that pitch is called the instrument's wolf note, the note that differs markedly in intensity and quality from the adjoining notes in the compass. When you have a nodding acquaintance with the physics of acoustics, you begin to understand that the constitution of sound, like everything else in our post-Einstein age, is relative. What we hear, what we receive, is always a complex blend and interaction of various independent sound sources, collision and collusion of wave patterns. If your ear is sharp, and if independent voices in ensemble are very well tuned, you can hear pitches in the overtone series¹ that aren't being produced,

¹ The study of acoustics delineates the complex activity of sound; almost all sounds we encounter are wave patterns comprising a prime and a specific series of upper partials. Helmholtz:

The ear when its attention has been properly directed to the effect of the vibrations which strike it, does not hear merely that one musical tone whose pitch is determined by the period of the vibrations. . . , but in addition to this it becomes aware of a whole

or, more accurately, aren't being *voiced*, but that are present, physically present, readable on a wave printout. When these (un)voiced pitches are also enhanced by the room, the effect is enough to shock one into pleading for the existence of ghosts.²

It is impossible, finally, to *specify* the aural event since it encompasses the particular combination of voices/voicings, the writer's configuring of those voices/voicings, the proclivities of the space that receives them. This is how I understand resonance: the peculiar and potent conjunction of what is notated by a text, of what is snagged in the outering of a text, of what is enhanced by a text's environment. Texture, performance, context, you might say. Poetic resonance works as a complex of interactive modes of texting. I cannot locate resonance only inside the text, but must account also for my performance (oral or silent) of text; as well, I must figure in my response *to* text, the reverberations I enhance through whatever surprising accidents of memory and expectation. The reading body becomes the resonating chamber, an often unpredictable sounding board, a chorus of wolf notes.

series of higher musical tones. . . . (22)
When several sounds interact, the ear receives particular and often surprising interference patterns.

² I sing with a small *a cappella* vocal ensemble; the chapel where we rehearse introduced into a tightly configured chord, one day, a booming fundamental, a low rattle that startled us all.

The figuring of sound, the figuring *out* of sound, in a text, this constitutes textual resonance. When we read for resonance, we yield to the conspiracy of the ear, the expropriation of the (bounded) subject by the body's unwilling reverberations. Lend me your ears, in the multiple.

Poetic language is not now, in our time, suddenly resonant; poetic language is characterized by an aural density, textured, thickened; apart from line, this is how we recognize poetry, what leads us to call even certain prose texts poetic. Still, reading resonance is a shaky proposition, that fear of conspiracy again, of being dragged off by the ear. Resonance is what we cannot control, what the text builds into itself, what the text drags out of us; resonance labels the breakdown of the word, its internal dialogism, the inherent heteroglossia of our lingual adventures, the inevitable vibration that expands and occasionally confounds what we thought we meant, what we thought we understood.

Poetic language is not now suddenly resonant, but contemporary poets may be pressing us to understand the implications of poetic resonance differently. Garrett Stewart, in exploring the aural density characteristic of Romantic writing, argues its functionality in maintaining/retaining particular notions of subjectivity (for reader and writer): in "its glorification of the personalized and prophetic voice of lyric utterance,"

Romantic textual vocalization operates at the very core of the lyric motive itself: a text's impulse to represent the voice of its

own representations. Such is the myth of presence -- in warrant of reference -- that of course co-opts the reader as well. And in particular, the reader's passive vocal organs. . . . For it is Romanticism's dream as well as its perpetual default to engage the very pulse of the reading body, whose palpable equivalent it would at the same time pretend to incarnate in the organic vitality of its own verses. (188-89)

For the Romantics, the point of aurality in text is still always referential: "the heady privileging of the signifier is not regularly indulged at the intended expense of the referent but, rather, in purposeful homage to -- and in a willed mirage of -- the very density and mutability of the natural world, the thick but permeable life of things" (Stewart 188). Resonance, then, is always located not *in* text but somehow *behind* text. Resonance itself becomes commandeered by the referential project, becomes coded referentially.³

In a more dialogic writing space, resonance can begin to perform a different function. For one thing, its location becomes less specific. The text no longer pretends to harbour the resonating energy in itself, a strategic position that, as Stewart points out, is co-optimive of the reading body which not

³ There are reasons to squeeze resonance into a subsection under referentiality, and they relate to issues of the lyric and prophetic voice, the Romantic insistence on a speaking/singing subject. For the lyric tradition posits a singer, an Orphic singer who enlivens the world. A *singer* and not a *hearer*. A singer is not in the same danger as a hearer, doesn't face "the loss of subjectivity and self-possession" (Bruns 128).

only provides the energy but has, simultaneously, to efface its awareness of that knowledge. Resonance moves into the space between, into the dialogic interplay between the text and the text's performer/reader. It moves back into the ear, into the hearing ear, welcomes back into the reading activity the inherent danger, the risk of expropriation.

Paul Dutton's recent book, Aurealities, announces even in its title its interest in the interface between hearing and knowing. Here is "Morning Song" from the section entitled "Jazz":

sun kiss brick
 kiss green pipe sun
 kiss bird-song brick
 kiss sun kiss pipe
 kiss wire sun
 kiss bird-song green
 in early morning
 wire sky kiss
 green leaf blue
 kiss sky kiss sun
 kiss shingle sun
 kiss board kiss sky
 kiss early morning
 bird-song sky
 kiss wire strung kiss
 board kiss sun
 kiss roof of shingle
 wired board kiss
 green leaf sky
 of wired sun
 of shingled roof
 kiss morning bird

of green pipe sun
 kiss blue
 of morning roof
 kiss sun
 of shingle bird
 kiss green
 kiss sun
 kiss morning shingle
 bird

("Jazz" 35)⁴

"Morning Song" spells out an atomized landscape, constituent bits that bump against one another, proximity without the connectives. Without the hierarchies of perspective, either: we have no sense of foreground or background, no indication of how to assign priority. This is the post-lyric landscape poem, buzzing in the (eye and) ear of a (reading) subject who no longer knows the safety of an objective point of view. Post-lyric, where point of view becomes hearing-in-the-round.

A snaking sibilance connects this dismembered, re-membered landscape, and we listen to *kiss, kiss*, the *ss* finding itself again in *sun, song, sky*. A spray of sound, the flash of *ss* up against the back of your teeth. It is curious how this aural texturing works: you encounter not a tangled language that lures you into rereading "the thick but permeable life of things" (Stewart 188), but a texturing that implies contiguity and distinctness, relation on different terms. *Kiss* suddenly belongs to *brick* and *shingle* and *morning* by virtue of a shared

⁴ Because, as I argue later, Dutton's sectioning of his book is so critical to our reception of it, I am including the section name in bold typeface when I introduce poems from Aurealities.

vowel, and *brick* links with *bird*, *bird* with *board*, *board* with *wired*. The logic of relation has shifted, we are not assembling a landscape any longer but being displaced into listening, acknowledging possibilities on an other, an *aural*, assembly line.

As you become alert in your listening, you begin to hear, for instance, how "wire sky kiss" wobbles back and forth, three accented syllables, discrete and distinct, *wire* and *sky* with the heft of the elongating *i*, *sky* performing an anagrammatic backflip into *kiss*, and *kiss* resonating backward and forward, the poem a *kiss* which promises to repeat itself. Dutton does something quite strange with these resonating words, lets them happen again and again, lets us hear and rehear: our ear training exercises. Listen to his variations on a theme of *green*, where "kiss green pipe sun" can become "kiss bird-song green" or "of green pipe sun" or "kiss green," and "green leaf blue" reappears newly minted as "green leaf sky." This, it seems to me, is writing that shades itself with collisions rather than modifiers, words vibrating against other words, exciting sympathetic vibrations.

This isn't exactly being brought "into the open," as Bruns would have it (128), but being opened to the frequency of this bounded space, the poem as bounded space, listening to the vibrations it enhances. "Morning Song" keeps echoing with the short *i*, all those *kisses*, and as we are hijacked by the ear, we come to hear other vowel colorations as departures from *kiss* (*green* is not *kiss* because it *sounds* other), come to understand a line like "kiss wire strung kiss"

as a series of verbal palettes. In small pockets, other textual frequencies will suddenly ring with a local resonance -- "green leaf" or "kiss blue / of morning roof" -- but that particular collocation of textures, *k-i-ss*, functions as this text's aural anchor.

I'm arguing, then, that our reading of resonance locates itself at the surface of the word, of words, where we take hold (at our peril, in our joy) of an aural thread that constantly and consistently unravels any secure notions of how language functions in our lives. We watch -- or listen to -- words perform their shapeshifting miracles:

Sound a word and others answer. . . . Hence the uncanniness of ordinary language where no word is just itself but is always threatening to turn into another. . . . Imagine language as an infinite conversation in which words talk endlessly back and forth, picking up hints from one another, playing to one another, internalizing one another, sounding and resounding in one another so that nothing can ever be said in quite the same way twice by virtue of the way words are always echoing differently.

(Bruns 124)

Bruns labels the peculiar and almost magical web of relations that

characterizes language in action: the radical pun, roots twining in suggestive ways. When words pick up hints from one another, we are in the presence of what Stewart calls the *antiphone*, "that antiphonal or contrapuntal phantom latching upon lexical units and breaking down their integrity" (48).⁵

The radical pun may be more conspicuous as a generative model in other work from Dutton's book; here is a portion of the poem "Pause":

now the rest's to come before the next beat's drummed to spring
a trap that you'll fall into some or several times again alas a loss
a lot a little bit of seasoning will spice up all that dead meat
heating on the stove you never got to stop to turn off at the next
exit and circle back

("Prosetics" 66)

When we eavesdrop on that "infinite conversation in which words talk endlessly back and forth" (Bruns 124), we hear how *spring* implicates *fall* and *seasoning* and *spice*, against all odds, in erratic play along semantic fissures, we hear words resonating back and forth, reconstituting one another. Hear, or perhaps *audit*: other logics are at work, and a string like "again alas a loss a lot a / little bit" can become self-evident, generated by its own soundings and resoundings.

⁵ Stewart considers, also, the implications for the critical enterprise of a reading that accounts for antiphonic writing:

If a critic were to grant that there is a phonic slippage of this kind inherent in language, an irresolute and disruptive drifting that destabilizes any given constraint upon the bonding of phonemes into words, then that critic would also have to face a fact about (to reverse [Geoffrey] Hartman's subtitle) literature-from-the-point-of-view-of-language. Such language is in some ways too heterogenous and dispersive for an author-centered aesthetic. . . , too freakish, eccentric, and insubordinate. (48)

The resonance of buried puns powers "Morning Song" too, in spite of an apparently divergent aesthetic. Here the word wobble engages more absolute resonance, a word implying not only others but other functional versions of itself as well:

sun kiss brick
 kiss green pipe sun
 kiss bird-song brick
 kiss sun kiss pipe

We read *kiss*, in that first line, and register its oscillating between noun and verb, register several aural versions, several evocalizations,⁶ which alter and unsettle our reading of both stress and implication. There is a buzz of options in how you might read "sun kiss brick": *kiss* may sink into its verbal function, less pronounced, a conduit from *sun* to *brick*, inadvertently assigning passivity or priority; or *kiss* may muscle its way into the line, noun among nouns, blurring our distinctions between abstract and concrete, insinuating contiguity into the place of hierarchy. The lines which follow do nothing to still the oscillation, the equi-vocation. If anything, they contribute to the haze: to pile line upon line opening with *kiss* tends to channel energy into a reading of the word as a verb. But it also erodes our sense of the subject of the verb, and

⁶ Stewart blends *evoke* and *vocalize*, labels the zone of aural consciousness in silent reading:

This somatic locus of soundless reception includes of course the brain but must be said to encompass as well the organs of vocal production, from diaphragm up through throat to tongue and palate. Silent reading locates itself, that is, in the conjoint cerebral activity and suppressed muscular action of a simultaneously summoned and silenced enunciation. (1)

thereby multiplies the verbal function by implicating an invisible second person. Even if the reader accepts the invitation, begins to read him- or herself actively into a subject position engaged with this world -- "[you] kiss sun [you] kiss pipe" -- the text resists the flattening, cuts across pattern to keep the several options reverberating, retrogressively and progressively: "wire sky kiss" we find, and *kiss* lapses back into a noun, perhaps, or reintroduces its possible transitivity.

Dutton's *kiss* buzzes and crackles, refuses to settle in a reader's ear. And the semantic haze of resonance it excites blooms out to stir other words in "Morning Song" too: *green*, for instance, quivers between noun and adjective, and even remembers the possibility of verb. Once the buzz takes over a reader's ear, even the more stable words in this matrix -- *shingle*, for example, and *sun*, *wire*, *leaf* -- begin to vibrate. Dutton's *kiss* is Bakhtin's dialogized word:⁷ it hovers, oscillates, sets the whole bounded space of this poem ringing. It howls the wolf note.

⁷ Michael Holquist, in the glossary to Bakhtin's The Dialogic Imagination, writes:

A dialogized word . . . can never be *zaverseno* [completed/ finalized]: the resonance or oscillation of possible meanings within it is not only not resolved, but must increase in complexity as it continues to live. (426)

Resonance, then, is implicated in the radical destabilizing that is freed into action when language is allowed to reverberate. Resonance *expresses* the impossibility that signifier and signified will ever match up; it announces the perpetual slide in signification which makes language endlessly alive (and powerfully subversive). Resonance *signals* the dialogic.

It is important, I think, to consider the effects of this resonating word, or perhaps more precisely how we process these effects. Because labelling a word as a locus of special resonance in a text could suggest that our readerly activity is finally only conservative, locating, specifying a point (source?) which orients and absorbs all other information. Stabilizing the text, tuning out the seditious overtones. This is precisely what much of our training has been about, and why radically destabilizing reading strategies like Derrida's are so important in the shifting political dynamics of our critical enterprise.

Jonathan Culler targets this tendency to engage in detailed explorations of gaps and aporia at the textual surface only to neutralize or contain them within larger (conservative) conceptual structures:

The model of the modern lyric, which focuses on the drama of consciousness of a depersonalized speaker, has provided a powerful strategy for interpreting even the most refractory poems: the most bizarre and disconnected images can be read as signs of alienation and anomie or of a breakdown of mental processes brought on by the experience in question. . . . What this structure does is promote the notion of an autonomous or originary subjectivity by presuming that language must come from and should be explained by a consciousness. ("On the Negativity of Modern Poetry" 196)

Such a reading disposition, he suggests, is strategic, defends the reader against having to contemplate a radically destabilized constitution of subjectivity. As long as even the most abrupt discontinuities can be subsumed under one (single if complex) consciousness, the old structures of subjectivity are protected from erosion.⁸

Culler proceeds to consider the implications for an aurally sensitive reading:

[B]y imagining a self instantiated in the language we establish a

⁸ Culler's suggestion that we still operate, however anxiously, to locate language under the rubric of a (singular, however depersonalized) consciousness is reminiscent of Bakhtin's claims about the monologic nature of poetic discourse:

The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance. . . . The poet must assume a complete single-personed hegemony over his own language, he must assume equal responsibility for each one of its aspects and subordinate them to his own, and only his own, intentions. (Dialogic Imagination 296-97)

There are sympathetic vibrations between Bakhtin's position and Culler's argument: although intervening theorizing may make contemporary readers wary of notions of authorial intention, still (in our enlightenment) to excise the author from the Bakhtinian argument may only be to invite a displaced subject -- Culler's "depersonalized speaker" who, suitably effaced and inconspicuous, re-presents us -- to step into the vacated space.

Charles O. Hartman observes that the Bakhtin passage "reads like a reverse manifesto of modern American poetry"; he argues "historical as well as heuristic grounds for taking over Bakhtin's terminology while rejecting the scaffolding he employed to build it" (Jazz Text 39). I, with Hartman, am arguing against Bakhtin's claims that poetic discourse is monologic; indeed, contemporary poetry like Dutton's is explicitly and relentlessly dialogic. What I am suggesting, though, is that many of our reading habits actually bolster an insidiously monologic conceptualizing of the poetic event, and effectively cancel or contain even radical gestures of dispersal.

specular relation that works to confirm for us the autonomy and freedom of the subject we consider ourselves to be. . . . We are enjoined by this model to attend to sound patterning when it can be seen as elucidating the attitude of the speaker and to interpret puns as wit, instead of exploring verbal echoes or word play without reference to a principle of consciousness. (197)

A specular relation: once again we find a stable/stabilized subjectivity linked to the eye rather than the ear; "The eye appropriates what it sees, but the ear is always expropriated, always being taken over by another" (Bruns 127). And in this press for a (resolutely) specular relation, radical resonance is recuperated within a context that reassures rather than endangers our own (reading) subject position. As far as possible, resonance is made to behave referentially; surplus is simply overlooked. Over-looked, and in our habituated privileging of the eye, the other dimensions of textual excitation, the reverberations shivering along our aural pathways, are dismissed or ignored, rendered inaudible.

Resonance (re-, *sonare*, to sound): the word an echo chamber holding its own sounding, an apt and evocative verbal sign of the sonic imprint, the physicality of sound that inheres in language, in our processing of language,

the *melos* tensed inside the *logos*.⁹ I say *tensed*; this is the risk of expropriation that Bruns invokes. He says expropriation by the ear. I would expand the zone of contact to include the whole apparatus by which we process sound: the voice which produces it, the ear and indeed the body which receives it.

One is tempted to figure (in) the voice only metaphorically (what we too casually label *tone*, or what we might call the writer's stance in relation to material, language, audience¹⁰). I invoke voice here in its more physical expression, voice as it activates language,¹¹ the tactile interface between *logos* and *melos*; this is where language meets what Barthes calls "the *grain* of the

⁹ Aristotle, in his Poetics, takes care to distinguish speech (*logos*) from song (*melos*):

First, in the same way that certain people imitate a variety of things by means of shapes and colors, making visible replicas of them . . . , while another group produces its mimicry with the voice, so in the case of the arts we just mentioned: they all carry on their imitation through the media of rhythm, speech, and melody, but with the latter two used separately or together. (16)

¹⁰ What Keith Johnstone calls *status* in his brilliant study, Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre. Status relations label power (and even spatial) dynamics between dramatic "characters"; in translation, notions of status readily and effectively expand to incorporate issues of the textual voice in all its refractions, and the reactivator(s) of that voice.

¹¹ As my argument unfolds, it will become clear that my sense of the function of voice in contact with text is at some distance from Derrida's anxieties about the phonocentrism inherent in metaphysical constructions of the world. It seems to me that a voice-activated awareness of text, what Stewart calls "phonemic" rather than "phonocentric" reading, is not only powerfully animating, but interrogative rather than defensive of (habituated) metaphysical assumptions about language and subjectivity.

voice" (The Pleasure of the Text 66).¹² I am positing a grainy text, then, one that meets the voice, a textual space -- a-kin to Barthes' musical one -- where "*a language meets a voice*" (The Responsibility of Forms 269). What happens at that tactile interface, or more precisely, what happens to our reading of the site and the production at that site?

Barthes proffers a theory of *writing aloud* which is

not phonological but phonetic; its aim is not the clarity of messages, the theater of emotions; what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language. (The Pleasure of the Text 66-67)

Language lined with flesh, not dry and abstract(ed), but fresh with the memory of mouth, mediated by the vocal apparatus that caresses or expels it. Mediate and at the same time im-mediate, hanging in the air between, exposed, a trace of the articulating body, a musical trace of language's

¹² Barthes speaks of "the grain of the voice, when the voice is in a double posture, a double production: of language and of music" (The Responsibility of Forms 269). This doubleness is precisely the (dangerous) doubling, internal combustion, I'm arguing occurs in purely lingual contexts as well as (and distinct from) the art song genre Barthes examines in this particular essay; this doubleness is a musical trace.

speaking.

Dutton makes the voice-body complex an explicit participant in the reading moment:

hear uh
 hear oh
 hear eh
 hear ah
 hear ha
 hear he
 hear ho
 hear huh
 hear hhhh
 hhhhhhhhhhhh
 hhhhhhhhhhhh
 hhhhhhhhhhhh
 hhhhhhhhhhhh
 hhhhhhhhhhhh
 ("Vocagraphics" 52)

As a reader, you "hear" *hhhhhhhh* because you produce it, measure it with your own body:¹³ in musical terms, you *realize* it. Dutton calls up a nimble voice, a playful and sometimes outrageous voice. He rewrites *voice* -- as in *the poet's voice* -- to accommodate ranging parameters of not only style but ex-pression, how the air/sound are channelled out of the body. He energetically disperses a predilection for the security of a known and relatively singular voice with a

¹³ Dutton's poem, though it dictates/specifies exhalation of air, is not about breath so much as about the materiality of a signifying system -- *the alphabet* -- as it conjoins with the reading/speaking body. I am inclined to think, with Barthes, that "any exclusive art of the breath is likely to be a secretly mystical art" (The Responsibility of Forms 271).

heteroglossic virtuosity. Plays the voice hard.¹⁴ His voice, the reader's voice: he demands voice, any voice, not voice in the abstract but voice in its physical outing. He demands voice in contact with the buffed or bumpy surfaces of his words, but he doesn't solicit any one voice. He dialogizes the reading space.

Voice, then, becomes performative. And the performative voice is perhaps necessarily the heteroglossic voice, since it assumes the posture of projection: this is my voice and this is not my voice. Performance, in crucial ways, makes untenable the notion of a unified subject who must exist as a source (and guarantee) for any simple idea of voice. Charles O. Hartman writes, across musical and literary borders, of performed voice:

¹⁴ Hartman presses notions of voice in directions that refract tellingly on projects like Dutton's. He writes, for example, of Bobby McFerrin's stunning vocal pyrotechnics in his (solo) album, *The Voice*:

Sometimes he sings tunes, sometimes songs; but his voice is never simply . . . a vehicle for words. Sheer virtuosity calls attention to McFerrin's voice in itself. His charm as a performer is to seem merely the voice's custodian; so *virtuosity becomes a form of modesty*. McFerrin's first aesthetic gesture is *to separate his singing voice from his individual self*, to treat it as an instrument. (Classical singers do this, too, speaking never of "my voice" but "the voice," as dancers speak of "the body"). (Jazz Text 111, my emphases)

Again, the dissolution of the ego's boundaries, the dispersed -- *modest* but never *inaudible* -- subject.

In any performance, we confront not Tradition and the Individual Talent, but many voices of tradition and many constituents of individual talent. And how individual -- that is, single and indivisible -- can the talent be? To find a voice may be truly to find a place among voices. (Jazz Text 21)

The voice in action, then, is not simple; it is a conglomerate of borrowings and inventings, initiatory and responsive, infinitely shaded and subtle, subject to the particular resonances of the sounding body.

Even if you don't speak the text aloud, you lend it voice. As Stewart argues, even silent reading is registered in the vocal apparatus of the reading body. And since so much of our text consumption is silent, the implications of this complex of engagement and suppression are provocative indeed:

Where we read to ourselves is thus the place, always, of a displacement, a disenfranchisement of voice, a silencing. It is the place where what is called up is voice, but only under suspension, a stratum of response located between a merely evoked aurality and an oral vocalizing: the zone of evocalization.

(2)

Place of voice, place of disenfranchisement of voice: this is a place of promise and lack, place of desire.

Roland Barthes writes that "Every relation to a voice is necessarily erotic" (The Responsibility of Forms 280):

there is no human voice which is not an object of desire -- or of repulsion: there is no neutral voice -- and if sometimes that neutrality, that whiteness of the voice occurs,¹⁵ it terrifies us, as if we were to discover a frozen world, one in which desire was dead. (The Responsibility of Forms 279-80)

Desire, then, for Barthes, is incompatible with neutrality; desire is somehow contingent upon the voice's grain, upon its difference from the context in which it emerges and decays, its difference and *différance*. It has something to do with personality, the voice's engagement and virtuosity and variety. Something to do with its *resonance*, I would argue, its overtone series, physical and emotional, its complexity. This is the particularity of voice, of *a* voice.

Barthes again:

The human voice is . . . the privileged (eidetic) site of difference: a site which escapes all science, for there is no science (physiology, history, aesthetics, psychoanalysis) which exhausts the voice: no matter how much you classify and comment on music¹⁶ historically, sociologically, aesthetically, technically, there will always be a remainder, a supplement, a lapse, something

¹⁵ Pure sinusoidal waves, that is, sound waves without upper partials, exemplify this phenomenon; they are disconcertingly neutral, almost unpleasant. They lack resonance, and therefore the edge of desire which inheres there.

¹⁶ I would add here *text*, coming at the argument from the other end.

non-spoken which designates itself: the voice. . . . (The
Responsibility of Forms 279)

Voice is our particularity, our sonic/phonic fingerprint; it is also a range, a repertoire of borrowings. When I perform, audibly or silently,

sun kiss brick
kiss green pipe sun
kiss bird-song brick
kiss sun kiss pipe
kiss wire sun

I read the soft and hard tissues of my vocal production, perhaps register the sound as it resonates along the bones of my skull,¹⁷ perhaps only the nearly imperceptible twitchings of my musculature suppressing voice that is called up; I read also the intonations of my imaginings, borrow or reconsider my previous encounters with this text or other texts it brings to my mind. I *voice*,

¹⁷ Hearing, registering sound, is a multiply positioned event: sound sources can excite a range of receptors. Douglas Kahn:

When speaking to other people the head resonance you hear is not heard by other people. Your voice leaves your lips without its skull; it is a deboned voice. When you hear your own speaking voice the bones are in place. The bones in question are those involved in the conduit channelling the voice up from the throat through the mandible and skull, vibrating the basilar membrane in the same way as air-conducted hearing. The phonographic, deboned voice is the selfsame voice heard without bone conductivity, the voice rebounds gelatinously. . . . Air-conducted hearing is not without bone conduction, but the conduction of the hammer, anvil and stirrup is not of the order of hearing one's own speech. In fact, during speech vibrations, the path of the tiny bones is attenuated by the stapedius muscle, just as when it reacts to high intensity sounds from the environment, thus deploying the audition of one's own voice more completely to the route of other bones. When you speak, you become a little deaf to the world. (32)

in my reading; I initiate the erotic "appearance-as-disappearance" that Barthes invokes (The Pleasure of the Text 10), start a wave that will only decay.

Still, to say something about the gap and fade: desire huddling in the interstices¹⁸ where language appears and disappears in the ear of our reading bodies. It is almost cliché in our critical climate to yoke desire and loss, and in spite of the interdictions against metaphysical habits of thought which label presence and absence in particular and ideologically implicated ways, still our predilections may bear the traces of (modernist) belatedness that survive in and even possibly underpin our postmodernist/contemporary theoretical sophistication. If desire, or for that matter, if the gap, were otherwise constituted and read: is it possible to move into a more comic construction of the space of reading and response?

