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Editors' Note

Richard Parker & Francisca Folch

Dear Readers,

This special issue of *ESLA* came about as a result of the V Jornada de Literatura en Inglés which had as its main topic Poetry and Performance and was hosted by Letras UC in January 2022. The conference was held online and brought together two clusters of actively experimental poets based in the UK and Chile. The British poets we include in this issue are loosely connected to the London-centred maelstrom of poetic innovation that grew out of the British Poetry Revival in the 1990s and 2000s, expanding as an informal alternative to the more codified experimentalisms of poetic schools such as Cambridge, initially under the auspices of committed performance poets like Bob Cobbing and institutions such as the London branch of Writers Forum and working from British and American poetry and performance traditions. More recently the Crossing the Line poetry series, lately organised by Jeff Hilson, has sprung up alongside Writers Forum and provided a collegial venue in London for the encouragement and dispersal of numerous approaches towards poetic experimentation. Heterogeneity is the most consistent element of the various poetics that have emanated from these sources, but an interest in the material, performative, sonic and visual

elements of poetry—those parts that extend the poem beyond the page—is shared throughout much of the work associated with these poets. This interest and faith in the ability of the poem to be more than a linguistic construct lies behind all the work that we have brought together here and qualifies it for study under the rubric of “performance”.

The French-born, London-based poet Iris Colomb, who contributes poetry and an explanatory essay here, is an active contributor to London’s experimental poetry scene—an event organiser in the mould of Cobbing and Hilson and an uncompromising experimenter whose work draws from performative, conceptual and minimalist traditions. Her work here offers a glimpse of some of the more extreme possibilities countenanced by the broadly-conceived definition of performance poetry that we’re working from here.

The experimental node extends beyond London, of course. Scott Thurston is Professor of Poetry and Innovative Creative Practice at the University of Salford and a one-time organiser of the Manchester experimentalist collective The Other Room, a project that brought a series of important northern writers into connection with wider networks. Thurston provides an explanatory essay and videos of his dance poetry practice, which brings physical performance to the forefront and insists on the presence of the body in the poem.

Nia Davies, previously the editor of the important poetry journal Poetry Wales, is based in Wales and works on the intersection between poetry and ritual. Her essay and recorded talk offer an insight into the performative poetics of Maggie O’Sullivan, a poet, visual artist and performer, previously associated with the London scene who is now based in Hebden Bridge.

The Catalan poet Jessica Pujol Duran, who wrote for some time from London and the midst of Crossing the Line experimentalism, and who is now working in Santiago de Chile, addresses the idea of translation as performance in an essay that brings together three translators and three source texts: Tim Atkins’s stunning reimagination of Petrarch, William Rowe and Helen Dimos’s ground-breaking gloss-translation of Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo and Caroline Bergvall’s challenging approach towards Dante.

Pujol Duran’s contribution signals a bridging of the activities of the preceding UK-based

writers with Chilean writers working from a different, though connected, tradition. Writers Forum has had a Chilean branch running in parallel to since the early 2000s, providing a loose network of experimentalists the opportunity to connect around innovative ideas and practices in Santiago. It is from this international connection that the Chilean writers Felipe Cussen and Martin Bakero's Language is à Virus sound-poetry orientated virtual reading series emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their essay here Cussen and Bakero describe the incredible internationalism of a project that took full advantage of the changes in reading, performing, consumption and connection of poetry through that period.

Among the many outstanding performance and sound poetry projects shared through Language is à Virus is the New York poet and "lingualisualist" Edwin Torres, who provides a recording of a sound and visual poetry performance here. Edward Gonzalez, a Cuban-American poet who also spent time in the New York spoken word milieu that Torres riffs off and is now a successful spoken word performer based in Santiago, provides an essay of his experience of working with spoken word poetry and performance.

We would like to thank the whole *ESLA* team, especially Allison Ramay and Andrea Casals for guiding us so expertly on this experimental poetic journey. Many thanks as well to Francisca Fernández, Tamara Cubillos, and Catalina Salvatierra for their invaluable work on this issue.

Richard Parker

Francisca Folch

Guest Editors



“Language is à virus”: tendencias de la poesía sonora actual¹

Martin Bakero Carrasco², Felipe Cussen³ & Rachel Robinson⁴

RESUMEN

En este artículo se da cuenta del ciclo “Language is à virus”, curado por Martin Bakero y Felipe Cussen, que reunió a través de la plataforma Zoom a diversos poetas, artistas y músicos internacionales vinculados a la poesía sonora entre abril de 2020 y abril de 2021. En las 52 reuniones que conformaron este ciclo, se presentaron y comentaron variados trabajos, que dieron pie a distintas reflexiones que aquí han sido resumidas y analizadas, que permiten acceder a una mirada amplia y transversal de la poesía sonora actual.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Poesía sonora, poesía experimental, poesía y tecnología, improvisación, pandemia

ABSTRACT

This article gives an account of the cycle “Language is à virus”, curated by Martin Bakero and Felipe Cussen, which brought together various international poets, artists and musicians linked to sound poetry through the Zoom platform between April 2020 and April of 2021. In the 52 meetings that made up this cycle, various works were presented and commented on, which gave rise to different reflections that have been summarized and analyzed here, which allow access to a broad and transversal view of current sound poetry.

KEY WORDS: Sound poetry, experimental poetry, poetry and technology, improvisation, pandemic

1 Este artículo forma parte del proyecto “Tendencias de la poesía sonora chilena actual” (Folio 598810) del Fondo de la Música, Línea Investigación y Registro de la Música Nacional, Investigación, Publicación y Difusión (Fondo de Emergencia 2021).

2 Martin Bakero Carrasco es doctor en Psicopatología, Medicina y Sicoanálisis por la Universidad París-VII, y tiene un Diploma en Composición de Música Electroacústica del Conservatorio Municipal de París. Actualmente es investigador del C.R.P.M.S. de la Universidad de París Cité, del EPS de Ville Evrard y del IME Alternance, Perce-Neige.

3 Felipe Cussen es doctor en Humanidades por la Universidad Pompeu Fabra y profesor titular del Instituto de Estudios Avanzados de la Universidad de Santiago de Chile. Recientemente publicó *La oficina de la nada. Poéticas negativas contemporáneas* (Siruela, 2022).

4 Rachel Robinson es doctora en Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad de Oxford, y es becaria de investigación postdoctoral Alexander Von Humboldt en la Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Sus intereses de investigación incluyen la poesía visual y experimental de los siglos XX y XXI en América Latina, los nuevos materialismos y las estéticas relacionales.

Introducción

A través de este artículo queremos presentar y analizar una particular experiencia desarrollada durante el primer período de la pandemia por COVID-19: el ciclo de conversaciones y performances en torno a la poesía sonora “Language is à virus”. Este ciclo, creado y curado por los poetas y académicos chilenos Martin Bakero y Felipe Cussen, se desarrolló a través de 52 sesiones (una por semana, desde el 23 de abril de 2020 al 14 de abril de 2021) a través de la plataforma Zoom. Participaron regularmente poetas, artistas y músicos de países como Chile, Francia, Inglaterra, Gales, España, Cataluña, Alemania, Austria, Eslovaquia, Finlandia, Estados Unidos, México, Uruguay y Argentina.¹ El formato, de duración variable, consistía en la presentación del trabajo de un artista o grupo, una discusión entre los asistentes y, casi siempre, una improvisación colectiva. Todos los capítulos fueron publicados a través de un canal de Youtube. Dada la gran cantidad y variedad de participantes, así como la posibilidad inédita de desarrollar una conversación continua entre practicantes de la poesía sonora y zonas afines (poesía visual, performance, música, artes visuales, traducción, etc.), consideramos que este material resultaba muy relevante para comprender las principales reflexiones que existen hoy en este campo a nivel internacional. Con este fin, un equipo conformado por Bakero y Cussen más la participación de la académica Rachel Robinson, llevó a cabo una investigación gracias al Fondo de la Música en Chile, que nos ha permitido trazar este panorama.

Antecedentes

El concepto de poesía sonora, como cualquier otro vinculado a la poesía experimental en general (poesía visual, poesía electrónica, videopoesía, etc.), suele implicar varios equívocos: por una parte podría decirse que, en rigor, cualquier texto poético que pueda ser leído en voz alta es

1 Compartimos aquí las páginas web de algunos participantes de este ciclo: Zoë Skoulding: <https://www.zoeskoulding.co.uk>; Jörg Piringer: <https://joerg.piringer.net>; Joachim Montessuis: <http://www.autopoiese.org>; Gerard Altaíó: <https://altaio.net>; Miriam Reyes: <http://miriamreyes.com>; Dirk Huelstrunk: <https://www.dirkhuelstrunk.de>; Eduard Escoffet: <http://propost.org/escoffet/>; Gregorio Fontén: <https://sites.google.com/view/gregoriofonten>; Heike Fiedler: <https://heikefiedler.ch>; Martín Gubbins: <https://martin-gubbins.cl>; Carlos Cocina: <https://www.poesiacero.cl>; Adrian Fisher & Luna Montenegro: <https://www.mmmmm.org.uk>; Zuzana Husárová: <https://husarova.net>; Thomas Havlik: <https://www.thomashavlik.com>; Rhys Trimble: <https://www.rhystrimble.com>; Rocío Cerón: <https://www.rocioceron.com>; Orquesta de Poetas: <https://orquestadepoetas.cl>; Maja Jantar: <https://majajantar.wordpress.com>; Eugenio Tisselli: <http://motorhueso.net>; Martin Bakero: <http://therapoetics.org>; Felipe Cussen: <https://www.felipecussen.net>. Podemos agregar además algunos proyectos colectivos y editoriales vinculados a los participantes: Festival PM: <https://festival-poesiaymusica.cl>; Sonhoras: <https://www.sonhoras.org>; Pamenar Press: <https://www.pamenarpress.com>; Crater Press: <http://www.craterpress.co.uk>; Buh Records: <https://buhrecords.bandcamp.com>; Veer Books: <https://www.veerbooks.com>; Erratum: <https://erratum.org>; Voxxx: <https://www.voxxx.xyz>.

evidentemente sonoro, y por otra, muchas de las obras calificadas como poesía sonora no contienen palabras inteligibles, por lo que las expectativas de interpretar un contenido semántico ceden a una experiencia puramente sonora y, por ellos, muchas veces son consideradas más cercanas al ruido y la música experimental. Por ese motivo, preferimos acogernos a la definición más básica y abarcadora de Dick Higgins: “poetry in which the sound is the focus, more than any other aspect of the work” (40).² Desde esa perspectiva se pueden englobar varias tradiciones y prácticas en este campo: cantos rituales basados en la repetición, ejercicios de combinatoria, juegos poéticos que tienden al sinsentido, glosolalia, y, como es más evidente desde el dadaísmo y el futurismo ruso e italiano, la poesía fonética. También es posible sumar posteriormente los trabajos de Henri Chopin, que incorporan las grabaciones y la manipulación del sonido como campo de operaciones (con prescindencia del soporte impreso), lo que abre el camino a las numerosas creaciones basadas en tecnologías análogas (cintas) y digitales (softwares de edición de sonido).

En la historia de la poesía chilena es posible encontrar varios antecedentes relevantes de todas estas líneas. Podemos considerar, por una parte, la fractura lingüística en *Altaçor* de Vicente Huidobro (1931), los neologismos y fusión de palabras en la poesía joven de Eduardo Anguita y *Las ferreterías del cielo* de Arturo Alcayaga (1955), así como las performances de Cecilia Vicuña y los cantos de Lorenzo Aillapán, el hombre pájaro, que nos retrotraen a una dimensión originaria del lenguaje. Muchas de estas manifestaciones, sin embargo, han circulado de manera aislada, por lo que resulta difícil hablar de un movimiento más masivo durante el siglo XX. El desarrollo más fuerte ocurre a partir de la fundación del Foro de Escritores en 2003, grupo inspirado en el Writers Forum dirigido por Bob Cobbing en Londres. Su principal animador ha sido el poeta Martín Gubbins, pero en él han participado activamente la artista Anamaría Briede, el poeta Andrés Anwandter, el poeta y compositor Gregorio Fontén, la performer Luna Montenegro, el artista sonoro Rainer Krause, además de Martín Bakero y Felipe Cussen, entre muchos otros. Este grupo funcionó en sus primeros años como un taller en el que participaron numerosos artistas, poetas y músicos, además de muchos visitantes internacionales, y dio pie a varias publicaciones, entre ellas la *Iera Antología de Poesía Sonora Chilena*, compilada por Gregorio Fontén.

² Para más definiciones, ver también Cussen (“Quise grabar un disco de poesía sonora, pero me salió música electrónica”).

Otro evento muy relevante ha sido el Festival de Poesía y Música PM, organizado por los músicos y poetas Gonzalo Henríquez y Federico Eisner junto a Martín Gubbins. Se han realizado ya 5 ediciones de este Festival (en 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021 y 2022), en los que ha confluído una cantidad creciente de proyectos de carácter intermedial, ya sean grupos musicales, voz a capella o un computador, y otras prácticas que incorporan el teatro, la danza y la improvisación sonora. Han creado, además, el sello Discos PM, en el que se han publicado, por ejemplo, las performances de Raúl Zurita + González y los Asistentes, Cecilia Vicuña + José Pérez de Arce, y los discos de Marcela Parra y la Orquesta de Poetas.

Ciertamente, el trabajo del Foro de Escritores excede la poesía sonora, pues ha abarcado la poesía visual, la performance y otras áreas. Del mismo modo, una parte importante de lo que se ha presentado en el Festival PM podría calificarse más bien de canción, o de lectura poética acompañada por música, y no necesariamente poesía sonora. Sería un error, sin embargo, perder demasiado tiempo en categorizaciones estrictas porque esto implicaría traicionar el espíritu que han tenido estos proyectos, entendidos siempre como una expansión de la poesía hacia otras disciplinas, aunque se corra el riesgo de que, en el camino, se produzcan resultados que están fuera de lo que usualmente se entiende por poesía.

Es preciso agregar, además, una condición específica del circuito de la poesía sonora y experimental en general: su carácter colaborativo y su intensa circulación a través de redes internacionales. Esto se debe, por una parte, a ciertas formas de funcionamiento provenientes de los movimientos de los años '60 y '70, como la poesía concreta o el arte postal, que apostaban a una vinculación más allá de los límites nacionales e institucionales y los circuitos comerciales. Pero también influye el rol secundario del contenido semántico en este tipo de prácticas, que hace irrelevante conocer o no el idioma de expresión original de tal o cual artista, pues el foco muchas veces está puesto en su textura sonora o su dimensión performativa. En las últimas décadas, gracias a la residencia de varios poetas del Foro de Escritores en diversos países (Martín Bakero en Francia, Andrés Anwandter, Gregorio Fontén y Martín Gubbins en Inglaterra, Anamaría Briede en Alemania, Felipe Cussen en Cataluña, por nombrar algunos) y el desarrollo de una serie de festivales

en Europa y Latinoamérica (como Enclave en México y PM en Chile), estas redes se han ampliado y potenciado. Esta característica es notoria si se compara, por ejemplo, con la circulación que tienen los autores chilenos en el ámbito de la novela o la poesía más tradicional, que se da principalmente en países de habla hispana, y solo trasciende a otros contextos en la medida en que se publiquen traducciones de sus obras.

Cuando, a partir de la idea de Martín Bakero y la colaboración desde el comienzo de Felipe Cussen, se inició el ciclo “Language is à virus”, ya existía una red de al menos veinte o treinta de sus contactos directos que rápidamente se fue extendiendo a partir de invitaciones a otros posibles interesados en participar. La plataforma de organización fue a través de un grupo de Whatsapp que alcanzó a sumar cerca de un centenar de personas, lo que permitía no sólo avisar las sesiones semanales, sino también compartir novedades, publicaciones y convocatorias. La asistencia a las distintas sesiones fue bastante variable, desde 5 a 30 personas, aproximadamente. Si bien había una cierta cercanía generacional (entre los treintas y cincuentas, en su mayoría), como ya se señaló, proveníamos de distintos países y trayectorias, y nuestra relación con la poesía sonora también era diversa: ya sea como el centro del trabajo artístico, como una extensión (secundaria) de una trayectoria más vinculada a la literatura, las artes o la música, desde una perspectiva académica, etc. Por lo mismo, además, los puntos de referencia eran muy divergentes y en varias ocasiones debíamos anotar los nombres de poetas o artistas que escuchábamos por primera vez.

Una de las primeras decisiones prácticas fue la elección del idioma para estas reuniones, y en casi todas las ocasiones se privilegió el inglés, por ser el segundo idioma de la mayoría de los participantes, y que también provocó, por cierto, varios momentos de dudas y confusiones en nuestra comunicación. Otra decisión fue mantener un mismo día (miércoles) y hora de la semana (noche para Europa y tarde para Latinoamérica) para darle regularidad a las reuniones: tal como señaló en varias ocasiones Bakero, queríamos que funcionara como la reunión semanal de un grupo de amigos en un bar, a la que uno asiste sabiendo más o menos con quiénes se encontrará. Ese carácter suelto y flexible (muchos se sumaban más tarde, otros se retiraban antes, y los grados de atención e involucramiento eran bastante oscilantes) favoreció que la extensión de cada sesión fuera,

en promedio, de dos horas, a veces casi tres. Solía ocurrir, también, que al inicio de cada reunión la dinámica era más formal (generalmente Cussen presentaba al poeta o artista invitado, y éste exponía aproximadamente una media hora) y luego la conversación se iba abriendo y desviando, para terminar en improvisaciones que a veces eran bastante extensas. Más que describir alguna en particular, intentaremos caracterizar a través de estas páginas sus condiciones recurrentes: la mayoría de las veces los poetas y artistas utilizaban sus voces o algún instrumento (desde guitarras eléctricas a cascabeles) a través de los micrófonos de sus computadores, pero también algunos ocupaban micrófonos de mejor calidad; a veces se leían textos ya escritos (en inglés o en otros idiomas) o se balbuceaban sonidos ininteligibles. Muchas veces se lograban momentos de clímax, pero por largos espacios se producían silencios no programados, apenas puntuados por sonidos sueltos que intentaban recuperar el flujo. Algunos sumaban también movimientos corporales y acercamientos bruscos a la cámara, o mostraban dibujos realizados durante la conversación. Para la mayoría, sin duda, estos gestos resultaban frustrantes, en la medida en que se perdía el carácter físico y compartido de la experiencia performativa, y se convertían en un recordatorio cruel de la imposibilidad de conectarnos físicamente. No se buscaba, obviamente, realizar una grabación profesional de estas improvisaciones, sino simplemente aprovechar la instancia de una manera más lúdica y exploratoria, dirigida más hacia nosotros mismos que a un público externo.

Aunque casi siempre los expositores provenían de nuestro propio grupo, también hubo ocasiones en que se invitó especialmente a algún invitado que no participaba de manera regular. También ocurrió que el rol de organizadores de Bakero y Cussen se fue diluyendo y hubo varias sesiones coordinadas por otros participantes regulares del ciclo. Por último, creemos que el nombre adoptado (en referencia al concepto de William Burroughs) operó no solamente como referencia a las condiciones de confinamiento que vivíamos por culpa del virus, sino también a la rápida expansión que permitió a tantas personas participar de este espacio de reunión.

Discusiones

Nos interesa a continuación dar cuenta de algunos de los ejes principales que fueron surgiendo gradualmente a través de todas las sesiones del ciclo “Language is à virus”, y que, gracias a

la continuidad de muchos de los participantes, se fueron profundizando o relacionando con nuevos temas. Como ya se señaló, no se trataba de conversaciones estructuradas, y si bien inicialmente se comentaban los trabajos o problemáticas planteados por el invitado de cada sesión, rápidamente se entrelazaban con los intereses particulares de cada uno, muchas veces divergentes. Finalmente pudimos reunir seis grandes temas, con algunos subtemas, que ahora desglosaremos como si fueran una sola conversación.³

a) ¿De qué está hecha la poesía sonora?

Una de las consideraciones recurrentes fue que, a pesar de que podría pensarse que el material principal de la poesía sonora es obviamente el sonido, estas prácticas también involucran, de manera implícita o explícita, el cuerpo en una dimensión más amplia, como el tacto o el gusto. Para Maja Jantar, las voces tocan, son ondas y por eso pueden ser contagiosas (de una manera positiva, por supuesto), Cia Rinne expresa que las respiraciones pueden considerarse como una nueva forma de hablar y Alejandra del Río asume que también el acto de la escritura implica a todo el cuerpo (1; 31; 38). Quizás el ejemplo más claro de esta intención fue la performance de danza y poesía (o “kinepoesía”) de Scott Thurston (40). Este énfasis sensorial se relaciona, a la vez, con una distancia o incluso una visión crítica respecto del uso cotidiano del lenguaje y con la predominancia de la materialidad del lenguaje por sobre el plano semántico. En esta línea son muchas las intervenciones: Julien d’Abrigeon plantea que si sólo buscamos el sentido, perderemos la vibración del lenguaje, Martín Bakero valora que el resultado de la poesía sonora es, muchas veces, “un sentido sin sentido,” y Luna Montenegro señala que en una cultura en la que pareciera haberse perdido el sentido, hablar palabras incomprensibles sí podría tener un sentido (6; 3; 48). En la misma línea, Dirk Huelstrunk valora que el no comprender puede ser menos restrictivo que el comprender (16), lo que ciertamente puede vincularse a toda una tradición de poesía sonora relacionada con el hermetismo. Felipe Cussen, por otra parte, repara en el hecho de que, por más abstracto o incomprensible que sea un poema sonoro, muchas veces tendemos a tratar de encontrar allí patrones o elementos que nos permitan organizar, aunque sea de manera precaria, algún mínimo sentido (16).

3 En esta sección referiremos las conversaciones desarrolladas dentro del ciclo “Language is à virus” indicando el número de episodio al que corresponde, y que pueden encontrarse en el listado de nuestro canal de Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-JURzLv6KJw&list=PL8MyJgRQ1QPXc9-hMAKgImqIXEc4sYixb>. En la bibliografía también incorporamos por separado los links de cada capítulo referido. Las citas han sido traducidas por nosotros.

Es interesante que, dentro de los elementos constitutivos de la poesía sonora se deje en segundo plano, por ejemplo, la metáfora, y que se le dé una relevancia mucho mayor al silencio o la quietud (Hannah Silva 45; Gerard Alaió 8) y, en especial, a la repetición. Nia Davies la valora en la medida en que forma parte tanto de la poesía como de los rituales, que provocan una conexión especial independientemente de las creencias religiosas de cada persona, y, del mismo modo, Kinga Toth recuerda los movimientos de monjas que rezan y cantan mientras caminan (9; 5). Para Edwin Torres, el ritual es una necesidad humana básica, y el acto repetitivo puede servir también para la destrucción de lo viejo que da espacio a lo nuevo (12). En esta línea, Zoë Skoulding también considera que la repetición puede considerarse revolucionaria en la medida en que cada ciclo puede dar espacio a un quiebre respecto a lo anterior (24). Estas reflexiones, ciertamente, se vinculan a las prácticas de muchos de estos poetas y artistas que utilizan la repetición ya sea a través de la pura voz, o bien con dispositivos como el *looper*. Por el contrario, Ramuntcho Matta se declara “anti-repetición” (22).

b) Poesía sonora y tecnologías

Es constante el uso de las tecnologías digitales en la poesía sonora actual, como bien muestran muchos de los participantes en este ciclo. Lo importante, sin embargo, es que prevalece una mirada crítica respecto a su utilización, pues, como comenta Jörg Piringer, los dispositivos no garantizan *per se* una novedad en la producción poética (3). Hortense Gauthier y Kinga Toth coinciden en pensar la tecnología de manera integrada con lo humano, no como un ente distinto, pero se evita una confianza ciega en sus posibilidades (10; 5). En esa misma línea, Martín Bakero lamenta que las máquinas no pueden explorar las posibilidades del error (26). Eugenio Tisselli, un activo creador de poesía digital, también advierte del riesgo de idolatrar la tecnología, o confundirla con la magia, y critica el control industrial de programas como Flash (muy común para la creación de poesía animada, y discontinuado a partir de 2021) (43). En la sesión en que participó el colectivo chileno *Otra Sinceridad* también se discutió largamente sobre el valor de formatos análogos como el cassette, que ofrecen una condición de resistencia respecto a otros soportes de publicación (36).

Una mención aparte merece la utilización de la plataforma Zoom como forma de contacto durante nuestras sesiones. Es sabido que este medio, si bien permite múltiples conexiones desde lugares distantes, con la posibilidad de compartir imágenes, audios y videos, también implica una serie de diferencias respecto a un encuentro presencial: la calidad del sonido no es alta, la transmisión muchas veces se interrumpe debido a fallas en la conexión de internet y, además, siempre existe una latencia que, por mínima que sea, dificulta el intercambio más espontáneo y provoca numerosas superposiciones o silencios. Más allá de las continuas quejas o bromas que muchas veces surgían, el grupo de participantes tendió a asumir las particularidades de Zoom y fuimos desarrollando nuestra propia forma de colaboración y creación conjunta.

En ese sentido, el uso de esta plataforma también fue evolucionando, en la medida en que dejaba de ser una novedad o un obstáculo y en vez de echar de menos aquello que nos impedía realizar, comenzábamos a explorar sus potencialidades. Se hacía más fluida, por ejemplo, la posibilidad de compartir información con links o desarrollar conversaciones paralelas a través del chat, y también se jugaba con algunos elementos audiovisuales (algunos aplicaban efectos que deformaban las imágenes). Pero lo más potente, sin duda, era la posibilidad inédita de realizar improvisaciones colectivas tan amplias y con participantes tan diversos, sin ninguna dirección fija (porque resultaba imposible contar con la figura de un “director”) y que en muchos momentos tendía a un flujo muy orgánico. Si, como decía Freud, el poeta es un inventor de nuevos puentes con la realidad, creemos que las características accidentales que permitieron estos encuentros nos impulsaron a cumplir con esa premisa.

c) Improvisación

Una discusión frecuente se dio en relación a la composición de obras versus la improvisación, y el espacio que existiría para el azar. Gerard Alaió destaca el valor del texto como punto de partida de una exploración que puede prolongarse en las performances, y Miriam Reyes considera que el libro no debe ser una prisión para el poema (8; 23). En esa línea, Jennifer Scappettone cree que un libro, una instalación o una performance pueden ser todos distintos vehículos para un mismo proyecto (47). Anamaría Briede, por otra parte, considera que la

experiencia en un escenario implica la traslación de elementos de su estudio de artista, y Nia Davies refiere el uso de partituras para sus performances, pero de una manera extremadamente abierta: puede ser, por ejemplo, una piedra (2; 9). En cualquiera de estos casos, como vemos, se asume que la performance necesariamente implica una experiencia nueva y más abierta respecto a la obra precedente.

Una característica particularmente distinta de la poesía sonora respecto a la práctica habitual de la lectura poética es que se aleja del carácter íntimo o confesional y se acerca mucho más a una experiencia colectiva, en gran medida debido al carácter ritual que ya mencionábamos. Esto puede realizarse en performances individuales, en las que el poeta asume un rol cercano al de un chamán, como se desprende de lo planteado por Nia Davies y, en particular, Cecilia Vicuña (9; 15). Esta última lo describe como un proceso de vaciamiento, que coincide con la intención de Aódan McCardle en pos de borrar el yo y la intencionalidad y el interés de Edwin Torres por eliminar la jerarquía que muchas veces implica la religión (por ejemplo, el discurso desde un púlpito) (15; 32; 12). Rhys Trimble también menciona el carácter ritual que implica una improvisación, mientras Luna Montenegro cree que estos actos pueden relacionarse con un hechizo, y Martin Bakero destaca que la poesía nos permite entrar en un estado de trance (14; 9; 12).

Las improvisaciones de más de diez o veinte personas que cierran casi la totalidad de los capítulos fueron descritas por muchos como una experiencia catártica, evidentemente relacionada con las condiciones de aislamiento que vivíamos entonces. Pero ellas también prueban, por otra parte, la condición extremadamente flexible que permite esta forma de interacción, donde los roles muchas veces se intercambian, se combinan distintas texturas y formas de intervención, y hay espacio para intervenciones más puntuales e intermitentes. En una interacción de este tipo es claro que no existe el error como tal, y en ese sentido esta experiencia puede observarse como la culminación del interés de muchos por los desvíos y los fallos (Altaió 8, Jèssica Pujol 19), así como la curiosidad y la inocencia (cómo valora Huelstrunk respecto a Tomás Browne 44), que constituyen una característica fundamental del espíritu experimental de estas poéticas.

d) Poesía sonora en relación

Parte importante de los integrantes de “Language is à virus” forman parte de instituciones académicas, ya sea como profesores o investigadores, como escritores residentes, o en ambas condiciones. No es raro, entonces, que las exposiciones de muchos invitados se plantearan desde la intersección de la crítica y la creación, o incluso en la investigación basada en la práctica artística (por ejemplo, Sophie Seita 29, Emma Gomis 41 y Urayoán Noel 30). Sophie Seita, de hecho, reivindica el valor del poema como una forma de pensamiento, e incluso Chris Paul considera que un poema podría ser visto como una forma experimental de crítica (29; 41). Para Cussen, por otra parte, el diálogo directo con poetas y artistas, tal como se dio en este mismo ciclo, es una oportunidad muy valiosa para incorporar una serie de conocimientos que usualmente quedan excluidos de la discusión académica más teórica (4). En esta misma línea, Cussen también valoró la experiencia curatorial (en el capítulo 39, dedicado al Festival de Libros organizado por *La oficina de la nada*) como otra forma muy provechosa de investigar que, lamentablemente, no suele ser valorada como tal a nivel institucional.

Otra labor que comparten muchos de los miembros del grupo es la traducción (por ejemplo, Jèssica Pujol y Andrés Anwandter), que se suma al uso y mezcla de distintas lenguas en la creación poética (Eduard Escoffet, Edwin Torres y Cia Rinne, entre otros). Dado que el uso del inglés en nuestras conversaciones constituía para muchos un esfuerzo adicional, era frecuente que dedicáramos un espacio a reflexionar sobre los sentidos específicos de un concepto pero, además, sobre las potencialidades de la traducción como un espacio de descubrimiento (Luis Bravo 27). Fue atractivo, sin embargo, que en muchas ocasiones surgiera una visión de la poesía como un acto de traducción en sí mismo (o viceversa), ya sea como una traducción del mundo sensorial (Edwin Torres 13), o a través del cuerpo (Aódan McCardle 13). Al mismo tiempo, como indicó Ghazal Mosadeq, todos buscamos desesperadamente traducir y comprender lo que experimentamos, pero la poesía muchas veces se resiste a ese esfuerzo (13).

Otros temas relacionados que surgían puntualmente atendían a la relación con el medio ambiente: Camilla Nelson se preguntaba de qué modo nuestras prácticas de publicación podían

ser más amigables con la naturaleza, y Jörg Piringer planteaba que el problema no radicaba en las tecnologías por sí mismas sino en su explotación industrial (34; 43). Pero a un nivel más amplio, también Nelson apuntaba a la fusión de los sonidos producidos por los humanos con todos los otros sonidos producidos en la naturaleza, y Hortense Gauthier planteaba que podríamos aspirar a una forma de incorporar nuestros cuerpos sin distinción con el medio ambiente (34; 10). Paralelamente existía una mirada crítica del conocimiento científico; Piringer, con formación en computación, destacaba que las matemáticas no siempre son precisas y Joachim Montessuis señalaba que la ciencia es sólo una forma posible de conocimiento, tan válida, por ejemplo, como la alquimia (7). Este comentario, por cierto, se vincula a las numerosas referencias y reflexiones en torno a los vínculos de la poesía sonora con la mística expresados en la mayoría de las sesiones.

También nos preguntamos en ocasiones respecto al lugar de la poesía sonora en relación a otras artes, y en especial la música. Ello implicaba revisar algunas de sus evoluciones históricas (por ejemplo, el paso de la poesía fonética a aquella producida con máquinas, como indica Federico Eisner 46), así como a la expectativa usual de la literatura como un espacio de significados más que vibraciones y sensaciones corporales (Altaió 8), que lleva a Julien d'Abrigeon a proponer que la poesía sonora estaría más cerca de la música que la literatura (6). Es importante mencionar, a la vez, que en varias ocasiones se expusieron trabajos más vinculados a la dimensión visual, como el trabajo con proyecciones en espacios públicos del colectivo Delight Lab (51), y otros casos de instalaciones y exposiciones. Pero lo que prima, en todo caso, es la intención de dejar las etiquetas de lado, es decir, reconocer su utilidad práctica pero jugar con ellas para borrarlas (Huelstrunk 16) y utilizar la poesía como una forma de resistir y huir de las normas (Gauthier 10). Muchas de las performances desarrolladas en las sesiones parecieran ejemplificar estas posturas: son mucho más extensas de lo que constituiría un espectáculo habitual, son más caóticas, los roles de sus participantes no son claros y no tienen comienzo ni fin definidos; a veces, de hecho, se mezclaban con la conversación.

e) Recepción y efectos

Uno de los aspectos más relevantes en cualquier discusión sobre poesía sonora, vinculado a su carácter muchas veces hermético y las expectativas que desafía, es el de la recepción. En

este plano, tal como indicó Martín Gubbins, el problema no son necesariamente las condiciones específicas de un poema sino sus condiciones de circulación (51). En este punto, encontramos visiones muy dispares entre los participantes: Eduard Escoffet, por ejemplo, plantea que no se preocupa especialmente si a los espectadores les gusta o no su trabajo, Aódan McCardle destaca que el público poco especializado es a veces mucho más receptivo a la experimentación, Julha Valkeapää menciona el rol de responsable, o anfitrión respecto al público y Nakh Ab Ra (fundador de la Estación Alógena en Buenos Aires) destaca que en muchas ocasiones se produce una fusión con la audiencia (50; 32; 48; 4).