In Reading Voices, Stewart performs acrobatic readings of the phonotext, the graphed sound that is always already unsettling its own fixedness. The test-case for what you might call the perpetual

¹⁸ Barthes: "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* . . . it is intermittence . . . which is erotic" (The Pleasure of the Text 9-10).

countervoicing¹⁹ of the text by its reader and by the text itself he calls the *transegmental drift*, the oscillation of possible readings that suspends itself over the gap between words -- *silent-speaking* registered also as *silence speaking* (Stewart 6); he tracks down versions of the radical pun. Stewart's reading plays the field from a different vantage point:

Acknowledging . . . a reading eccentric to writing may finally provide one of the most convincing ways to localize the no longer metaphysical but no less mythologized status of writing, as a crisis of the decentered subject, in the works of Blanchot, Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Deleuze, and others. In a melodramatic (and often little more than metaphoric) scenario, writing in this way becomes the imputed emptying out of identity always incident to inscription, a traumatic alterity. (31)

Desire and gap, so situated in terms of the emptied writing subject -- Stewart specifies an obsession with "otherness, dispersal, dis-integrity, annihilation"

¹⁹ Daniel Fischlin posits *countervoicing* as the functional event that consistently occurs where *logos* and *melos* come in contact; that is, countervoicing is always already in the experience of language. A radically deconstructive impulse rooted into the medium itself, countervoicing speaks other than what it says, and is, variously, appropriated by discourses of the hegemony which must suppress it in order to consolidate power. Fischlin's position echoes Jonathan Goldberg's exploration of Derrida's attack on phonocentrism:

The oppositions (worldly/nonworldly, physical/spiritual, transcendental/empirical, internal/external, etc.) inhabit voice, and rob it of its privilege and priority. Differences do not come from voice -- it is not a transcendent origin; *differences are within voice*. (Goldberg 105, my emphasis)

(31) -- must necessarily be understood in terms of a tortured reclamation of a speaking position, no matter how disintegrated; somehow, the locus of locution remains in the author, however un-authorized.

Still, one could resist constituting the writing "site (place) or scene (enactment)" (Stewart 31) in terms of an inscription of the crisis of the decentered subject²⁰ and enlarge the scope to accommodate the resonance between writer and reader and text, understand text instead as an inscription, a necessarily *indeterminate* inscription, of the perpetual and perplexing and often improbable wobble of language in and out of the writing/reading body, an inscription of *listening*. "The emphasis," Stewart argues, in a reading that listens, would be

always on writing, on the letter, on script and its determinant blanks. Instead of the blank as inscribed void, a fatal hole in continuity, . . . phonemic reading would give a different weight, a differential force, to the blank, one all the more subversive for being less figurative, more actively linguistic. (32)

Stewart refigures the gap, measures the heft of (sonic/phonic) alternatives that resist any settling. His readings are explosive, perhaps,

²⁰ Here again, in another guise, is Culler's (omniscient) consciousness figuring the lyric poem, no matter how complex or distorted syntactically or linguistically. Our (metaphysical) reading habits protect us from being implicated in -- and dispersed by -- texts; they posit, again and again, the author (displaced, quite possibly, into the idea of a consciousness) as ultimately responsible for our reading experience, and resist the implications of our own creativity as readers, our own function as textual sounding boards.

because they work from within a theorizing of the subject which is both unflinching and unparanoid:

Between the written and the reread, between two scripted units as they oscillate in the release of a cryptic third term, opens a moment of extraneous pulsation -- before the regularizing provided even by conceptual ambiguity. This moment is not produced by an Edenic innocence speaking through the text, trailing filaments of prephonemic glory, but it does precipitate a certain freedom between beats of the reading brain. (281)

A certain freedom: this is not paranoia or panic, neither is this a confrontation with existential sorrow over the "fatal hole" or the emptied subject. Rather, Stewart locates in the *impertinence* of the read text a kind of spaciousness. Another version of room *between:* that which is requisite for textual resonance.

It is important, I think, to trace Stewart's arguments about the implications for the subject in his version of reading. The space which opens up is not a function of a reassured subjectivity: that "moment of extraneous pulsation" is not produced

by repositioning the deconstructed textual subject as the consolidated "I" of the reader. Rather, it transmits textual energy along the momentarily ungendered and nonsignifying body of a vocal agent without identity, whose subvocal cooperation alone spans the recesses within that combined cerebration and

subjectivity known as reading. (281)

It isn't that the subject, then, is suddenly not a subject, or has been tortuously emptied out, eviscerated. Rather, the subject has become at the same moment less and more determined: "momentarily ungendered" and "without identity" but very much a present body. Stewart inscribes what I am naming the resonant reader, the reader as sounding board who engages and amplifies the peculiar verbal/lingual excitations scored in the textual surface.

I am positing resonance as a phenomenon of excitation, the buzz and blur of oscillation. A phenomenon that occurs *between*: between "beats of the reading brain," as Stewart expresses it (281), and between the antiphones, the radical puns at the textual surface, between colliding discourses, between explorations along the fault lines of genre. Between, as Fischlin argues, the physical manifestation of a word travelling the resonating spaces of the speaking body, and its more austere manifestation on the page: *melos* and *logos*. Between, to push it just that much further, the literal and figurative, the slipping signification in the semiotic transaction. Determination, then, becomes a critical marker in charting this conceptual space: the more determined, perhaps, the less resonating space.

I am suggesting that Stewart's subject is both more and less determined.

The same, perhaps, is true of poetic language in the resonant text: it too risks the erosion of a confident signifying function²¹ in favor of a blur that marks the presence of oscillation. A sonic blur, and an interpretive blur too. This language is not a reflection -- a signification -- of "the thick but permeable life of things" (Stewart 188); rather, it folds into itself the "*profound dialogism of the word*" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 292), its perpetual *différance*. It is, you might say, *embodied*, given its own body, and traced in the writing/reading body. Such a language, such a construction of its functioning, rewrites desire, not in terms of a perpetual sorrow, a longing born out of profound lack, but as a physical and located response, however ephemeral and enigmatic, an excitation of the readerly/writerly body.

This, I would suggest, is a more musical figuring of language: not that

²¹ I am considering the relation of, in crude terms, *signifier* and *signified*: poetic constructions tend to foreground and problematize any easy or assumed correlation. It seems to me that art-making that is accountable to the system(s) of signification availed by the medium can play with over-determination -- Robbe-Grillet comes to mind as a test case, Alex Colville in the visual arts -- which threatens to collapse the signifier into the signified, with all the attendant violence of that move. Another option is under-determination, evocation perhaps, where the resonant blur may even overwhelm the events that excite it. Constriction and spaciousness. Still, some determination -- a bounded space -- is essential for resonance to occur at all.

The overdetermined text, the one most likely to (attempt to) cancel resonant overtones, can veer toward profound conservatism. But it is also within the text-maker's means to stylize the overdetermining inclination itself, to overshoot the explicit, constitute that drive as the subject of inquiry. This turns the signifier-signified relation back upon itself again, reintroduces room for resonance.

I am charting possibilities rather than positing one mode or other as in some way preferable on artistic or moral grounds.

it discounts language's meaning profile, its potency as a signifying system, a signing system, but rather that it shifts weight onto its expressive -- its expressive -- activity. Reading as it engages the body.²² The text, then, becomes not something still(ed), fixed; the text becomes itself only when it is activated. Not *arrested* but *restless*. Which impinges upon how we speak of texts and reading, since the distinctions, the separations which protect one from blending into another, become problematic. And when a text is no longer comfortably wrapped in a suit of objectivity, how we discuss what it is changes dramatically. The descriptive, the *adjectival*, becomes not only inappropriate, but even inept, in tracing the text's embodiment; one is left stumbling in a more corporeal space. Measuring text with a body, reading text in/on a body; this is comparable to the way one releases oneself into musical listening. Barthes, writing of musical experience, conceives the problem this way:

²² I am arguing, in a sense, for a reconceptualizing of language's materiality; musically expressed text is much more than a referential window, it is a physical entity inscribed by/on the reading body. This construction of materiality is far different from Bakhtin's yoking of materializing impulses with reification and objectification; he writes:

Reified (materializing, objectified) images are profoundly inadequate for life and for discourse. A reified model of the world is now being replaced by a dialogic model. Every thought and every life merges in the open-ended dialogue. Also impermissible is any materialization of the word: its nature is also dialogic. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 293)

A materially experienced word, I would suggest, one that traces the tissues of the reader's body, engages in a dialogic act even in the course of utterance (voiced or silenced). Body speaks word speaks body.

we cannot say a certain figure is gay or melancholy, somber or joyous, etc.; the figure's precision, its distinction, is linked not to states of the soul²³ but to subtle movements of the body, to all that differential coenesthesia, that histological fabric out of which the self-experiencing body is made. (The Responsibility of Forms 304)

Language, language as it behaves *musically*, works this way too, excites the body's subtle movements. As Barthes argues: "as soon as it is musical, speech . . . is no longer linguistic but corporeal; what it says is always and only this: *my body puts itself in a state of speech: quasi parlando*" (The Responsibility of Forms 306). *Quasi parlando*: Stewart would expand this body poised on the edge of speech to include the (solicited) reading body. This is an engaged body, a playful and responsive and comic body. It is not a body constructed in (or, out of) lack. It is a replete body: its resonating spaces are responsive spaces, not empty but activated.²⁴

²³ This would suggest that there is even some correlation between reading strategies which work off adjectival designation and tendencies to sanction the metaphysical.

²⁴ A reading, then, is physically ex-pressive, embodied. Still, all readings, even if necessarily eccentric, are not equivalent: potency is contingent, I would suggest, upon the degree to which the reading subject can relax into the "momentarily ungendered and nonsignifying body" (Stewart 281), the degree to which s/he can become a resonating chamber.

Barthes, writing of musical performance, laments realizations by the "mediocre body, trained, streamlined by years of Conservatory or career, or more simply by the interpreter's insignificance, his indifference" (The Responsibility of Forms 303); "It is not a question of strength, but of rage: the

The gap, then, assumes a different face, becomes the region of excitation rather than the marker of deficiency. This is a *resonant* gap, an activated gap *between*; it has a suggestive kinship with Barthes' figuration with a patient -- *embodied* -- reading:

it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport,²⁵ grasps at every point in the text the asyndeton which cuts the various languages . . . : it is not (logical) extension that captivates it, the winnowing out of truths, but the layering of significance; as in the children's game of topping hands, the excitement comes not from a processive haste but from a kind of vertical din (the verticality of language and of its destruction); it is at the moment when each (different) hand skips over the next (and not one *after* the other) that the hole, the gap, is created and carries off the subject of the game -- the subject of the text. (The Pleasure of the Text 12)

body must pound -- not the pianist" (The Responsibility of Forms 303). Playing Schumann might indeed tap rage; other texts/readings would resonate differently. Still, *the body must pound*: a reading to engage blood and breath and muscle.

²⁵ *Application and transport*: I am arguing this as the reader's task and pleasure, to be momentarily ungendered and nonsignifying, and still to resound with the effort of intellection and the power of an embodied responsiveness.

Reading *vertical din* fuzzes and frustrates the directional syntagmatic pull of language; we are hijacked by the ear, perpetually derailed. Dutton:

warship a warship a warship a warshippewa shi pawash e pawash e
 pawash e pawash e pawatchya pawatchya pawatchya pawatchya pawa
 ta pawa ta pawa ta pawa ta pawa ta pawa ter pawa ter pawa ter pawa
 ter pawa ther pawa ther pawa ther pawa ther pawa there is no more
 beautiful, enchanting and sublime portion
 ("Vocagraphics" 54)

Dutton maximizes the potential afforded by what Stewart names transegmental drift, the erosion at the gap marking word boundary. He pulls against the directional imperative, frustrates our desire to drive through in search of a meaning. A critical part of Dutton's enterprise is to introduce blur into the reading project. Blur, the trace of phonic/intellective oscillation, invisible, conspiratorial.²⁶

Barthes names the *din vertical*, I overlay that designation with *the blur between*. Still, resonance functions less linearly than such designations might suggest. Sound, after all, is not a straight-line phenomenon: its track is more like an explosion, a blooming. The (replete) body that excites and responds to the resonating possibilities of a text, that entertains the blur, sonic and interpretive, this body engages a multi-dimensional encounter. The *blur between* does not name a binary proposition; the *blur between* is multiple, is

²⁶ To resound Bruns: "The ear's mode is always that of conspiracy, that is, of getting caught in something (a tangled plot), being overtaken or taken over and put to use" (127).

dialogic.²⁷

The bloom of resonance in a text, in a *reading* of a text: this is the *talkative* language that Bruns sketches, words perpetually in conversation with one another, sounding and resounding. It is a potent, and destabilizing, textual force. For one thing, the erratic and unpredictable and resolutely multiple nature of resonant blurring frustrates the binary models²⁸ that underwrite our conventional notions of reading, of knowing. For another, how we constitute meaning in such a blooming medium, how we control its functioning and circulation, becomes increasingly problematic.²⁹ As Bruns writes: "One could not write a grammar for such a language; that is, one could not say in what the logic of such a language could conceivably consist. This is not a language for speaking; it is a language for listening" (124).³⁰

²⁷ Dialogue (Gr. *dia*, through) speaks across or between; it doesn't denote an obligatory binarism.

²⁸ Barthes: "But does the body know contraries?" (The Responsibility of Forms 301)

²⁹ In discourses formulated in panic, issues of language and subjectivity, always intricately implicated in one another, are likely to be read as virtually interchangeable, viewed with misgivings for being too prone to erosion. Much of the effort of (recuperative) reading, then, goes into bolstering some sense of stability around notions of language and subjectivity, often enlisting one in defense of the other (a kind of Derridean reading in reverse).

Reading resonance takes us back to Bruns' position that "hearing means the loss of subjectivity and self-possession, belonging to what we hear" (128). Crediting language with aural vigor and resilience, then, would suggest that a blurring of subjectivity could be read as one measure of a text's effectiveness.

³⁰ It is provocative that Barthes too generates a grammatical metaphor, linking musical signification, the erosion of grammar, and the body:

Such are the *figures of the body* . . . whose texture forms musical

We come back to where we might have been: at risk ("the ear is always expropriated" [Bruns 127]), or perhaps at ease. The listening Bruns advocates is not the listening that attempts to take over and control a text, but a listening that settles into the voicings of a text, the voicings of a body reading, the reading body's responding. This is what Barthes calls *free listening*: "a listening which circulates, which permutates, which disaggregates, by its mobility, the fixed network of the roles of speech" (The Responsibility of Forms 259).³¹ A dialogic listening, a listening that is aware of the multiple and constantly shifting patterns of language held in suspension, the vertical din. In this kind of listening,

what is listened to . . . is not the advent of a signified, object of a

signifying (hence, no more grammar, no more musical semiology: issuing from professional analysis – identification and arrangement of "themes," "cells," "phrases" -- it risks bypassing the body; composition manuals are so many ideological objects, whose meaning is to annul the body). (The Responsibility of Forms 307)

The grammar of a composition manual, the grammar of a language system: strictures to suffocate a body's encounter with sounding.

³¹ This argument for radical listening is set into a context that interrogates social roles. Barthes continues: "it is not possible to imagine a free society, if we agree in advance to preserve within it the old modes of listening: those of the believer, the disciple, and the patient" (The Responsibility of Forms 259). Free listening, then, advocates a more flexible notion of the construction of subjectivity, which in turn has ramifications for other constitutive programs (political, personal, artistic).

recognition or of a deciphering, but the very dispersion, the *shimmering* of signifiers, ceaselessly restored to a listening which ceaselessly produces new ones from them without ever arresting their meaning. . . . (Barthes, The Responsibility of Forms 259)

This listening allows the buzz and crackle and rustle of language, it acknowledges and accounts for the blur, the resonant bloom. In free listening, the shimmer overtakes everything, from the referent to the auditor: one is not compelled to recognize or decipher, and one's own subject boundaries become blurred by the engagement in listening.

It's worth noting, I think, the distance between Barthes' *free listening* and Derrida's anxiety about phonocentrism. In Derrida's argument, the privilege (historical, conventional) granted the *phone* in turn affirms metaphysical notions of subject and language both; hearing is excused from, rather than implicated in, the shimmer:

The system of "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" through the phonic substance -- which *presents itself* as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier -- has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical, etc. (Of Grammatology 7-8)

Voicing, then, in this construction, is prior to hearing, and both, in collusion, affirm the subject's (hierarchical) position with respect to his world.³²

Hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak: this is at some remove from the hearing/listening I am tracking here, a listening that plunges the hearer into Barthes' shimmer, into Bruns' chatter. The listening these latter theorists advocate (in their arguments, in the language with which they fashion their arguments) is more corrosive than consolidatory, resists even the comfort of a grammar to specify the workings of what is heard. It is listening carried to a degree of self-consciousness³³ which cannot refuse to overhear the hearer's

³² Goldberg reads this Derridean argument into an expanded context:

"The privilege of the *phone*." Derrida presents this as a necessity that is not an accident of history, rather a product of a conception of history and consciousness that has dominated western thought from its inception. . . . Breath is Being, nonphysical, transcendent. Ideas in the mind of God made manifest in the world, history their unfolding; ideas in the mind of man made manifest in voice, speech their articulation: such is the homology of breath and Being. The human experience of having an idea amounts to a feeling of an internality, an inhabitation of mind that offers itself as the immediacy and intimacy of a voice; we speak our minds. The intimate experience of intellection is an assurance of our being (*cogito ergo sum*); that there is no distance between our thoughts and ourselves carries the conviction of identity. (104)

³³ Of course, once one begins to problematize issues of subjectivity and language, one also stirs lye into the lingual substrate. Still, calling into question the authority of language doesn't necessarily occasion a lapse/loss in value, but presses increasingly stringent requirements of responsibility on reader as well as writer. In the context of interrogated subjectivity, the concept of "self-consciousness" obviously must appear *sous rature*, to borrow Derrida's term. Under erasure, but not effaced altogether: Barthes, writing of a student's obdurate equating of *subjectivity* and *narcissism*, argues that today the subject apprehends himself *elsewhere*, and "subjectivity"

meddling. As Barthes words it, "by deconstructing itself, listening is externalized, it compels the subject to renounce his 'inwardness'" (The Responsibility of Forms 259). This is the threat of the ear, then, the bloom of resonance storming the borders of self,³⁴ relentlessly leaching away our designs on signification, inscriptions against shiftiness.

Or, to look at the blur again and from another refractive angle, *free listening* lures us away from conceptions of singular grammar and into a collision of languages. Resonance is hardly contained/constrained by the

can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage: why should I not speak of "myself" since this "my" is no longer "self"? (Roland Barthes 168)

³⁴ Though Bruns begins from the same metaphysical implications Derrida dismantles in his attack on phonocentrism, he arrives in another place, storming the borders of the self in a tangle of difficulties -- constitution of self and other, in and out of language:

loss of subjectivity means self-annihilation only if we hold to the Cartesian outlook of the pure subject -- pure in the sense of disembodied and free of all environment and contingency. Descartes' motto, *cogito ergo sum*, carries with it the angelic corollary that thinking, and therefore being, can do without the body, has no need for it, cannot, in any case, picture itself that way as having or being in a body; has not language of embodiment in which to sort out the tangle of whether one is "in" or whether one "has" a body, which is just the age-old question of ownership or mastery. (129)

"How we connect up with the body," Bruns argues, "is just as mysterious as how we connect up with language" (129).

(generative) gap that impedes a signifier's collapse into a signified, or the synaesthetic *between* where a text scores, scarifies, an uttering body. Resonance also booms in the excitation of one voice by another. Language butting against language, the clatter and buzz, the energy that is constantly and consistently released in contact.

Aurealities is saturated with voicings, from the slow vernacular of the "Jazz" poems to the runon breathiness in "Prosetics," the reserve of "Statementalities," the compulsive repetitions of "Borrowings." Dutton constructs a text of bounded spaces, a sectioned book, organized not by narrative or content so much as by linguistic habit, vocabulary, style. Each section he labels for the characteristic voicing it enhances: besides "Jazz" and "Prosetics," "Statementalities" and "Borrowings," we sound our way through "Vocagraphics," "Double-Dutch Talk," and "Solutions." Not to say that each section is somehow a piece, a completed idea or project, but that each section is comprised of poems that all invoke a similar language model, that access a certain aural/oral, not to mention attitudinal, orientation to texting.

"Solutions," for instance, borrows its material from cryptic crosswords:

"Salve"

A history-book is perpetual. Elgar is a flash-in-the-pan, a drainpipe beyond measure, who slips tiaras to senators, dashes utensils on the ingle, ruminates with beady eye, and steals cacti from literati. He should be executed in Fleet Street by an irate operative of barbarous aspect.

("Solutions" 71)

The lovely incongruities signal a particular discursive (re)source: where tiaras

can glitter against an absurd "drainpipe beyond measure," where the aphoristic and colloquial collide, where the peculiar -- *ingle* -- is oddly appropriate, and where you wouldn't dream of editing out the copious and overly formal "irate operative of barbarous aspect." The poems in "Solutions" all work from the same discursive program, though the cumulative effect is more suggestive of *range* than *identity*. "Telegram," the next poem in "Solutions," has a much different personality:

Come back, Toffee. Tonga miserable. All right: punish. Others
tripe. Embers Hotel. Cable.
("Solutions" 71)

Part of the humor in a poem like this issues from our appreciation for the models that generate it: the abbreviated telegram message in collusion with the absurdities of crossword solutions. The cryptic narrative that invites the pressure of scrutiny.

Dutton's writing is a textual *encounter*, a rash of languages vibrating against one another. Each section calls up (and talks around) a linguistic antecedent, like a theme and variations where the promise of inexhaustible variations screens the faint trace of a theme that might have been prior.

Dutton's work enacts Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic. Bakhtin:

Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. The utterance so conceived is a

considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it,³⁵ which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression. (Dialogic Imagination 354-55)

The dialogic utterance is not only multiply located, but also multiply constituted: it issues from a dialogized subject, and emerges from what Bakhtin designates "the living heteroglossia of language" (Dialogic Imagination 326).³⁶

³⁵ Read into poetic contexting, this construing is reminiscent of Culler's argument of the tendency to generate an animating "consciousness" to preside over (and explain or efface) a poem's discursive particularities.

³⁶ In Bakhtin's theorizing, novelistic discourse is dialogic, poetic discourse is monologic. He argues that, by constructing characters to people a novel, the novelist engages disparate habits of discourse, pulls into action competing or at least supplementary languages (in the sense of *use* rather than *tongue*), each with its own (ideological, political, emotional, psychological) signature.

For Bakhtin, any use of language necessarily participates in the social heteroglot. Still, he argues (and it is worth noting with Hartman that this may say more about the sorry state of poetic discourse in Bakhtin's experience of it than any stubborn obtuseness on his part [Jazz Text 39]) that poetic utterance must suppress evidence of its heteroglossic lineage, present a smooth and unitary (and *created*) voice to its reader:

the trajectory of the poetic word toward its own object and toward the unity of language is a path along which the poetic word is continually encountering someone else's word, and each takes new bearings from the other; *the records of the passage remain in the slag of the creative process, which is then cleared away (as scaffolding is cleared away once construction is finished), so that the finished work may rise as unitary speech, one co-extensive with its object, as if it were speech about an "Edenic" world.* This single-voiced purity and unqualified directness that intentions possess in poetic discourse so crafted is purchased at the price of certain

The resonance of Dutton's work is intricately tied to our reception of it. We become a textual sounding board; our recognition of the conventions that underwrite each section excites the buzz that enlivens them, allows the writing to resonate. The strategy in Aurealities is profoundly and explicitly dialogic: the expressive potential of each piece of text (poem, or section) is exercised in dialogue with other text, with the language habits and models that facilitate each expressive gesture. The reader, then, as a (particular, individual) site of textual information, a discursive site, engages the text; the reader also provides the energy to animate the text.

"T' Her" from the "Jazz" section exemplifies the textual tangle that allows resonance to register. A small segment:

'roun' midnight
 I s'z I gotta
 'cuz you gotta be 'roun'
 'bout 12 it's gotta be 'bout
 mus' be 'roun' midnight
 anyway 'n' you gotta be
 at least somewhere I s'z 'n'
 so 'roun' midnight

conventionality in poetic language. (Dialogic Imagination 331, my emphasis)

I am putting forward not the opposite argument, exactly, but the proposition that *any* textual construction (novelistic, poetic, and others) may not only acknowledge its inherent heteroglossia, but embrace dialogic activity as one of its aims. In this kind of writing/reading, even "single-voiced purity," if it is evoked at all, can be understood as an extremity of stylization which is interrogated by the context in which it is placed.

I took a li'l look 'n' saw
 'tsabout 11:59 I s'z you
 'n' someone s'z oh yeah
 'cuz I know you
 'n' I know
 ("Jazz" 24)

The conspicuously notated speech habits -- contractions, abbreviations, phonetically rendered slang -- signifies a voiced language, or at least the evocation of voiced language; the text adopts the conventions that denote a vernacular and verbalized speech. Not only the notation, but also the speech rhythms, the phatic insertions: *I s'z, oh yeah*. As well, there is a presentness, an improvisatory quality about this writing, which intimates a jazz lineage.³⁷ "T' Her" is in dialogue with not only other linguistic texts, then, borrowing the conventions of transcription to imply a present and idiomatic voice, but also with a musical tradition that has its own structural and textural characteristics. We hear in "T' Her" a musical tradition, and we also hear traces of the specific song, "Round Midnight," which precedes the poem (theme and variations, again, where the variations overtake the theme). The poem draws on the

³⁷ That the styling is deliberate and strategic becomes more evident in the context of the book, since it is particular to the "Jazz" section. The looselimbed ease in "Jazz" is, for instance, distinct from the lean muscle of "Statementalities." The poems in "Statementalities" work by implication, tend to be condensed & connotative. Here is "Haiku":

Crickets' tambourine
 shakes against night's black beat:
 rattled dreams.

("Statementalities" 21)

The aesthetic here at some remove from the cumulative and apparently rambling "Jazz" poems. *Evocative* versus *talkative*, you might say. Proximity, I am arguing, brings each styling into sharper relief.

barest suggestion of the original narrative, but charts a departure rather than a retelling: the poem's recurrent '*roun' midnight* functions as a shared zone of contact between two dialoguing texts. Dutton's "T' Her" is not finally *about* Thelonious Monk's song: it has different rhythms, and frustrates the storied imperative of its precursor. "T' Her" is, rather, *about* a kind of voicing, an approach to the language medium that is particularly jazz in texture and language, and in the (apparently) casual maneuvering in time and space. When "T' Her" resonates, then, it draws on the context, textual and musical, that supports it. It also draws on the reader's awareness of the models it invokes, and willingness to let various implied voices exist in solution.³⁸

Protean, language sidles and slides between sundry expressions of itself: what can/does language *do*? This is what Dutton's Aurealities investigate(s), inscribing voice upon voice, labelling and dis-integrating linguistic habits, checking one against another, checking one with another. Systems of checks

³⁸ Dutton's strategies for constituting voice suggest Don Bialostosky's delineation of the notion:

"Voice" . . . is not so much a matter of how my language relates to me as it is a matter of how my language relates to your language and to the language of others you and I have heard address our topic. . . . If voice . . . is to be heard in the speaker's responsiveness to the voices of others who have spoken on the topic as well as to the voices of those who now listen but may yet speak, then an authentic voice . . . would be one that vitally and productively engaged those voices. It would be *authentically situated*. (in Hartman, Jazz Text 47)

and balances, where there is no final equilibrium, no hope or desire for one,³⁹ where there is only ever the dialogically interanimated contact of word and word, language and language, the echo chamber in full b(l)oom. The radically resonant text.