Otro aspecto muy importante es el carácter político que podría tener esta práctica poética. Recurrentemente, la poesía experimental, por su distancia del discurso más explícito, es calificada como solipsista e irresponsable, pero las posturas de los integrantes de “Language is à virus” contradicen esta opinión. En primer lugar, la poesía es vista como un espacio capaz de abrir una nueva realidad (Bakero 10), permitir la exploración y alejar el miedo (Gubbins 28 & 52), mostrar posibilidades y expandir la imaginación (Torres 12) y ofrecer gozo (McCardle 12). Para Altaió, incluso, nos muestra la posibilidad de crear a través de la destrucción, como un impulso anárquico (11). Eduard Escoffet considera que su trabajo es político en la medida en que constituye no un contenido sino una forma de hacer, y Luna Montenegro estima que cualquier cambio en la palabra [word] es un cambio en el mundo [world] (50; 38). Desde una posición más comprometida, Carlos Soto Román recuerda que la poesía aún es capaz de manifestar las atrocidades que somos incapaces de escuchar, y que, aunque no sea una prédica, si es capaz de fomentar la memoria (25). La práctica colectiva también es valorada en esta dimensión: para Chris Paul el arte es una excusa para hacer amistades, traspasar límites y crear comunidad, y, al final del ciclo, Joachim Montessuis también rescata ese espíritu colaborativo (49; 52).

f) Pandemia

Un tema que se mantuvo como una constante, como un *ostinato*, fue la condición de reclusión debida a la pandemia. Más allá de los gravísimos efectos que provocó en toda la población mundial, a muchos participantes del ciclo les afectó específicamente en su labor poética, basada

muchas veces en las performances en vivo, giras, festivales y encuentros académicos. Por lo mismo, fue recurrente la valoración de esta oportunidad de encuentro semanal entre distintos *freakies* desperdigados por el mundo (Altaíó 1), que podían constituirse como una familia poética (Gubbins 9). En algunas ocasiones se destacó, por lo mismo, el carácter libre y desprejuiciado de estas reuniones, muy cercana al modelo del *Writers Forum* de Bob Cobbing o el *Foro de Escritores* chileno, en los que todos eran admitidos sin distinción, y en los que se podían compartir trabajos provenientes no sólo de la poesía sino de distintas disciplinas, con la posibilidad de aburrirse, entretenerse o reírse sin que fuera un problema.

Ese espíritu expansivo se mantuvo en varios planos: tanto en la amplitud de los participantes como en la disposición a conocer manifestaciones muy diversas. Hay que recalcar que esto ya se encontraba presente en la primera cita, cuando Martin Bakero trajo a colación la cita de Burroughs que nos impulsaba (1). En esa ocasión Maja Jantar ya planteaba que podemos hacer mucho más de lo que imaginamos a través del sonido, y Rocío Cerón destacó el rol del lenguaje como una forma de sobrevivencia (1; 1).

No pretendemos, con esto, sobreenfatizar la importancia de “Language is à virus”, sino simplemente poner en valor la importancia fundamental que tuvo para todos quienes tuvimos la suerte de integrar esta red en el primer año de la pandemia y que encontramos allí tanto un espacio de contención como una oportunidad única para dialogar y expandir nuestros intereses. Teníamos conciencia, asimismo, que este ciclo permitió crear un archivo muy particular de un momento específico del desarrollo de la poesía sonora, y que esto no hubiera sido posible si las circunstancias externas no hubieran sido tan extremas. Por eso, la decisión de publicar en *Youtube* todos los capítulos responde también al intento por preservar no tanto una serie de obras, sino especialmente las dinámicas y reflexiones conjuntas que, de algún modo, iban creando un gran discurso ruidoso y multiforme, que creemos que podrá ser muy útil para futuros estudiosos de estos fenómenos. Al mismo tiempo, asumimos que gran parte de lo que conversábamos, mostrábamos o improvisábamos podría parecer anecdótico o irrelevante visto desde afuera, pero desde el interior siempre fue muy valorado porque no buscábamos crear una reflexión o una obra de características definitivas, sino

simplemente aprovechar la oportunidad de encontrarnos y divertirnos juntos. Esta sensación de proximidad a pesar del encierro, de cercanía e incluso ternura en momentos tan críticos, ciertamente marcó un hito en todas nuestras trayectorias.

Proyecciones

Tras el fin del primer ciclo de un año, que coincidió con un mayor relajamiento de las condiciones de confinamiento en muchos países, especialmente del Hemisferio Norte, este grupo ha mantenido su contacto a través del grupo de Whatsapp como un medio para compartir novedades y material que puedan ser de interés general. Además, hemos vuelto a reunirnos puntualmente en distintas instancias en un formato similar. El 21 de junio de 2021, algunos de los participantes chilenos (Felipe Cussen, Martín Bakero, Anamaría Briede, Martín Gubbins y Pía Sommer) participaron en el panel “Language is à Virus: The Chilean Variant”, presentados por Zoë Skoulding, en el Metamorphosis Festival 2021 organizado por Bangor University, de Gales. Posteriormente, el 12 de enero de 2022, varios integrantes de distintos países volvimos a reunirnos en la mesa redonda “Language is à virus”, en el marco de la V Jornada de Literatura en Inglés: Poetry in Performance, organizado por la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Recientemente, y como parte de las actividades de difusión de esta investigación para el Fondo de la Música, grabamos un nuevo episodio en el que conversamos en torno a los ejes principales que hemos mostrado en estas páginas. Una vez más, el encuentro dio paso a una improvisación colectiva. Estamos organizando, en paralelo, un dossier de material visual y sonoro para la revista francesa DOCK(S), que cuenta con una trayectoria muy importante en el ámbito de la poesía experimental, y para marzo está programado un encuentro presencial en Bangor University, con el colectivo de Adrian Fisher y Luna Montenegro, Andrés Anwandter, Martín Bakero y Felipe Cussen, junto a Zoë Skoulding. Y sigue pendiente, además, la posibilidad de retomar las reuniones regulares, aunque sea de forma más espaciada, en un nuevo ciclo. Hubo muchos poetas, músicos y artistas que, por diversos motivos (falta de tiempo, dificultades para conectarse, etc.), no pudieron participar, y que nos encantaría convocar. A fin de cuentas, aunque las condiciones iniciales que provocaron nuestras primeras reuniones hayan cambiado, creemos que es importante mantener este espacio, tan absurdo

y mágico, de encuentro, y que, dentro de un clima apocalíptico, nos permitió utilizar las herramientas tecnológicas no desde su potencial utilitario y efectista, sino como los puentes para constituir una comunidad con sus propios rituales que aquí hemos querido compartir.

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“Song-Song Stare”: Maggie O’Sullivan’s Ritual Listening in Poetry and Performance

Nia Davies¹

ABSTRACT

Drawing from research in the field of creative writing, this poetics essay explores performance and ritual in the work of Maggie O’Sullivan. I focus on sound poetry and listening to explore some of O’Sullivan’s ritual techniques of transformation. Following O’Sullivan’s ‘mattering of material,’ I elucidate some of the processes of ritual, embodiment and ecological relation which she makes use of in her poems and performances. I bring concepts from ritual theory and performance studies into play with O’Sullivan’s poems and sound texts. Ritual techniques are used by O’Sullivan to transform the material of language and open up a liminal potential of poesis, a making anew in language or a sensual re-enchantment. These ritual techniques include fragmentation and re-composition of language into new material, the use of rhythm and repetition in a poem to create a resonant ‘pulsing’ and approaches which emphasise the embodied connections between those present in the space of the poem and their ecological interrelation. O’Sullivan makes poetry a medium for transformation where language becomes ‘an active physical presence in the world’, creating the possibility in performance of a liminal ‘space of undiminishment’, a poesis which opens our ears to ‘other-than-(as well as human)-sentience’ (in Olsen 204). The essay asks what new openings might be possible in the field between embodied arts and poetry.

KEY WORDS: Ritual, performance, performance poetry, poetry, poetics, Maggie O’Sullivan, embodied practice, creative writing, experimental poetry, ecopoetics, intermedia, live poetry, embodied methodology, British Avant Garde poetry.

¹ Nia Davies is a poet experimenting with embodied practice and performance. She completed practice-based Ph.D. research into ritual poetry in 2021. Her publications include *All fours* (Bloodaxe, 2017), editorship of the journal *Poetry Wales* (2014 – 2019) as well as several pamphlet and performance projects. *All fours* was shortlisted for the Roland Matthias Prize for Poetry in the Wales Book of the Year poetry category in 2018 and longlisted for the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize for First Collections in 2019. She co-curated Poetry Emergency festivals in 2018 and 2019 and has also worked on several intercultural translation projects such as Literature Across Frontiers and Cyfnewidfa Llen Cymru/Wales Literature Exchange. She lives in Wales/Cymru. Her second collection of poems will be published by Bloodaxe in 2024.

1. A poesis: O'Sullivan performing in Glasgow

A poetry reading in a packed bar in Glasgow, dark and humid. We are listening to a poet reading on stage and the listening is beginning to feel like dancing. This is poet and artist Maggie O'Sullivan performing in October 2016, in the venue 'Poetry Club' under a railway arch at the end of the symposium Outside-in/Inside-out, a 'Festival of Outside and Subterranean Poetry'.

Reading her poetry from the page, O'Sullivan builds up a rhythm with her voice, clearly sounding the words, phonemes and fragments of language she has assembled in her poems. The style is not untypical of O'Sullivan's performances, some of which you can hear in recorded readings, but I find this one particularly absorbing to listen to. Her poems are choppy with about-turns that surprise a listener with unexpected sounds and images. She emphasises the distinct sonic texture of the language, clearly pronouncing the rhythm of syntax. Sitting on the floor of the mezzanine above, I feel immersed in the poems' sonic and semantic fields. Her reading seems to create a unique sonic and kinaesthetic energy in the room which emerges from the poetry itself and her vocalisation. The meaning gestured to in the poetry is often material, embodied and ecological in nature, although there is no determined or fixed message in these poems but dynamic open-ended pieces to become immersed in. I soon feel I am moving along to the sound text of the poems as if to music.

The room is crowded and includes some of O'Sullivan's fellow travellers in the world of experimental poetry – particularly poets experimenting with embodied, ritual and performative poetry; Jerome Rothenberg and Charles Bernstein are here, for example. Many others seem as rapt as I am, as O'Sullivan enunciates the tumbling shapes of her words and neologisms, sounding the jagged corners and rushes of each piece of language carefully. Her voice seems responsive to us; I am listening so intensely that it feels as if my rhythms are synchronising with the poet's speech. Perhaps this is a form of *resonance* in that we begin to vibrate together in the midst of this altered and altering language.

Poetry readings do not often live up to the potential of such performance. It is all too common for the conditions of these events to interfere with the kind of careful listening poetry

requires. But when a reading is resonant like O’Sullivan’s performance here, we will remember the poetry as an encounter of an embodied nature. Such a sensually intensive form of listening might be experienced as pleasure and/or challenge.

I think of this bright and altering moment in poetry and language art as poesis. For me, poesis is the making anew in language, the moment new poetry is created or made possible. There are many routes towards poesis but in my practice and research I am interested in the embodied, relational and enactive techniques that bring poesis about and which O’Sullivan demonstrated so vibrantly in Glasgow in her ritual of listening. In my recent practice-based research in poetry and poetics, I have been drawing on ritual practice, performance studies and anthropology to consider the uses of ritual in poetry.¹ In Glasgow I wondered, if O’Sullivan makes a ritual out of the poetry reading, how does her approach and practice bring about poesis?

2. Poetry of ritual

Such poesis, or any kind of transformational moment in art, is rare and can never be expected or guaranteed to emerge by those who desire it. But, as Ben Spatz and others in performance studies have shown (Spatz, *What a Body*; Spatz, *Blue Sky Body*), techniques of embodiment and performance can be studied in a concerted practice. Thus, I study the techniques of ritual and performance practice and theory in order to understand how poesis may unfold and invigorate writing, reading and performance. My study of ritual poetry is a poetics – in Robert Sheppard’s term – a writerly discourse and cycle of practice oriented towards the making of new forms of writing (Sheppard, *The Necessity of Poetics*).

I define ritual as an embodied, material and relational process of enaction; ritual is enacted with the intention of creating new meaning. I follow Ronald L Grimes’s idea of ritualisation as that which “transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places” (*Beginnings* 60). Following Victor Turner’s theory of the rites of passage, ritual is often thought of as a process that involves movement in relation to thresholds:

¹ My research is in the field of creative writing and the doctoral thesis (2021) that I draw on in this essay is primarily practice-based research (Smith and Dean, *Practice-led Research*) using poetry, embodied practice (Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*; *Blue Sky Body*) and poetics (Sheppard, *The Necessity of Poetics*) as well as literary study as my methods. My study of O’Sullivan’s ritual poetry then has been primarily an exercise in creative practice and poetics, researching the technique that structures poetry practice (as in Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*).

the passing of zones in space and time to mark change (Turner 95-96). Such thresholds might be spatiotemporal boundaries or thresholds relating to that which is yet to have been done, such as pushing an embodied action beyond its previous limits. For example, a ritual may test or pass a pain barrier, play with the limits of materiality or be a rite of passage to mark cyclical events or important transitions. In Grimes's creative sense of ritualisation, any event, process or idea can be made into a ritual with intention and ritual process. It follows then that a poetry of ritual is full of diverse manifestations; I have observed and experimented myself with many different ritual techniques.

In this essay I want to focus on the techniques of ritual related to sound and listening in live performance of poetry, as in O'Sullivan's performance in 2016. In O'Sullivan's most resonant readings language itself becomes a medium of generative poesis. Her poetry performances invite listeners to become newly aware of our embodied ecological lives through the poetry itself and together as listeners we enact an iteration of the poem's life cycle.

3. 'Undiminishment': Fields of Ecological Poetry

Born to an Irish family in Lincolnshire in 1951, O'Sullivan was active on the Avant Garde poetry scene in London in the earlier part of her life, attending and collaborating with the Writers Forum of Bob Cobbing and other experimental networks, before moving to West Yorkshire where she still lives and works.²

The landscapes of the northern moorland environment and its inhabitants are everywhere in her later poems, with concerns for the other-than-human, ecological and environment central from the beginning of her work. In an interview with Redell Olsen, O'Sullivan states this: "the celebration of the transformative, merciful intelligences and energies of animals is in all my work" (in Olsen 204). O'Sullivan's poetry often seeks to undo the binaries of human/animal and other hierarchies, writing in the same interview that the 'exploitation and violation of other-than-human beings underpins our society and is embedded at every level in our h/arming hierarchies' (204).

2 Active across several media including visual art and sculptural assemblage, O'Sullivan's publications include *In the House of the Shaman* (1996), *red shifts* (2001), *Palace of Reptiles* (2003), *Body of Work* (2006), *WATERFALLS* (2009), *murmur – tasks of mourning* (2011) and most recently *courtship of lapwings* (2021). She is the editor of *Out of Everywhere: an anthology of contemporary linguistically innovative poetry by women in North America and the UK* (1996). *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan* from 2011 collects essays by contemporaries on her work and includes interviews. Several recordings of performances are collected on the PennSound website: <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/O'Sullivan.php>.

It is possible then to see O'Sullivan as part of a field of ecopoetics. The term is contested, but I want to talk here about *ecology* as this wide field of interrelation between organisms in the natural world which includes the human. Ecopoetics is described by Jonathan Skinner, in a conversation with Harriet Tarlo on definitions, as a field which aims to "broaden our imagination of the work of poetry to the scale of the earth"; where we are "rethinking home and place in an expanded field, in the turbulent space of a world-ecology" (Skinner and Tarlo 67). Tarlo's work on the field of "radical landscape poetry," which is different but related and overlapping with ecopoetics, foregrounds an experimental poetry where "there is a poetic displacement of the anthropocentric view" (Tarlo 19). In this poetry, language is the experimental medium to explore concern and care for the whole ecosystem's flourishing. O'Sullivan's poetry, for example, brings forth that which is silenced or erased in an ecology. Tarlo writes that in "O'Sullivan's work, it is possible to see nature moving from its position as resource or thing in order to become an agent in the production of knowledge, a position traditionally denied it" (Tarlo 19).

I would argue that one of the ways that O'Sullivan makes ecology or nature an 'agent in the production of knowledge' is to use techniques such as performance and ritual to bring the listener-readers into closer embodied contact with that natural "knowledge". O'Sullivan replies to Olsen's question about the 'place' of the page as a "place of transformation". I would understand this to also include the place of performance, listening, or the sound text of the spoken poem as an expanded idea of the page. Such a *place* for O'Sullivan is

a place of damage, savagery, pain, silence: also a place of salvage, retrieval and recovery. A place of existence, journeying. A sacred space of undimishment. Of dream. Of ritual. Of magic. Also a "re-constituting-as-being-heard" in the sense that as we hear, we also are heard in an intertwining of potential exchange of hearing-(being)-heard of other-than-(as well as human)-sentience (in Olsen 204).