Each section of Dutton's book evokes a different language habit, calls into play not only a vocabulary, but also a speed and rhythm of delivery, an attitudinal orientation to language, a range of ideological and political and aesthetic impulses and implications. Moving between sections is walking room to room, testing the particular resonances of each space you encounter. And for all the humor and playfulness, it's also important to credit a kind of respect in Dutton, a seriousness in his curiosity. He borrows or lifts or mimics or reproduces without belittling the language(s) he is hearing, without belittling and without lapsing into passive reiteration either. He engages, I think, in what Bakhtin calls *stylization*:

Stylization forces another person's referential (artistically referential) intention to serve its own purposes, that is, its new intentions. The stylizer uses another's discourse precisely as other, and in so doing casts a slight shadow of objectification over it. . . . [W]hat is important to the stylizer is the sum total of

³⁹ Bakhtin argues that the dialogic has an "utterly distinctive orientation of discourse" that is "contested, contestable and contesting -- for this discourse cannot forget or ignore, either through naiveté or by design, the heteroglossia that surrounds it" (Dialogic Imagination 332).

devices associated with the other's speech precisely as an expression of a particular point of view. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 189)

To use another's discourse *as other* underscores the shift in the poet's function: no longer an Orphic presence who speak/sings (the) truth, but a listener who inscribes the delights of her/his perpetual release into (expropriation by) language. Entering into the buzz and blur, entering the complicated echo. Stylization, because it recognizes and respects -- because it *engages* -- competing versions of discourse, takes dialogue to another degree of reflexivity, already engages the writer in a fracturing of self, in a radically dialogic enterprise.

Stylization inscribes a different (an-other) space between, the resonance of a reflexive awareness of language's potential for speaking and being spoken. Double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin calls it, which

is internally dialogized, fraught with dialogue, and may in fact even give birth to dialogues comprised of truly separate voices. . . . Authentic double-voicedness . . . remains in the discourse, in language, like a spring of dialogism that never runs dry -- for the internal dialogism of discourse is something that inevitably accompanies the social, contradictory historical becoming of language. (Dialogic Imagination 330)

A writer (or reader), then, who enters language prepared to allow it its own

power of iteration relinquishes control in critical ways. Gadamer writes, "all playing is a being played" (quoted by Bruns 128). The writer/reader who listens, who actively and unabashedly enters the shimmer of signification, agrees to be played as much as to play.

As Dutton's reader, you are invited, perpetually, to play the listener, to enter the conspiratorial world of the ear. You are invited to listen, to listen to Dutton listening to languages rustling and rumbling, rubbing against one another. What Dutton hears is "not a language for speaking; it is a language for listening" (Bruns 124): he gives us what he hears, but at a remove from itself (that "slight shadow of objectification" Bakhtin labels [Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 189]), filtered through his listening ear, his reading and writing body. In some poems, the filtering is explicit and literal. In "Double-Dutch Talk," for instance, a foreign language newspaper article is strained through an English sieve; Dutton listens for transliterative equivalences, generates an expressive text that hovers between the original and the translation which flank it. The title of the original, "Canadese dichters boeien met geluiden," which, translated, reads "Canadian poets intrigue with sound," lives in the transliterative version as "Canadian poets boing with gladness" ("Double Dutch Talk" 58-61). In other sections of Aurealities, the filter is

more material: the first poem in "Vocagraphics" performs a gradual winnowing away of text to leave only a sound matrix. "Alpha/Omega" opens with

Any old stuffin
I stuff in I
stuff out

and ends

ff
ff
ff

("Vocagraphics" 51)

after having passed through a (logical) series of intermediate phases in which textual material is squeezed out, letter by letter.

In other cases, though, the filter is more subtle, an expression of the writer's sense of possibility opening up within a particular discourse field. In "Adagio for 1984" from the "Borrowings" section, Dutton absorbs and reconfigures found material -- a painter's titles -- and maps a surprising range of expressive potential. The project he undertakes in "Inversions" works off possibilities at a different level:

Pact with the Devil

signed
singed

Lullaby

sung
snug

Awe

scared
sacred

("Statementalities" 21)

Incising the ground at the surface of the word, Dutton produces optical illusions to enhance the haze of aural puns, and he resists the necessity of directional pull: *sung* and *snug*, for instance, can coexist as two separate inscriptions of lullaby, or they can coalesce into a phrasal unit -- *sung snug* -- to suggest the security a lullaby instills in a listener; Dutton's insistence on independent lines for each pair secures the eye rhyme, saves the resonance that hovers over each constituent.

When subjected to the constant and active disruption Dutton effects through his irrepressible stylizations, section upon section, the notion of *book* comes to assume a suggestive haze of functional possibilities. It is not so much a whole or finished thing, but a context which calls up and engages "the living heteroglossia of language" (Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 326). Facing out Western culture's dream of "the book as total embodiment of the word, the book (either as opacity or transparency) secured by an ultimate referent, the beginning word" (Goldberg 109), Dutton fashions a dialogic text, enjoying the wealth of voicings he hears. The book, then, becomes an occasion of/for

linguistic experiment, the book becomes a bounded space that resounds with the interactive energy of the voicings it summons. A bounded space that only ever suggests a larger bounded space, an echo chamber that could always accommodate more. The book, then, invokes the social heteroglot, multiply expressed; it inscribes what Goldberg names "the dialogic space in which speech occurs, ventriloquized through other voices, other scenes" (121).⁴⁰

In Aurealities, Dutton explores the possibilities for voicing on the most minute scale as he twists letter order and plays repetition to the verge of chant. And he multiplies the channels we track in our processing of his texts by shifting our bearings syntactically so we read and reread sentence, section; voice expands to accommodate the eclectic array of discursive options that enter the active interplay of reading. Book, finally, becomes only a sketchy transcription of the bloom, expansive and transfiguring.

When language has its way, when it is allowed its double-voiced ambiguity, its iterative and reflexive muscle, we encounter the resonance of

⁴⁰ Goldberg's discussion of the book occurs in a chapter on George Herbert, who also writes unfinalized text. Of Herbert, he notes, "it is to citation that the text finally turns, the rehearsal of another voice. . . ." (121). The shift from a monologic utterance of truth to a dialogic expression of possible voicings is true of Dutton's project as well. *Citation* and *rehearsal* are somehow implicated in the shift: both credit the impossibility (and undesirability) of finalization.

comment(ary), a writer's/reader's sense that the linguistic exercise of power is a game of *between*, a series of echo chambers: versions of discourse exciting one another, expropriating the hearer into a field of play, word and discourse wobble. And another game too, where the hearer becomes an active listening agent, an unsecret agent, who stylizes the discourse habits to sharpen the overtones between ingenuous and reflexive versions, to set ringing the cracks of a subject constituted as both employer and employee of language.

For the writer who acknowledges it (and sometimes even in defiance of the writer who will not), the persistently multiple, inherently destabilized character of the language medium reverberates in any given linguistic usage or pattern of usage. Or, in Bakhtin's words, "heteroglossia . . . determines, as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic [and I, clearly, am inserting *poetic*] discourse" (Dialogic Imagination 332). *Special resonance*: the whole context of utterance buzzes with possibility, a blur of linguistic options. A blur of options, and a blur of obligations too, since acknowledging the social heteroglot is not without aesthetic, or, for that matter, political, ramifications. To adopt a dialogic writing/reading model is not merely to access more variety; to trace the surfaces of discourse patterns in stylizations is not to engage in superficial rhetorical trickiness. On the contrary, words and habits of language use impinge upon (infiltrate, define, register) the ways in which we constitute our political and social and artistic selves, by which we make decisions that impact upon all who participate in the medium. Bakhtin:

The more intensive, differentiated and highly developed the social life of a speaking collective, the greater is the importance attaching, among other possible subjects of talk, to another's word, another's utterance, since another's word will be the subject of passionate communication, an object of interpretation, discussion, evaluation, rebuttal, support, further development and so on. (Dialogic Imagination 337)

The greater the importance, the greater the responsibility: in Dutton's Aurealities, we are pulled into disparate discursive options, aural/oral universes that dialogically interanimate one another, that provide relief and commentary and reflection. We are trained into attention, coaxed into hearing the terrain mapped by discrete voicings, by discourses in concert or conflict. We are dragged off by the ear.

I am positing a conjunction of terms: *dialogic* and *resonant*. The notion of resonance presupposes the *between* of *dia*-logue, the wobble of possibilities that animates our encounters with/in language. This, perhaps, is resonance in its more metaphorical garb, tracking the bloom of activity around the word "which resonates so as to sound not like one word but many" (Bruns 123). And tracking the hum around stylization, too, when a discursive pattern is

distinct enough to sound, and reflexive enough to perform its own echo, to resonate. Tracking, on an ever larger scale, the brush of voicings against one another, Bakhtin's "authentic multi-voicedness," an incessant dialogic force that excites the space *between*, from within the smallest units of linguistic utterance to the colliding or cooperating language habits of a subject (however dialogized) or nation or language family. Versions of excitation, the rattle and hum as language enlivens, rejuvenates itself.

So *resonance* in its metaphorical maneuvers. But resonance embraces also the potential for more literal excitations -- sound waves, sympathetic vibrations, voiced and unvoiced sound -- and this is one of its great advantages, imported into the consideration of poetics. Resonance expands our conceptualizing of the dialogic to accommodate the (necessary, and affective) dialogue between an utterer (or hearer, or reader) and the body registering language: where language and the speaking/hearing/reading body interanimate one another, where one scores the other scoring the first. Orchestration, striations. Voice, perhaps, as it trembles on the verge of voicing.

A bounded space has a particular resonating frequency. Reading for resonance in poetic texts means becoming alert to a proliferation of bounded spaces, echo chambers, all of which excite slightly different wolf notes. The word buzzes with buried antiphonic potential, phonemes bounce off one another. The individual poem describes certain bounds, the book announces

others. Oeuvre, nationality, aesthetic, period, genre, explicit or implicit intertextuality: the possibilities for constituting bounded space extend vertiginously, like the expanding bloom of sound waves. And the text itself cannot claim to situate these various (and arbitrary and shifting) boundaries. The reader receives text into his/her own preconstructed echo chambers, and certain words, phrasings, language habits, generic decisions, stylizations, even visual cues, will set other stored texts and linguistic experience into sympathetic vibration, exciting responses of varying potency and exhilaration and endurance.

Resonance defies what Bakhtin calls *finalization*: it pulls the reader -- by the ear -- into an experience of *free listening*, into the astonishing shimmer of signification. Resonance is that moment of excitation seduced into an endlessly excitable field: the delicate and responsive aural/oral tissues of the reading and listening body.

_____ CHAPTER TWO

Running Interference: Silence and Noise

in Douglas Barbour's "Story for a Saskatchewan Night"

and George Bowering's "Allophanes"

theres nothing more to say

theres more nothing to say
(Barbour, "Story" 13)

A: Is the self always gathering the undone to itself?

B: Yes.

A: No, it is always moving into the other,
removing its clothing as it goes.

(Bowering, "Allophanes" 224)

Music nudges up against language: a perpetual courtship, a border under constant seige. When we acknowledge the complex action of music in language as we speak and hear and read it, when we choose to account for the countervoicing¹ always already present and active in utterance, we access components of linguistic functioning that tend otherwise to be effaced or recuperated under other terms. As Fischlin argues:

The musical elements of utterance define the sonic as opposed to the visual imprint of language. Music, then, as the transient sonic imprint of the logos, is profoundly implicated in the movement that occurs in language toward, around, and away from meaning.

(3)

Reading for the sonic imprint turns the whole reading enterprise on its head, executes a comic somersault that makes everything look (sound) different, unfamiliar, alive with possibility: "Music shapes meaning as an 'otherness' that inheres in spoken language, for language is that which is transformed by utterance into music" (Fischlin 3). Reading musically allows meaning to be *other*, and the landscape is suddenly transformed.

To grant this more abstract dimension of language a performative capacity is radically destabilizing, and fosters a range of response: Fischlin, in his study, traces its deployment in (political) strategies from sweeping trends

¹ Again, I am borrowing Fischlin's term for the dialogic relation within utterance of *logos* and *melos*.

toward universal(izing) harmonization² to pessimism and panic,³ positions generated in defense against an implicit threat. But it should be possible to concede language's musicality a functional potency without enlisting it in defense of some conservative agenda or in proof of a nihilist reading of the world. In a less paranoid contextualizing of language and its effects, in a comic construction that celebrates rather than effaces or dreads the fissures of a language which is necessarily resolutely ambivalent and equi-vocal, the musical *othering* of meaning can become playful and profoundly effective in reconstituting text along different fault lines.

The musical othering of meaning⁴: this might be another way to approach a typically postmodern emptying of significance without surrendering to the crippling pressure of pessimism like Kroker's. As Celeste

² Right back to Plato, a pervasive strategy to neutralize (or at least repossess) the musical countervoice is to posit music as a transcendental signifier for the soul; after that, "[m]usic and the control of the musical elements of speech become representative of a form of political harmonization that universalizes the human condition eradicating the threat of difference" (Fischlin 2).

³ Arthur Kroker and David Cook assume a panic position; they call their The Postmodern Scene "a panic book: panic sex, panic art, panic ideology, panic bodies, panic noise, and panic theory" (i).

⁴ Walter Ong: "music, while it is not inward in the sense of being purely subjective, nevertheless is inward in that, while it speaks, it says nothing -- that is, *no-thing*. Pure music shrugs off all effort at *representation*" ("A Dialectic" 1162). He refers to its "calculated irresponsibility" ("A Dialectic" 1162), which he credits with both its beauty and its disintegrative tendencies. This is perhaps a rather negative take: an irresponsibility toward meaning, especially if calculated and sensitive to its own project, can also open options for signification.

Olalquiaga writes:

the postmodern flattening of meaning does not imply its disappearance but rather a shifting of registers that allows the formation of new ways of signifying. The flattening of meaning is the exhaustion of certain features that were believed to be intrinsic to it -- depth (moving along vertical paradigms that grant a hierarchical position as opposed to moving along a more integrative horizontality⁵), linear causality, univocality -- but which turned out to be dispensable when put to the test of new formations or new modes of analyses. (xvi)

Meaning is not absent, then, from postmodern cultural productions, not absent or obsolete or irrelevant. Rather, it is otherwise configured, in both its inscription and its reception.

When meaning becomes a textual otherness, a shudder runs through the chain of events by which we conceptualize communication. The project of writing may no longer conform to the addressor-addressee model Jakobson spells out (Language in Literature 66), a kind of direct line from sender to receiver, a transmission of sensible -- decodeable -- information. In a

⁵ You could, borrowing from Saussure and Jakobson, refigure this move toward horizontality as a shift from the paradigmatic toward the syntagmatic, from metaphor toward metonymy.

postmodern situation, where the author has been reinscribed as writer⁶ and text is perpetually differing/deferring, the reader assumes a more active role in textual production. Away from passive reception by the addressee, away from a model that leaves the reader "with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text," where "reading is nothing more than a *referendum*" (Barthes, *S/Z* 4). Away from passive consumption and toward active participation in the making of text. Which sends the pulse, the information movement in Jakobson's schema, ricocheting backward as well as forward: the addressee simultaneously an addressor, the message snagged in a scramble of activity from both ends of the line.

Subtle contests of power and authority animate the addressor-addressee axis. In assuming the power of address, an addressor names and (re)locates the addressee, displacing him or her into the position of listener. The *other*, then, supplants and disenfranchises the self. Lyotard: "By turning the I into its you [*toi*], the other makes him- or herself master, and turns the I into his or her hostage" (111).⁷ Something happens, then, in the passage between sender and receiver, something unsettling: the listener's subject position is dispersed,

⁶ And the writer, in turn, as a site of *possibility* rather than *knowledge*. Kristeva labels the writer "neither nothingness nor anybody, but the possibility of permutation from [subject] to [addressee]. . . . He becomes an anonymity, an absence, a blank space" (*Desire in Language* 74).

⁷ Bruns: "The ear gives the other access to us, allows it to enter us, occupy and obsess us, putting us under a claim" (127-28).

and s/he experiences that characteristic "loss of subjectivity and self-possession, belonging to what we hear" that Bruns labels (128). The takeover, which can be abrupt and practically unauthorized, dramatically reconfigures the arrangement of power. Conscripted as addressee, one is robbed of the power of speech, the power of constituting self and world in one's own terms.

Lyotard:

An addressor appears whose addressee I am, and about whom I know nothing, except that he or she situates me upon the addressee instance. The violence of the revelation is in the ego's expulsion from the addressor instance, from which it managed its work of enjoyment, power, and cognition. It is the scandal of an I displaced onto the you instance. (The Differend 110)

The scandal of an I displaced onto the you instance: in/for an instant I am not myself, I cannot speak for myself, I am removed from my hope of enjoyment, power, and cognition. I am, however fleetingly, *other* to you, *other* to myself. I am dispossessed.

Still, subsequent to this (dis)possession by the ear, the subject may assume again the power of address to explain it. "This new phrase is always possible," Lyotard argues, ". . . [b]ut it cannot annul the event" (The Differend 110-111). It cannot annul the moment of scandal, the expulsion of the ego from its position of power, of cognition; speaking its occurrence is not quite equal to mastering it. "The I enclosed within the disposition of itself and of its

world knows nothing about the other and can know nothing about him or her. The appearing of the other is not an event of cognition. But it is an event of feeling" (Lyotard, The Differend 111). The revelation of the other, the other's assumption of the power to displace the first person into the second: this is a moment of interference, an interruption that cannot be understood. When it is rendered as a cognitive construct by the displaced/re-placed subject, the moment is always misrepresented. The moment, and the *I* that speaks it too: the interruption in the subject's power to speak him/herself is not negated by "a phrase in which the I is *I*" (The Differend 111). So reinserting oneself into the addressor instance, asserting one's own *I* back into the discursive context, combats "the destabilization of a knowledge in which the I was *I* (the self itself, its identity)" (Lyotard 111). One can contend with that destabilization, but it can't be recuperated entirely.

Communication, then, actually registers cognitive interference. And this paradox inheres in the reading event as well, where the subject is upended by the writer's/text's assumption of power of address. Even the most classic texts effect "the scandal of an I displaced onto the you instance" (The Differend 110), enlisting a reading body that is reactive, suddenly othered. If a text engages the scandal as part of its mandate, if it is constructed to (re)mark these interruptions of subjectivity,⁸ if it enacts "a shifting of registers" (Olalquiaga

⁸ Lyotard describes "the scrambling of the phrase universe in which *I* is *I*" (112).

xvi) that configures meaning in terms other than depth, linear causality, and univocality,⁹ it is likely to spell an open field where subject and text alike are destabilized, polyvalent and polyphonic. A field of interruption, a field that embraces rather than effaces interference.

Derrida writes, "play is the disruption of presence" (Writing and Difference 292). The scandals that effect communication, then, the perpetually repeating moments of disruption as the subject becomes dissolved into an addressee, are versions of play, challenges to presence (or at least to the singularity of presence, to *identity*). And the series of scandals that effect communication begs translation into the reading event. Except that in the postmodern text -- the text that disallows the reader the "idleness" Barthes describes as the request of the classic text (S/Z 4) -- exactly who adopts what role becomes blurred: the text is never merely a message that travels between a sending author and a receiving reader. The instances of addressor and addressee, to say nothing of the instance of *address*, contaminate one another; they interrupt, they interfere. These instances blur because the postmodern

⁹ It's worth noting that these three qualities Olalquiaga labels as exhausted (xvi) all bolster a monologic subject position. The subject who *speaks* (univocally), who insists on retaining power of address, will depend on a causal model to transform the scandal of displacement into a cognitive construct, neutralizing the threat to his/her substantiality and depth.

project has abandoned certain (structural) imperatives -- those that circulate depth, causality, and univocality -- in favor of a decentered field.¹⁰ Derrida:

This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field . . ., instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. (Writing and Difference 289)

The postmodern text (re)writes a field of play, a playing field. Running interference along the axis of communication, the text interrupting the writer interrupting the reader, the reader interrupting the writer interrupting the text. Away from the originary moment, the center at which "the permutation or the transformation of elements . . . is forbidden" (Derrida, Writing and Difference 279), and into an alchemical wizardry, an endlessly shifting and reconfiguring writing/reading project:

One could say . . . that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which

¹⁰ Olalquiaga describes the postmodern moment as "being profanely ambivalent and ambiguous, rejoicing in consumption and celebrating obsessions, ignoring consistency and avoiding stability, favoring illusions and pleasure" (xi).

supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence -- this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. (Writing and Difference 289)

The sign which occurs *as a surplus*: this could be a sign for writing, as Derrida has teased it out.¹¹ It could as usefully be a sign for reading, at least a reading responsive to what Barthes calls the *writerly* text, a reading that implicates the reader,¹² that shifts his/her position from consumption to production:

the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world . . . is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the

¹¹ Derrida unravels the metaphysical underpinnings of a belief in the interiority of speech as derived from an exteriority of writing, and posits instead one as supplement of another:

the absolute *alterity* of writing might nevertheless affect living speech, from the outside, from within its inside: *alter it*. Even as it has an independent history . . . and in spite of the inequalities of development, the play of structural correlations, writing marks the history of speech. (Of Grammatology 314)

The idea of supplement, he argues, confounds the binaries (exteriority/interiority, speech/writing) that issue from a metaphysics of presence:

Using [such oppositions], one can only operate by reversals, that is to say by confirmations. The supplement is none of these terms. It is especially not more a signifier than a signified, a representer than a presence, a writing than a speech. None of the terms of this series can, being comprehended within it, dominate the economy of *différance* and supplementarity. (Of Grammatology 315)

¹² Derrida: "anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset" (Writing and Difference 279).

plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (S/Z 5)

Barthes probes a reading that merges with a writing, a reading that trips over its own tongue, a reading that effects the scandal of interruption. Entranced by that plurality of entrances, by the stubborn resistance of the text to acquiesce to a singular system, to a *center* in Derrida's figuring of the field: there is nothing "idle" or "intransitive" (Barthes, S/Z 4) about this reading-writer. Still, *active* does not exclude *re-active*, and the experience of reading the writerly text is both initiative and responsive.

The experience of reading the writerly text is also, finally, untellable. Because it is a performance of perpetual displacement, because it enacts the scandal, because it de-scribes the lurch between, the interference of one instance by another, the dissolution of the (reading) subject by the gapped and interfering text. Any telling *about* would be an assumption -- a resumption -- of the power of address, a giving in to the temptation of knowledge, to "repossess[ion] through . . . understanding . . . what dispossesses" (Lyotard, The Differend 110). The temptation of cognition, which necessarily comes after. "The writerly text is a perpetual present," Barthes writes, "upon which no *consequent* language . . . can be superimposed" (Barthes S/Z 5). No commentary can *follow* such a text.

If such a text exists. "[T]he writerly text is not a thing," Barthes claims (S/Z 5), but rather "the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem,

the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure" (S/Z 5). The writerly text is neither a thing nor an ideal toward which a thing aspires. Rather, it is a moment, a receptive moment (which occurs only "very rarely: by accident, fleetingly, obliquely" [S/Z 4-5]) which is always a moment of surprise. It is the moment when the ego is displaced, when the other is present(ed).

Lyotard writes:

The other can only befall the ego, like a revelation, through a break-in. . . . The ego is tempted to know [the break-in] and is tempted by knowledge. But the other, as an exteriority whose reason does not lie within the ego, announces the insufficiency of knowledge. The other announces no sense, it is the announcement, the non-sense. (The Differend 110)

These moments of non-sense that catch us by surprise, textual hiccups interrupting cognition, these moments enact Barthes' seamed discourse with its obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed. (The Pleasure of the Text 6)

The death of language exists as a possibility *within* language, or perhaps more

accurately *at the edge of* language, just as the displacement of an ego as it witnesses the revelation of the other extends rather than cancels the experience of subjectivity. The edges, both conformist and mobile, exist *supplementarily*: their (necessary) edginess undermines any fiction of a center. The point, then, is not that the two are in contention, and one must triumph, but that the two are in *contact*, each performing its particular configurations in/on the face of the other.

I position Barthes' writing on bliss alongside Lyotard's on subjectivity to underscore the complexity that clusters around a decentered construction of communication. Through Lyotard, we track the ego's oscillation in and out of the addressee instance, toward and away from its constitution as an edge, "mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours)" (Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text 6); this problematizes the sender and receiver ends of Jakobson's model considerably, insinuates into their place radically destabilized subjects. If language, as Barthes argues, is similarly unstable, fissured, then the message making its tortured journey between mutually interruptive subject positions is as blurred and decentered as the poles between which it travels.

Yet it is that undecidable zone of contact between seams, where the edges -- of text, of subjectivity -- rub against one another, interrupting and displacing, *interfering*, it is that very ambi-valence which generates energy. "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic," Barthes writes, "it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so" (The Pleasure of the Text

7). In a text, an undecidable message encounters a reader who behaves as a writer, a disruptive text meets a subject who is perpetually oscillating between decision and displacement. Here there is *play*, crackling potential that manifests itself as/in difficulty and desire. The incessant slide between supplements, a floating and vicarious positioning, a glimpse, a rent. Barthes:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue -- this texture -- the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. (The Pleasure of the Text 64)

And the project becomes erotic precisely because of its indeterminacy: reading can be construed as "the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" (The Pleasure of the Text 10) where the reader's certainty about both signification and self simultaneously appears and disappears, appears as it disappears. The metonymic slide, the hovering, the desire.

Hovering acknowledges the potency of those moments when the subject engages in unmaking, plays the disruptions of an opening field that de-scribes both subjectivity and language. Where the death of language is glimpsed,

there can be no settling.¹³ This is a site of excitation -- of language, of the subject encountering language -- but excitation reconfigured: not so much excitation in the additive bloom of resonance, but excitation by rupture, tricks of interference.

Lyotard writes that the other "announces no sense, it is the announcement, the non-sense" (The Differend 110). The textual other, the blank and mobile intrusions that mark the site of (textual) bliss, then, might be located as inscriptions of nonsense. Unintelligibility as revelation. Still, it is somewhat more difficult than you might anticipate to specify announcements of *no sense*, partly because, as Lyotard and Barthes both charge, the language of re-cognition is always consequent and tempted by knowledge. That is, language is tempted to make sense of non-sense.¹⁴

But if we ambush the problem from another positioning, if we reconsider "meaning" as an other inhering in language's trek toward realization

¹³ Derrida: "The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a *floating* one because it comes to perform a *vicarious* function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified" (Writing and Difference 289, my emphases). Supplementarity, unmaking, and desire are interconnected; to speak the profile of any one of them is to configure *différance*. Each performs similarly: each *hovers*.

¹⁴ An alternative Barthes advocates in The Pleasure of the Text is to "enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss" (22).

as/in music,¹⁵ we might label as "announcements of no sense" a text's expressions of *melos*; the interruptive textual events, then, the mobile, blank edges of bliss, would be moments of language's musical functioning, foregrounded into conspicuous performance. It is helpful to remember Frye's distinction of musicality in poetic language: he argues (against the sentimental current) that a "dreamy sensuous flow of sound" is not musical at all, and that, on the contrary,

when we find sharp barking accents, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, and long lumbering polysyllables, we are probably dealing with *melos*, or poetry which shows an analogy to music, if not an actual influence from it. (Anatomy of Criticism 256)

Following Frye, we understand musicality as interruptive, figuring the hiatus that is Barthes' construction of bliss.

The disturbance effected on the face of language by a potency that is not meaning-oriented has been described by Kristeva as the *semiotic*. She argues that poetic language "posits its own process as an undecidable process between sense and nonsense, between *language* and *rhythm* . . ., between the symbolic

¹⁵ My recontextualizing of the musical field both rewrites & perhaps makes sensible Pater's dictum: "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (quoted in Winn 289). Pater's romantic traces, so tellingly insinuated by that *aspiring* vertical axis, I am choosing to reconfigure along a more horizontal axis of intertwined aspects. Countervoicing doesn't imply a hierarchical relation between *logos* and *melos*, so much as a complex dialogic conversational one.

and semiotic" (Desire in Language 135). This is another construction of countervoicing, where the semiotic expresses non-sense. An ear attuned to the semiotic activity of language is likely to hear with more complexity:

a phoneme, as distinctive element of meaning, belongs to language as symbolic. But this same phoneme is involved in rhythmic, intonational repetitions; it thereby tends toward autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a semiotic disposition near the instinctual drives' body; it is a sonorous distinctiveness, which therefore is no longer either a phoneme or a part of the symbolic system -- one might say that its belonging to the set of the language is indefinite, between zero and one. Nevertheless, the set to which it thus belongs exists with this indefiniteness, with this fuzziness. (Desire in Language 135)

Kristeva describes *logos* and *melos* at play in language, displacing, othering, constructing a set which is always already contaminated by indefiniteness, by fuzziness.

Fuzziness recalls the blur and buzz I have labelled resonance. Indeed, the bloom of the semiotic as it overreaches or undermines, as it unsettles the symbolic signification of a word, may express itself as verbal resonance. When we read the inscriptions of aural excitation in a text, when we allow the particular *resonant* configurations of interference, we are alert to the activity of the semiotic. Resonance describes the additive transactions of the semiotic,

thickening and texturing a message, reverberating the sounding board of the reading subject. But the semiotic may also act interruptively,¹⁶ blocking or scrambling the transfer of information between sender and receiver. This kind of *non-sense* has more to do with unintelligibility: it resists the additive enriching of text that resonance performs, opts instead to deploy often elaborate interference patterns.

Reading nonsense as musical trace already insinuates one paradoxical quirk into the works: non-sense, constituted musically, is quite specifically about *sense*, about sensory engagement and response.¹⁷ Sense and non-sense,

¹⁶ I am writing *interruptive* into the place of Kristeva's *eruptive*. Her construction of the semiotic places it both prior to and beneath the symbolic. I am suggesting, with Fischlin, that the two are helplessly entangled, trace the same horizontal pull of language flow.

To understand the semiotic as *eruptive* (Kristeva: "this thrusting tooth pushing upwards before being capped with the crown of language" [Desire in Language 28]) presupposes a hierarchal structuring of consciousness(es) that clings to a psychoanalytic model. It also protects (an essentialist?) *mystery*, and invites a conception of the semiotic as a "music" that bubbles up through language's symbolic operations. This finally reiterates (in a reciprocal configuration) Pater's notion: both constructions posit musical functioning as some magical signification unconstrained by law or system (music as a transcendental signifier), a strategy both dangerous and inappropriate.

I am suggesting, alternatively, that we might read the action of the semiotic as *additive* or *interruptive*, depending on the intelligibility of the signal and its activity along the communication axis.

¹⁷ Here, again, we encounter the habitual devaluing of a body's knowing. *Non-sense, the body*: two of many terms inevitably slotted into the right-hand

despite tricks of habit and usage, suddenly and impossibly converge, fold back upon each other. If you fold them over again, you see that sound in turn is sensible or not, that it spans a spectrum that bleeds into (insensible) absence of sound -- *silence* -- at one end, and at the other into its (unintelligible) hyperpresence -- *noise*. So to locate Lyotard's *announcement of no sense* in a text might be to label the moments where the text is silent or noisy. Because at those moments, the text resists the reader's effort to render it intelligible; it inscribes "the trace of a cut" (Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text 20) which interrupts the press toward intelligibility, the temptation by knowledge.

Silence and noise embody and express interference. It doesn't overtax the imagination to conceive of noise as an interference pattern, an overabundance of information jamming the reception channels. Silence, even though it is typically construed as somehow opposite, is only a more subtly expressed pattern of interference, emerging as nodes where various waves interfere with one another and effect a masking of acoustic activity.¹⁸ As Douglas Kahn expresses it, silence "is constitutive of the presence of waves

position in the binaries which shore up our metaphysical foundations. The characteristic deflation of the body aligns with the devaluation of musicality in utterance, as Fischlin outlines it; he suggests that a complex of attitudes, from a desire for mastery and clarity to a fear of intervention, enforces these habits of constraint. The right side of the binary, after all, tends to be *unruly*.

¹⁸ Except in space. Silence as we experience and understand it is still constituted in terms of (air) waves. The silence of space is a scandal of an altogether different order.

busily cancelling themselves out, not of the absence of waves" (25).¹⁹ In a literal sense, then, silence and noise are constituted as interference. But they are also *read* as interference, entering a text as interventions. They displace the symbolic, you might say, and they displace the assurance of the ego²⁰ too; they register interference both at the textual surface and in the configuration (and comfort) of the reading subject. They effect the scandal of displacement; they break in, announcing no sense.

Unintelligibility as revelation. When you conceive of that as *strategic*, as a position, a poetics a writer (and by extension, Barthes' reader-as writer) might assume, you move toward the poetic universe Douglas Barbour constructs in "Story for a Saskatchewan Night" and the very different poetic universe George Bowering configures in "Allophanes." These two long poems, while distinct from one another tonally, formally, aesthetically, both weave in the unintelligible interventions silence and noise perform on text.

¹⁹ Both silence and noise, then, insinuate presence, perhaps even hyper-presence. And both function interruptively, effecting the cut, the seam, the hiatus. Another fold of the infolded problem, then: where presence figures absence in several guises.

²⁰ I am suggesting the ego of the reading subject (Lyotard's addressor displaced into the addressee moment), but also what you might call the *textual* ego, the text's particular habits that indicate a coherence and (voiced) intention.

How does a writer incorporate the break-in of the other, the revelation Lyotard invokes, without yielding to the temptation of cognition, recuperating the moment within known parameters? It's worth noting, I think, that both Barbour and Bowering choose, in these poems, to write from a displaced position: each locates himself in the addressee instance, each is a listener. Barbour in "Story" listens to the held-in breath of the prairie landscape as it reverberates the storyteller's inability to story it. He locates himself as listener, tracks voicing(s) of/in silence. Bowering, on the other hand, listens in "Allophanes" to a whole plethora of voices, a racket. He writes that the poem began with a sentence heard in the author's head: The snowball appears in Hell every morning at seven. It was said in the voice of Jack Spicer. The author knew something was up, and went deliberately to hear some more voices as best he could, and hurried to write down what they were saying. ("Look into your Ear" 329-30)

The poem, then, for these poets, becomes an inscription of a listening.

Both Barbour and Bowering listen -- and *hear* -- the interference patterns that silence and noise intrude into an aural (and texted) context. They range over and through the complex terrain of the listened-to, tracing textually the listening Barthes characterizes as a listening for indices, for "the *possible* (the prey, the threat, or the object of desire which occurs without warning)" (The Responsibility of Forms 249), and another kind of listening, what Barthes

names a listening for meaning, for "the *secret*: that which, concealed in reality, can reach human consciousness only through a code, which serves simultaneously to encipher and to decipher that reality" (The Responsibility of Forms 249). To put Barthes' distinctions in another language, Barbour and Bowering trace a listening for/to noise and a listening for/to silence.

Barthes understands these modes of listening as stages, but in both "Story" and "Allophanes," listening for the *possible* and listening for the *secret* inform the texts without claiming priority: in the levelling characteristic of postmodern artistic practice, the what-it-is (or -isn't) and the what-it-means inhabit the same textual space in varying degrees of explicitness. And both in turn are problematized, subjected to that Derridean folding which "*lets the voices come back like an endless recording*" (Dissemination 306).²¹ The what-it-is is refracted through extravagances of intertextual (intervocalic) borrowings: Bowering's opening line, for instance, is delivered to him in the voice of Jack Spicer, who may or may not have spoken it; and Barbour listens through barest traces of voices that may not be there at all.

And neither poet will settle the swarming that might finally constitute his text's what-it-means. Not that either one abandons the model altogether. We listen, through the textual noise and silence, for the secret, and we echo, in our listening postures, Bowering and Barbour in theirs. Displaced persons,

²¹ Derrida: "*when the text is interrupted, folds back upon itself, lets the voices come back like an endless recording --*" (Dissemination 306).

engaged in a listening that is, Barthes argues, both

religious *and* deciphering: it intentionalizes at once the sacred and the secret (to listen in order to decipher history, society, the body, is *still*, under various lay alibis, a religious attitude). What is it that listening, then, seeks to decipher? Essentially, it would appear, two things: the future (insofar as it belongs to the gods) or transgression (insofar as transgression is engendered by God's gaze). (The Responsibility of Forms 250)

"Story" and "Allophanes" constitute what you might call a *swarming*: a blur of voicings that provokes the desire for a (hidden) voice to clarify, to *comprehend* them. They provoke the desire for the secret, and they resist it too. Barbour and Bowering provoke and resist; in their hands, the poem becomes a promise that refuses to promise, a Derridean field without center, a supplementary swarming. The religious and hermeneutic impulses registered in each text become, you might say, part of its textual noise.

Still, if I wanted to claim that Barbour's poem is texted in or through silence and Bowering's poem is texted in or through noise, how would I locate the presence and configuration of these patterns of interference? After all, all text is, finally, mute, so no text actually *conveys* silence, no text actually *conveys*

we typically perform in reading poetic texts where the conventions of inscription provide a considerable range of aural information.²⁴ The conspicuously gapped text we encounter in Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" alerts the eye, makes more racket at the site of retrieval; it signifies (conspicuously, *noisily*) the silences that are to punctuate this spoken, or at least evocalized, product.

Poetic texting, intent on transcribing language with overtly aural contours, draws heavily on our ability (our training) and willingness to

²⁴ Roland Posner considers the semiotic codings that are necessary for recognizable language and musical patterning. He argues that the two systems depend on different hierarchies of information:

In classical Western music scores we find the following: (a) pitch is always designated in *absolute* values on a scale; (b) duration is always designated in *relative* values given the type of note. . . ; (c) volume is only designated occasionally, and if so, then *approximately*. . . ; (d) timbre is mostly *not* designated *at all*, and if so, then only through an indication of the type of instrument. . . .

The writing of the Indo-European languages functions analogously to musical notation but treats the four dimensions differently. . . . We thus find the following for texts written in the Roman alphabet: (a) timbre (the phonetic character or manner of articulation of the given syllable) is always designated in *absolute* values by a chain of letters; (b) duration is generally designated in *relative* values, e.g. as long or short vowels (with reference to a certain basic speech tempo never specified in absolute terms); (c) volume is seldom designated, and if so, then only *approximately* with accent marks; (d) pitch (intonation, sentence melody) is generally *not* designated *at all* (and can at most be derived from sentence meaning and accenting). (178)

Posner assumes a traditionalism about scoring, both musical and textual, which limits the range of material his system of structuring will accommodate: he could make little sense of a R. Murray Schafer score, for instance, or a bp Nichol poem. Still, as a sketch of what tends to be saved and what tends to be effaced in the course of our evolving notation strategies, his listing is suggestive.

decipher visual information -- format cues like spacing, layout, font size/style, as well as possibly ink color, page size, design. Perhaps especially contemporary writing, coming out of the expanded visual/aural options codified during the modernist investigation of free verse and montage, and the post-modernist interest in borrowed and recontextualized (aural and visual) texts, exacts a kind of virtuosic readerly activity: we are expected not only to (re)sound the words (or letters), however interiorly, but also to account for other textual information which impinges upon the sound profile we concoct.²⁵

I am, I suppose, confounding -- interfering with -- the conventional take on referentiality that considers signification in terms of the (slippery) relation between word and world, instead (con)figuring referentiality from a different angle, suggesting that the signs on the page refer, however tenuously, to a sounded experience, and to an intellectual experience that refuses to overlook

²⁵ That general reading practice tends to be *unvoiced* further snarls these textual traces of silence and noise. *Silent* reading, we say, and efface the noise crowding around the edges, the interior clatter reading generates. As Cage illustrated so eloquently in his (silent) 4'33", even silence *performed* entails (facilitates?) a shift in consciousness to acknowledge other versions of sound implicit in our aural surround: environmental noise, the sound of our living bodies. Silent reading, and silence read, are not silent either. We register the decay of (suppressed) sounding in our ears, the murmur of our aural environment, internal and external.

both the sensuous contact of the signifier with the body and the ruptures a text of bliss imposes on a reader. Barthes' distinction between *signification*, which realizes the more typical(ly) referential demands on language, and *signifiance*, charts this territory more precisely:

when the text is read (or written) as a moving play of signifiers, without any possible reference to one or some fixed signifieds, it becomes necessary to distinguish signification, which belongs to the plane of the product, of the enounced, of communication, and the work of the signifier, which belongs to the plane of the production, of the enunciation, of symbolization -- this work being called *signifiance*. (quoted in Heath, 10)

In allowing the *moving play of signifiers*, we enter a reading experience with less assurance about what we may discover there. We allow ourselves to be deflected from our pursuit of the *one or some fixed signifieds* by the text's assembled patterns of interference. We place ourselves at the mercy of the text:²⁶ we become its listeners.

We are listeners, then, when/if we actively engage a text: we suffer the scandal of displacement, the break-in,²⁷ and attempt to read the *announcement* which tells us where we are when our cognition cannot quite know.

²⁶ Lyotard: "The other is not master . . . because he or she dominates the I, but because he or she asks for the I" (The Differend 111).

²⁷ Barthes: "The injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another" (The Responsibility of Forms 251).

"Listening," Barthes says, "is *taking soundings*" (The Responsibility of Forms 250). We listen for indices, and we listen for meaning, and our listening is always an interpretive activity. Not the process of criticism that Barthes dismisses as always already effacing the rupture of bliss, but interpretation, our active and careful listening.

When I listen to Barbour, I hear a writer listening to silence. And the silence Barbour records is a (re)sounding silence, a silence that is constructed as both withholding and absence, a silence that assumes the power of address. The *I* the poem registers is displaced into listening, minuscule, teetering on the edge of gaps large enough to swallow it:

coyotes maybe hidden nearby i
 am silent the ghost in
 the shadows waiting to speak but
 i am silent listen
 ("Story" 9)

This might be called, after Barthes, a perforated discourse (The Pleasure of the Text 8). We read the interference at the surface, the noise in the eye, measure the stretch of white that opens up around the tiny *i*. This is the ego befallen by the other, an other it cannot know or name, in an event beyond recognition. *Listen*, instructs this minuscule *i*: *listen* appears as a directive four times in the first section alone.

"Story" enacts a curious schizophrenia as the displaced I both listens and speaks. The poem scores patterns of interference that recall the interference suffered by an I who simultaneously both receives and sends, who interrupts himself in action to tell a story of no story, a narrative that is always reflecting its narrativity. Or its absence of narrativity. Our experience stumbling over fissures in the text recalls another trek, a trek by a miniscule *i* through cracked landscapes, exterior and interior. The I, then, the speaking I as well as the interpreting I,²⁸ is always oscillating between displacement and replacement, between the moment of scandal when the ego is lost and the moment of recovery when the ego acquiesces to temptation by knowledge. That the writer would assume power of address to speak the loss of power of address, though: this is one of the ways "Story" inscribes its own interference.²⁹

In Barbour's text, the speaking of a loss of speaking ghosts the white spaces that stretch our waiting eyes (ears):

i said
listen/
or look

²⁸ The interpreting I includes, I would argue, both the miniscule *i* inside the poem who comments on its own entanglement in making the story, and the reading *I* who encounters and performs the poem at another remove.

²⁹ Writing, then, as *communication*, enacts a series of displacements, the teller befalling the receiver. But when the teller effaces his/her power to tell, the dynamics along the sender-receiver line shift, and a model of usurpation is replaced by a more open (playing) field. A wedding guest could engage or disengage the ancient mariner's story in this configuration: both would recognize their implicit involvement in the politics of exchange that comprises story.

its all around you
 all those stories you
 want told
 or it does

listen

: one moon only
 a howling below

all that empty filling
 with the stories we dont believe
 we can tell

& we re telling them
 ("Story" 14)

Barbour's attention to the scripting of this text makes the white space powerfully audible -- "listen/ or look" -- and we begin to understand the text as one material permeating another. The white, then, is no longer invisible: it becomes part of the map, expressive, directive. This is our training, our ear/eye training, in Barbour's text. And it means that by the time we piece together "all that empty filling" we understand it as something other than *space* that goes unspoken: we are playing with possible speakings (*all that empty; all that, empty; all that, empty, filling*) of what will remain stubbornly elusive.

Barthes writes:

If you hammer a nail into a piece of wood, the wood has a different resistance according to the place you attack it: we say that wood is not isotropic. Neither is the text: the edges, the seam, are unpredictable. (The Pleasure of the Text 36)

Unpredictable, beyond the reader's best guess. The seams, the cracks and fissures in Barbour's text, are conspicuous. Like the hiatus that opens up *we re telling* ("Story" 14). This is how this text works: we are always unsettled, fidgeting in white space to which we are suddenly accountable. "Story" enters its own dialogue with silence, bumping up against or leaping over the gaps and fissures, registering the interference:

it didnt hurt	
you dont have to say	
anything you	say will be held against you
mustnt cry	all that pain
	you cry why
	("Story" 16)

You read, *you mustnt cry*; you read, *anything you say will be held against you*. Or perhaps more accurately, if you dare to perform your own displacement, to resist the through-line that effects language as (only) an agent of cognition, you read,

anything	you	say
----------	-----	-----

and let the silence register, let it become palpable, let it assume power of address. This is the scandal folded over upon itself: the ego expelled by an other whose power of address is a withholding.

& that is what it wont tell
 & that is what it cant tell
 & that is what it
 tells you

that horizon
 split with light
 a way off

silence

an abundance of
 absence
 you know

("Story" 16)

As "Story" charts its inability to tell, or perhaps more precisely the incapacity of language for telling, the textual white space gradually takes on increasingly complex dimensions. We read it *speaking* -- between words, between columns -- a discrete voice in an increasingly polyphonic project. The gap, then, reconstituted as silence, is pulled into the play of voices as a functional, performative, active participant. Silence as performative, and not empty but full: it speaks of *abundance* rather than lack. The holes in Barbour's perforated discourse, then, are not blank; rather, they build white noise into the text, scramble our reception. They interfere.

So if Barbour's "Story" is finally about silence, about the story not told, the story of no story --

the sky opening
 the land the land the sky

they keep repeating they
 keep repeating they
 have nothing to say &
 they say that they
 say we say
 theres nothing here
 can you hear it

("Story" 13)

-- it is also, ironically, a noisy text. Noisy to the eye which encounters the visual interference of fractured and scattered lines, discontinuous columns of text. But noisy also to the ear which hears all these words endlessly evoking a lack of words. Barbour translates the abundance of absence, sketches plentiful black letters onto an endless whiteness; he creates a noisy text about silence, about nothing. This text that comprehends -- that *plays* -- the filial relations of silence and noise, comes to script one version of interference as evocative (indicative?) of the other. On occasions, the transference is audacious:

nothing to say
 nothing to say
 nothing to say
 nothing to say
 nothing to say
 ("Story" 17)

Barbour folds metalingual impulse into phatic utterance, folds the text back on itself, folds its irony out of existence; he performs the interruption that hollows a new discursive space, a speaking space of no speaking.³⁰ And the

³⁰ Lyotard explores the subtle territory where one "family of phrases," one mode of discourse, assumes some descriptive or interpretive power over another:

What is truly abstract is to raise the question of the abyss . . . such that it would have to be either filled in or hollowed out. Now, there is no abyss, as in general no limit, except because each party . . . grants itself the right of inspection over the other's argumentation, and so extends its pretensions beyond its borders. (The Differend 123)

Barbour uses excessive repetition and abundance of signifiers to denote an opposite (an-other) effect; he performs -- and we perform after him -- what Lyotard calls a *passage*:

It is because he attempts this passage that he discovers its impossibility. . . . It is then that he comes to use a mode of

hollowing in no way neutralizes its impact. As Barthes argues,

the word can be erotic on two opposing conditions, both excessive: if it is extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected. . . . In both cases, the same physics of bliss, the groove, the inscription, the syncope: what is hollowed out, tamped down, or what explodes, detonates. (The Pleasure of the Text 42)

Barbour, in "Story," opts for the energy generated by extravagant repetition, of a word or phrase, and more abstractly too as the whole poem reiterates its own incapacity to speak its speaking.

"Story for a Saskatchewan Night" is oddly disarming, performing its magic through discursive maneuvers that claim the performance is impossible. In section after section, Barbour invokes the prairie's (unintelligible) voices and voicings; stories of coyotes, ghosts, cowshit, flames, sky, and train -- stories which are only ever known as *potential* stories -- appear in the first section alone. This deceptively understated landscape holds too many stories, or none:

passage which is no longer simply the extension of a legitimation from one realm to another, but the establishment of a differential for the respective legitimations. (The Differend 123).

These (attempted) passages, then, and our awareness that interference is necessarily concomitant, are part of a *humane* practice of reading and thinking/knowing. Away from legitimation, and toward exploration. All of which affirms, I think, the value of a reading/writing which insists on the displacement of the reading subject, and a resistance to his/her ingrained habits of recuperation that perpetuate certain discursive hegemonies.

i have to tell you there
 is no story tonight there
 is no story here listen
 there are all too many stories
 clamouring &
 i have to tell you i
 cant tell them
 ("Story" 9)

Barbour's strategy in "Story" is, you might say, apostrophic, marking both "invocation and turning away" (Budick and Iser, "Introduction" xvi): it inscribes the mobile edge that names too many stories, or no stories at all. It sends itself, a barrage of words resisting their own becoming, into a space left awkwardly vacant. The apostrophe marks the spot of the absent, saves the place of the silent. Sandford Budick writes:

Apostrophe . . . carve[s] out an empty space so that appropriation can -- *must* -- occur. What is then appropriated and reappropriated is the empty space -- negativity -- itself, which however, can never be made into anyone's substantialist message, anyone's possession. (319)

Barbour appropriates and reappropriates the empty space in the course of "Story":

each time they
 repeat it each time
 i believe it i believe
 theres nothing more to say

 theres more nothing to say
 ("Story" 13)

Over and over, *nothing more* transforms itself into *more nothing*, dispersed and

abundant. Absence, then, becomes an inscription of possibility, neither possessed nor dispossessed; nothing slides into multiple speakings which may be heard or not, but whose place will be saved. *No-thing* gets reread to efface its singularity.³¹ This abundant silence interferes with our reclamation project: we cannot listen for the *secret* (Barthes, The Responsibility of Forms 249) in a text like "Story" because the secret is become so dispersed as to be ubiquitous. And still unnameable. Because the prairie hides not an ultimate story, its secret, but a wealth of tellings which may not be translatable. The field, to shift back toward Derrida again, is a field of play, and we engage the interruptive activity of supplementary traces. To listen for the secret is to misunderstand the constitution of a field that resolutely counters the press to discover and name a center which will anchor it.

³¹ Marking *nothing* as somehow critical to how we conceive our somethings is reminiscent of the project of negative theology Derrida describes:

"negative theology" has come to designate a certain typical attitude toward language, and within it . . . an attitude toward semantic or conceptual determination. Suppose, by a provisional hypothesis, that negative theology consists of considering that every predicative language is inadequate to the essence, in truth to the hyperessentiality (the being beyond Being) of God; consequently, only a negative ("apophatic") attribution can claim to approach God, and to prepare us for a silent intuition of God. ("How to Avoid Speaking" 4)

Derrida resists the charge of negative theology as a name for his work, arguing that negative theology merely repeats, under a different designation and configuration, metaphysical habits of organization. Nothing becomes reified. Because Derrida resists the possibility of center or origin, his conception of the negative is dispersive.

Barbour performs a Derridean labelling of absence: nothing is not located, and therefore becomes capacious and multivalent.

Interference, in a way, is the point of Barbour's poem. He respects the otherness of a landscape, agrees to grant power of address to an other that may resist speaking at all. In the schizophrenic pull, the writer both records and reenacts the scandal of his displacement: inscribing interference into his text, he resists the finalization that inheres in the temptation toward knowledge, he resists that legitimation of one phrase family, as Lyotard would say. And this, perhaps, is Barbour's generosity. His text is finally only a story *for*, a gift that plays backward and forward, toward again the context of its generation, and out into the newer terrain of a receiving subject who will reconceive the place and its abundant silence. The poet declines the power and certainty of telling in favor of the more radical destabilization of listening. Eschews the powers of signification for the very other pleasures of signifi-ance. As Barthes writes:

Signifi-ance is a *process* in the course of which the "subject" of the text, escaping the logic of the *ego-cogito* and engaging in other logics (of the signifier, of contradiction), struggles with meaning and is deconstructed ("lost");³² *signifi-ance* . . . is thus precisely a work: not the work by which the (intact and exterior) subject might try to master the language . . . but that radical work (leaving nothing intact) through which the subject explores –

³² Lyotard: "Saying yes to the gift of the undecipherable message, to the election that the request is, the (impossible) alliance with the other who is nothing, signifies the assumption of the I's fracture" (The Differend 112).

entering, not observing -- how the language works and undoes him or her. (Barthes, quoted in Heath 10)

The writing, then, the writing the writer embraces, is an enactment of interference: it engages the blank and mobile edge where the death of language is glimpsed, interrupting the subject's coherence and mastery. The work of writing, the work of *reading*, is a work of subjectivity, tracing the modes and expressions of language's revelation as other, allowing the self to be undone.

Undone: unfastened, unfinished. The writer and the reader undertake a different pact once there can be no last word; they agree to play (in) the confusion of supplementary traces. Everything, in a sense, comes undone: the subjects, writer and reader, who counterbalance the communication teeter-totter, the text that travels between. When there is no center to be named and claimed, mastery -- a writer's (or reader's) subjugation of language, language's (referential) mastery of a world external to it -- is not only inappropriate, it is impossible.