So ritual is a conscious part of her approach to the poem as a "sacred space of undimishment" involving the "intertwining of potential exchange" with the "other-than-(as well as human)-sentience" of the world (204).

4. 'Muscular activity' Fields of Ritual poetry

O'Sullivan draws on a history of poets experimenting with ritual, performance, sound and other media.³ In experiments in the 1960s and 1970s, poets brought language art into contact with other media such as performance. Dick Higgins's 'Intermedia' in 1966, for example, is indicative of how, in the 1960s, poets had begun experimenting across media. The work of the British Avant Garde which O'Sullivan emerged within, (Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*), was connected with other poetry scenes involved in performance and ritual such as European sound poetry scenes, North American poetics related to LANGUAGE poetry and Latin American arts, most notably in Chile where performance is still central to contemporary poetry and poetics (Bernstein; Pujol-Duran).

Jerome Rothenberg's poetry, assemblages and ideas were 'key' to O'Sullivan (Palace 68). Rothenberg's "ethnopoetic", and then "omnipoetic", collections, such as *Technicians of the Sacred* (1967), *Shaking the Pumpkin* (1972) and *Symposium of the Whole* (1983) are assemblages and studies of ritual poetry with many rich examples of ritual texts as poems drawn from a wide variety of eras and cultures. Rothenberg describes a turn in poetry towards "ritual models" and performance in a 1977 talk:

Nearly a century after Dada,⁴ a wide range of artists have been making deliberate and increasing use of ritual models for performance, [this] has swept up arts like painting, sculpture, poetry (if those terms still apply) long separated from their origins in performance ... [JR's elision] The performance/ritual impulse seems clear throughout: in "happenings" and related event pieces (particularly those that involve participatory performance), in meditative works (often on an explicitly mantric model), in earthworks (derived from monumental American Indian structures), in dreamworks that play off trance and ecstasy, in bodyworks (including acts of self-mutilation and endurance that seem to test the model), in a range of healing events as literal explorations of the shamanic premise, in animal; language pieces related to the new ethology, etc (*Eye* 208).

3 For example in her poetics 'Riverrunning Realisations' (Palace) and in interviews (Thurston; Olsen) she has stated connections and inspirations as Kurt Schwitters, Charles Bernstein, Jerome Rothenberg, Bob Cobbing, and Cecilia Vicuña.

4 To avoid confusion, I would note that this talk was originally made in 1977 but Rothenberg reprinted and edited it for *Eye of Witness* in 2013, almost a century after Dada.

Rothenberg here describes works which move between media, are continuous with performance traditions and often involve altered states of perception or transformation. Such ritual poetics blur the boundaries between subject and object or art or life or between audience and performer and emphasise embodiment, relation to the earth and animals, as a ‘new ethology’ (Rothenberg, *Eye* 208).

As Rothenberg mentions above and elsewhere (Rothenberg and Rothenberg, Symposium of the Whole), poets have been experimenting with ritual and performance since the beginning of recorded history,⁵ but the turn to ritual and performance in the 1960s and 1970s was notably active. At this time, we also see ritual in the laboratory theatre of directors such as Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba as well as in new works of performance art, movement and dance. German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte has termed this burst of activity the *second performative turn* (Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*; Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power*).⁶ Performers experimented with ritual spacetime, sound, smell, movement, rhythm, audience provocation, liveness, bodily mortification and pain and unusual use of materials and reversals. They enacted thrilling re-imaginings and alterations of the traditional theatre models of the proscenium and narrative drama. Their techniques brought to the fore of the spectators’ attention their own embodiment and agency, as well as their role in the generation of the performance (*Transformative Power*). Fischer-Lichte’s history of performances that use ritual techniques allow her to identify processes of what she terms the *autopoietic feedback loop* and the *re-enchantment of the world*. These are concepts I will return to in thinking about O’Sullivan’s poetry.

At the centre of these turns to “ritual models” in a poetry context in the UK was Bob Cobbing (1920-2002), who was important to O’Sullivan’s development as a poet and artist. In “Some Statements on Sound Poetry”, Cobbing describes a sound poetry reading with group voicing:

Communication is primarily a muscular activity. It is potentially stronger than everyday speech, richer than those monotonous seeming printed words on the page....

Say ‘soma haoma’. Dull. Say it dwelling on the quality of the sounds. Better. Let it say itself

⁵ The temple hymns of Enheduanna (fl. 23rd Century BC) in ancient Sumer and the poets composing drama for the Theatre of Dionysus in ancient Athens are some of the earliest records of poetry and also rituals. Historical uses of ritual then reoccur through all periods of the history of poetry. Movements which included interest in ritual, such as Romantic and Modernist poetics, have not been the focus of my study which focuses on contemporary lineages.

⁶ According to Fischer-Lichte, a first ‘performative turn’ took place in the first decades of the twentieth century when artists also drew on ritual culture, (*Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*).

through you. Let it sing itself through you. The vowels have their pitch, the phrase has potential rhythms. You do it with the whole of you, muscular movement, voice, lungs, limbs. Poetry is a physical thing. The body is liberated. Bodies join in song and movement. A ritual ensues.

My research has been a process of understanding how this ritual ensues and how poets bring about this poesis.

5. Ritual poems: 'Narcotic Properties' and 'Theoretical Economies'

I want to look closely at how "a ritual ensues" (Cobbing) in O'Sullivan's poems. I cannot refer to the poems O'Sullivan read in Glasgow as a recording was not reproduced, but I can show some of these qualities of O'Sullivan's work on the page through reading aloud and listening to recordings of readings.⁷ Two poems in her collection *Palace of Reptiles* (2003), "Theoretical Economies" and "Narcotic Properties" seem to involve fragments of a ritual for example.

We can think of the poems as closely interlinked, in fact they have been merged together in error in the 2003 collection *Palace of Reptiles* with parts of their order confused (Email Correspondence). I first noticed in 2018 that a recording of these poems, made at Willowdale, Ontario The Gig in 2003 was different from the published poem which comes alongside "Theoretical Economies" in *Palace of Reptiles*. Upon enquiry with O'Sullivan and Scott Thurston we discovered that the two poems had been mixed up in error in the publication and O'Sullivan had not noticed this until this point (Email correspondence).

Perhaps this confusion is not surprising given that these poems correspond to dispersed art works. That is, at the time of writing, the materials for O'Sullivan's art and assemblages were yet to be unpacked after a move to the countryside.⁸ The poems seem to gesture to specific works and processes of making but it's not determined if these are imagined works, already-made or yet-to-be made pieces. The image on the cover of *Palace of Reptiles* does seem to correspond to some of the

⁷ See PennSound's Maggie O'Sullivan webpage for a collection of recorded readings n.d. Web. <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/OSullivan.php> Accessed 1 Oct 2022.

⁸ In the introduction to a reading of "Theoretical economies" at Willowdale Ontario in 2003, O'Sullivan speaks about this: Pennsound "Maggie O'Sullivan" <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/OSullivan.php> Accessed 1 Oct 2021.

materials mentioned in these poems. “Theoretical Economies” and “Narcotic Properties” are thus steeped in a process of making across media. “Narcotic Properties” begins:

PLACE A SMALL PALE-CREAM BOWL (TO SIGNIFY
abundance)
(Palace 15)

Lead animals are to be laid out, cleaned carefully and placed without overcrowding; a preparing of space typical to ritual. The list of these animals forms a chant or litany for a section of the poem and a momentum is built up, accelerating briefly, before breaking off. A ritual seems present here, but this is not a clear description of an intentional passage of thresholds, where one might move through the “rites of passage,” as ritual theorists such as Victor Turner lay out.⁹ Following Arnold Van Gennep (1909), Turner described rites of passage in which ritualists would pass through distinct phases for the sake of transformation. In this theory, a preparatory separation is the first phase, followed by a crossing of thresholds into a spacetime of transition where normal rules are reversed or suspended and a ludic state of play, playfulness and inversion brings about *liminality*, a spacetime “betwixt and between” (Turner 95). These rites of passage would be followed by a closure threshold and a re-incorporation into the community as a person with a changed status. Turner coined the term *communitas* for the intense feeling of bonding that emerges from people enacting together in the liminal (Turner 94-95).

There are poets who use or play with such spatiotemporal thresholds of ritual in their work, for example, the performances and writings of NourbeSe M Philip’s 2008 *Zong!* and or Bhanu Kapil’s rituals of borders and sites of violence in *Ban en Banlieue* in 2015. However, in these poems, O’Sullivan’s movement is not a linear crossing of thresholds through separation, liminality and re-incorporation. “Theoretical Economies” and “Narcotic Properties” instead seem to enter into the liminal chaos of the upside-down world of fragmentation: “middles-a, haunts-a, tops-a, folds-a”

⁹ Theories of ritual can be found across a wide range of cultural and anthropological studies, from the works of Nietzsche, Robertson Smith, Frazer, Van Gennep, Durkheim, Mauss, Levi-Strauss and the Cambridge Ritualists such as Harrison, to Mead, Malinowski, Douglas, Eliade, Turner, Geertz, Leach, Tambiah, Rappaport, Campbell, Goffman and Schechner and more. For a discussion of the ‘over-theorisation’ of ritual theory see Catherine Bell’s two studies (Ritual Theory; Ritual Perspectives) and for a recent summary of these debates see Grimes (Endings). Fischer-Lichte’s 2005 discussion of this theoretical history is also useful for studies in an artistic context (Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual).

(16). There is no neat re-incorporation back into the shared meaning of a community as in Turner's rites of passage. Perhaps these poems are processes in line with "ritualisation" (Grimes, *Beginnings; Endings*), a process that is not yet complete, may be turned on its head, or played with in an ongoing cyclical creative process.

So, instructions for action are given but fragmented. Animal energies are invoked and lingual chaos opened up: "Unfixed/ Song-Song Stare..." (20). Despite the flurry of movement, care is given to the materials mentioned. The poem instructs, "WASH THESE LEAD ANIMALS WITH songerings-a-rung, a-chant, a roughly/ unsway /& stirs" (16). More instructions ensue – to dry the animals carefully and later to "throw talk over the lead animals" (17). Whether these imperatives *are* instructions, intentions or suggestions, notes to self, or half-torn directives of a ritual, O'Sullivan leaves open.

Later, the poem suggests lighting a match to a blood stain at the centre of a white cloth which then crumples and implodes. It is not specified where this blood springs from and this uncertainty charges the poem with the presence of a wounded body,

WATCH AS THE STAIN IGNITES AND
SPREADS EVER MORE OUTWARD TO THE EDGES OF THE WHITE CLOTH
(17)

The ritual letting of blood and fire lighting are common tropes of ritual. Substances like these, as well as earth and other material and bodily interventions, were often used by artists in the 1960s and 1970s in the performative turn such as in the works of Ana Mendieta, Marina Abramovic, Hermann Nitsch and Joseph Beuys (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power*). Beuys was an influence on O'Sullivan (in Thurston 247). Fire, blood and earth also recalls Rothenberg's description of artistic 'ritual models' (*Eye* 208). These substances and methods draw attention to the materiality of the body, earth and relationality, bringing corporeality and community, and sometimes mortality, to the fore of the spectators' awareness (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power*).

In O'Sullivan's poems here, fire, blood and bodily matter, including animal body, animate the text. These, as well as other ritual acts of cleansing, preparing, naming and 'throwing talk over' the

animals, remain enigmatic as to any clear symbolic meaning and are often broken off or stranded in the commotion of the liminal. Snatches of action, chant or rhythm and song fly in and out of the poem's soundscape. We are brought up close to the body, to listen to the sounds of animals in flight, with hints of violence perceptible.

Sound is a crucial part of the sensual field of the poems. In recordings of O'Sullivan's readings, the following part comes fast as a clatter of hooves:

SOLSTTTIAL, STRUCK-NINE

(whatll wattle wambs

wha

white

whe

who)

(*Palace* 21)

It's as if the animals have kicked up particles of material into the air in a dust cloud of language that is yet to settle. The end of "Theoretical Economies" in the publication, but what should have been the end of "Narcotic Properties", reads:

RED

BEES

APART

owl-sha

conks clays-under splashing. Abundance. weeps.'

(21)

"Abundance" recalls the beginning of 'Narcotic Properties', the bowl placed to signify abundance (16). "Abundance. weeps" seems to mourn for an other-than-human voice, a cry for the "HIDDENFULS UNHEARD" (18). We are listening in to unheard parts of animal language and the sounds of the "were-loud" ecosystem (21). Perhaps this is a mourning ritual. But some energy or particles of these creatures might linger in the air to be reassembled and transformed anew from

lifeless lead into another material. That is, some of what is “gone” (21) might remain as traces for the next cycle of poesis.

We are being invited to consider our animal kin. The final line suggests this as a transformed sense of kinship: “KINSHIP OOZED OUT OF SHAPE BLUE/ matter” (Palace 18). Perhaps we are moving into *communitas*: the transition phase of the ritual liminal that Turner wrote theorised (Turner 96). But this liminal chaos has an edge, it is not only the playful ludic world of reversals of Turner’s theory wherein the ritualist is safely returned to their community with a changed status. In a poem “Vienna Blood”, Jerome Rothenberg once directly cautioned Turner about the chaos possible in the liminal: “Communitas/ (I meant to tell you)/ is Holy Terror” (*Eye* 294). This resonates with O’Sullivan’s poems as the liminal zone she has created here feels risky, perhaps because of violent imagery of wounding and pain. Bones and flesh feel exposed and sensitive; something living is undergoing destruction, animals coldly being taken apart and dispersed into a violent market:

(& so the BONES go on in silence, violated often)

BY DEALS

DISPERSING SKULLS INTO

BASKETS. ADDITIONS. ORPHANS. CARCASSES.’

(*Palace* 17)

Recall that blood is spreading from who-knows-where. A body, humanimal, is very present and vulnerable:

LISTEN AS THE SKEWERED TRAMPLING OF THE DOOMED

ANIMALS ear into nethery Singes, Neighed-at’s,

all knuckle-noised,

were-louds, mouth,

mouth & proves

Unfixed

Song-Song Stare

stood-like

fist-on-breath
 finger-on-brain
 madder bled meat. maddled,
 (20)

An exposure seems to leave open the flesh of the brain, vulnerable to a finger or to ‘madder bled meat’ (20). The liminal of fragments in commotion is dangerous and subject to transformation, poesis.

6. In the Loop(s) of Performance: Poetics of Transformation

Although in these poems there is no neat re-incorporation from the liminal stage back into a stable community of shared symbolic meaning, as in Turner’s rites of passage (95-97), I might suggest that O’Sullivan’s liminal fragmentation is a creative poesis. As in much of her poetry, new words and utterly original combinations of language and sounds are made from recombining fragments of language and traces of destruction. In the liminal process, language is made unfamiliar, volatile but also malleable, transformed and possibly transforming.

Transformation is O’Sullivan’s intention, as explored in *In the House of the Shaman* (1993). And in a poetics work ‘Riverunning(Realisations)’ (2003), O’Sullivan lists some of her methods, interests, purpose and thematics. A ‘mattering of material,’ is a principle that is important to her (*Palace* 65):

Collaborations / Liberations /
 VISION / MYTH / RITUAL /
 Words, Breath,
 Divergence & Multiplicity, my tend sees errant, Vulnerable
 Chanceways –
 BECOMING
 Strains of Lament & Desire
 & Perpetual Strong SONG –
 (*Palace* 64)

Ritual here is placed alongside vision and myth, this is linked to the body, “words, breath”, processes of “perpetual” becoming. O’Sullivan is conscious that her work is close to song and there is a less-definable errancy suggested too, of ‘Vulnerable Chanceways –’. In an interview with Scott Thurston, O’Sullivan touches on her intentions around transformation, hinting at what a ‘mattering of material’ might be:

I think language is essentially transformative. Transformative power, ability, essence is inherent in language, all languages. I think by working with language one can tap into this and use it, by making it more visible, more of an active physical presence in the world. (in Thurston 247).

O’Sullivan seeks to transform all kinds of material, paralleling in language the way her influence Joseph Beuys worked with materials such as fat and felt (see O’Sullivan’s *In the House of the Shaman*). O’Sullivan’s is a transformation of language and its material so that words and sounds can become an “active physical presence in the world” (247).¹⁰ Performance is one way to transform language through the embodiment of sharing spoken words among listeners. In performance the speaking poeticking body of the poet and her listeners, as well as the “other-than-(as well as human)-sentence” (in Olsen 204) in the poetry are the material made to matter. The reading event becomes a poesis, an activation of the poem’s lifecycle so that “in the listening, seeing and inhabiting, the audiences are taking part in the construction of the work” (in Thurston 245).