In "Story for a Saskatchewan Night," Barbour encounters a landscape that resists (his) language: already something is undone. And rather than taking it over, planting the flag of the colonizer, naming and speaking it into existence, Barbour inscribes its resistance. His poem, then, *responds to* rather

than *speaks for*.³³ Nothing is replaced -- or maybe more accurately *nothing* is *not* replaced. The structures of exchange are radically altered in a conceptual space that is constructed without a center: when the material to be transferred is no longer discrete and coherent -- Barbour's prairie's story -- and the sender and receiver are dispersed as well, a model based on exchange value won't suffice. Suddenly, our evaluative practices become inadequate to the (new) task; we can't ask the same questions of texts that are constituted in the act of production -- in the interactive interruptions of sender and receiver and text -- that we might ask of texts that have been constructed as discrete units, as products. When a text refuses to speak the last word, it repositions itself as additive, supplementary. It can only ever enter an economy which overflows itself, an excessive, abundant economy. Expression in this reconfigured model is offered rather than intruded into a zone of encounter: the dispersed subject who resists uttering the final word, who relinquishes power of address even while engaging in the communicative act, enters into a relation valued not in terms of exchange but in terms of supplementarity. S/he offers speaking as a gift, an expression that does not constrain the other to respond in kind or

³³ After the erosion of the concept of a center/origin, substitution, replacing one thing with another, becomes increasingly problematic. Olalquiaga notes the shift in postmodern production from "vertical paradigms that grant a heirarchical position" to "a more integrative horizontality" (xvi). The field is constituted additively, metonymically.

degree.³⁴ Barbour extends his poem -- toward the place, toward the reader -- as an offering, a story *for*; he resists the temptation of replacing one thing with another, of inserting his voice in the apparently abdicated position of the voice of the other. He "say[s] yes to the gift of the undecipherable message" (Lyotard, The Differend 112), and offers a gift of his own speaking in return.

Barbour's project is seeded in excess: in an "abundance of / absence" ("Story" 16) that informs that particular "plenitude" ("Story" 14) of the prairie, in the extravagant gesture of the poet writing and writing to tell "no story at all" ("Story" 10). He gives us nothing to hold onto, partly because he exceeds all the limits of the thing he presents: we cannot hold it because it is not a discrete object but an interference pattern, a scrambled conglomerate of silence and noise. And rather than represent the other, it adds itself to the other and the other's (re)configurations, it allows itself as surplus.

Barbour dares the gratuitous act, and confounds those systems of legitimation that Lyotard invokes. Entering an economy of gratuitous expression rather than exchange has implications for the politics of his writing as well: he dares to write the prairie in ways that both summon and frustrate a lineage that could provide legitimation. His poem opens with an epigraph

³⁴ Bataille explores the notion of potlatch which is also based on a conjunction of gift and excess; it works within an economy of exchange, though, in establishing a precedent which must be met or exceeded by the receiver:

Potlatch excludes all bargaining and, in general, it is constituted by a considerable gift of riches, offered openly and with the goal of humiliating, defying, and *obligating* a rival. (147)

from Kroetsch's Crow Journals, a maneuver that would apparently locate an ancestry with a certain currency value. Still, he quotes Kroetsch lamenting his own silence in the face of the unspeakable landscape and registering story in the ghost of his father. The epigraph, then, roots the speaking of the othered landscape in a common/communal exchange that is informal, il-legitimate: the articulating parent -- the authorization -- is not a (self-conscious) artistic lineage but a construction where all tellings are somehow gratuitous, an oral universe with its splendid excesses.

If Barbour inscribes the unlanguage space of the prairie in "Story for a Saskatchewan Night," George Bowering takes on a much different project in "Allophanes": his encounter is more explicitly textual, he writes and rewrites the textured languages of multiple voicings. He writes the noise. You might venture to call Bowering's project urban, where the *natural* is a well-worded landscape, a space written all over by discourses of every imaginable character, high and low and silly and serious, mundane and metatextual. Where Barbour faces an other who resists language, whose power of address is swallowed in silence, an other whose being intrudes nonlingually into a lingual space, Bowering engages an other who is already spoken/speaking, a plural other who is constituted in words. Barbour listens and hears no words; Bowering

listens and hears all kinds of words.

Bowering's project is transcriptive: he hears and captures a range of speaking. Consciously (and modestly) positioned as a listener, he welcomes the animation of his acoustic space, the grand conversation built of interruptions and infiltrations. He listens and collects. He is alert to the possibilities that inhabit the scrambling along the communicative axis -- "If you speak in tongues this trip, companion, / may I listen in ears?" ("Allophanes" 209) -- and also admits his participation in a project of transcribed interference: he is the active listener, the arranger, the one who scores the noise. "Allophanes" bulges with extravagant surplus, so many voicings, so many threads to chase and (un)tangle. So much noise. And the poem's energy is generated by these many voices rubbing against one another. Here is the whole of section vi:

I havent got a Dante's chance in Hell.

That snowball's got red stitches
 & it's imitating God.
 Tells me from third to home
 is The Way Down And Out.

(Aw poet, just tell us how you
 felt about something.)

What?
 You dont want the untying
 that frees the mind?

Dionysus is the power in the tree.
-- like a Louisville Slugger.

There is safety in derision,
read either way.

Sacredness of the act of thought
is transferred to the record, books made from trees,
& there it is, unmelting literature.

(Oedipus at Kelowna)

I woke to find the others gone,
six men working round the camp,
& I alone inside the tent,
I alone to meet the boss.

I'm too far north to run into the wood
where wisdom floods out work & fear.
(*"Allophanes"* 211-12)

Bowering transcribes noise, and he generates it too in his readers: we puzzle through the dramatic lurches in tone and vocabulary and discourse and subject matter as one utterance collides with the next; we wonder about how to read the contradictions, the non-sequitors, the strangely interruptive inflated/deflated diction. We register, then, the noise of the text, the lingual noise, and the interpretive noise we add to it ourselves as we attempt to read through, to make sense of it.

"Allophanes" tenders Lyotard's announcement of no sense, but in a way distinct from Barbour's: *"Allophanes"* foregrounds all the cracks between discourse, figures them materially, in the visual and semantic leaps the text

imposes. Which isn't to say for a moment that the poem is a jumble. It isn't. It *is* rashly discontinuous, and it enhances the interruptions by flaunting the possibility that they may be resolved, if we can only conceive of a pattern elaborate enough to contain them.³⁵ The racket of incessant difference in Bowering's text becomes audible in its interruptions. An image will appear and then surprisingly, reappear, a hint of clarity in the midst of cacophony. The snowball in hell works this way: after opening the poem, it appears again in various permutations, often as itself, and sometimes with the red stitching of a baseball ("Allophanes" 211), as a ball of ice cream ("Allophanes" 215), or a lightbulb ("Allophanes" 217); and it insinuates itself into other contexts too, implicated in snow castles ("Allophanes" 206), St. Arte's "snow white skirt" ("Allophanes" 210), "the word made white & melting" ("Allophanes" 218). It figures even the inside-out dream that impels men to dynamite mountains in an effort to construct "a perfect smooth black orb" ("Allophanes" 222).

Snow and cold and hell, construed both seriously and frivolously, track

³⁵ Again, we encounter Culler's argument about the conservatism of recuperative reading strategies which insist on totalizing frameworks, even if they are conceived in the negative. He writes:

Those negative totalizing frameworks offer escape from the more banal and unsettling predicament of confronting an endless series of memories that cannot be integrated or -- to move from the situation of the speaker to that of the reader -- of coming upon potential patterns, hearing echoes, without being able to decide whether they signify or not. ("On the Negativity of Modern Poetry" 207)

Bowering's poem, while it teases with the possibility of escape from the noise, confronts the reader with that *banal and unsettling predicament* of an undecideable, undecipherable reading.

their way through "Allophanes." Still, it would be dangerous to say that they function as motifs, effecting a thematic coherence. Because the text is constructed on radically different principles. McCaffery suggests that the snowball is "both the site and series of fetishistic duplications" (137):

It is of the nature of the fetish . . . to detach itself from its origins and to re-occur in obsessive transformations.³⁶ Spicer's sentence is motivated as an object-choice onto which are projected numerous micro-discourses, phrasings, changes, ideations, propositions and questions, all compulsively repeated and reinscribed. The snowball in hell is a contaminated and contaminating image, entering the poem as a fold in utterance and instantly problematizing . . . the work's signifiatory ground.

³⁶ In a curious convergence, Olalquiaga names the prevalence of obsessive compulsive disorders in postmodern experience:

compulsive repetition usually implies a lack of resolution between self and space that produces an overlapping of the self onto space. . . . The obsessive compulsive person gets stuck in time, which repeats itself as a futile gesture of imitation caught in the twilight zone between the organism and its setting. An artificial fulfillment of space, obsessive repetition is at the core of the process of simulation in which postmodern culture is engaged. It is not by chance that just when the body is struggling to survive referential loss, obsessive compulsion disease and its bodily fixation should emerge so dramatically. (7)

Such distrust of one's spatial boundaries is both appeased and aggravated by simulation and repetition which underlie much postmodern production. Simulation and repetition intrude versions of noise into the interpretive act; they become dangerous to the self when one is unable to accommodate their interference patterns. When one is untrained in approaching the writerly text, you might say, when one is unwilling to consider the implications for subjectivity of radical art-making.

(137)

A contaminating image: the snowball infects the poem, rearranges other material to carry its stamp. Or rearranges itself to carry the stamp of other material. Because it is dispersive, accommodates notions of whiteness, and hell, and play. It is other, and the other's other. It is the moment of interference, the blank which is not blank, the glimpse of dissolution.

And the snowball is only a conspicuous example of the way the voices in this text stage their interference with one another. On a small scale, voices clash into one another and perform similar contaminations: the snowball's red stitches ("Allophanes" 211), for instance, link up with the stitching of patchwork quilt colors in the previous section. Sometimes these links expose the blatant transformations that keep upending the poem. "Somewhere in the world you could have a green rose," a voice muses ("Allophanes" 237), and soon after we stumble across:

The blue fell,
the green rose

& I was prest between.
("Allophanes" 241)

Threads of language, from the most simple to the wildly elaborate, wind and knot through "Allophanes." They keep insisting that text is textual, that its referentiality and its logic are necessarily textual too, and our reading can never be about neutralizing the boiling excess by specifying some overarching structural imperatives.

Bowering writes a baffled text. He writes a text that is not about to clarify itself ("Literary deciphering is not clarified butter" ["Allophanes" 209]), that refuses to collapse its discontinuities for anyone's comfort. And he writes a text that *has* baffles -- noise walls, interference producers -- built into it. The writer, then, constructs a text that even s/he may not be able to read, if reading is considered a project of making sense. Because there is, finally, a way in which the textual conflagration is senseless, and a way in which the writer's responsibility is to resist the seductive pull of organizing structures which falsely represent an experience of the textual world by implying an ultimate order, the dream of completeness. A sensible text -- a text whose interference can be recuperated as somehow expressive of an omnipotent consciousness -- is finally a text with a center that holds. It is not a text that keeps glimpsing the death of language.

Bowering's text frustrates our desire for order and sense because it apprehends a (textual) world after the center has been blasted out of existence. The world of "Allophanes" is a world where all things appear, or all things are only appearances;³⁷ it can never escape from its (mis)readings: it is a textual

³⁷ Bowering:

Allo means all. Phanes means appearances. The poem tries not to get one without the other. The scientific usage of the term attends the shifting colours of mineral formations, such as stalactites, lights in a cave.

world after dispersal, after Babel, after a confidence in a single speech has become impossible. And still it is a textual world construed not in mourning for a lost center, but in celebration of found opportunity:

Dr Babel contends
about the word's form, striking
its prepared strings
 endlessly, a pleasure
moving rings outward thru
 the universe. All
sentences are to be served.
 ("Allophanes" 205)

When all sentences are served, a text is necessarily fractured, and requires exertion from a reader. This is the writerly text, where the reader is challenged to credit the interference, to be frustrated by the rents in the tissue. The radical discontinuities in "Allophanes" keep blocking the reader's attempts at *comprehending* this text, at encompassing it in an act of cognition. "Allophanes" confounds the temptation to knowledge. As well, it frankly announces the limits of its own knowledge:

(Shit, shore up the fragments
for yourself, dont expect
a fullness here, I'm only
one pair of ears.)
 ("Allophanes" 239)

It labels the limits of its knowledge, and the limits of its function too: as transmitter, the writer can access only so much material, can only screen and

The word could also be translated as those things which are other than what they at first appear to be, all taken together. ("Look into your Ear" 329)

sort and reiterate so many voices; the interpretive responsibility rests always with the receiver. Not that the writer, then, becomes an innocent party in the making of text. In adopting a listening posture, Bowering short-circuits any claims to textual *creation*, but he is evident in the text as the transcriber of the voices: he arranges the fractured pieces of text so that they both suggest and frustrate our habitual interpretive patterns. He teases us with textual echoes and alignments, and then inundates with interference the small islands of sense we create in the course of our reading.³⁸ He places the baffles, you might say, he arranges the text so that it will perform its dance of resistance. He saves the noise.

"Allophanes" is marked over with the traces of request -- "Aw poet, just tell us how you / felt about something" ("Allophanes" 211) -- which announce a dynamic between a sender and receiver in this poem.³⁹ The confusion of a reader approaching an altered playing field with unfamiliar rules enters the text as part of its polyvalency; "Allophanes" writes in difficulty. Exchange, the exchange that defines the communicative act, is insinuated into the foreground.

³⁸ McCaffery, reading the constellations of images that "Allophanes" both posits and frustrates, illustrates the impossibility of a "*clean* structuralist reading" of Bowering's poem: "one set of oppositions erupts inside the other and proliferates a carcinoma of highly local and ludic meanings" (138). Bowering purposefully intrudes interference into the nascent interpretive structures we invent as we read.

³⁹ Lyotard: "For the one who reads is one who requests, one who calls" (*The Differend* 113). To write an interference pattern, however, is to name the request and actively refute its obligations. It is to disturb the communicative link at another location.

And if the writer is not quite sender (just because the writer is not quite *the writer*, Bowering is and is not Bowering within the text's own logic of dismemberment), still he acts as the focus of locution, channelling the textual energy toward confluence with the textual noise of its retriever/receiver. The writer acts as sender, then, but actively stymies the patterns of exchange that characterize the communicative act: the reader is displaced not so much by the sender's expropriation of his/her subject position as by the sender's refusal to insert some (coherent) self into the place of the expelled ego. The scandal of displacement, then, is effected at another remove, as the reader is overtaken by a sender who is willfully indiscrete, and a message that is monstrous. To read a text like "Allophanes" is to court catastrophe,⁴⁰ to absorb into the texture of your own (tenuous) subject-position the lurch of discontinuity.⁴¹

Bowering's text is scandalous partly because he dares to be impertinent. Lippy and bold and irreverent -- "(That him / with the / big dick?)" ("Allophanes" 233) -- and superfluous too. Entering a context that embraces a "postmodern flattening of meaning" (Olalquiaga xvi), he spells out a text with

⁴⁰ McCaffery: "Mathematics holds the fold to be one of the simplest of the seven elementary *catastrophes*. (A catastrophe is a discontinuity or instability in a system)" (136). Here again we encounter Derrida, surprisingly, who names the interruption of the fold.

⁴¹ McCaffery considers *catastrophe* in "Allophanes" in terms of the interruptions effected by non-phonetic events in the text. The intrusions of "this *other* script" (136) he marks include other alphabetic systems and pictographic writing. Other "catastrophic foldings" (136) occur in the text too, in the larger interference patterns that keep the text from coalescing into a sensible product.

a distinctively spacious character. You might call it *dispersed*, but "Allophanes" is not *scattered*, and not *scatterbrained*. It thrives on its impertinence, the way it interrupts expectations, interfering, reorienting. The implications of signifying shift perceptibly once one enters a levelled field that refuses a center: gestures, textual or non-, are always already both pertinent and impertinent. A textual construct, then, may be suffused with significance or emptied of it, and the constituents play more freely along the horizontal axes: it is increasingly difficult (and more *impertinent* too) to assign value according to our old habits of reading. Bowering effects a move toward the "integrative horizontality" Olalquiaga articulates (xvi), and makes a text that is comfortable with the collisions of *serious* and *silly*, that even causes those distinctions to falter and collapse.

It suddenly means that anything can belong in a poem. Nothing -- or everything -- is impertinent. From some perspectives, this appears to denote a state of crisis; from another, an opening, access to other potential resources of expression and power. Whichever reading, the old values of depth and originality are awkwardly inept⁴² in speaking toward these other textual constructions. Olalquiaga lays out this ground:

The current crisis of representation . . . implies not only

⁴² I would suggest that even though we all struggle toward a vocabulary that can accommodate postmodern cultural production, we remain hampered by the residue of old systems of valuation: we don't know, quite, how to process and evaluate other more radical artistic expressions.

disillusionment with progress, originality, and formal experimentation but also a reconsideration of all they excluded. It follows that copy, simulation, and quotation are raised to a new level of interest, representing a different experience of art and creativity. In postmodern culture, artifice, rather than commenting on reality, has become the most immediately accessible reality. (52)

If artifice becomes the reality we access, a text that advertises its interference patterns becomes, in an odd slide, functionally referential again. It speaks the life that surrounds it, the texted urban landscape. It *speaks* rather than speaks *about*,⁴³ which considerably realigns its functioning. Olalquiaga:

Fakery and simulation were present in modernism as aesthetic means. They had a function, as in the reproduction of consumer society's alienation in Andy Warhol's work. In postmodernity, there is no space for such distances: fake and simulation are no longer distinguishable from quotidian life. The boundaries between reality and representation, themselves artificial, have been temporarily and perhaps permanently suspended.⁴⁴ (52)

⁴³ Here again, we encounter the reluctance of one text to supplant another that we noted earlier in Barbour. This, it seems to me, is one of the characteristics of a textuality that cleaves to the politics of the open field.

⁴⁴ When the boundaries between reality and representation, the boundaries that delimit the self, are suspended, the environment becomes exclusively interactive. Interference becomes a way of signalling our own presence and

Quotidian life has a haphazard quality about it: textual and non-textual expressions, ranging broadly in styling and intensity, converge with no design to provide interpretive grounding. In "Allophanes," all these discursive options bang into one another, and we are constantly at the mercy of a text that parades its excesses unapologetically.

Have a seat on my language,
& here we go,

lecherously, thru the flowing world
of Hera's clitoris.

("Allophanes" 209)

Reading becomes a giving over, and even when we stumble over fragments that invoke Eliot, or references that implicate bp Nichol, our project is not to (re)assemble a meaningful, *sensible* text from the rubble, but to enter the zone of interference, recognize not what or where these prior texts are, not credit them somehow with privileged status, but comprehend the interactive drama of a textual milieu where discrete texts -- original or simulated -- have entered a textual body, accessible and responsive. The pleasure of recognition intrudes into the text as pleasure of recognition, not as some key to unlocking

our active engagement with the other, text or person. Rereading presence as interference helps sidestep the metaphysical trap: presence can be an indication, however evanescent, of engagement in the world by a subject whose coherence is always variable. And the body reenters the picture as a locus upon which the patterns of interference play themselves out.

significance. Allusiveness gets resorbed in pastiche, and we read not so much for source⁴⁵ as for textual interpellation.

For a writer, a text that tracks interference allows much more to live within its (artificial) boundaries. Partly because the writer is no longer positioned in mastery over his medium -- "All / sentences are to be served" ("Allophanes" 205) -- and writes instead the encounter of language and subjectivity, the infiltration of consciousness by the infinite variety of discursive options, and the mutual infiltration of language by structures of consciousness. Given that latitude, language assumes its own strange animation. And in an interference text, nothing need be rejected because it is disruptive (of tone, structure, ideological positioning); any textual experience, overheard or pirated or faked, enters the living tissue of language and text.⁴⁶

Bowering's text makes room. His particular "intertext does not comprehend only certain delicately chosen, secretly loved texts, texts that are free, discreet, generous, but also common, triumphant texts" (Roland Barthes 47). His text allows free play of the clichéd and common. And in the process, he expands the idea of intertextuality: he moves away from a source-based

⁴⁵ The whole notion of source becomes a blurred proposition in a context in which simulation is indistinguishable from life. Anything is viable.

⁴⁶ This is not to say that a writer who locates interference as integral to textual production will include anything and everything in his/her text. A text shuttling across its wrinkled terrain of quotation and fakery will have a character of its own, a character shaped by its particular patterns of interference.

model, and introduces instead the possibility that a textual pattern may interrupt itself even as it emerges from the textual fabric. Inter-text on the fold, you might say, text as it interferes with itself, mutating its sources into unrecognizability. In this intertextual neighborhood, the snowball which appears at "every morning at seven" ("Allophanes" 205) hardly has "a Dante's chance in Hell" ("Allophanes" 211).

All sentences are to be served: there is a certain responsibility implicit in writing that serves language, a discipline and commitment to the range of possibility *all sentences* might prescribe. In "Allophanes," Bowering serves his sentences -- pays his dues -- by charting the floating boundaries of a textual territory that becomes, in the process, noisily infinite.⁴⁷ He hears his sentences as they are delivered: he is to figure a way into/through language, religion, philosophy, (poetic) tradition, play, in a context that will still embrace clichés and impressions, energy and confusion and great good humor. He must be able to run translations across diction gradients which dissolve as he approaches them. He must be able to say:

⁴⁷ Derrida: "This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite. . ." (Writing and Difference 289).

Being ventures us. A stolen base
wasnt there before you reacht it.
("Allophanes" 206)

or

The artist has disappeared,
he is standing silent before God.

Wha'd you say? asks the latter.
("Allophanes" 239)

He must be able to comprehend writing and religion and alchemy and baseball
all within the same context, allowing these sentences to serve themselves and
each other as well.

In the process, something very complex and curious occurs. The
collision of the mundane with the serious effectively desacrelizes our cultural
icons: religion, philosophy, art. God mutters in the vernacular, and "Ideas fall,
/ peanut shells / blown by passing vehicles / along the gutter" ("Allophanes"
231). Inquiry, then, assumes a different cast:

Does not the eye altering alter all?

It is a spilled ice cream ball,
kick it to hell & Gone,⁴⁸
& turning the cone over,
place it on your head.

⁴⁸ In Bowering's overturning of structures of privilege, *hell* loses its proper noun status and is superceded by *Gone*: this could serve as an iconographic moment in the poem, especially since the emptying out that *Gone* implies is textured by the play of the living subject who wears a dunce cap to stay aboveground. Bowering's project is animated by the excess and upending that imbues the comic turn of text.

Stay aboveground that way.

You get a head-ache &
germs scatter to the ends of the earth,

Oh sages standing in God's holy shit.
("Allophanes" 215)

Bowering does not shy away from the impertinence of inquiry in a levelled landscape, and this is partly what makes "Allophanes" an unusual poem: it refuses to be glib even as it refuses the weighty presuppositions of its more metaphysical and religious discourses. Its strategies of importation *desacrelize* but don't *neutralize*. Which means that the poem has a kind of emotional muscle you might not expect from a cobbling together of textual soundings, it reconsiders passion in a context that can (or will) no longer distinguish legitimacy.

In this sense, Bowering's practice dovetails, at one remove, with the self-reflexive practice of kitsch that Olalquiaga examines:⁴⁹

kitsch, generally understood as bad taste or a poor imitation of

⁴⁹ Olalquiaga opens her discussion of kitsch with this quotation from Milan Kundera:

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: how nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. (Olalquiaga 36)

Kitsch, as she suggests, has a certain self-consciousness about its operation.

art and therefore always banished to the margins of artistic practice, does exactly what that practice fears so much: it gathers its motifs randomly and eclectically, fragmenting the cohesion and continuity so cherished by high art, and then dares to represent them in the most blunt, figurative, and sentimental ways⁵⁰ (xiv)

Olalquiaga focuses her attention on contemporary strategies for recycling religious iconography, and distinguishes three degrees of kitsch in circulation, each degree more reflexive than the one preceding it. The first still respects the possibility of icon, the second creates substitutes, often junk, to recall the powerful attraction of the iconic moment, and the third recycles the potency of the first-degree artifact in a radically recontextualized milieu. Olalquiaga:

It can be said that each degree of religious imagery satisfies the desire for intensity in a different way: in the first degree through an osmotic process resulting from the collection and possession of objects still infused with use value; in the second degree by the consumption of commodified nostalgia; and in the third degree by cannibalizing both the first and second degrees and recycling

⁵⁰ And she is not shy to propose links between kitsch practices and postmodern practices:

Kitsch and postmodernism's sharing of an irreverent recycling, a taste for iconography and the artificial, a pleasure in color, gloss, melodrama, and overdetermination, lead me to believe that either postmodernism is kitsch, kitsch is postmodern *avant la lettre*, or both. (xiv)

them into a hybrid product that allows for a simulation of the lost experience. (54)

Olalquiaga's analysis of kitsch unfolds Bowering's text in provocative ways. His focus is not necessarily the religious icon. Still there is a sense in which the *serious* problems he confronts in "Allophanes" -- religion, philosophy, art, language, and the discourses in which they are imbedded -- are the sacred icons we inherit from a pre-postmodern culture, the zones of discursive inquiry that required the protection of serious and deferential engagement. They are subjects that do not brook interference well.

Kitsch practice, and Bowering's practice in "Allophanes," opens up the textual space to radical interference. It revises the serious by inserting it into unfamiliar (unnatural) contexts, contexts that refuse to distinguish simulation from quotidian life. It revises the serious by allowing it its potency as a cultural signifier --

You would sweep me away
 into an indefinite world
 that fills me with terror!
 ("Allophanes" 220)

-- without granting it its original power to designate. "God's holy name is at anyone's fingers, / any scrambler, / thank you, Mr Underwood" ("Allophanes" 228). In Bowering's poem, any scrambler can refigure the name of God, the name of art, the name of thought. Textual landscapes are allowed to *circulate*, interrupting and correcting one another, staging elaborate games of interference. The freed movement of signifying practice is characteristic of

kitsch, and has profound implications for cultural production:

Even though they're produced at different moments, these three degrees cohabit the same contemporary space. Their synchronicity accentuates the erasure of cultural boundaries already present in third-degree kitsch, throwing together and mixing different types of production and perception. This reflects the situation of the urban cosmopolis, where myriad cultures live side by side, producing the postmodern pastiche. Such an anarchic condition destabilizes traditional hegemony, forcing it to negotiate with those cultural discourses it once could oppress. (Olalquiaga 54-55)

The noise in a text like "Allophanes" is, then, a political act, an overt destabilization of the hierarchies that legislate how we construct meaning. Noise interferes with the hegemonic control exercised by tradition, by habit, by training; noise forces the text and the reader to *negotiate*. In a text that positions interference as integral to its functioning, noise is not added on, a superficial wrinkling along the textual surface. It is more like an infection,⁵¹ an infiltration that unsettles the structures even of its own speaking.

Because interference is insidious as well as disruptive of traditional

⁵¹ Traces of McCaffery tracing the multiple and rapid transformations of Bowering's image patterns in "Allophanes": he speaks of "logical *contaminants*" (141, my emphasis), and elsewhere "a *carcinoma* of highly local and ludic meanings" (138, my emphasis).

claims to power, it is prone to charges of underhandedness or unethical maneuvering. And because it infects and reconfigures what it encounters, because it announces the impossibly arbitrary boundaries between high and low, between simulated and "real," it is subject to accusations of eroding value from cultural expression. Still, as Olalquiaga argues,

The ability of cultural imagery to travel and adapt itself to new requirements and desires can no longer be mourned as a loss of cultural specificity in the name of exhausted notions of personal or collective identities. Instead, it must be welcomed as a sign of opening to and enjoyment of all that traditional culture worked so hard at leaving out. (55)

In this reconfigured terrain, we can re-member the potency of a child "walk[ing] thru the gate / carrying her own lunch bucket" ("Allophanes" 214); and we can "handle or be handled / by more than a single god" ("Allophanes" 221).⁵²

⁵² Bowering:

As I get older, I come more to realize that my activity as a poet composing is an extension of my desirous childhood Christianity. I want like crazy to get here alone & hear God's voice. I mean it. If I hear the gods instead, I am acknowledging, like it or not, my adulthood. ("Look into your Ear" 329)

Engaging the interference "Allophanes" would perform does implicate notions of personal or collective identities.⁵³ As reading subjects, we may be unwilling to undergo the multiple displacements the text demands: our displacement into the instance of the addressee, but also our displacement by a subject who refuses to replace us. At least in Barbour's poem, we can allow that miniscule *i* to stand in for us in our confusion, to speak the scandal of displacement by an other who refuses to present itself. In Bowering's poem, we cannot find an *i*, large or small, who is willing to step into the vacuum that informs the reading moment, the gap that opens up when we give over our

⁵³ Hartman unpacks the implications of *identity* by tracing through its etymological history:

The *Oxford English Dictionary's* headnote on [identity]'s formation suggests that late Latin felt the need for a term expressing "sameness," to split the difference, or fill a gap, between the words for mere "likeness" on the one hand and complete "oneness" on the other. (Greek and classical Latin had not felt this want; languages, like people, develop by distinctions as much as by accretions.) In this original sense, "identity" can refer only to two things, not to one. Something is identical to something else. . . .

Identity comes from the pronoun *idem*, "the same," but *idem* has no combining stem. Though etymologists disagree, the favored explanation is that "identi-" was invented from the adverb *identidem*, "over and over again." This begins to suggest the OED's second and far more perplexing set of definitions: Identity is "the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality." . . . It may strike us that two things are much more likely to be *identical* than is one thing to have an *identity* by this demanding rule. (Jazz Text 145)

identity to be spoken by the text.⁵⁴ Identity becomes an issue, acutely implicated in -- and addressed by -- our textual experience. "Allophanes" constrains us to read as if we understand that "the self is irreducibly a collection of more or less realized persons" (Hartman, Jazz Text 146). The receiver, then, becomes constituted in terms as dialogic as the sender; incoherence infects our conceptual habits, and we register interference before ever we begin to register text.

Hartman writes: "Ego is not self, but the insistence that the self be unitary" (Jazz Text 158). In a textual configuring of self that is resolutely multiple, the whole concept of ego is problematized. The scandal of displacement Lyotard traces in the scene of address occurs earlier and more subtly: the postmodern construct that disallows/disavows the viability of a singular subject has already effectively clouded reception with interference. The subject who sends and the subject who receives are themselves already dispersed, swallowed in noise. Once "the boundaries between reality and representation" have been suspended (Olalquiaga 52), there is no secure place from which to speak, from which to listen. The ego -- of sender, of receiver -- is unseated before the drama of exchange can transpire: the scandal of displacement has occurred already.

The postmodern moment, in a sense, has supplanted the ego of the

⁵⁴ Stewart: "the momentarily ungendered & nonsignifying body" (281) of the reader.

addressor. And it effects rigorous reconfigurations because it refuses to coalesce into a coherent replacement figure. It persists in being "profanely ambivalent and ambiguous" (Olalquiaga xi), in being inconsistent and playful and unstable. It refuses to coalesce: this is how it subverts the structures that favor hegemonic jurisdiction. It performs its own interference. These strategies of resistance have particular implications for subjectivity construed within such a context. The subject is unbound(ed), allowed to overflow the artificial boundaries that have demarcated the self. And if the postmodern context functions as a matrix that absorbs and infects the subjects who participate in exchange within it, these same subjects also constitute through perception and practice the context that contains them.⁵⁵ One interferes in/with any simple construction of the other, insists that the other be read as infinitely complex and subtle.

Both Barbour and Bowering engage the difficulties of other and self, the difficulties of perception and exchange and thinking in a context that keeps erasing its own edges. Both work off excess, flooding the reception area, and inscribing the confusion of noise that constitutes the responsive subject, the listening subject, writer or reader. Both embrace the possibilities that open a world where gratuity and wonder reside: the comic world that allows for the

⁵⁵ Olalquiaga describes a similar mutual infiltration in the cannibalized image patterns in kitsch art production: "Instead of appropriation annihilating what it absorbs," she argues, "the absorbed invades the appropriating system and begins to constitute and transform it" (53).

gift. *All sentences are to be served*, Bowering writes, and we hear the shadow of a reading that would implicate the feast, the "roast pig" of "culture" ("Allophanes" 206) to be tasted and tasted. Both dare to write the glut, where *nothing more* becomes *more nothing* ("Story" 13), where subject and text become excessive, monstrous. They offer their transcriptions of textual and anti-textual experience; they offer, they give.

And this is part of what imparts to these poems a particular expansiveness. Gift implies an affluence, as Lewis Hyde argues: "increase is the core of the gift, the kernel" (36). To partake of the generosity of gift is to resist the utilitarian economy of exchange that asserts practical limits and boundaries, that maintains the *coherence* of things and their users. The exchange economy, then, is in critical ways temperamentally disinclined to accommodate the blur and interference of a postmodern context.

Barbour and Bowering write away from exchange and toward the excesses of noise and silence. They write the listening body, the body who receives the gift of textual traces.⁵⁶ The body who receives, who reads, who transmits. This is no longer an exchange economy, but much more the non-productive libidinal economy McCaffery describes:

⁵⁶ Hyde connects the gift and the body in terms of excess:
 When we are in the spirit of the gift we love to feel our bodies open outward. The ego's firmness has its virtues, but at some point we seek the slow dilation . . . in which the ego enjoys a widening give-and-take with the world and is finally abandoned in ripeness. (17)

Libidinal intensities are oppositionally related to the fixity of the written; they are decoding drives that seep through and among texts, jamming codes and pulverizing language chains; they are liberative of the energy trapped inside linguistic structures.

Libidinal circuits, however, are intractable, intensely permeative and impossible to locate as specific, operational factors. . . . (153)

Patterns of interference we register or generate as we plot our way through texts like Barbour's "Story" and Bowering's "Allophanes" signify our engagement, our presence. Perhaps our willingness to receive a gift. As the metaphysical distinctions by which we have been accustomed to designate subjectivity and value collapse, we encounter text and other in different ways. We are otherwise constituted. And still we are responsive: this is part of the gift Barbour and Bowering bestow. They invite us to encounter what Barthes has called *the certain body*:

We have several of them; the body of anatomists and physiologists, the one science sees or discusses: this is the text of grammarians, critics, commentators, philologists (the pheno-text). But we also have a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body: it is another

contour, another nomination; thus with the text: it is no more than the open list of the fires of language. . . . (The Pleasure of the Text 16)

The *body of bliss*. This is the body, the libidinal body, the interruptive and unforeseen body, that the resolutely postmodern text can access. This is the body the text maps when it intrudes its announcements of non-sense: a map of libidinal jamming and pulverizing, the involuntary gasp at the glimpsed edge of bliss. A map of interference patterns.

Barbour and Bowering tackle the challenge of transcribing circuits white with noise. They write the interruptions that constitute the self's engagement with what is other in a context that has effectively eroded the possibility of self. They give away what they hear, what they register, recycle old and new iconography to keep the gift in motion, keep it animate and active. "Story for a Saskatchewan Night" and "Allophanes" inscribe gratuitous noise, gratuitous silence, they track and treasure the surprising gifts of the play of non-sense.

*Loose Change: Improvisation in Gil Adamson's Primitive
and Fred Wah's Music at the Heart of Thinking*

[T]he work is never monumental: it is a *proposition* which each will come to saturate as he likes, as he can: I bestow upon you a certain semantic substance to run through, like a ferret. (Barthes, Roland Barthes 175)

The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future.

(Johnstone 116)

Musical improvisation is a startling project, when you consider it: a performer willingly enters a musical event without any specific notion of what to play, and is expected to produce material that is at least listenable, at best intensely exciting, off the top of his/her head. Not *off by heart*, but not altogether cerebral either, a musical improvisation engages the improviser's body, the reservoir of his/her musical memory and experiential reality. The player has a certain freedom, but no luxury to reconsider. S/he has to be on. Or *in*. This is not "emotion recollected in tranquillity" (Wordsworth 611), but a body measuring its most immediate responses across a passage of time. A body voicing itself, discovering its intention.¹

The improviser is an acrobat, you might say, a tightrope walker who spins out his/her own rope, moment by moment by moment. And the supporting structure in place -- are there poles at either end of this tightrope? is there a net? -- varies with the type and context of the improvisation. An improvised concerto cadenza, for example, typically occurs as a (virtuosic) insert in the cadential gesture;² it is a dilation, an exploratory, looping tightrope that connects clearly defined, functional endpoints. At the other end

¹ Hartman: "A voice is intentionality unfolding in time" (Jazz Text 54).

² Theoretically, a cadenza is improvised, but composers as early as Mozart have provided them in their scores. As well, some concerti appear with transcriptions of cadenzas played (presumably improvised) by celebrated performers (Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music 234-35). In practice, then, cadenzas may or may not be improvisational.

of the spectrum, free improvisation groups -- Michael Snow's CCMC³ is an example -- have no structural imperatives in place before a performance begins; whatever formal logic occurs emerges from extemporaneous dialoguing between group members.⁴

Jazz spans the range, from largely composed material through largely improvisatory material; a "typical" performance, as Hartman describes it, reaches in both directions:

The musicians agree on a "tune" -- a melodic and/or harmonic pattern of set length -- which they may inherit as a generalized communal property like the twelve-bar blues, or adapt from a popular show tune, or write themselves as a specialized jazz composition. They repeat a series of "choruses" of this tune. The performance usually begins and ends with a "melody chorus," in which one or more "front line" players (conventionally the wind instruments) play through the set melody in unison or harmony, while the "rhythm section" (drums, bass, perhaps piano or guitar) iterates the rhythmic/harmonic infrastructure of the tune. In

³ Paul Dutton, incidentally, is a member of CCMC, performing *voice*, non-discursive vocalizing which is oddly articulate for all that.

⁴ On a European tour a few years ago, one CCMC member was anxious to begin the performance with a mutually agreed-upon motivic gesture and finally overwhelmed other members' resistance. To their collective amusement, when the group assembled on stage and began to play, no one, not even the one demanding it, conformed to their decision. (Michael Snow, personal conversation)

between the relatively formal beginning and ending, the various players take turns improvising for one or many choruses each.

(Jazz Text 10)

The jazz improviser's tightrope, then, tends to spin out over a harmonic and/or rhythmic net, a set of changes, a period of measures. The small-scale starting and ending points may be marked by the infrastructure (the net), but a soloist may choose to play across several choruses, effacing the structural periodization and creating an ever-extending improvisatory space, or s/he may choose to share a chorus with another player, trading two- or four-measure units in explicit dialogue, fracturing the time line. The real energy in a performance issues from the way *what is given* is written over by *what is invented*: the vitality of the improvisatory material, the freshness of the individual or collective commentary, the subtlety and attentiveness of the players' dialogic interactions. What is given, what is not given: the improviser walks backwards into the blank, into a marked and unmarked space, spinning fabulous tales to elaborate a perpetually present moment. S/he rereads improvidence⁵ as a gift, as license for extravagance, for play.⁶

⁵ *Improvise* and *improvident* share the same etymological history (from the Latin *improvisus*, not to provide). They spell in different ways the notion of how one proceeds when something apparently necessary is not provided (for): you might say that both name a reluctance to trade the exhilaration of a (reckless) present for future security.

⁶ Improvisation is play, but improvisation is also work. In a certain way, invention is unconfined by pressure toward correctness; still, such a position is only earned through extended familiarity with the conventions, structural and

Musical improvisation, being simultaneously invented and prescribed, subject to the demands of both historical responsibility and spontaneous revision, affords an appealing conceptual model for writing. Fred Wah prefaces his Music at the Heart of Thinking with a story of a Chinese monk who "would practice his tai chi while drunk so he could learn how to be imbalanced in the execution of his moves without falling over" (Music at the Heart of Thinking preface); he braids together unpredictability and discipline and consequence and associates them with a jazz aesthetic:

This method of composition is the practice of negative capability and estrangement I've recognized for many years, through

expressive, of the medium that incorporates the improvisatory gesture. A jazz improviser, for instance, will have to account for the rhythmic and harmonic design and the stylistic assumptions of a particular piece. As Hartman writes, "The uninspired (that is, inattentive) moments of run-of-the-mill jazz solos may display no further ordering principle than [the] negative and mechanical one of avoiding wrong notes" (Jazz Text 22). Surprising and imaginative improvising issues from intense attentiveness. In free improvisation, for instance, where it is least possible to make mistakes, a player who is not attending to the gestures as they emerge is likely to insert material that is contextually inappropriate, counterproductive.

Satisfying improvisation is not in any sense haphazard. (Even disorder, as Hartman argues, "betokens not chaos but complexity of attention" [Jazz Text 45]). One must be aware of the implications of one's musical gestures, and this awareness can only issue from an almost instinctive sense of the premises upon which a gesture rests -- an *embodied* knowing, a recognition that is internalized to the degree that conscious consideration has become extraneous and ungainly. Improvisation isn't easy. Or it is and it is not: while the process is complex and demanding, a certain ease clings to the active improviser. It has to do, I think, with a renunciation of the ego, it marks the degree to which the player is swallowed in curiosity for what the present moment will reveal to and about a self in contact with a construct. This backward-walker has looseness, flex, the confidence of dexterity.

playing jazz trumpet, looking at art, and writing poetry. I've tried to use it here in a series of improvisations on translations of and critical writing about contemporary texts and ideas. (Music at the Heart of Thinking preface)

In designating Music at the Heart of Thinking *a series of improvisations*, Wah slimms the interval between a musical thing, expressed in time, and a textual thing, appearing in space; he redirects our attention to the experience of text as an event, inventive and surprising, and participatory. He inscribes an improvisational engagement with a present moment, discovers it to be as elusive and compelling for a text-maker as for a jazz player.

PREACT THE MIND AHEAD OF THE WRITING BUT STOP TO
 think notation of the mind ahead of the writing
 pretell the "hunt" message doesn't run like the
 wind simile makes it the belief of the wild
 imagination or trees or animals too to preface up
 the head ahead but notice the body as a drum-
 mer preacts the hands to do to do insistent so it
 can come out tah dah at every point simply the
 mind at work won't do or the body minding
 itself thinking (which is why the drum's cedar)
 get it right or get it wrong just strike from the
 body falling back thoughts felt behind to the
 notes sometimes gives it shape or thought as
 body too my drum tah dum

(Music at the Heart of Thinking 2)⁷

Freewheeling, we careen along a channel cut by a sentence which only reluctantly expires. This block of text may create a visual impression of density, but aurally, and cognitively, we are swept forward by the relentlessness of its drive. Motion notated. Like a jazz improviser, Wah both acknowledges and overwhelms the infrastructure provided in advance of the moment: he adopts a familiar lexicon, but blurs past the syntactic junctures that characteristically divide semantic information into comprehensible chunks. Suddenly, language becomes unfamiliar, we are estranged in our deciphering. Or, perhaps more precisely, everything is estranged: language, writer, reader. Wah, in Music at the Heart of Thinking, reinscribes the nexus of reading as an encounter between linguistic habits rooted in culture and practice, and the *elaborations* -- disruptions and recuperations, extensions, omissions, frustrations, misprisions -- improvised in the moment of text-making. First performance by the writer, repeat performances to infinity by a reader, by a community of readers. Here is the dialogized text in another incarnation: text perpetually encountering its own making.

Preact the mind, Wah writes, labelling with characteristic succinctness an improvisatory orientation to what is given, what is provided. Prescription: alertness, readiness, and the decision/courage to engage. Proscription:

⁷ The prose-block pieces appear in Music at the Heart of Thinking with justified margins, left and right; I have elected to sacrifice justification in favor of retaining the line endings that appear in the original text.

determining in advance what will ensue.⁸ An improviser may be authorized, but s/he is not an authority. Wah leads this piece with an injunction -- *preact the mind* -- to approach the textual encounter with alertness, with respect for what is unforeseen. I read it as an injunction to the text-maker, an injunction that opens out from the improvising writer to embrace an ever-enlarging community of (writerly) readers.⁹

I am willfully blurring the moment of writing and the moment of

⁸ From a different angle, we encounter again the necessary resistance to Lyotard's *temptation to knowledge* (The Differend 110-13). In improvisational structures, such a temptation precedes rather than succeeds the message: the scandal of displacement occurs not as the other intrudes into the ego's (discursive) sphere, but issues in advance of (and to facilitate) an unforeseen message, a message to be spoken by an ego no longer authoritatively positioned in relation to its locution(s). It isn't a matter of simple transposition, where the position of the other is occupied by a structural premise -- musical or linguistic -- and the ego by the improviser. On the contrary, the infrastructure which sustains an improvisatory gesture is more akin to the ego of Lyotard's model in that it provides the security of decision against which the scandal is projected. The self who improvises is radically othered in the process.

⁹ The only textual experience we can speak of with any assurance is our experience as a reader of a text, and here again we encounter the blur Barthes invokes when he distinguishes between readerly and writerly texts. The writerly text, after all, is not one that has more of the writer inscribed into it, but rather one that reinscribes the reader as writer: "the writerly text is *ourselves writing*" (S/Z 5). The reader activating a text becomes a writerly presence in that text.

From another positioning, it's arguable that the writer only finally encounters his/her own text as a reader of it.

reading. Wah's writing project in Music at the Heart of Thinking, as he outlines it in his preface, is improvisatory. And the pieces *feel* improvisatory to us as readers: they incorporate surprising (rhetorical, logical) shifts and unstable syntax, they travel odd paths, loosening the dictates of design. They are *unpredictable*. Hartman:

What we cannot predict, we cannot provide for; what is unforeseen is, literally, improvised. The etymology, though at the expense of confusing our point of view with the artist's, reminds us why a jazz solo keeps us so alert. We know the tune; but we cannot know what we will hear about it. (Jazz Text 43)

When we encounter an improvisatory text, we are situated analogously: we know the language (or sentence structure or narrative conventions), but we cannot know what we will hear about it in this particular manifestation.

We have a feeling, reading Music at the Heart of Thinking, that Wah is practicing a writing that is alert to what it might say, that is suggestible, willing to follow the traces that inhere in its lingual gestures.¹⁰ In a certain

¹⁰ Derrida: "We must begin *wherever we are* and the thought of the trace, which cannot not take the scent into account, has already taught us that it was impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely" (Of Grammatology 162). Improvisatory work respects the trace; it willingly swerves from a through-line to accommodate the suggestions that are buried in the language as it is given. A jazz soloist will borrow melodic and rhythmic ideas that float freely in the collective memory and reconfigure them to speak his/her present moment. An improvisatory writer (and reader) performs in a similar way, loosening the trajectory to allow digressions as they recommend themselves. Invention is always induced by what Derrida here calls *the scent*, and digression can be rewritten as transgression.

sense, though, the degree to which the improvisatory status of the reader reflects the improvisatory status assumed by the writer is irrelevant: the text as it unwinds ahead of us is always unforeseen, unpredictable, our reading is always necessarily an improvisatory act, a leap of faith. Certain writing, though, advertises its gaps, configures itself unpredictably; this writing -- however painstakingly revised and rewritten -- always retains an improvisational stamp.¹¹

Wah's pieces in Music at the Heart of Thinking unfold unpredictably, and we walk blind through the maze. Or not blind so much as backward, adding one word at a time to our accumulating sense of where we've been.

PREACT THE MIND AHEAD OF THE WRITING BUT STOP TO
 think notation of the mind ahead of the writing
 pretell the "hunt" message doesn't run like the
 wind simile makes it the belief of the wild
 imagination or trees or animals too to preface up

Wah heightens this one word at a time sensation by refusing to punctuate, and by building in ambiguities in syntax. If our reading habits legislate that we

¹¹ Hartman again:

It seems natural to project our moment-by-moment ignorance back onto the poet; and we do not essentially wrong the poem in doing so, no matter what the facts of its actual composition. We feel accompanied through such a poem, not guided. (Jazz Text 43)

Hartman is tracing the intersections of jazz improvisation and the work of Robert Creeley. Again, we bump up against the issue of authority: the work that prompts an improvisational reading stance is one that has given over its own claims to authority, and this reflects a writer-presence who is *attentive* rather than *directive*, who has rescinded an ego-centric (authoritative) relation to his/her medium and project.

insert punctuative effects into the verbal slur in order to make the text signify, Wah's text consistently frustrates our attempts, or at least apprises us that each decision is provisional. Do we read: "pretell the 'hunt'"? "pretell the 'hunt' message"? "pretell; the 'hunt' message" or "the 'hunt' message doesn't" or "doesn't run" or "run like the wind"? How we choose to fracture the stream of words has considerable impact on the sense that we may draw out, the scents that engage our tracking instincts, pull us off the path. Even apparently syntactically clear passages are subject to the constant vicissitudes of our constructions. I read and reread: will I hear "but stop to think notation of the mind" or will I yield to my temptation to interrupt the press just slightly after *think*? My hesitation will reinflect; it will suggest the possibility of an invisible of perhaps, or dramatize the collision between *think* and *mind*, snarled up here, again and again, with intricacies of writing and notation.

And what can it be, "notation of the mind ahead of writing"? It seems to me that Wah engages the problem of writing and authorization both theoretically and practically, which would suggest, then, that he is not after the notation of a language which resists signing itself, but that his notion of signification is less exclusively cerebral than our (Western) habits would imply: "to preface up the head ahead¹² *but notice the body.*"

The body: a drummer's hands expressing the compulsions of a

¹² Here is the *head* pun in an explicit incarnation, and it pulls a *face* out of *preface*.

repetition; our own bodies, tripping over the rhythmized rhyming of *to do to do*, not pressing past to retrieve the object of the doing, but considering the possibility for even a moment that a whole poem could be made of nothing more than that repeating figure. And suddenly we may re-collect a filial rhyme: *too to* has already slid by, but we remark it now as we become more candidly aware of our own rhythmic sensitivity; we remark it, notice that the pulse is slightly more elusive there, but essentially inverts the iambs propelling the drummer's hands. Something happens at *to do to do*, something which catapults the (reading) body into action. That small figure, our first encounter with a conspicuously regular metrical pattern, alerts us to the rhythmic substrate that embeds it. We read *insistent*, satisfied because it does not interrupt the drummer's hands -- *to do to do insistent* -- and then stammer through several words which seem to resist emphasis altogether. It is unnerving. We may settle into *the mind at work won't do*, but that is followed by an increasingly irregular (but far from unpulsed) chunk of text: *or the body minding itself thinking*. The rhythmic shiftiness that snakes through this text isn't simply a haphazard consequence dictated by semantic necessity: dictation is at some remove from the practice of this writing. Rather, Wah is coaching us to hear the elasticity of language as it manifests itself metrically. Like knowing the tune but not knowing we will hear about it, we find ourselves recognizing again that language indeed has a rhythmic profile but that we are not in for any simple representation of it.

Somehow, it is the intrusions of absolutely regular portions of text that become striking:

get it right or get it wrong just strike from the
body falling back thoughts felt behind to the
notes sometimes gives it shape or thought as
body too my drum tah dum

Solid thumping trochees open this last segment of text, all the more forceful by virtue of the weight that accrues where a line beginning coincides with a syntactical beginning.¹³ Trochees, as opposed to the iambs of *to do to do*. The effect is different, and not solely because the pattern of emphasis is reversed. Something happens to the pacing: each syllable in this monosyllabic lineup -- *get it right or get it wrong* -- moves by/through at the same rate; emphasis bumps up and down, but the measure of time each word occupies is roughly equivalent. The same is not true for *to do to do* where the weak beat is also a short beat,¹⁴ launching a rhythmic sensation (short-long, short-long) that is swinging rather than squared-off.¹⁵ That swing has tracked itself sporadically

¹³ It is not always easy, as I've already argued, to distinguish syntactical segmentation in this text, but most lines seem to wrap around the line ending. To my ear, the third line and this eleventh line read as initiating a syntactical unit, but most other lines resist such a reading. Which is only to say that where line and syntax coincide, we must figure in the weight of reinforcement.

¹⁴ Conventions of poetic meter blur the distinction between length and weight: the iamb, for instance, originally designated a short syllable followed by a long, but, when transposed into a more accentual than quantitative language, came to be understood as an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed.

¹⁵ If you notated it musically, you would choose a compound meter, subdividing each pulse into three constituent parts.

through the middle of the poem: *notice the body, or a gain, simply the mind at work*. In the parenthetical insertion -- *which is why the drum's cedar* -- we juggle between an anapestic scan¹⁶ which points up *cedar* but underplays the surprise of the drum, and a scan which witnesses the collapse of the anapest into an irregular rhythm which accommodates emphasis on both *drum* and *cedar*; my temptation is to allow the rhythmic urgency to override the semantic press, a reinscription, in a sense, of the drummer's preacted hands.

The shift to the straight rhythm¹⁷ of *get it right or get it wrong* is palpable, partly because the previous line has been sinuously avoiding explicit metricality, and partly because we suddenly lurch into a different configuration of the pulse. This piece of text *feels* different, more solid, more measured and deliberate. We register a change not so much in our impression of tempo (how fast are these pulses passing?) as in our impression of how full or weighty the pulses are (how is time discerned? what are the subdivisions of the pulse?).¹⁸ The sturdiness of that line opening blasts out of its textural

¹⁶ An anapest marks out a three-part pulse; it traces the swing that characterizes a compound time signature in music.

¹⁷ Simple, as opposed to compound, meter.

¹⁸ Poetic notation is not particularly adept at specifying rhythmic density; we can scan for strong and weak accents in a line, but often the scansion may bewilder what the ear encounters with relative ease. The lingual pulse is a complex entity: we actually can (and do) perform certain rhythmic acts in reading, even ones that are not cued linguistically. We may, for instance, extend a word across another subdivision of the pulse: in "simply the mind at work," for instance, *mind* and *work* are slightly elongated by the pressure toward a tri-partite pulse inscribed by the leading dactyl. Whereas scansion takes into account the stressing of syllables that *appear*, an actual reading may

also respect the traces of the metrical underpinnings, may rescatter words along a regular metrical figure, however attenuated. The time line, the time *signature*, may intervene, meter superceding matter.