In a performance like the one in Glasgow, O’Sullivan’s *mattering* took the form of sounding and resonance. Here the contagion of theatre spread among the poets and those co-present, a loop of sympathetic rhythms between listener and poet emerged. It would be impossible to know the responses of every person in the room, but this loop of exchange seemed to correspond with Fischer-Lichte’s description the ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ in performance (*Transformative Power* 39). In this autopoietic loop the audience’s reactions to the performer’s presence, their embodied techniques and performance devices, activate and bring into existence the performance. The performer responds in turn to the reactions of the spectators (*Transformative Power* 39) in

¹⁰ I need to leave aside for another discussion the other sense and side that ‘mattering of material’ has in O’Sullivan’s work: that of making the haptic material matter, wherein she engages with visual, sculptural assemblages and book making. In this essay I focus on the sonic side of the sensual spectrum.

an exchange of corporeal energies. The performer might use vivid techniques to encourage this feedback loop to emerge. An example of the autopoietic feedback loop is the intervention of the performers among the audience, such as Einar Schleeef's competing choruses of chaos in *Mothers* (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power* 55-58), John Cage's use of silence, Marina Abramovic's use of self-injury to provoke the spectators into action, or when live animals were introduced on stage in the works of Abramovic and Joseph Beuys (*Transformative Power* 122-125; 12-23; 101-107). We can also find O'Sullivan blurring the boundary between audience and performer in the resonance created in Glasgow and in other performances.¹¹ This is part of her intention to co-compose the poem with the audience, so that our listening becomes an activating force, with audiences involved "in the construction of the work" (in Thurston 245).

In the moment of the autopoiesis, spectators and participants are made keenly aware of embodiment and the materiality of the world around them. For Fischer-Lichte, the emergence of an autopoietic feedback loop may open up a liminal spacetime where usual boundaries have been blurred or erased. For example, the boundaries between audience and performer, subject and object or human and animal may be redrawn as the audience comes to feel themselves part of the performance, as embodied and animal (*Transformative Power* 175). The spectators become then aware of their corporeal existence: of mortality and of their place among other bodies, or of their agency as part of the event, and of ecological relation; perhaps they find themselves re-enchanted. Sometimes these interventions are more subtle than bloody and dramatic: the simple reversal of expectations, or introduction of surprise, silence, a slightly altered gesture or release of fragrance can be enough to generate a change in the audience's expectation and perceptual experience. Such subtle gestures and vocal fluctuations are common to a poetry reading.

7. "Song-Song stare": Rhythm and Repetition

In the cavernous Poetry Club in Glasgow in 2016, O'Sullivan stood stationary on stage and read her poems from paper, but her use of the rhythm and patterning of language in her vocalisation created a dynamism we could follow. Swerving syntax and surprising rhythmic patterning, fragments of song and even perhaps an emergent beat or incantatory pulse via

¹¹ As in a performance of 'murmur', November 6th 2003, as described by O'Sullivan in her interview with Olsen, 211-212.

repetition, all created a heightened and energetic sound text. This extract of O’Sullivan’s from Narcotic properties noted earlier is typical:

SOLSTTTIAL, STRUCK-NINE

(whatll wattle wambs

wha

white

whe

who)

(Palace 21)

Following syntax that is fragmented and multidirectional, listeners to this performance might experience a build-up of tension in expectation, followed by release. Rhythm emerges then deviates, followed by a return. Another rhythmic work in *In The House of the Shaman* (1993), “Another Weather System”, reads “*when your animal is brought back*” and includes a repeated refrain of “you/ too”,

you

too

stiffen swoop on ridge

you

too

topple turn hills many more turns

you

too

the Beasts do the rain not the Birds do another

you

too

call the pulsing home.

(17)

These elements of “pulsing,” this world of ridge, hills, beast, bird, listening human are called “home” through a pulse. In such incantatory or pulsing poetry, repetition or rhythm can lead listeners to surprise or alteration in perceptions; we move along and our listening bodies start to follow a beat, to dance even. This is a liminal moment of poesis, or Fischer-Lichte’s “re-enchantment of the world” in response to the performative aesthetic (Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual; Transformative Power*).¹² Performers and theatre makers, such as those described by Fischer-Lichte, are aware of how rhythmic patterns of bodies moving and speaking can bring about altered states in their participants. In a laboratory theatre setting, performance practitioners often use rhythmic embodied exercises that are known to bring on new states of perception and emergent psycho-physical conditions. For example, performance theorist and practitioner, Richard Schechner describes the heightened feelings of “omnipotence/vulnerability, tranquillity/readiness” arising from sustaining certain laboratory theatre exercises (Schechner 239).¹³ Other writers in performance studies have examined the trance states possible in synchronised rhythmic and repetitious work (Daboo; McNeil).

So, what happens when poets use language to create similar transformations through ritual rhythm, repetition and the semantic possibility of poetry? We might find this rhythmic poetics in incantation, in the ritualised reading aloud of texts as speech act, in praise, song and songlike intonation, spells, call and response, refrain and so on. Perhaps the “narcotic properties” of O’Sullivan’s poems come from the chanting and music of language: “WASH THESE LEAD ANIMALS WITH songerings-a-rung, a-chant, a roughly/ unsway /& stirs” (Palace 16). Chants are a particular technique of the poetry of ritual and Cobbing’s group chant of “soma haoma” wherefrom, he says, a “ritual ensues” (Cobbing) is emblematic.¹⁴

12 Fischer-Lichte’s picture of German theatre director Einar Schleef’s choric theatre in the 1970s and 1980s gives us a theatrical example parallel to challenging or musical sound poetry. In *Mothers* (1986) Schleef used two choruses who chanted rhythmic semi-sensical language in competition in increasingly chaotic confrontation with each other and the audience. Semantic and sensual meaning were confused in the spectator leading to experience of liminality, what Fischer-Lichte describes as “re-enchantment of the world” (*Transformative Power* 55-58, 129-130).

13 For example, I myself trained in workshops in this tradition. Especially relevant are the experimental practices that emerged after Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and others.

14 As well as O’Sullivan and Cobbing, several contemporary poets play with the voice’s rhythmic potential for changing embodied states. Geraldine Monk’s books and performances explore this, see *Interregnum* (1994) and her poetics *Insubstantial Thoughts on the Transubstantiation of the Text* (2002). Poet, researcher and performance artist Nathan Walker has a body of work in this field using embodiment, chant and “semantic satiation” which brings up many possibilities for radical new thinking in performance, poetry and poetics (see Walker, “Carrying in the Mouth”).

In the Poetry Club in Glasgow, were we in Schechner's "omnipotence/vulnerability, tranquillity/" or Fischer-Lichte's "re-enchantment of the world" (*Transformative Power*)? Were we high on the poesis of O'Sullivan's "narcotic properties"? I won't suggest that everyone reacts the same in these moments. Listening to "all the noises in the abruptly thousands" (*Palace* 18) in O'Sullivan's poems might instead be troubling or sensually flattening if it is experienced as overwhelming to a spectator. Perhaps other listeners are hungry or uncomfortable. And yet at the very least, there was a feeling in Glasgow in 2016 that this was a special performance – most I have spoken to who were present shared this feeling.¹⁵ Certainly O'Sullivan managed to *matter* the material and bring us into a poetry that is an "active physical presence in the world" (in Thurston 247). A liminal state of poesis, or "omnipotence/vulnerability" (Schechner 239) or whatever one calls an emergent moment of alteration, was made possible by O'Sullivan's techniques of embodiment, performance and ritual.

O'Sullivan is not just using embodied elements of ritual technique to bring her audience along with her and change their perceptions. As well as devices such as rhythm, repetition, resonant vocalisation and occasional moving among the audience, there is also the transformation of meaning possible. She has a turbulent semantic field of the poetry as her medium so that associations, meaning and images conjured are in play with alteration to perception and embodied response. Poetry is a medium of re-enchantment in O'Sullivan's performances and ritual works.

8. Weaving relation

Communities are formed like this – in the act of sharing in ritual poesis. The collective moment where we listen and react, enter into a feedback loop, could be called a moment of *communitas* in Turner's terms (Turner 96). *Communitas* is rare and any community created among poets and listeners is temporary, contingent on the shared experience of listening. In Glasgow I felt as if we were held in this moment of relation as bodies co-present and receptive to O'Sullivan's poetry and its evocation of the "other-than-(as well as human)-sentience" (*Palace* 65).

15 Ellen Dillon in her review of the conference described O'Sullivan's performance as "spell-binding shamanism" (Dillon). This follows other commentary on O'Sullivan's work as being somehow in relation to what is termed the "shamanic" (in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan* see Thurston 201; Rowe 148 and in Mortuza 15). O'Sullivan explores this in *In The House of the Shaman* (1993). I have tended to focus on the *techniques of ritual* in O'Sullivan's work which might be often associated with the broad concept of shamanism, rather than enter into debate on the complex and problematic term *shamanism*.

After the reading any *communitas* disperses. And yet with the memory of intensive shared experience of poetry, there is an ongoing relation of reading, writing, listening and being together in poetry which continues to be woven. In my research and practice I call the ongoing relational process between ritual poetry experiences ‘*plethu*’, after a Welsh word for braiding and weaving. For me the *plethu* here is that I remember this event in Glasgow and try to write about and after it; strong moments of poesis have an ongoing life.

O’Sullivan’s practice is cyclical and involves reiterative acts of poesis whereby the performance is a way to activate a poem in its cycle of life, with audiences “taking part in the construction of the work” in performance (in Thurston 245). Ritual practice as a series of cycles is also found in other poets who use ritual such as Bhanu Kapil and C.A. Conrad. These poets make ritual and embodied practice part of ongoing research and the practical project of writing and living. Each repetition of composition or performance in a ritual cycle returns the ritualist-poet to the material. These cycles are ritualisations in “the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places” (Grimes, *Beginnings* 60). Every return to the site brings new knowledge of the site. And within each rite, there may be further instances of repetition, such as chant and rhythm, considered use of time brackets or spatial thresholds. Each repetition in ritual practice opens up a new awareness of the dimensions of a word, or a sound, or space, to bring forth its material nature, its connections to other parts of an ecology, to the listener’s emotions, bodies, the site, history, sensual qualities and so forth. No wonder chant and rhythmic sound poetry are common uses of ritual in poetry performance. There is a potential in the liminal space opened up by these reiterative sound texts and ritual techniques which can lead to a poesis, to “call the pulsing home” (*In the House* 17).

9. ‘Strains of Lament & Desire’: Care and ethics

But, there is also “finger-on-brain/ madder bled meat. Maddled ...” an exposure – the sensitivity of bodies vulnerable to the commotion of the liminal. This is poetry where “Vulnerable Chanceways” (*Palace* 64) are opened up in ritual and we may move beyond our usual thresholds of logic, sense-making and comfort. In my research I have found that ritual poetry for both audience and poet can sometimes involve an intensity in the form of vigorous action; performance uses

bodily energies, exhaustion is possible. Rothenberg's thought that "Communitas/ (I meant to tell you)/ is Holy Terror" (*Eye* 294) is pertinent to the chaos and raw change and flux of the liminal. If sensitised to the imperilled "other-than-(as well as human)-sentience," the implications of our role in our environment becomes apparent, we might be reminded of mortality and ecological destruction. Such exposing liminality should be opened and closed carefully and ethically; a clear end point for the performance means a ritualising poet can move off the stage, be relieved of intensity and re-incorporate the meaning of the ritual's poesis. I have found in this research that ritual practice is often a study of spatiotemporal thresholds.¹⁶

O'Sullivan's work invites a care and ethics. In the same way, many of her fellow poets working with ritual and performance such as Kapil, C.A. Conrad, Rothenberg, NourbeSe M Philip, Cecilia Vicuña and others are also inviting care and ethics through ritual methods and ecopoetics.¹⁷ Ritual and performance is often the route chosen by poets to bring about ethical and political action. This might be in part because in ritual conditions, participants' attention is drawn to the materiality, to communality and relation, embodiment and ecology. A re-enchantment of the world around us might prompt care for that environment and even action, although an audience or reader's reactions can never be predetermined or predicted. In artistic settings, ritual techniques of transformation are methods of invitation and suggestion, and a ritualist-poet can never be certain or pre-empt what a response might be in an audience or reader.

As a technology ritual does not come with an in-built ethics. In the wider cultural context that extends beyond contemporary poetry, I have found examples of ritual aesthetics, including poems, used as indoctrination or marketing devices, to endorse oppressive hierarchies and obfuscate power.¹⁸ I have also found examples of primitivist art movements using idealised ritual tropes as

16 Peggy Phelan's discussions of self-injury in the work of ritual performance art is pertinent to thinking of ritual as a study in thresholds, including the ultimate threshold for animals, death, and thus life. Although we cannot know for certain the origins of ritual, Phelan's point about ritual as a study of the life/death threshold remains relevant to the ritual poetry I am researching. "Perhaps it makes sense to say that insofar as early ritual, theatre and performance were devoted to managing the meaning of death, that management itself involved the invention of another conceptual biological experiential field that came to be called 'life'" (Phelan 17).

17 And several poets use ritual as part of therapeutic and activist practice, for example Kapil's *Schizophrenia* (2011) a work of healing through ritual writing practice; C.A. Conrad's rituals are made as activism but also to heal and change life for the better in *Ecodeliance (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (2014).

18 The words spoken at the coronation ritual of the British monarch, or new age cult marketing programme's 'poetic' buzzwords, for example, do not leave me re-encharmed with the world.

mystification or to commodify and de-humanise the cultures of others.¹⁹ As poets and readers we have to develop ethics for the use of our embodied techniques. I am interested in an ethical and political poetry practice which critiques, re-invents and thrives in the face of the contemporary moment of systemic damage and alienation. O’Sullivan’s embodied poetry, for example, provokes in me a more intense practice of listening to the language of the “other-than-(as well as human)-sentience” and I begin to care for the inhabitants of my environment when engaging with her poetry. In making my own ritual poetry, my ethics now involves thinking of who is present or absent in the space of poesis, how different bodies may be welcomed or excluded in the spacetime of poetry.²⁰ O’Sullivan brings to the fore the “were-louds” and the silenced (*Palace* 21). How can we listen with all of our bodies to this poesis and how does what we hear change us?

10. Kinship: openings and conclusions

In summary, O’Sullivan’s performances and poetry use ritual to transform the reader-listeners’ perception of materiality and activate the poem with the audience. The ritual techniques O’Sullivan uses include the fragmentation and transformation of language into new material as well as play with rhythm and repetition to create a resonant pulsing in performance or in the ears of the reader. She also responds to those co-present in the space of the poem, emphasising the connections between listeners and our ecological interrelationality. She uses ritual and performance to transform the material of language and open up the liminal potential of transforming poesis or re-enchantment. What this poesis creates for the reader-listener, or indeed the poet who attempts these ritual methods, is not fixed or predetermined; transformation is not predictable. But in its broadest sense, ritual poesis involves change and new poetry or material. O’Sullivan’s ritual poetry is

19 One need only glimpse at Arnold Van Gennep’s references to various ethnographic sources in *Rites de Passage* (1909), to be reminded of how much the research into ritual originally drew on racist investigations of human cultures that were systematically destroyed for the sake of imperial capitalist accumulation. Rustom Bharucha’s postcolonial critique of appropriation of ritual cultures in performance in the work of Artaud, Schechner, Grotowski and Brook specifically looks at the adoption of ritual by the Euro-American Avant Garde and, though it is applied to performance practice, is also relevant to poetry that uses ritual in performance. In performance art, playful postcolonial critique of Joseph Beuys’s *I Like America and America Likes Me* can be found in James Luna’s *Petroglyphs in Motion* (2000). In poetry, one can find the modernist era several examples of primitivism through themes of ritual, for example T.S. Eliot’s writing on anthropology, DH Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and Antonin Artaud’s ideas of Balinese theatre. See Etherington and see Horáček for a discussion of primitivism in Rothenberg’s ethnopoetics assemblages and translations. Fischer-Lichte’s 2005 history of the first performative turn provides several relevant discussions of artistic ritual with varying political intent (*Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*).

20 In *Blue Sky Body: Thresholds for Embodied Research*, Ben Spatz asks how a decolonial embodied practice that considers different embodiments and care could be the future performance studies, something that we can also consider as poets working in an embodied relational medium (*Blue Sky Body*).

an invitation to care, form ethics or action for the embodied ecologies she makes matter. Poetry here is a medium for transformation where language becomes “an active physical presence in the world”, a poesis which opens our ears to “other-than-(as well as human)-sentience.” In a time of demand for radical ecological care, relationality and embodiment in the face of alienating destruction of world crises, O’Sullivan’s work gives us multiple approaches to the transformation of poesis through embodied listening and ritual, opening up a liminal “space of undimishment” (in Olsen 204).

My research into ritual poetry shows that there is much more to know and create between the knowledge traditions of embodied arts and poetry and poetics. This has been largely a practical investigation in creative writing, as a poetics oriented to the creation of new forms. Whole studies of single methodologies could be made on single embodied techniques are used in poetry and what these can tell us. For example, we might experiment with any one of the following techniques: chant, masks, delineation of thresholds in spacetime, chant, staging, land art, poets’ theatre, protest, somatic sensing, scores, objects, my list goes on.