Musical notation diverges from poetic notation: it preserves more accurate information about (both relative and absolute) duration in its rhythmic coding. It might be tempting to express textual rhythms in musical notation, and in certain cases -- folk rhymes, metrical verse -- it is even advantageous. But musical notation, at least traditional notation, of rhythm also assumes a periodic regularity of pulse which, if appropriate to many kinds of music, is generally impossible (and undesirable) to maintain in a poetic text. It is very difficult to notate musically the flexibility that inheres in the rhythms of delivered/uttered speech, even highly inflected speech. Musical rhythms tend to overwhelm or efface the subtle shifts of tempo that characterize linguistic rhythmic profiles. And musical rhythms that do approximate such fluctuations, encountered in some contemporary compositions, oblige the composer to abandon traditional notation or produce scores so complex as to be nearly impossible to realize.

To conceive of a poetic metricality that will accommodate the shiftiness of speech patterns is, perhaps, to enter the territory William Carlos Williams was attempting to chart in his sense of the measure --

The measure intervenes, to measure is all we know,

a choice among the measures . . .

the measured dance

(Paterson 239)

-- which he specifies, however elusively, in his notion of the *variable foot*. The variable foot is a mode of measuring, of taking one's bearings, and marking time too. As Bowering writes, "Williams' 'variable foot' steps at a pace that can be *measured*, but not *metered*, in a dance rather than a march" (Imaginary Hand 138, my emphasis):

The variable foot responds to the present sense of relativity, plus the hankering after a constant. It is sensitive to the pauses and intonations in the poet's speech, as no convention of metrical consistency can be. . . . (Imaginary Hand 138).

From another position in the rhythmic tangle, studies indicate that even rhythmically straightforward musical material is never realized precisely, even by highly skilled players: not only emphasis but actual duration is subject to interpretive interference as it is channeled through the performer's body (Kramer, The Time of Music 72-76). A performer *cannot* reproduce a rhythm precisely, even if s/he attempts to free it of inflection. Even regular rhythms are subject to what Kramer calls "performance nuance" (73).

surround, even we are not taking conscious notice: this is the improviser's play, to lure an audience to attention, and then reorient its reception of information.¹⁹

Wah teases us with complex rhythmic patterns and fluctuations; he alerts our rhythm detectors, and then presses us to acknowledge that alertness. We respond, and repond to our responding. This is the richly syncopated interaction of the rhythms of reception with what you might call the tempo of cognition.²⁰ It takes a certain amount of agility to be in a present that

¹⁹ And I would explicitly expand the scope again: not only the audience is lured to attention, but the improviser is too; both embark on the improvisatory act, backing into tomorrow. The improviser will be as interested to hear what is said about the tune we all know, to find out what might be invented, as the listener. A soloist isn't compelled primarily by a desire to avoid errors (which might translate into an anxiety about where one is going, to correct for a future), but by a desire to say something about what is and was, to signify his/her presence in a present playing moment. Improvisation demands -- and generates -- attention, and channels that energy as a scrutiny of the medium.

A great jazz improviser argued that so-called wrong notes were not *wrong*, but *funny*. Such a radical positioning is only possible assuming that the player has absorbed the conventions which allow any gesture to be construed against the backdrop of expectation. Kundera writes: "things deprived suddenly of their putative meaning, the place assigned them in the ostensible order of things. . . , make us laugh" (Book of Laughter 61). We laugh at incongruity.

²⁰ Improvisatory reading involves, implicates; it contests the sovereignty of the reading subject. Stewart writes of a late Barthes essay on Lucette Finas, in which he considers her interest in *excess*, "an excess that various speeds of reading struggle with or shake loose, according to 'the *battue* (the beat) of the

constantly recollects itself:²¹ this is a state of improvisatory readiness that

text' -- the text, in other words, as performed" (133):

Finas finds an impertinent overplus haunting the pertinent opposition, and since this finding is in the reading, not strictly in the text, she, according to Barthes, 'turns reading itself into text.' When such a text of reading is in turn read, Barthes goes on to imply, the question of the reading subject comes into focus. Pushing beyond structuralism, the reader reads herself as structured by the reading, polysemously. . . . Reading . . . the writerly is a participatory decentering; by letting the tempo of reading remain undetermined in advance, contingent, variable, Finas puts herself, her *Je*, under the textual sway. . . : 'In opening up the tempo of reading, you are therefore opening up the subject.' (Stewart 133)

To allow a condition -- the tempo of reading, for example, or patterns of cognition -- to remain *undetermined in advance, contingent, variable*, is to assume an improvisatory attitude, a state of readiness.

²¹ This complex of a present (and presence) that is constantly sliding in and out of focus invokes Derrida's notion of *différance*, where difference colludes with deferral. Derrida:

Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. . . .

The activity or productivity connoted by the *a* of *différance* refers to the generative movement in the play of differences. The latter are neither fallen from the sky nor inscribed once and for all in a closed system, a static structure that a synchronic and taxonomic operation could exhaust. Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *différance* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of *structure*. (Positions 27)

The present that *différance* will acknowledge is always already inscribed in terms of its difference from what might precede and succeed it; the present, then, is not allowed the bloom of a metaphysical privileging, a certain Romantic bias. Still, the present, as a *spacing*, with all the traces it carries, is the improvisatory moment of performative activity. Improvisation, you might say, is how one plays after everything has become relativized. Derrida's *différance* forms a nexus where structure and time and subjectivity, issues that underwrite improvisatory concerns, keep interrupting and reflecting (on) one another. Derrida again:

Nothing -- no present and in-different being -- . . . precedes

Wah advocates in his opening directive, *preact the mind*. To be prepared, to play from/on what is not provided. You might think, given the imperative mood that keeps intruding into this particular text, that more is provided here than withheld: "preact the mind," "stop to think," "pretell the 'hunt'," "notice the body," "get it right or get it wrong," "strike from the body." Still, as a list they urge readiness rather than deliver instruction,²² and they insist on the value of the body's knowledge. Text-making, in its moment of happening, recovers its body.

In the grip of this text, we are suddenly compelled to consider a reading that accounts for the implications of a body's involvement in signification. Wah's improvising enacts a physical engagement with possibilities of/for thinking and texting. It traces out an embodied present, reinscribes

différance and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken by *différance*. Subjectivity -- like objectivity -- is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*. This is why the *a* of *différance* also recalls that spacing is temporalization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation -- in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being* -- are always *deferred*. Deferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces. (Positions 28-29)

The improviser, backing into a future, drags with him/her traces of what has been said, what might be said; the improviser becomes present in the moment of expressing *différance*.

²² Hartman: "We feel accompanied through such a poem, not guided" (Jazz Text 43).

responsiveness as accomplishment: "notice the body as a drummer preacts the hands to do to do insistent so it can come out tah dah at every point". Once we have taken due *notice of the body*, we can encounter other constructions of knowledge and necessity, constructions that don't insist on the absolute (and exclusive) value of rational thought. When we pay attention to "the body minding itself thinking", as Wah so cryptically encodes it, pathways of knowing are replotted. Causal constructions get snarled in non sequiturs. We may trip over the *why* in "which is why the drum's cedar," we may scramble backward in search of justification. None will be offered. And not out of casual disregard, but because a different logic, the logic of a body, of a drummer's insistent hands, has intruded into the process of knowing. The drum is cedar because the drummer's hands play their insistent knowing. That may be *why* enough.

Once the demand for rationality has been relaxed, once comprehension is not conceived in a head divided from its body, thinking -- and writing that thinking -- is loosened into a more expansive enterprise. It needn't be so concerned with censoring whatever does not conform to the structures of logic reflected in and perpetuated by our grammatical and narrative structures. Reconceive the *sentence*, then, and you reconceive *thought*. This is essentially

what happens to you as a reader snared in a Wah text: you are forced to reconceive the sentence, to read across the blended edges of units that will not define themselves, or will not define themselves singularly, absolutely.

But another possibility exists: reconceive *thought*, and read the effect of that on the *sentence*. This, I think, is more precisely Wah's writing project.²³ And his lever is a musical one. By placing *music* at the heart of thinking,²⁴ he effectively challenges any simple notion of cerebration. Into the sacred sanctum of *the mind* he intrudes a radically unstable signifier, one that is stubbornly non-referential, one that targets both a physical apprehension and a more cerebral comprehension, one whose effect always exceeds its signification. If Wah begins from a musical base, his syntax must necessarily be unfamiliar; he is revising the notion of thinking, which then alters habits of notation. So Wah's syntactical blind alleys, though effectual, are not maybe *strategic*: their design is less to trap us in confusion as to inscribe a (writerly)

²³ My sense is that we are trained, in the course of Music at the Heart of Thinking, to relax into this writing that expresses estrangement: we learn to be comfortable in strangeness, to stop insisting interpretive logic into structures that constantly frustrate it. We learn to back into the future, to read improvisationally.

At the same time, Wah's writing that we are learning to read seems to open out of a (musical) disorientation of linguistic exigencies, proceeding toward the possibilities for notating that estrangement. He would seem to be backing into writing through thinking, and backing into thinking through the improvisatory determination of a resolutely present moment of performance.

Reader and writer, then, back toward one another, gathering the spool of the past into a knot that defines a present.

²⁴ In his title, Wah proposes a *heart* of thinking, already problematizing a habitual head-body split.

stance that accommodates multiple logics of knowing and telling, an improvisatory stance that spins backward from the cusp of a sharply focused present moment.

In a way, everything in this Wah text is interrupted before it can begin -- the texter will *preact*, *pretell*, even *preface* -- and this pries open to notation that interval between apprehension and comprehension. Which translates, functionally, in several directions. For one thing, less is censored as redundant or meaningless. The writing hand can name its activity as it becomes aware of it: the word *simile* appears in this piece of text, labelling what has preceded it, and prompting a passage -- "simile makes it the belief of the wild imagination or trees or animals too" -- that wends in directions you might not anticipate. With the mind preacted, with thinking translated in musical terms, words will follow or foil one another, and the writer will function more as a filter than a creator. This is improvisatory positioning: *aware* without being *wary*, willingly listening to and working with what is already held in solution in the medium. A musical improviser hauls into the performative present an enormous library of melodic and rhythmic configurations from both public and personal domains, and will quote and diverge, allowing what is already present to impact on what is being invented. The textual improviser, too, listens to the language; s/he is suggestible, willing to be overtaken by cliché ("run like the wind") or an insistent rhythm, as well as to cut new tracks. Once again, then, we confront a levelled playing field where high diction and vernacular collide,

where something never said before can emerge from the banal clutter of workworn expression. Where the newness of invention is more a stamp of one's dexterity in recirculating and recontextualizing what is freely available.

What's available: in Wah's improvisatory excursions, we encounter a medium with agency, and cognition that concedes its muscle memory. Both of which contribute to a relaxation of the need to pre-scribe an order of things, a right and wrong that exist prior to and apart from the tangle that is the work of thinking:

get it right or get it wrong just strike from the
body falling back thoughts felt behind to the
notes sometimes gives it shape or thought as
body too my drum tah dum

Wah both advocates and performs a *falling back*: he feels behind to his *notes* -- lovely ambiguity across the poetry/music border -- and is swallowed up in an indisputably even pulse that floats the last lines, from *sometimes* to the end. And if *to do* has earlier mutated to a declarative *tah dah*, it now alters again to the more modest *tah dum*, claiming (by rhythm and rhyme) *my drum*.

The body falling back. As Barthes writes, "these dilatory maneuvers, these endlessly receding projects may be writing itself" (Roland Barthes 174). In a sense, the Wah text is only ever (always already) endlessly receding, because our improvisatory access to it dictates that we roll back -- fall back -- from whatever position we occupy in the immediate present of the reading moment. And when we come to the final word (which isn't a *legitimate* word), we discover there is nothing final about it: no period here, no promise or pledge.

A half-empty line, more like it, or (if you prefer) a half-full line, stretching into the white.

Barthes' "endlessly receding projects" might well name Wah's writing project in Music at the Heart of Thinking. Endlessly receding, refusing to conform to a model that stipulates a goal toward which everything must direct its energies. Not that Wah has no goal in this collection, but that each piece traces out possible shapings of that goal,²⁵ each piece repeats and expands the project, so that the effect is more a gathering of interanimating segments, *dilatory maneuvers*. Across considerable variety in matter and even structural premises, these pieces root into one another, they attach, prolong. They dilate the textual space.

Here, for example, is a piece from the collection that adopts a considerably different styling:

²⁵ Wah aims toward an elusive goal, one you might name as a commitment to tracking the effect on and through writing of a cognition that stubbornly unbalances the hegemony of rationality, a cognition that assumes the tangling together of language (with its own awkwardly involuted traces of history and power and structural imperatives) with brain and body (also both inscribed with the particular histories of personal and cultural expectation and experience, problems of presence and agency and subjectivity). Wah sets out to inscribe a *musical* thinking.

otherwise;
right now it's confusing.

small words
small months
announcements [sic], abandonments
and tribulations; or tell me.

raptures now risks, secrets
parts --
nervous falcons.

shy shit;
materials, circumstances,
and that's for sure.

and that's what I miss.

an abolition of another longing.
(Music at the Heart of Thinking 16)

This piece *looks* different: the poetic line is here in force, short and terse, end-stopped in a way that lends weight to the space to the right. And punctuation to check one's motion; we are far from the spooling motion of most of the pieces in this collection. And still, a similar texture of recollection -- like the drummer's insistent *to do to do* -- characterizes this piece too, expression generated in part from a willingness to engage the echo: "small months" repeating (visually and rhythmically) "small words," "announcements" finding traces of itself in "abandonments."²⁶ And again that levelling of discourse

²⁶ These pairs perhaps *chime* rather than *rhyme*, and still the effect is similar to that thickening of texture that attends rhyme. Stewart, reading the voicing of literary language from the baldest rhyming to the most subtle transegmental bleeding of one phoneme into its neighbor, suggests that "taking the term 'rhyme' in the broadest sense of recurrence and symmetry, phonic included, one could well characterize poetry, indeed literature as a whole, as 'rhymed

which allows for the high diction of "raptures" and "abolition" to risk a close encounter with "shy shit," a suppleness which can remember in "and that's for sure" both casual habit and reflexive intensity. Most tellingly, though, we face the same daunting task of dancing across gaps that vex one's rationalizing of the text. Walking the tightrope. We waver at the untenable "otherwise" that opens the poem: we are offered no clues about how to perform this inscribed othering, and even if we invent possibilities (and we can hardly restrain ourselves, it's our occupation, our enthusiasm), we are immediately stymied by the semicolon which closes off any forward press in the adverb and lands us in the midst of the next line's confusion.

Wah's pieces in Music at the Heart of Thinking keep reinscribing the reach of a thinking that is quickened musically, reconceiving the parameters, reconsidering the implications for knowing and writing. Reiteration, but never simple; we may be taking readings of the same terrain, but the positioning and perspective are in constant flux. Music at the Heart of Thinking is a series of dilatory maneuvers, virtuosic improvisations: Wah's book is a *jazz text*. And such a designation suggests much about styling, but it also implies a certain orientation toward arrangement and structure. Recall again Hartman's description of a typical jazz performance, and you realize that, when jazz

discourse'" (Stewart 97). "Rhymes are not read," he argues, "rather, rhyming is a way of reading" (Stewart 98). Marking "recurrence and symmetry, phonic included," is part of the reader's performance of text, part of the improvisatory elaborations on a score.

performers are enlisted by a structure that invites a kind of dilatory ecstasy, they might "feel less concern for structure than for continuation" (Jazz Text 10). That isn't to say that a jazz improviser won't respect the infrastructure that lays out the parameters for the performance,²⁷ but that s/he will be engaged more in a kind of perpetual glutting of the structural paradigms.

In a jazz performance, the dilatory maneuvers may be so prolonged and elaborate that the opening and closing statements of the tune become dwarfed, of little consequence. Or formalities, gathering all the stray personalities into an arbitrary agreement: here is where we will end. When the middle is reconstituted as a potentially infinite condition, the Aristotelian dictum specifying the requisite importance of a beginning, middle, and end is subtly undermined.²⁸ Suddenly, we are faced with the possibility of the *endless*, and this dramatically reformulates how we might process structure (and time) in a

²⁷ The tightrope walker's net: perhaps a rhythmic or harmonic pattern, or a modality, or (especially in free jazz exchanges) a tempo or expressive character.

²⁸ Hartman locates the non-European roots of this aesthetic in jazz: The communal music of African peoples from the Shona to the Arabs, with its ties to both mystical trance and tribal conviviality, often goes on for hours without interruption; it does not comprise "pieces." . . . The continuousness of the music -- linked to a world-view in which historical process means less than cyclical stability -- reduces the status of beginnings and endings. . . . Aristotle's premise that a work must have a beginning, middle, and end, which can seem trivially obvious to us, was not obvious before his time; and in the remaining oral cultures even today, this kind of closure does not possess the same hegemony we suppose it to have. (Jazz Text 9)

musical event. Hartman:

Where beginnings and endings claim importance, temporal limits contribute to a consciousness of temporal structure, whether in sacred history or in narrative plot. European music, like European art in general, has emphasized this kind of structure since around the time writing became important, in classical Greek culture. (Jazz Text 10)

A non-improvisatory model begins from assumptions of madeness (the masterpiece) which by definition requires an integrated shape, and demands closure. After all, judgement (the verdict that bears on the *mastery* in the *masterpiece*) can only be bestowed once the processive juice has exhausted itself, once the piece has gathered its loose ends and presented its finished face to the jury. Judgement is *consequent*.²⁹ "Temporal limits contribute to a consciousness of temporal structure," Hartman says. Our habits of assuming

²⁹ *Consequent* conjures from another zone of inquiry Barthes' exploration of the challenge writerly texts exercise on critical response:

its model being a productive (and no longer a representative) one, it demolishes any criticism which, once produced, would mix with it: to rewrite the writerly text would consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference. The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed. . . . (S/Z 5)

Writing and improvisation converge around a shared aesthetic positioning: the perpetual present of the writerly text is a refiguring of the perpetual present of the improvisatory gesture. And with improvisation as with the writerly text, the only possible commentary is an incessant dispersal, charting the improviser/writer/reader at play in this "field of infinite difference."

the absolute importance of opening and closing gestures is tied into habits of structural listening. In a closed-form aesthetic, one's experience of passing time tends to be organized in terms of pressures generated by the work's structural logic. Time is contextualized spatially, according to an *a priori* logic: one event leads to another which leads to another. In such a context, structuring digests its own temporal component, or, more precisely, we allow our perception of structure to neutralize our perception of passing time; we have entered the domain of history and plot.³⁰ The effect is similar for music or text: we will foreground the structure of a work -- a sonata, a sonnet -- as somehow *explicative* of its functioning. Time gets resorbed, relegated to the adjectival status: temporal structure.

Of course, even the improvisatory musical event has a structure, however loosely the players adhere to it. But there is not the same drive toward an end, not the same uphill press in intensity that eventually needs to explode and dissipate itself. An improvisatory event *ends*, but the closing

³⁰ Musically speaking, this would seem a strange place indeed. Because we are more accustomed to perceiving music as freer of history and plot than other arts, as more intimately connected with the physical responsiveness of the body. And indeed, as Susan McClary points out, "the most difficult aspect of music to explain is its uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms" (23). Still, music, even the most abstract non-programmatic music (excepting some of the contemporary avant-garde compositions), has a powerful structural logic, a musical narrative if you will, that exerts tremendous pressure on our habits of listening. Musical narrative engenders expectation and recognition and surprise; it circulates a "semiotics of desire, arousal, and sexual pleasure" (McClary 9). McClary: "music teaches us how to experience our own emotions, our own desires, and even . . . our own bodies. For better or for worse, music socializes us" (53).

gesture is perceived by both players and listeners as more arbitrary, more punctuative. It does not culminate an undertaking so much as release those engaged in it into other versions of time. In theory, a jam session can last indefinitely. When beginning and ending an event are less significant than continuing it, *temporal structure* can be turned inside out, rewritten as *structural time*. Structure becomes structuration, saturated by the time of its revelation, reconceived in terms of the time it charts. And suddenly the whole territory opens out: there are innumerable ways to mark passing time, the whole playing/writing enterprise is necessarily suffused by indeterminacy. This is the room improvisation demands: the project names itself as a continual flooding of structural borders, spinning over and past. Overflowing the measure.

Wah marks and floods the measure through the indiscretions his sentences perpetrate upon a reader: they seem to begin after the breath is engaged to leave you with that feeling that you should have begun listening a fraction of a second earlier, and they end, sometimes obliquely, sometimes bluntly, without ever relaxing into a closure that would suggest the last word has been spoken. They may cadence, but they don't conclude. And in the midst, they perform awkward leaps and spins, they back into their futures,

surprised and surprising.

What Wah does by estranging syntax, Gil Adamson does by estranging narrative. She crams her book, Primitive, with poems that promise and resist story, that split possible stories into impossible constituents. Here is "Strong, Dead":

The turning point is invisible
 needs drop like spiders to the ground
 and glide away as they should.
 You won't need a fork anymore.
 Conversation dies only once
 after you flash
 like a burnt lightbulb.
 People turn and look
 ice clicking in their glasses.
 There is something to be learned
 but you can't remember what
 so you wear a sequined dress to the car
 and ride out to see the desert.
 Sheep try to beg for food
 but move back when you step forward
 like a walking x-ray.
 In their little heads
 the sun on your face
 reminds them of something.
 Your open mouth looks like home.
 (Primitive 11)

There is something deceptively straightforward about Adamson's work: the diction, for example, is not inconspicuous but certainly unobtrusive; it is not intent on asserting itself into the texture of the reading event.³¹ We have no deliberately "poetic" words in this text, no deliberately "unpoetic" words either.

³¹ Except perhaps as an absence: the flatness will be particularly tangible to readers who are sensitive to the aural profile of a poetic text.

And the plainness is reinforced by the syntax: the sentence -- the *simple* sentence -- figures prominently as a structuring principle. Subject, predicate.³² Subordinate clauses (with the exception of "In their little heads") tend to be subordinate in position too; modifiers don't get out of line here. And it's important to the functioning of the poem, I think, that the most potent modifying phrases littered throughout the text tend to appear as simile constructions, with that prominent *like* which refuses to conceal constructedness and provisionality. So "needs drop *like* spiders," "you flash *like* a burnt lightbulb," "you step forward *like* a walking x-ray," "your open mouth looks *like* home." Alternative ways of reading experience are, in a sense, advertised as flights of fancy.³³

In this poem, *nothing* gets out of line. Look at the squared-off line breaks Adamson deploys: she never challenges the narratives of grammar with ambiguous lineation or rhythmic cross-currents. On the contrary, she clarifies the grammatical shapes of these sentences by breaking lines at the natural fracture points in the sentence; she disambiguates:

³² Oddly, the opening three lines -- a merge of two sentences with only a line break as partition -- set a precedent which is scrupulously avoided in the rest of the poem.

³³ And the comparisons, though often bold and startlingly perceptive, are also unfailingly mundane, of the world. There may be potential for *transformation* in this (textual) world, but certainly not for *transcendence*.

There is something to be learned
 but you can't remember what
 so you wear a sequined dress to the car
 and ride out to see the desert.

Adamson's strategy in this poem, a strategy that replays itself throughout the collection, is the inverse of Wah's bleeding across grammatical fault lines or overpunctuating to obstruct individual words from coalescing into meaning units. No syntactical misdemeanors here: Adamson *announces* the sentence, end-stopped and self-sufficient.

Still, there is something eerily untenable about "Strong, Dead," something that belies the apparent flatfootedness of its styling.³⁴ You can read it, but you can never quite get ahold of it. Like this character who puts on a sequined dress, you sense that "there is something to be learned but you can't remember what." That second-person *you* in the poem, stubbornly unlocated/unlocatable, slides surreptitiously into another *you*: *you* the character, *you* the reader: somehow there is too little distance, too little information. Too little protection. You are implicated, folded into a narrative that slyly resists telling itself.

What is not provided is what initiates improvisation. Adamson's work demarcates its boundaries in different ways than Wah's, but it too invites, *compels*, the dexterity and alertness of an improvisatory engagement with text.

³⁴ The quality of strangeness here -- *estrangement* is Wah's word, more located in the text-activator -- does not work at cross-purposes from the styling; on the contrary, it is *enhanced* by the ostensible transparency of expression. Ingenuousness can be a discursive mask.

Even assertions that are utterly clear -- "You won't need a fork anymore" -- become opaque when context is refused. *Why* won't you need a fork? What are the circumstances that will make a fork expendable? How might this fork attach itself to needs dropping like spiders, to dying conversation? After the first three sentences, all of which become increasingly impenetrable the harder you read them (a turning point becomes obscure when defined in terms of visibility, and is this a *turning point*, a *turning point*, a *turning point*?), we stumble across

People turn and look
ice clicking in their glasses.

Mundane and uncomplicated, but also *social*, a public occasion, traces of behavior that has been somehow immoderate, inappropriate. This must attach to *you*, flashing like a burnt lightbulb, even if you can't quite fix the impact of that image. "There is something to be learned," something to be solved perhaps, a logic that can accommodate the sudden shifts, the stubborn non sequiturs. Still, what is to be learned (sometime in the future) can't be remembered (from some time in the past): this story is already known and never remembered, its motives and consequences scrambled chronologically as well as logically.

Adamson presses to the foreground our habituated desire for coherency (will we invent a big enough canvas to accommodate all these disparate

detailings, the scrambling of chronology?³⁵), our immoderate clamorings for a narrative through-line to buoy us up. Barthes argues that "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (Image Music Text 79), and Adamson taps into a powerful, possibly an irresistible, reading reflex. She provides material, sharply evocative of a lived world -- forks, cocktail glasses -- but she won't quite attach all the parts. She gives and withholds, constrains us to participate in an unfinishable storying.

Hayden White uses historiography as a limit case to distinguish two kinds of narrative discourse, one that *narrates* and one that *narrativizes*, the former "a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it" and the latter "a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story" (The Content of the Form 2). The distinction becomes oddly provocative when translated into the context of Adamson's work. Because here we seem to be in the presence of a reportorial spirit, and a storying spirit too. The poems act out a kind of collision, where detail collapses into clutter, but where the clutter is permeated with the perpetual labour of assigning significance.³⁶ Narrative ("it is simply there," as

³⁵ Culler argues that our tendency to privilege a reading which naturalizes disparate detailings -- "the most bizarre and disconnected images can be read as signs of alienation and anomie or of a breakdown of mental processes" -- finally functions to "promote the notion of an autonomous or originary subjectivity" ("On the Negativity of Modern Poetry" 196).

³⁶ In Wah's work, *signification* is problematized; Adamson's work shifts the focus to *significance*. Reading, always, is a hovering.

Barthes says, "like life itself") may be inescapable. But in Adamson's hands, it refuses to clarify our positioning with respect to the worlds it charts, refuses to say finally which details or events are important, how one detail relates to another.

No, I can't taste anything
just the radio.