I want to know what poets and their reader-listeners can do together with this poesis and embodied knowledge in an era of destruction. When we listen with more of our embodied selves, and begin to dance in poesis, and resonate with the “other-than-(as well as human)-sentience” (in Olsen 204), what might we find? I’ll be returning to the poem we can dance to together. But “& oh, the room is to be lit first with/ KINSHIP OOZED OUT OF SHAPE BLUE/ matter,” (*Palace* 18).

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Performative Translations, Intimate Dialogues and Political Transformations: Contemporary Experiments on Translating the Classics

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ABSTRACT

In this article I bring together three different textual practices that set up intimate dialogues with the works of variously canonical authors (Dante, Petrarch and César Vallejo). William Rowe and Helen Dimos present a new bilingual version of Vallejo's *Trilce* with glosses, Tim Atkins answers *Il Canzoniere* with 366 'sonnets' that not only enter into a dialogue with Petrarch but also with previous translations of his work, and Caroline Bergvall performs an experimental engagement with translations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. These exercises in translation challenge notions of fidelity and break phantasmagorical hierarchies built by the canon. Instead of fidelity, there is intimacy in their dialogues, since they each open up particular, personal approaches to the oeuvre, its author, its translators, its history, and the audience or reader. I argue that these works understand translation as an intimate performative and political action, and their reading provokes a reconfiguration of both the source text and its previous translations.

KEY WORDS: Experimental translation, classic authors, contemporary British poetry, performance, intimacy

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In recent years there have been a number of poetic translations published in English that experimentally recover classic texts written in languages that are not English.¹ This growth can be read to be answering a need to reach beyond the supremacy of the anglophone literary world;² nevertheless, there is an element of intimacy present in many of these publications that discloses a more complex set of worries. The works I will bring into contention are William Rowe's and Helen Dimos's experimental glosses to *Trilce* (2022); the free translation of Petrarch in Tim Atkins's *Petrarch Collected* (2014), and the archivist exercise in the translation of *The Divine Comedy* by Caroline Bergvall, *Via. 48 Dante Variations* (2000).

What these works have in common is that the translators perform the role of author themselves through an intimate performance of and with the source text. These author-translators mount the stage not only to give voice to the source texts, but also to hold a discussion with their authors and previous translators around content, linguistic effects, historical and present receptions, and future possibilities. I will argue that they engage in an intimate dialogue that destabilises both earlier renderings of the source texts by overriding the notion of fidelity for one of intimacy, and our own reading—as audience, but also as actants in the dialogue—of them.

As noted by Sophie Collins, drawing from Lawrence Venuti's translation hermeneutics, “while fidelity implied the presence of a primary source of power, a notional adjudicator that both determines and polices the translation, intimacy indicates a mutual, consensual, and willing exchange between author and translator,” or, as Tim Atkins puts it in a review of contemporary British poetry edited by Amy De'Ath and Sarah Dowling, “[p]oetry is a conversation among equals, be they 2,600 or twenty-six years old” (338; De'Ath and Dowling). There are two concepts that need to be distinguished: one the one hand, fidelity or faithfulness, which, despite being understood broadly, have been a guiding principle for the translator since the ancient times as Cicero already outlined that translation was not a word-for-word enterprise, but a way of preserving “the general style and

1 Some examples include Peter Hughes *Quite Frankly – After Petrarch's Sonnets* (2013); Sean Bonney's *Happiness: Poems After Rimbaud and Baudelaire in English* (2011); Philip Terry's *Dante's Inferno* (2014); Caroline Bergvall's *Meddle English* (2011) and *Drift* (2014); Harry Gilonis' *unHealed in Rough Breathing* (2018), etc.

2 Translated literature in English-language markets has become more popular in recent years but is still rather low compared to other countries. See “Nielsen Reports Translated Literature in the UK Grew 5.5 Percent in 2018.” *Publishing Perspectives*, 6 March 2019, publishingperspectives.com/2019/03/nielsen-reports-translated-literature-in-uk-grows-5-percent-in-2018-booker/. Accessed 3 Oct. 2022.

force of language” despite the losses (Cicero 46 BCE). And, on the other hand, intimacy as a way of approaching translation. As revolutionary as Cicero’s thinking was, it is interesting to step back and think translation as a way of establishing an intimate dialogue with the source text, one that does not only entail fidelity, or that does not place fidelity at its core because the focus of the translator has moved: from a subjugating relationship to the primary text or ‘source of power,’ to a relationship that focuses on the exchange that is taking place between author and translator, culture of origin and culture of reception; a relationship that involves closeness and intimacy and that can be expressed or materialised as variously as we can imagine. The writers I address here all translate canonical authors with this focus at heart: Rowe and Dimos perform a dialogue with Peruvian poet César Vallejo while Atkins and Bergvall approach the Italian Renaissance poets Francesco Petrararch and Dante Alighieri respectively. They all *do* something to their texts, in the sense that they do not offer a literal translation but *perform* an intimate dialogue with the author and their previous translators that, at the same time, *does* something to us, the readers or contemporary audience of the performance. In the reading of these works and in their listening, two movements can be identified: one centripetal, as the text guides the reading inwards, towards the source work, its context, language and preceding translations; and a centrifugal one that happens simultaneously, with an awareness that it will take place in front of a determinate reader/listener who will experience a reconfiguration of the source text through their participation in the performance. Sandra Bermann stresses the performative nature of these sorts of translations and their “potential for literary *action*, presenting a text from elsewhere to a new audience, while creating a new language that will, in some sense, belong to (and disrupt) them both” (290). It is in this disruption that I argue that Berman’s sense of literary *action* is found, as she reminds us that “[t]ranslation is not merely the interpretation that a translator performs on a literary or social script. Rather, translation itself —and particularly its encounter with otherness— becomes a model for ethical and political action” (293). Thus, thinking of the following performances as encounters with otherness can also help us to approach a model of translation for ethical and political action.

WILLIAM ROWE AND HELEN DIMOS'S GLOSSES ON *TRILCE*

There are multiple English translations of *Trilce*, but none is presented in the format followed by Rowe and Dimos: a bilingual edition with extensive 'glosses.' Gloss, from the Greek *glossa*, refers to the organ of the 'tongue' and to 'language' itself, and it can also refer to an obsolete or foreign word. Historically, glosses were written on the margins of a book and used to explain to a foreign audience the meaning of a word or passage in its original language, in an effort to bring that foreign vocabulary closer to the audience of reception. Nevertheless, in this instance, the glosses take a poetic turn, adopt a life of their own, as it were, because not only their reading, but also their position on the page —aligned-left, alone on the page, leaving a space in blank on the right, facing the original poem and a more literal translation on the left-hand page (see fig. 1)— imply that we are not reading marginalia but a work in and of itself, a text that is central to the book.

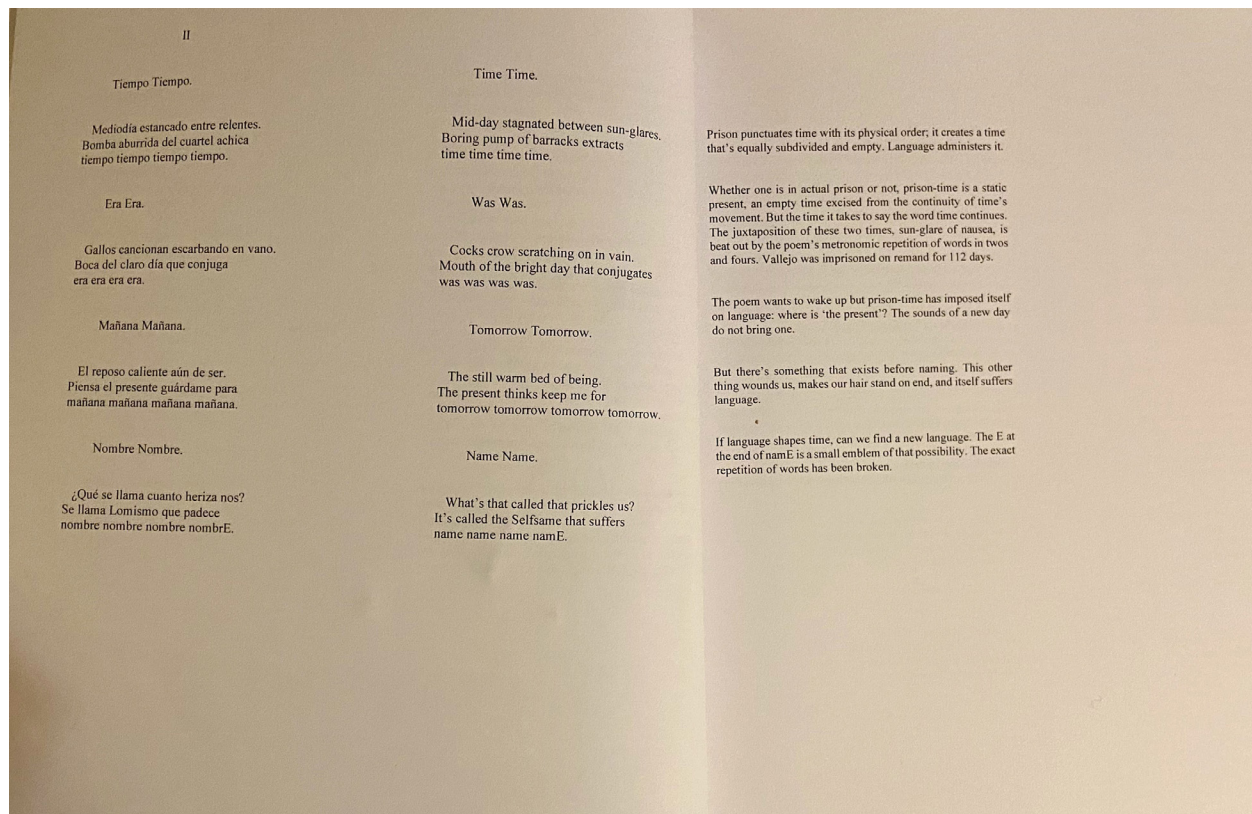


Fig. 1. Poem II with translation and gloss from César Vallejo's *Trilce* (Translated with glosses by William Rowe and Helen Dimos). Crater/Veer, 2022, pp. 12-13.

This turn creates a quite different reading experience from other versions of *Trilce*.³ In this case, we read the more-or-less ‘literal’ translation across from the original version, entering into a dialogue with the translators by spotting differences or similarities with other translations; poetic ambiguities; neologisms made from neologisms, and, in addition, we read Rowe’ and Dimos’s own dialogue with Vallejo:

In our experience, when one sits with a *Trilce* poem long enough, asking it questions, it’s extraordinary to find how the poem contains what one needs for apprehending its thinking. ... Our translations seek to preserve and convey how the poems reveal themselves alongside how they do not (Vallejo, Afterword to *Trilce*).

We not only witness their questioning but become active questioners ourselves. It is a dynamic reading: we read glimpses of their translation process in their glosses that make us move back to the source poem and its translation as many times as necessary. The reading becomes a visual and kinetic experience, as well as a verbal one, because of this constant movement through the page, while the glosses also address readers by providing: information about Vallejo’s life at the moment of writing the poems; insight into the linguistic and syntactic complexity of some of his verses; comment on possible interpretations; clues to access some obscure words, remote places, particular Peruvian customs, etc. and the source poem and their own translation. Thus, the reader enters a multivalent performance in an exercise open to infinite possibilities and dialogues, which becomes, at the same time, a performance of what it is like to read Vallejo.

Rowe is a scholar of Vallejo and has studied the representation of time in *Trilce* in much of his academic work. In the article, “El tiempo de *Trilce*,” he points out that a reading of *Trilce* “nos exige pasar por la crítica al tiempo” (22). I think poem II and its gloss illustrate this well:

³ Other, more literal versions, include *César Vallejo - Trilce*, edited, and translated from Spanish by Michael Smith & Valentino Giannuzzi (2022); *Trilce*, translated by Clayton Eshelman (1992), and *Trilce*, translated by Rebecca Seiferle (1993).

II

Time Time.

Mid-day stagnated between sun-glares.

Boring pump of barracks extracts

time time time time.

Was Was.

Cocks crow scratching on in vain.

Mouth of the bright day that conjugates

was was was was.

Tomorrow Tomorrow.

The still warm bed of being.

The present thinks keep me for

tomorrow tomorrow tomorrow tomorrow.

Name Name.

What's that called that prickles us?

It's called the Selfsame that suffers

name name name name.

The gloss follows:

Prison punctuates time with its physical order; it creates a time that's equally subdivided and empty. Language administers it.

Whether one is in actual prison or not, prison-time is a static present, an empty time excised from the continuity of time's movement. But the time it takes to say the word time continues. The juxtaposition of these two times, sun-glare of nausea, is beat out by the poem's metronomic repetition of words in twos and fours. Vallejo was imprisoned on remand for 112 days.

The poem wants to wake up but prison-time has imposed itself on language: where is 'the present'? The sounds of a new day do not bring one.

But there's something that exists before naming. This other thing wounds us, makes our hair stand on end, and itself suffers language.

If language shapes time, can we find a new language. The 'E' at the end of *name* is a small emblem of that possibility. The exact repetition of words has been broken. (Vallejo, 12-13) Rowe and Dimos read, in Vallejo's poem II, and in *Trilce* in general, a struggle between the time of order, which has become the time of the word, and the time of 'the present' that does not arrive. The time of order, imposed by capitalist production, creates an illusion of stability in the quasi-oniric repetition of daily labor that empties our capacity to experience 'the present.' This repetition resonates in the word 'time,' emptying itself further of meaning with each repetition: time time time time. On the other hand, the time of the word has also become a 'prison-time' because the system is in the same language that 'administers it'; thus, we are captured in a linguistic net that impoverishes our senses, and Rowe' and Dimos' resolution —'If language shapes time, can we find a new language?'— is written as a question but it lacks a question mark, a question and a statement at the same time. One cannot help to wonder, then, is the time it takes to read *Trilce*, or even to translate it —by creating an intimate relationship with its words and significances— the time of this new language?

Much of *Trilce* was written while Vallejo was in prison, his time and space violated, and his existence reduced to a barracks room. Against this time, Rowe and Dimos read the possibility of another time, not future or past (not the 'Was' or the 'Tomorrow' conjured by the poet), but the time of 'Name,' the time that the word 'Name' takes, which is the same that wounds us, 'prickles us,' and which language also suffers. The final 'E,' in upper case, represents a small sign of change, when/where the poem breaks with the exact repetition of words; this is, when/where that sense of a suffocating temporality is disrupted through the introduction of a typographical variation. Vallejo's 'name' is also an intimate word, individual, that changes from person to person, and takes a certain amount of time to say. This 'name' provokes in the reader, in Rowe's words, "una perturbación, un estremecimiento. Porque este tiempo ocupado por la palabra, este pedazo de duración, salta fuera del tiempo sucesivo" (Rowe 27). A window opens into a possible outside.

Vallejo's poems reveal a struggle against a certain conception of time/language, and that window that opens can take us to the possibility of transgression in a present, real time, that "[c]omo relámpago, como corriente eléctrica, ... pasa por el poema" (Rowe 27). According to Rowe, "este tiempo no engaña porque precisamente es lo que estaba fuera (de la ecuación)" (27). The glosses also give us a conscience of an outside, of a dialogical intimacy that offers an invitation for the reader to take part. Rowe's and Dimos's glosses are a part of the act of translation that is normally occluded, but in this instance, in the gesture of giving over some portion of the performance space of the physical book itself, the gloss becomes a part of the shared experience of translation and a revelatory symbol of translation's performative function.

TIM ATKINS'S *PETRARCH COLLECTED ATKINS*

Petrarch Collected Atkins brings together some 400 poems, though the numbering finishes at 366, recalling the collected 366 "Rerum vulgarium fragmenta" (Fragments in the vulgar tongue), known as *Il Canzoniere* (Song-book), completed by Petrarch a year before his death in 1373. Atkins's poems are not literal translations (and challenge the idea that there could be such a thing); instead, he uses a range of broadly Oulipian translation techniques to approach the source poems and their earlier translations. He employs a language and register that contrast with Petrarch's and situates his versions firmly within the ungainly frame of the quotidian: passports, PMS, a dancing Jesus, medicines, euro-disco, ginger ale, a SMEG fridge, a copy of *Hello Magazine* and wasabi chicken wings are just a few of the 'everyday' things in his poems. However, Petrarch uses the vernacular, rather than Latin, and Atkins's *vernacular* objects and English feel like a version—a rather contrasted one—of that revolution. *Il Canzoniere* was also known as *Rime Sparse* (Scattered Rhymes), "in rime sparse il suono / di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva'l core" (*Canzoniere* 1)—a description that could readily be applied to Atkins's poetry, not because his poems contain 'scattered rhyme,' but because they are simply scattered. And maybe, in their own apparently cheerful but profoundly sombre way, they are also lyrically and emotionally 'sparse.' In this sense, and differences aside, Atkins has his way of taking Petrarch's poems and performing his own linguistic revolution in which he voices Petrarch but also his distance from that lyric tradition.

In his vernacular sonnets Petrarch brought together the sonnet-structure developed by the Sicilian School, medieval courtly love poetry and the intellectuality of the *stilnovisti* —an epochal innovation. Among his derivations from the *stilnovisti*, Petrarch's embrace of introspection, metaphorical language, symbolism and religious meditation are characteristics that Atkins both abhors and embraces. We find that his poems do not dwell on self-observation, but insist on subjectifying the other and forcing it into articulation:

Here in South London
The I-Speak-Your-Weight machine talks like
This-is-the-world's-biggest-crime
& if it all comes back to the body
As a space with total sonority laurels & robes (49)

This is the voice of the body rather than the metaphor, which it is “absolutely essential to abandon ... / In order to save time” (169). It is, then, a writing experience that places the body and material at its centre, inviting the reader to undertake a similar process with their body and senses, as if Atkins was responding to Petrarch's abstraction with the concrete world of things.

Atkins also holds conversations with Petrarch's translators —among them Robert M. Durling, J. G. Nichols, Mark Musa and Nicholas Kilmer—, as in poem 357, in which he alternates italicised lines from the Japanese Zen teacher, Eihei Dōgen (largely from his book of lectures, sermons and poetry, *Eihei Koroku*) with lines from translations of Petrarch by Musa, Durling and himself, provoking a confrontation between Eastern and Western understandings of life-time and religious experience:

Every day seems like 1000 years to me
The years of a lifetime are a flash of lightning; who clings to objects? They are empty through and through. (357)

Other conjunctions explore the different subjectivities of these traditions:

May now reach the end of me
Without turning away from the multitudes of people, body and mind drop off (357)

Atkins's poems are revealed as more than just modernised versions of Petrarch. Instead, they establish a relationship with Petrarch and his translators that makes us rethink the lyric tradition as well as our modern approach to it. Atkins's relation to the sonnet is casual —“We come with fourteen lines & a haircut we / Leave with too much information” (23)— though the work implies a more serious reflection on the meaning of poetic form throughout; it becomes a nutshell that concentrates space in simultaneity: a time and space that unfolds in our bodily reading. In another poem, Atkins writes: “Speaking the entire truth / Is being / Simultaneously masked and unmasked” (165). Poetry might speak the entire truth, but it requires signs to communicate, and signs are concrete yet ambiguous, especially when they are concentrated in such a small space. At the same time, translation is also an encounter with otherness, with a different culture/identity, and it traditionally relies on the ethical value of fidelity to express its own culture and self, but how can we maintain this fidelity in such an ambiguous context? Perhaps, as Collins remarks, it is more adequate to talk of intimacy than fidelity in order to indicate that translation is more of “a mutual, consensual, and willing exchange between author and translator,” which indicates a shift in the traditional model of translation: from having to reproduce a never-conclusive but always ‘faithful’ translation of the source text, to a model in which the author/translator can engage in an intimate conversation with the source text and its preceding translators, be they dead or alive, present or absent (338). In this case, as in Rowe’s and Dimos’s glosses, the book is the result of that intimate dialogue, offered to the reader to make them part of the creative-thought process, instead of presenting just another rendering of the classic.

Despite the obvious differences between Petrarch and Atkins, they both place the themes of love and death at the centre of their poetics. Love for Petrarch is unobtainable, subjective, desired yet painful, bodily, allegorical and spiritual, while for Atkins it is not something that can be possessed, but affects all, runs through all and is painful because it always embodies a profound absence:

In this world I do not love
What I imagined to be real
Placing my faith on the breath of a woman
...
All the love that I had
Amounts to the same volume of water
In a late summer cloud—which looked so enormous
Better for all who live under it (34)

Laura is the very reason for the existence of Petrarch's *Scattered Rhymes*. In April 1327 Petrarch meets Laura for the first time and falls in love with her. The encounter happens in church and Petrarch, wanting to link his love to a religious experience, dates it to Good Friday, the liturgical day of the Passion and death of Christ. In the third sonnet the poet relates his subjective experience of falling in love to a symbolic and religious event that is doomed from the beginning since Cupid only strikes the poet (he catches him naked) but does not get Laura who is 'armed' (Petrarch 20). If we move to Atkins's sonnet 3, while we still have fourteen lines, this doesn't seem to be a sonnet and the subject matter seems alien to the original. If this is supposed to be Petrarch's poem 3 we would say that it has been transformed nearly beyond recognition, but that 'nearly,' according to Robert Sheppard, is important because "[t]he poem is still a 'love' poem; at least it can be read as one if it opens on that word: 'Love of the welfare state / Did not prepare me for its or my own extinction'" (Sheppard). Thus, the dialogue emerges. Sheppard links the church at Easter in the Petrarch poem to the welfare state in Atkins's, but he soon wonders whether he is trying to explicate the poem by "unravelling its analogies, or making them because I know that this is poem 3" (Sheppard). And that points to the reader: are we reading an individual poem, a translation, or that intimate dialogue that Atkins is holding with Petrarch? If poetic language is ambiguous, so is the performance that is taking place. Indeed, when we read Atkins's sonnet, we are not reading a modernised Petrarch; we are not looking for the differences between the old and the new versions, but Atkins's poems create questions regarding our expectations as readers and receivers of the established tradition, questions

that we cannot ignore. Sheppard wonders: “am I reading the poem, reading the tradition, or reading the *distance* between Atkins’s poem and Petrarch” (Sheppard). Sheppard ascertains that the following passage uses two images from Petrarch: the arrow and the passage ‘through the eyes’:

A cowboy’s life does not extend much
Beyond rimming & riding
Like an arrow does through the eyes
To the millions of past lives
It must have taken to commute
Body fat into amorousness (5)

Although, as he emphasises, “the peripatetic cowboy suggests the ‘arrows’ here belong to the Red Indians of the Western film genre” (Sheppard). Towards the end of the poem, Atkins writes the word ‘amorousness’ and brings us back to ‘Love,’ the opening word, but this time “emphatically embodied in bodily process” (Sheppard):

One day on a rock at Lerici
I saw a woman etc her passport & her chair
3 fingers’ width away from the stars
Light their fierce scrutiny & Italian cars (5)

Atkins’s sonnet ends in the abrupt change of tone of the volta, as Lerici takes us to Italy and the site of the death of the Romantic poet P. B. Shelley, who had been working on *The Triumph of Life* at his death, a poem partly based on Petrarch’s allegorical poem *Trionfi*. Despite love’s centrality, or its opening out through allegory into further, grander questions in Petrarch’s project and in Shelley’s, in Atkins’s poem the climax is abruptly curtailed with an ‘etc,’ as if the transformative power of the allegory or the crescendo of sublimity is too expected and too conventional to be worth reproduction. The poem ends with a couplet like a Shakespearean sonnet, although, again, the celestial stars are ironically equated with Italian cars.

We find another example of this in poem 63: “Ready to set sail with every wind” can be traced to sonnet 63 of *Il Canzoniere*, in which Petrarch voices his readiness to take action in

response to any small gesture generated by his beloved Laura's pity. Atkins's poem, however, starts: "*On The Road* begins in Worcestershire if you start up with nothing / Then everything's ready to go," for the poet is not gifted with the 'frail life' that saved Petrarch, that little love engine that kept the Italian poet alive (63; *The Complete Canzoniere* 111); instead what saves the subject of Atkins's poem are books, as he insists that he was born to culminate in this book, and that no wind will take him from his seat, where he is

still
Tied to this art
With everything
Breathing (63)

There is no outside with a Laura giving false hope to the poet and a private inside in which to write poetry; there is merely reversibility, words that are things which, in turn, are also the poet: "A poem is a machine made of words / The poet is indistinguishable from the poem / Whirring in the top left corner" (34). We needn't really read Petrarch for the differences between Petrarch and Atkins, or, indeed, their similarities —such concerns seem inessential for the British poet, in fact. At the same time, the performance here between the Italian 'original' and the English 'version' forms a dialogue at the point of our reception. Thus, we read Sheppard's 'distance' aware that that measure is hallucinatory; that most of the time Atkins seems to be having a conversation with a neighbour, with a Zen master, or with "fucking-Jeffrey-fucking-Hilson," rather than with Petrarch (Atkins 11).

The reader may suspect that the dethroning of Petrarch is perhaps his only function in the text, for, like a flickering thaumatrope, he is and he is not in all of the poems:

Morning and reverend
President of the James Brown hair club
A gangster called Freddie Nostrils
From the *Ars Poetica*
& no Petrarch in these sonnets
= A dazzling array of tartans
All the matter that exists in the universe (21)

Atkins has written that his “original poems (as they said about Pound) are often translations —and my translations are often original poems” (De’Ath and Dowling). The same OuLiPian potentiality is at stake when he mistranslates Petrarch, or perhaps Dante:

When I awoke I discovered that it wasn’t all a dream

Succhi me cazzo (sic) Dante

The face that I am sitting on is my own

But you can’t

Translate that (5)

All his creations derive from transfiguration, a transposition from one place into another, from one language into another, from one nation into another, from one form into another. And, generated by all these transpositions, the collage technique is a cornerstone of Atkins’s poetics. In *Atkins Collected Petrarch* we find comic strips, dramaturgy, sonnets and drawings in addition to those other personalities and voices. Why, then, does Atkins choose Petrarch and not Dante, Shakespeare or Sappho to hold that intimate dialogue? Indeed, every universe has a Big Bang, and Petrarch is Atkins’s, one which leads him to pen lines that aim to include the entire universe; his poems becoming epistemological apparatuses with love and death in their core, that function not to celebrate life, or not only to celebrate life, but to scrutinise its multiple manifestations and absences: “in the emptiness of things / I was able to find only emptiness” (Atkins 9). All the same, there is also a non-translatable idiosyncrasy that keeps coming up when reading his poems, something that is distinctively British and contemporary. The Petrarch-thaumatrope that we find in this twenty-first-century reinvention embraces just this form that is, and is not, in sight. Atkins, therefore, transforms the Italian poems so completely that there is little left of the originals, but they leave just enough for identification, and from this identification arises that intimate dialogue between ancient and modern that depicts not a vertical relationship but a horizontal poetic recovery and re-contextualisation.

CAROLINE BERGVALL’S VIA

Caroline Bergvall’s piece *Via. 48 Dante Variations* was published in 2004 in her book *Fig*, but was written and performed earlier, in the summer of 2000, 700 years after the beginning

of Dante's journey in the *Divine Comedy*, before the dawn of Good Friday in 1300 (Bergvall 64). It consists of forty-seven English translations of the opening canto of Dante's *Inferno* —“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura / ché la diritta via era smarrita” (9)— that Bergvall recites in alphabetical order, including the name of the translator and year of publication. I began this article talking about the supremacy of the anglophone literary world in the publishing industry, but *La Commedia*'s classic status —as well as *Il Canzoniere*— makes it an exception to this hegemony: there are over two hundred published translations of Dante's *Inferno* in English.⁴ While most 'foreign' books do not make it to English audiences, others accumulate versions, readings, interpretations that build up the canonicity of the work. This is one of the accomplishments of this piece, that by revealing forty-seven of those translations, read in a list, Bergvall lays bare the scaffolding of that cultural and political apparatus.

Bergvall explains that the piece was first performed with the Irish composer Ciarán Maher, who, using his software, “unearthed an added line, an imperceptible grain, my voice's fractals, and we let it run, hardly audible, underneath of the reading voice, inextricably tied to it, yet escaping it, releasing from it a surprising beauty, magnified shrapnels of interior sound. The 48th variation” (64). Much has been said about *VLA* and its performativity, but this 48th variation has gone largely unmentioned. This addition is not Bergvall's attempt at translating Dante: she is not adding a version in the same sense as her male counterparts. Rather, one of the few woman writers involved in *VLA* —the actor/performer of all the male voices— uses her own voice not as a pillar to build up the cannon, but as a grain, a murmur that destabilises its monolithic status.⁵ Tradition is dominated by men, thus, by deciding to add her voice fractalized, hardly noticeable in the background, Bergvall is also telling us, the audience, that the female voice has always been there, emerging, as a secret, something left untold, intimate, of which we can only hear its murmur made up from the left-over fragments of the male voice, reminding us of the sound of the dark woods Dante is about to enter.

Bergvall's piece “presents translation as an ongoing act, a performing that engages reader or audience as much as translators themselves” (Bermann 286). Bergvall's monotone reading voice

4 Among the two hundred translations she chose to focus on the ones archived by the British Library up until May 2000 (Bergvall 64), giving her forty-seven examples.

5 The only woman translator that I could identify is Dorothy Sayers.

preserves that feeling of repetition and accumulation, and also emphasises the slight variants or differences between translations. With this she also gestures towards the intimate colloquy between Dante and his translators, challenging the idea of his epic as a single and original work. Bermann writes: “In the wake of these insistent variations, the sense of a single meaning in Dante’s ‘original,’ as well as its hierarchical priority, quickly recedes” (286). These variants stand out from the sameness of the performance, giving us the sense of being “lost in translation,” but also invite us “to interpret the theatrical situation, and perhaps our own, more closely” (Bermann 287).

Thinking of Derrida’s reflections on iteration, Bermann concludes that “translation’s ostentatious iterability,” which Bergvall’s piece pushes to the fore, “reveals a quite uncanny potential for literary *action*, presenting a text from elsewhere to a new audience, while creating a new language that will, in some sense, belong to (and disrupt) them both” (290). This disruption is attained through multiple processes: “la diritta via era smarrita” (Dante 9) —the straight way has been blurred. The female gesture and her role in tradition, the dethroning of an original/authorial voice, the mechanisms that operate in the building of the canon, are a few things that Bergvall lays bare in this performance, leading to a transformation of translation and the canon.

These texts are more alive than ever. Rowe’s and Dimos’s glosses are already being translated into Spanish —as I write this article they are yet to be collected in an English publication; Atkins’s sonnets have been translated into various languages, I have translated some into Catalan; and Bergvall’s experiment has also been variously experimentally translated.⁶ Each of the works examined in this article stages an intimate dialogue between the source author and other translators or translations and us, the audience. The acts of translation that Rowe, Dimos, Atkins and Bergvall undertake dramatize in their own ways their encounters with the other and with their own translator’s minds (Bermann 289-290). They all take different routes: while Rowe and Dimos maintain an intimate dialogue with Vallejo’s work, taking in his biography, academic readings and other translations in their own ‘poetic’ glosses; Atkins turns to OuLiPian constraints to translate

⁶ An interesting translation is that of Polish poet and scholar Katarzyna Szymanska. John Cayley explains that to make her translation, Szymanska took “the next conceptual step” by gathering the twenty existing versions of Dante’s opening lines in Polish and then adding her own translation at the end, “constraining her version to begin with the last letter of the Polish alphabet so as to set this verse at the conclusion of her translation as a kind of signature.” (49)

Petrarch and translations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* just to get rid of those constraints whenever he pleases, creating poems that free themselves from any control; and Bergvall 'limits' herself in order to showcase the multiplicity of translation strategies connected to a classic like Dante, revealing the power structures of the canon. Their processes are different, but they all exercise strong formal control over their texts, only to liberate them from tradition, giving the reader the sense of a serendipitous encounter that reduces monolithic understandings of text and authorship. These texts are exercises in thinking that prompt significant dialogues with the authors of their source texts, their translations and their tradition, our reception of them and our own contexts, the conjunction of these elements revealing nets of meaning that are not static. In fact, these performances if anything stress the dynamic understanding of a text that translator Carol Maier was considering when acknowledging the "performance element of translation," which, according to her, involves "repetition and representation as well as continuity," inasmuch as the translator produces a new representation of a text that has been already translated, creating a dialogue in continuity (5).

These texts invite us to read creatively and respond critically. Creativity and critical thinking become entangled in these exercises, inspiring new revisions, and thus more general change. In these cases the performance of an intimate dialogue with a classic becomes a transformative experience. The translations include play, re-contextualisation, rethinking and other displacements of the centre, as Borges, quoted by Sergio Waisman, points out: "To innovate from the margins — to reread, to rewrite, to mistranslate— is to challenge centre-periphery dichotomies by remapping accepted cultural and political relationships" (Waisman 154). These texts emphasise writing as an act of translation and translating as an act of writing, destabilising the concept of a 'definitive text,' challenging the primacy of tradition and the canon, and also that of fidelity, which here is replaced by performative intimacy, bringing those authorial voices closer to, and intermingling them with, those of their audiences.

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Text as Instrument: Improvising with Musicians

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In July 2021 I started taking part in SKRONK's 'Open Sessions'. In these bimonthly events, organised by artist Rick Jensen at London's New River Studios, musicians improvise in small groups across multiple short sets. Anyone in the audience is welcome to sign up and join in. At the time of writing (August 2022) this essay attempts to render my experience of improvising with text in this music context over the past year.