I believe these are signals:
something trotting along
just out of sight
raising dust;
a hole in the back seat;
my new haircut.

I roll by on four drums
hounding the red hills
boring holes where Vegas
used to be.

("Speed Creates Pure Objects," Primitive 54)

In a way, Adamson's work *reports*, catalogues the often prosaic details that comprise the clutter of a technologized landscape, a kind of apocalyptic world of "high-tech trash" (Olalquiaga 67). At the same time, it carries as much story as that cluttered landscape will concede. She narrates, and she narrativizes, to invoke White's terms again, and both are essential to her tracing of a cultural moment.

Olalquiaga argues that "wide circulation of the already replaceable and obsolete provokes a market saturation that continually overflows, creating an urban landscape of high-tech trash" (67); within this framework that functionally erodes any secure sense of a narrative drive *forward* (the American

Dream burlesqued by its own obsessive frenzy), responsive art-making becomes an exercise in ingenuity. To speak a landscape of high-tech trash means to tell a story when one can no longer confidently tell time. Olalquiaga:

this high-tech turnover also results in reproducing the displacement of time with space, by filling all the gaps left by the speed of production with the products themselves. Therefore, against a time progression so fast that it can no longer be sensed in the gradual aging of objects and consequently all but disappears from nonconceptual perception, we are left with a space full of practically unused objects. (67)

Dilation, then, can also be a practice of accumulating the junk -- the events, details, moments -- without subordinating them to a chronology that would neutralize or hierarchize or explain them. Chrono-logic is necessarily distorted; it cannot be certain of itself. The art-maker (writer/reader in our configuring) becomes the junk-collector, the overseer at the boneyard.³⁷

³⁷ And though the contemporary sensibility has a fair swatch of melancholia, it also recontextualizes that black edge to expose the incongruity, the humor.

Adamson:

we fall asleep at the wheel
our three mouths open
and our arms spread wide.
Afterwards we compare
who caught the most broken glass.
(from "Religious Carpool," Primitive 47)

In Adamson's hands, the narrative won't tell. Neither will the keeper of the boneyard, whether the writing presence outside the event or the teller who inhabits the story-space. And it's not that there are secrets to be kept: in a junk yard, nothing is hidden.³⁸ But the landscape is other, and the story it suggests is other too. Contingency rather than causality weaves connections here, and the storyer becomes an inventor whose narrativizing won't efface the untenable discreteness of contingent details, an improviser who takes the bones of what has been there before and weaves new skin around them.

It isn't, then, that an improvisatory project rejects narrative. Rather, the improviser exercises an improvisatory *attitude* toward narrative: s/he has not decided in advance the story s/he will spin, its directions, its texture. S/he assumes a positioning of *readiness* rather than *authority*. This is what Adamson does; this is what Wah does too within his (other) narrative framework.³⁹ The moves we encounter in the text, the moves we enact upon the text, are not authorized, or they are authorized only by the prerogative located in the performative moment. Authority, priority, privilege, direction: all give way.

The improviser reports and stories a contingent landscape, a clutter of

³⁸ The secret kept and revealed conforms finally to an epiphanic story structure that safeguards the possibility of a final knowing that can explain what confuses.

³⁹ You might call Wah's narrative an epistemological one: he writes a story of knowing and thinking.

details and discourses. But improvisation requires a certain giving over to facilitate the play it demands: the improviser both makes and is made by the material at hand, inscribes and is inscribed by the details and discourses, the stories and refusals. The improviser is un-authorized. But then, in a contingent landscape, nothing is authorized: this is Derrida's decentered landscape.⁴⁰ No origin, no center, no authority. Improvisatory play implicates the player, even *endangers* the player, because it has no respect for staying inside the lines.

A centered field, a field where one is authorized, where engagement is not improvised, can offer compelling forms of protection that are completely absent from -- and obstructive of -- the improvisatory experience. Derrida:

The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from

⁴⁰ Derrida argues that a field that has deconstructed the notion of center is "a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite" (Writing and Difference 289); this recalls from a different angle the givens of jazz structure, the givens of narrative structure. It is not so much the vastness of the field as the possibilities of infinite retracings across that field; this is a *playing* field. "The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more" (Writing and Difference 289).

the outset. (Writing and Difference 278)

Improvising assumes another kind of play, a play which questions that fundamental immobility and reassuring certitude, which questions that anything exists beyond its reach. Derrida claims that

Play is the disruption of presence. . . . Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.

(Writing and Difference 292)

The player is made present, then, *as s/he plays, in the play*.⁴¹ Which means that preparing to play -- the *readiness* I keep invoking -- involves relaxing one's ego-boundaries, displacing oneself in preparation for an extemporaneous speaking of/to the world. To engage in an improvisatory performance, as a musician or a text-activator,⁴² is to forego the habit and security of "an ego that relies on a sense of its boundaries to manage the world, the ego that most

⁴¹ A slightly different take on echo-location, perhaps, but signifying presence through play pulls back again toward the Bakhtinian insistence on relationship, dialogism: "*To be means to communicate*" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 287). Improvising is a talking to oneself, a talking to other improvisers (jazz players can *trade fours* in explicit dialogue), a talking to the cultural clutter than informs the present place and time.

⁴² Again, I am purposely including the reading act as well as the writing act within the compass of the textual improvisatory experience.

of us have for most of the time" (Kramer, Music and Poetry 220).⁴³ The improviser "plays without security" (Derrida, Writing and Difference 292) in what Kramer labels the *ramified present*:

In [the] rich collage of a present, coming is going, giving is giving up, having is having had, and vice versa -- actions that do not cancel each other, but that coexist in one bright sheen. Even more importantly, perhaps, in the ramified present to understand is to question, or more accurately it is to think and feel within the

⁴³ Kramer charts a historical shift in the way writers have inscribed a blurring of the ego's presence (security) which is important in locating the kind of improvisatory project I am naming in the particularities, cultural and aesthetic, of our time, our present:

In the Romantic tradition, the breaching of ego-boundaries is permitted and desired in isolated moment of epiphany, "spots of time," "times of inherent excellence." "Such moments worthy of all gratitude," as Wordsworth calls them, are discontinuous from the rest of experience, which is thereby protected from them. The styles of Ashbery and Carter advance, perhaps advance beyond, the visionary tradition of Romanticism by adumbrating a breaching of ego-boundaries that is continuous, by positing an ideal reader or listener who has an ego without walls. (Music and Poetry 220)

By partitioning off these spots of time from the rest of experience, the Romantic writer can actively recuperate the metaphysics underpinning that visionary tradition. It seems to me that the blurring practiced by Ashbery -- the blurring I am tracing here in Wah and Adamson -- does more than *advance beyond* such a tradition: an improvisatory orientation begins from an alternative assumption, positing a field that is unauthorized, decentered, a field that proscribes a metaphysical base.

Kramer argues that what is incurred in the process of smudging the discrete boundaries that mark the ego (and time) is the loss of that "quasi-erotic movement to a peak of ecstasy or illumination" (one of our most prized cultural narratives), and the challenge of relaxing "the defenses by which the ego conducts its thankless task of mediating between desire and circumstance" (Music and Poetry 220).

curve of a question mark that cannot be followed by an answer, but only by another question mark. Understanding is thus not a matter of knowing, but of being, and in particular of being in, of consenting to, time. . . .⁴⁴ To understand is to participate.

(Music and Poetry 220)

Knowing is participatory, and participation necessarily dilates the scope of the self. What Adamson *prescribes* in her fractured and resolutely indeterminate narratives, her kitsch clutter reports of a world we may or may not be able to story, Wah *describes* in his estranged writings that pronounce a musical knowing. Adamson tells (and resists) story, Wah tells (and resists) a story of our impulse to story. Wah's work, in its metatextual positioning,⁴⁵ re-plays the act of its own writing/reading; although he doesn't engage the story impulse at the same site as Adamson, still he explores the ramifications -- for the writing, for the subject -- of the teleological press:⁴⁶

TELEOLOGICAL MAPPING OUTSIDE THE REALM OF
observation architected to the brain the edge of
which you get so close to saxaphoning [sic] the right
gap this spark plug explosion dieseling after the

⁴⁴ This, I would propose, is another configuration of Wah's musical heart of thinking.

⁴⁵ Barthes: "the work is never anything but the meta-book (the temporary commentary) of a work to come which, *not being written*, becomes this work itself" (Roland Barthes 174-75).

⁴⁶ Or perhaps more precisely, he (like Adamson) charts the *resistance* to a teleological press: how one might constitute a narrativizing text that resists the doctrine of closure, how such a writing might (re)configure the subject.

key's turned off invisible *eme*⁴⁷ shapes still
 hanging around when she says roulette to you
 what is called meaning on the sound track trans-
 lated two levels under the lyric Hermes should
 have said not to steal from yourself yourself.
 (Music at the Heart of Thinking 65)⁴⁸

In the dilatory space that an improvisatory engagement occasions, we encounter possibilities, endless possibilities, for configuring and reconfiguring ourselves and our cultural expressions. Improvisation ushers in a certain extravagance, an amplitude, a flooding of the dictates channelling our language, our narratives, our versions of self. Improvisation partipates in an economy of excess, introduces into our textual awareness a surplus Kramer names *plenitude*, a "sheer density of esthetic particulars that ranges from mere multiplicity to a virtual all-inclusiveness. But to enjoy that plenitude," he

⁴⁷ Wah: "The 'eme' is an irreducible (chemical?) constituent in language and the world governing prehension. Available at every point" (Music at the Heart of Thinking notes).

⁴⁸ Barthes challenges the critical habit of writing over -- writing *off* -- a text in explicative maneuvers that flatten out the bumps and potholes; this is the *consequent* language (S/Z 5) which neutralizes, and seriously misrepresents, the writerly text. McCaffery wonders, when faced with almost impenetrable texts like this Wah piece, if we "counter the work and produce a reading or proceed further into the *textual experience* of the unreadable" (North of Intention 157).

I am exercising an other placement option, offering this Wah piece as con-sequential to my investigations into improvisatory narrativizing: it (re)reads my inquiry.

argues, "requires a readiness to be immersed in a complexity that can never be mastered" (Music and Poetry 220). Again, *readiness*, that willingness to forego the security of mastery for the greater play of indeterminacy.

There is, oddly, something both explicit and effaced in the improviser: backing into the future, s/he invents a path, one never yet travelled, and at the same time s/he is invented by all the paths others have tracked across the cultural landscape. S/he makes, then, and is made. Improvisers who are most able to abandon the egoistic clamouring for security, the ones most willing to be at the mercy of the medium, of their own replete readiness, the ones, that is, who really *play*, are also the ones who assume voices distinct enough for us to recognize, to name, to locate. Voices that startle us with speakings that recall and contest our own. And even when we ourselves are the improvisers – weaving paths through textual mazes, for instance -- our speakings of the path we back into will shift and reconfigure, recall and contest. When we improvise, we necessarily engage in dialogue.

Hermes might have said "not to steal from yourself yourself" (Music at the Heart of Thinking 65), but that kind of cautioning would have limited the infinite retracings an improviser may devise, bewitched by that "complexity that can never be mastered" (Kramer, Music and Poetry 220). To chart a path

through the bones, again and again, this is the improviser's task and pleasure. Hartman writes that "the jazz player's prowess is measured, in part, by how long he or she can keep inventing compelling variations" (Jazz Text 10); the whole project, then, is not to achieve an end, but to roll right over it.⁴⁹

This is Wah's project in Music at the Heart of Thinking, and it is Adamson's in Primitive. Both keep mapping the same boneyards, the boneyards of syntax, of story, of discourse, that have been written all over already, marked by habit and expectation; they back through, inventing compelling variation after compelling variation, until finally we come to understand that in the face of what is not provided, or what is no longer provided, in the absence of grammar's strangling logic, of narrative's overdetermined arch of tension, of discursive prohibitions circumscribing apperception, we are free to invent and reinvent our own compelling variations. Signification hovers, and the player plays the changes.

⁴⁹ Hartman considers both the *how* and the *who* of jazz improvisation, and his exploration of the *jazz personality* resonates with the tendency to overflow borders that I have labelled as intrinsic to the improvisatory undertaking; he writes that "the heroism of a Charles Mingus (or John Coltrane or Miles Davis) lies not in his dominating other musicians, but in his refusal to be satisfied for long by given solutions" (Jazz Text 149). Locating and overwhelming the bounds: this marks movements on both personal and collective fronts; you could argue that the entire history of jazz is a chart of the inundation of paradigms. The self (player or writer) who dares assume a voice is oddly re-storied, too: when the narrative is no longer constructed as a quest to achieve an *end* -- when it no longer traces "a graduated, quasi-erotic movement to a peak of ecstasy or illumination" (Kramer, Music and Poetry 220) -- the requirements for *heroism* shift to become configured in terms of extension rather than triumph.

Both Wah and Adamson adopt the short formal gesture -- none of Wah's pieces in Music at the Heart of Thinking exceed a page, Adamson's rarely do either -- and the choice, I think, is strategic. Because if they seem to establish a pattern, a paradigm, they also overwhelm it by the accretive effect of piece upon piece. Like successive improvisations across the repeating harmonic framework of the jazz chorus, these short takes spin out over their own bounds, attaching to one another in a series of dilatory maneuvers which are curiously capable of simultaneously specifying and exploding the moment. Adamson's poems gather odd assortments of moments, not necessarily related, not necessarily proximate, to effect an eddy of presentness, of disparate moments colliding with one another in solution.⁵⁰ Wah's moments are cluttered not from without but from within; his passion is the quick take, the moment, alive and well, and subject to elaborate, freefall dilations which make

⁵⁰ Adamson expresses in her way the merging boundaries that characterize our cultural landscape. Olalquiaga:

Bodies are becoming like cities, their temporal coordinates transformed into spatial ones. In a poetic condensation, history has been replaced by geography, stories by maps, memories by scenarios. We no longer perceive ourselves as continuity but as location, or rather dislocation in the urban/suburban cosmos. Past and future have been exchanged for icons: photos, postcards, and films cover their loss. A surplus of information attempts to control this evanescence of time by reducing it to a compulsive chronology. . . . It is no longer possible to be rooted in history. Instead, we are connected to the topography of computer screens and video monitors. These give us the language and images we require to reach others and see ourselves. (93)

it feel almost stationary.⁵¹

In both structure and material, Wah and Adamson effectively resist the hegemony of closure implicit in the language and stories of the culture they inherit: in practicing -- and demanding -- improvisatory engagement, they enter a field where closure is no longer an option. In a way, an improvisation is never finished.⁵² It both invites and thwarts its own collapse into decay. Because the whole positioning of improvisation is a resolutely present moment,

⁵¹ Jonathan Kramer teases out the ways we track time in music, and suggests that certain kinds of music which frustrate a forward (narrative) thrust tend to invoke interactive layers of seemingly static sound; he labels this kind of musical time *vertical*. Kramer:

Most of us tend to listen teleologically -- horizontally -- given the prevalence of tonal music and linear values in our culture. We listen for, and even project onto the music, implications and progressions. Thus even advance knowledge that a piece will be internally undifferentiated does not preclude our initial, habitual response of teleological hearing. The piece starts (not begins), and at first we try to impose linearity, storing potential implications out of which to make significant causal relations later in the piece. But as the music continues, implications accumulate with a minimum of consequences, because the composition contains no changes of structural import. We become overloaded with unfulfilled expectations, and we face a choice: either give up expectation and enter the vertical time of the work -- where linear expectation, implication, cause, effect, antecedent, and consequents do not exist -- or become bored.
(Time in Music 56)

Kramer's analysis bears tellingly on the reading experience demanded by Wah's work, and addresses many of the sources of confusion and frustration that plague a reader who comes to the work with inappropriate expectations of what s/he will find there.

⁵² And Music at the Heart of Thinking is not contained by the text-as-book: more pieces -- 99 to 103 -- appear in West Coast Line 6 (185-87). Music at the Heart of Thinking is not so much a book as a project, an ever-dilating text.

and the present moment is, in an odd way, both a fleeting thing and the only possible -- permanent -- condition. You can never finalize⁵³ a project that bears the imprint of an improvisatory pulse. Every time you perform an improvisatory act -- scating across a piece of music, dancing through a text -- you do it again for the first time; a freshness inheres in the undertaking.⁵⁴

Every reading differs.

This is the difference and differal that Derrida conflates in *différance*: designating, even celebrating, an indeterminate present, an experience you can only speak of as a trace of what you might have known. Every reading, every encounter, differs, and we slide into Barthes' "endlessly receding projects [that] may be writing itself":

First of all, the work is never anything but the meta-book (the temporary commentary) of a work to come which, *not being written*, becomes this work itself. . . . Afterward, the work is never monumental: it is a *proposition* which each will come to

⁵³ Here again, I invoke Bakhtin, and his conviction that a heteroglossic universe is by definition unfinalizable.

⁵⁴ This is more clear for musical performances perhaps. An improvised solo -- by definition -- is one that is not provided beforehand, one that is invented extemporaneously. The improvisatory engagement becomes more subtle for a listener who has access to a recording of an improvised solo: on subsequent listenings, you are no longer charting unfamiliar territory along with the performer; still, each time you engage in the listening act, you inhabit a slightly different present moment, separated from other listenings *in time*, but also by your ever-shifting relation to a world mediated by a personal memory of constantly accumulating experience and a delicately attuned register of physical responses.

saturate as he likes, as he can: I bestow on you a certain semantic substance to run though, like a ferret. Finally, the work is a (theatrical) *rehearsal*, and this rehearsal . . . is verbose, infinite, interlaced with commentaries, excursions, shot through with other matters. In a word, the work is a tangle; its being is the *degree*, the step: a staircase that never stops. (Roland Barthes 174-75)

Barthes writes and rewrites *the work*: a proposition, a rehearsal, a tangle; he slides *work* along an axis that won't suspend itself, a staircase that never stops. Still, the work is a work. Hartman, alert to our labelling habits, notes that in our culture, "composers produce works; musicians -- even severely classical musicians -- play. In that Calvinist opposition we indicate our sense of the difference between tenacious construction and the immediate engagement of performance" (Jazz Text 18). Improvisation blurs the clarity of those distinctions,⁵⁵ blends the merit of construction with the vitality of

⁵⁵ Hartman, having performed an exhaustive analysis of a Lee Konitz' improvisation on Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are," observes:

It becomes easiest at some point to think of Konitz as a kind of composer whose work begins from Kern's but insists on being seen as a creation of a partly different, partly parallel kind. As compared with a previously composed set of variations on a theme, this performance is reduced in scope and in the rigor with

immediate engagement. Improvisatory texts perform the same feat, undercutting our habitual (Calvinist) privileging of formal clarity and balance⁵⁶ by insisting on the importance of the performative function of the writer/reader. The writer invents compelling variations, the reader invents compelling variations. The work -- the thing, the activity -- the work is a proposition, a rehearsal, a tangle. The work is a writing, a reading, a rereading. It is a step always followed by another. *Ad libitum*: in pleasure, to any extent.

Improvisation dilates the writing space, the reading space; it pries open possibilities for signification. It remembers pleasure even in the giving over to the danger of utter insecurity. Improvisation exercises demands upon the improviser: the improviser works hard, yes, and the improviser plays hard too.⁵⁷

which the thematic materials are exfoliated. These relaxations are the least one would expect in the way of adjustment to the improviser's situation. Konitz cannot revise, cannot stop to consider, but must make up this present chorus, this present measure, while it is here, right now. We can think of the achievement as *instantaneous* composition, or as *instantaneous composition*. Either way, it must amaze. (Jazz Text 34)

⁵⁶ Read, *intelligibility*; works which approve compositional value with a disregard for the performative contributions of the reader generally work off a model of intelligibility. The reader is certainly not disengaged in the activity of receiving such a text, but his/her activity is pre-scribed by the piece and the linguistic (and epistemological) habits of the writer (as well as the cultural surround, generally uninterrogated in this kind of writing).

⁵⁷ George Bowering: "we will work to gather, & we will play together" ("In True Diction," Touch 7)

_____ *POSTLUDE*

It is sound more so than meaning binds
the body to language.

(McCaffery 178)

Ghostly wolf notes, improbable echo-locations intrude again and again into my perpetually woven and unwoven text-ile: resonances which sound the bounds of this particular space, resonances which defy the artificial margins, the possibility of ending. And still, to play after -- post *ludere* -- while everyone files out into unenclosed spaces, to chase dying voices haunting those sensitive aural and neural and intellectual pathways.

I might name the resonances of this particular bounded space as a fascination with the subtle complexities of constituting a reading subject, body and ear and head, and history too, personal and cultural. A reading subject and the language that might excite particular versions of that subject. I am

drawn toward an exploration of the subject who becomes possible when inscribed by a writing that no longer stakes its claims on "the deliverance of a message," (Lyotard, The Differend 113)¹ but instead serves as "witness to the fracturing of the I" (Lyotard, The Differend 113). *The fracturing of the I*. Interrupted, refracted through complex patterns of interference, the *I* scatters in several directions. Or gets caught up, re-sounded, in the shimmer of excitation that characterizes the bloom of resonance. Or is invented even as it is ambushed -- dis-articulated -- by the improvisatory pathfinder.

Perhaps especially now, in our increasingly technologized social and personal landscapes, the body registers the ambush; musical trace, tracking its way across the listening body, measures the destabilizing potential of language that chooses to witness the fracturing of the I. *Body language*: a conjunction of possibility, and the pleasure of strenuous play. Stewart suggests that

Unlike signifying language, this pulsional body language in a sense satisfies its own desire, not by naming it but by utterance itself, a vocal play ultimately devolved upon the alert, the *listening* reader. (278)

A *vocal play*, act and activity, implicates the subject swept away in encounter.

¹ "That," Lyotard writes, "is the presumptuousness of the I" (The Differend 113).

In a sense, it is body-language I am fascinated with marking, with re-marking, body-language as it is pinched and clutched and caressed by musical speaking. I have named here certain zones of inquiry in a musical-textual maze; there are others, too, and they would enhance somewhat different overtones in this complex of reader and text and the active pursuit of play. I think, for instance, that a musical orientation to text-reading could help clarify our various strategies for apprehending textual time, for perceiving and internalizing and telling the effects of duration cues. I have suggested certain durational attitudes and effects in improvisatory writing/reading; there are other forms of apperceived duration, and each one impacts on the reading body in particular ways. Repetition, for instance, even immoderate repetition, is often better served by a musical modelling: where more conventional interpretive strategies may be baffled into boredom by repetitious writing, a musical reading can access affective power.² And duration is also intricately

² Caryl Emerson consideration of Bakhtin's notion of repetition expands my conjecturing in useful ways:

[Bakhtin's] entire understanding of the word [repetition], & of the specificity of the utterance, invalidates the very concept of repetition. Nothing "recurs"; the same word over again might accumulate, reinforce, perhaps parody what came before it, but it cannot be the same word if it is in a different place. Repetitiveness is not repetitiousness. The phenomenon is perhaps better understood in the linguistic category of "redundancy," that is, as the surplus necessary for a certain mode, or force, of communication. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics xxxv)

I am positing a convergence of *dialogic* and *musical*: musical texting can sustain -- make sense of -- more than minimal repetition. John and Ursula Rempel follow Walter Ong in arguing for the trace of an oral aesthetic in

bound to our conspicuously mediated cultural environment: we understand time in terms of the flash of images of the music video, for example, the half-hour television interval, the short takes on pop radio. And still, with the concurrent collapse of faith in a teleological frame of reference -- *storied* time -- and the shift away from a (pastoral) relaxation of speed, we lurch in and out of time in provocative ways.

I have been arguing that duration is almost a permutation of structure -- repetition, for instance, is perceived as both a durational and structural event -- and a closer look at structuration strategies, explicitly musical and resolutely textual, would access issues of time and time apprehension in our time-obsessed cultural positioning. Musical thinking has well-developed analytical models for parsing the conventional musical structures; newer composers working against or outside of conventional structuring offer ways of reading and hearing textual artifacts that resist our conventional interpretive practice.

Musical reading might make different sense of the creep of technology

constructions that allow flagrant repetition:

Music in our society -- except to the specialist -- still exists in an aural, even oral, world of perception; this alliance with an older literary universe, one of oral delivery of epics, of plays performed on wagons, is perhaps the reason we are able to tolerate so much exact repetition in music of a kind we cannot bear in literature. In verbal art repetition is a trait of the oral, not the written, stage; since any passage may be reclaimed by going back to it, repetition is not needed to refresh the memory, as it is in a "heard" art like music. (vi)

A musical attitude toward text, then, can hear repetition as resonant, as an aural equivalent of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, and is less likely to banish or dismiss it.

in the vicinity of our texting: our bounded spaces are constantly refigured, and resonate in surprising ways. We tend to write on computers, for one thing, which produces an altered sense of authority and determination; computer texting means we reflect, moment by moment, the possibilities for floating text, and a shifting awareness of lineation.³ Performance art often makes unabashed use of technological wizardry, radically deconstructing any notion of the primacy of voice or expression; text encounters body, the performing and listening body, along wildly other channels, and a reading that is able to accommodate the blur of subjectivity and the blur across not only genre but discipline and even media would be more apt to preserve the nuance and potency.

Musical strategies for text-reading recover versions of textual space that are often effaced: text can become, again, a performance in a moment, a play(ing) that sets so many spaces humming. The page, for instance, a tensed notation of an aural environment on the verge of releasing its pent energy along the body of the reader who will (re)mark it. Writing as a performative act, a play in an open field. The page, then, and the reader, both of them become audible as physical and discursive (and technologically imprinted)

³ From a more musical positioning, computers are revolutionizing the options for music-making too: digitizing, where aural information -- pitch and duration, timbre, stress accent, "attack/decay envelope" (Kramer, The Time of Music 74) -- is encoded in computer language, is exploding open compositional territory.

spaces, trembling with active potential. And playing outward to ever-larger spaces -- from genre and critical context to the market, the political climate -- we read their reverberations in telling ways. Musical reading opens out, gets bigger, swallows into its singing the disparate elements that always already hum in sympathy when a reading event (eyes snared by a book, ears hijacked by performance) occurs.

So much depends upon how we mark our space: what overtones will we read and hear, what will we allow our bodies to register? In an increasingly technologized landscape, how we hear, around the racket of confusion about where we live and the neurasthenia precipitated by apathy and the drone of lowgrade noise, how we *hear* indexes our health, our attunement, our dexterity as players in a time we cannot quite know. Listening for the musical trace that adheres, that *inheres*, in our texted investigations of our place, our time, our selves, is one way we keep the lid from banging down on us, shutting us in to a vacuum which disavows our bodies and their knowing, which disqualifies a thinking that announces ludic possibilities even in the face of grim or reductive or irresponsible speakings.

Post lude, and after the play is always only more play in this field crisscrossed with wondering, overwritten with traces of musical speaking.

Musical trace, marking the edges of what we can hear and speak, re-calling *différance* in the performative moment of our speaking, reading, hearing.

"There are, everywhere," as Derrida says, "differences and traces of traces"

(Positions 26): this is our delight, the great ludic resource that calls us to read our pleasure, to perform our play.

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