The first sounds set the scene, let them gather, take them in. A space builds through them, don't try to fill it, feel your way through it to find where words fit. Sound is a space we actively share and are constantly negotiating. Find where words flow, let it change. Learn to resist the instinctive pull of saturated speech. Forget the weight of total responsibility, sound is a space through which we move, a space we all keep choosing, a space we hold together. I speak into it. I speak as I listen. I speak as I read. I listen as I speak. I listen as I read. I read, I listen, I speak, I pause.

I was used to hearing nothing but my own voice, what it should, what it must, what it needs to be doing. I had learnt to resist all other sounds, to speak over and despite them, to keep going. Here, whether I do or do not speak, I am part of every moment. Time flows with a new intensity, every instant bursting with potential and significance. Every choice is urgent, irreversible and immediately exposed. If I hesitate I use it. If I stammer I repeat it. My silence isn't silence. I let the sounds speak back.

I try to accept whatever I do as I do it, to stop questioning, to start reacting. Improvising requires a new kind of focus. I don't know how to reach it. Every set is full of new experiences for me to welcome, process and collect. I don't know myself in this context. I want to learn. I don't expect this to be linear. I try not to lose patience. Learning is a cumulative process. Every challenge is constructive. Struggling is necessary.

I think about the pieces I wrote to be delivered the way they were written to be delivered, the strain of every phrase, the rise and fall of every syllable, the weight of every moment, every breath, every word. I remember weighing my delivery against my expectations, feeling for the gaps, flinching. Here, the text is what it is as soon as it starts to exist, the text is happening and there are no mistakes, it ends when it stops, when it stops it is already gone. There is no time for regret.

People have often asked me if I would consider setting my poems to music. Despite the sincere enthusiasm they often spring from, these questions have always felt tinged with disdain for poetry, a familiar reluctance to consider it as a self-sufficient performative medium. I would say that I am interested in the sound of language, that I strive to reach a kind of musicality built through and for speech, one which other sounds can only dilute. My poems are written to be heard on their own terms. I haven't changed my mind. I neither want to wrap sound around text to make it more palatable, nor to plaster text onto sound and force meaning upon it. I want to learn to use language as an instrument, to explore text in a world of sound, to learn a new language.

I listen to musicians interact through their instruments. I slowly start to recognise events, to notice reactions, to hear voices, to imagine a kind of dialogue. Each set becomes a situation with which to engage, each phrase comes with an opportunity to respond. I play with the expressive qualities of speech, I ask, I suggest, I agree, I assert, I insist, I comment, I call. Sound makes me wary of the weight of language, that consuming propensity to point, define and explain. Here, language is one of many sounds, it must not overpower. I try to use meaning with caution. I avoid the 'I', favour connective words, pick out ubiquitous phrases, weave speech into patterns, let them contract, expand and collapse.

I start using a loop station. I pour words into unsynced loops and leave them to their own devices. They bounce against each other, building new connections through a set of independent permutations. Language latches onto itself. Once it is captured in a loop, text becomes tangible, speech becomes a gesture. I handle the words, alter, edit, add. As lines unfurl I speak through the gaps. A single word can heighten, transform or dissolve sense, but if I don't move, language carries on without me. I start to find this comforting. It gets too comfortable. I don't want to rely on technology. By the time I set my loop station aside I realise I have absorbed its patterns. My voice forms loops of its own.

I edge closer to sound without falling into it. I choose to stick to language. I don't sing. I choose to keep the tension. I use letters and numbers, occasionally play with syllables, but never stray far from words. Text is my medium and I work with textual materials: texts I find, gather or

assemble to then deconstruct and transform through performance. These materials are not scores, they are the instruments I am learning to play. Their limited set of words and various physical forms provide a generative range of possibilities to explore. Beyond my choice of material I have no plan.

I start with offshoots from previous performance pieces, repurposed fragments to be sequenced live. Something about them feels stale. I assemble new textual objects an hour before the next few sessions: a bucket full of cardboard text messages, torn articles stored in spice jars. Something about them is too familiar. It's too soon to make. Agency should start and end on stage, through sound, in the moment. I bring books, books I haven't read, books I find and borrow, books I would never read. I gradually replace books with everyday documents and items: contracts, forms, receipts, cereal boxes, medicinal tablets, cleaning products.

I am used to working with found text. Many of my pieces are composed by combining fragments from various sources. When I improvise, this becomes a performative process. I don't look at the text until I am on stage. As the set starts, my gaze skims across the material, I latch on to fragments I am drawn to and read them aloud. Liveness pushes me to both slow down and speed up. Instead of frantically sifting through endless possibilities in search of the ideal combination, I focus on finding one which is viable. When I do, I must both instantly commit and swiftly move on. As I speak the words, I often find myself hearing new layers of meaning. New possibilities emerge and I dive into them. Text and sound flow through each other, somewhere between intention and coincidence.

At first, five minutes feels endless, I struggle to find my place, the constant choices leave me drained. I know I just need to keep trying, to do it as often as possible. We are each called up to take part in several sets throughout the night. Everyone will play, but no one knows when or in what combinations. With no time to anticipate, I eventually forget to be nervous. As the pressure drops, choices become lighter until I hardly notice myself making them. At the end of a set I am often unable to describe what I have just heard or said, but always ready to start again. On my way home, I often walk longer than is necessary. I think about what I have just experienced and what I can take away from it; but I also tell myself that I need to find more time to write, that I should be writing, that I haven't been writing.

Transcriptions

[Attempt]
SKRONK 91, July 27th
2021 With Jonny Martin

and fall the mess of
doesn't it counterpoint attempt to
 clearly connects duration
not just and fall
the mess of before middle of
order to to reflect no significance
 hover over and fall
the mess a solid resolution as horror
expectations dispensed with
over time more than just
more of the mark
 duration as horror
time from to satisfy
over time more than just
a solid resolution caught up in
arms of attempt to point to point
are we fieldwork curl for granted
 tension transitions doesn't it
counterpoint doesn't it more of
tensions transitions
attempt to point over time
more than just
 duration as horror

[Clusters]

SKRONK 104, March 8th 2022

With Hywel Jones & Taku Hisadome

clusters clusters to clusters out
you tried to take out clusters to take out
you tried to take out all missed
tried to take out this to take
cluster to take clusters to take
clusters out crisp start to take
outer use crisp to take clusters start
crisp to take clusters start with
to take some your help you
help help to take out clusters
towards achieving to take
start to take out clusters craps start
if you are not entirely crisp start
if you are not crisp start crisp away from
start once opened you will crisp
once start once opened this crisp
start once once crisp start this start

[Ridiculous]

SKRONK 106, March 29th 2022

With Chad Murray & Allan Newcombe

only do it once only do it no
don't adventures once once
don't bet just don't don't
don't be ridiculous take a
no no matter certain
the outcomes will be ridiculous

leave behind your work
it is as you go
be be be be be be be
be be be be be be be
be be be be be be be
be be be be be be definitely

definitely definitely write
carefully what you want to say
carefully make things now
don't forget to struggle it is
your control it's gonna be
yourself you are so close to fun
it cannot or

[Unlikely]

SKRONK 107, April 4th 2022

With Allan Newcombe & Andrew Ciccone.

It is unlikely Or blocked
Unlikely Unlikely Or Blocked
Or unlikely Or Blocked
Or Unlikely Blocked Or—or—or—or
Or—or—or Unlikely Or—or—or—or—or—or—or
Blocked Or—or—or Or Unlikely Or
Or—or—or—or All things All things All things
All things Always Always Always
Always Or Or—or—or—or Unexplained
Not Read or Or—or & Blocked
Problems Ah Ah Ah Ah Associated
Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah So Ah
So Sociate Sociate Sociated
Blocked Or Unlikely Or—or—or—or—or
Blocked Or—or—or—or—or—or—or
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooor If you feel
If you If you feel This You
This If you feel All Also Also
If you If you If you If you If you feel this
Or Or—or—or Unlikely Or—or not
Or—or—or Unlikely Or—or—or—or—or—or—or—or
Or—or—or—or Unlikely Not Or—or—or
Not Or—or—or—or—or—or

[Lucid]

SKRONK 109, May 17th 2022

With Iris Garrelfs & Andrew Page

Has exccc—eeded the
 exxx—pect—aaations
 exxx—pec—ta—tionnn—sss
 has exceeded the exxx—exxx—exxx
 expectations of expectations of
 has exceeded the expectations of
 in an original / creative quality / are identified
 referenced—referenced—referenced—referenced
 referenced—referenced—referenced ready for
 referenced—referenced ready for referenced
 referenced—referenced—referenced—referenced
 referenced—referenced where the
 referenced—referenced issues are
 referenced—referenced—referenced—referenced
 in an original / in an original / and or—or—or
 referenced—referenced—referenced—referenced
 ready for—ready for—ready for—ready for
 ready for ready for
 almost almost a sophisticated almost
 almost—almost—almost the quality of almost
 with originality and and and of
 assured and lucid
 a whip that is fluent
 assured and lucid that is
 fluent fluent fluent shares all of the
 feeeca—tures of relevant relevant
 lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid relevant—relevant
 lucid—lucid referenced—referenced
 relevant lucid—lucid—lucid
 referenced—referenced
 completely completely referenced
 relevant lucid articulate articulate
 articulate synthesis—synthesis—synthesis
 articulate articulate lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid
 expectations in an original outstanding
 well structured and properly referenced
 referenced—rendered—referenced—referenced
 referenced—ref—ref—ref—ref—ref—ref—ref—ref—ref
 sophisticated identifiable lucid
 lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid—lucid
 synthesis lucid synthesi—sss

Links to listen:

[Attempt], SKRONK 91, July 27th 2021, with Jonny Martin:

<https://skronkimprov.bandcamp.com/track/iris-colomb-jonny-martin>

[Clusters], SKRONK 104, March 8th 2022, with Hywel Jones & Taku Hisadome:

<https://skronkimprov.bandcamp.com/track/iris-colomb-hywel-jones-taku-hisadome>

[Ridiculous], SKRONK 106, March 29th 2022, with Chad Murray & Allan Newcombe:

<https://skronkimprov.bandcamp.com/track/iris-colomb-chad-murray-allan-newcombe>

[Unlikely], SKRONK 107, April 4th 2022, with Allan Newcombe & Andrew Ciccone:

<https://skronkimprov.bandcamp.com/track/alan-newcombe-iris-colomb-andrew-ciccone>

[Lucid], SKRONK 109, May 17th 2022, with Iris Garrelfs & Andrew Page:

<https://skronkimprov.bandcamp.com/track/iris-garrelfs-andrew-page-iris-colomb>



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The Voice That Calls, The Voice That Answers (and The Parenthesis in Between)

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1 (1983) Cuban-American, English/Spanish bilingual. Studied exercise physiology and linguistics. Promotes the idea of “poesiar” (poetizing), or writing as an exercise open to whoever wants to create (alluding to the Greek idea of poet as “maker”). To him “poesiar” means exploring the interactive nexus between the individual, their body, and their environment. His first book of poetry *Sin Zapatos / Shoes Off* (Mago Editores, 2018) poetizes partly in English & Spanish. Recent works include the co-edited *Antología Poética Letras UC*, and the co-translated *Cuando la fruta madura cae: antología ecopoética D.H. Lawrence*. Currently works as a professor in the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago, Chile, Facultad de Letras.

In 2005, in some rundown part of Downtown Miami there was a place called The Wallflower Gallery. Run by a man known only as C.D. Flash, this little hole-in-the-wall cultural center showcased visual and performing arts from mostly local South Florida artists. It was cramped, offered poor lighting, no snacks, no frills of any kind, really—but it had a stage. Local bands and singer-songwriters would put on small-scale shows on that stage to a room of 25 people at most, for a five-dollar entry fee. These were the kind of word-of-mouth gigs you learned about at university, where you either knew the people playing or knew someone who did. It so happened that two Fridays a month that stage and its mic were open to the public—any band, singer, pundit, ranter, or poet could take the stage for 5 minutes and do their thing, no charge. There was something cozy about the small set up: old wooden floor, wooden tables and chairs, visible interior of walls, a stage in all its senses: as a noun it was a place to perform and as a verb it was how these performances were shown. So back in 2005 I took that stage for the first time—and read poetry for five minutes. I say “read” and not “performed” because, as I hope to express in this paper, perform(ance) goes far beyond, and may not even include, reading. In the case of music, we understand explicitly that lyrics are not songs and sheet music is but an intermediary between the composer’s conception of the piece and its being played for interested ears. We do not have such a clear consensus about what a poem is and what kind of role performing that poem plays. I hope in this paper to encourage anyone interested in poetry to consider a poem the way one considers music: ultimately itself in performance.

So what does it mean to perform a poem? And what then can we say is performance poetry? In a recent interview in the podcast *Poetas Ruculistas*, the Uruguayan poet, essayist and performer Luis Bravo discusses his way of seeing performance poetry, stating that he conceives of performance as the third component of a three-part process he terms “la voz inicial, el paréntesis y la segunda voz infinita” (Javier & Pancho 03:00-15:00), where performance emerges as that second, infinite voice. He starts with the first voice, what we can call inspiration, the call (el llamado), where from some recess of our mind or corner of our environment, something compels us to speak or otherwise render some snippet of language in a way that exceeds the

need to *communicate* and could be somewhat described as the need to *express* (Javier & Pancho 03:00-15:00). This is that moment when a phrase or rhythm occupies our mental theater, be it inundating our inner ear with some string of words or metric flow or projecting some snatch of language onto our visual field. We all have that voice, many of us listen to it, and some of us venture further, into the second component of Bravo's poetic tryptic: the parenthesis. I take Bravo's concept to mean that this parenthesis encapsulates the textual rendition of that first voice, where what is *in your head* becomes what is *on the page* and what was accessible only to us becomes readable to us and others, where what was invisible and internal becomes graphic and available for scrutiny. Up to this point one might nod along and mutter 'of course, first you think it, then you write it'; what sets Bravo's view apart from this is his idea that if you stop there, you are stopping short of what a poem is meant to be. And here, to understand Bravo's vision of a poem's true destination, we contend with the second voice, the infinite voice, the voice of performance. As Bravo himself states: "Desde sus orígenes la poesía fue concebida como una puesta en voz de la palabra", where "puesta en voz" can be roughly translated as "voiced", "performed", or "recited" (Bravo). Bravo's three components invite us to view a poetic work as essentially an ongoing process with a definable, if mysterious, start, a graphic/textual middle, and an open-ended third act never to be concluded. The following analysis will contend with Bravo's view and its implications for performing poetry.

The poet's intent revisited

The first point worth exploring is how seeing poetry as a three-part, open-ended process affects the poet's intent in composing and producing a poem. A perhaps familiar (yet false) dichotomy is that of the 'page' vs. the 'stage' poet. I posit that the former focuses on drafting a poetic text that conforms with whatever notions the poet had at the outset or, conversely, discovered in the process of writing a poem: how the words fit together, metrical and rhythmic considerations, length, layout, even perhaps how a prospective reader might scan the text and how to help them scan it in some accordance with the poet's intent—everything centered on the page, the text, the graphic representation of the poem; the latter, then, aims to

showcase the poem within the context of a performance on some form of stage or space, *to bring the poem to life* or *give the poem a voice* by manipulating their own voice, tone, speed, volume and cadence of delivery—everything centered on the unfolding of the performed recitation.

This dichotomy echoes the divide one studies in the linguistic differences between writing and orality, where each medium delivers language in its particular way with ready contrasts on how language is rendered in each, among them the differences in the resulting communicative phenomenon: writing generates a text, speech generates a string of utterances; writing imprints on a surface, speech travels and vanishes through airwaves. In either case, essentially, the poet answers the first voice of inspiration and endeavors to create a textual or oral response, believing at least implicitly that either a poem exists in print and offers the affordances granted to a text (among them an appreciation thereof in a time or place other than the moment of composition, rereading, close reading, critical analysis) or that it exists when it is recited, in real time, the text of the poem interacted with and shaped by the features mentioned above, such as cadence. As Michelle Gottschlich states in “Page vs. Stage: The ‘Deep Rift’ in Poetry Today”,

Generally a poem is considered “page poetry” if it gains strength from its positioning on a fixed surface, such as paper or a screen. The fixed surface allows the reader an infinite amount of time to explicate the poem, which permits the poem to be infinitely complex and rich. “Stage poetry” depends on its oral delivery. The performance denies the piece a static form, exerting it instead as a terminable experience. If the words are written down, there is a sense that the page is only a memory object and not really where the poem resides.

So why claim this is a false dichotomy? If we view a poem through the Bravo’s lens, we must remove the ‘vs.’ in ‘page vs. stage’ and see both renderings as essential components of a poetic work. A text (or at least a memorized string of utterances) is needed if a performance is to take place, and a performance is needed if there is to be at least one instance of the poem being ‘played’ or heard out loud with at least some record of how the words could be scanned and coursed through. One cannot skip the *parenthesis* because it is the necessary working

space for the initial voice to be answered. It is only after the initial voice has been shaped into some sequence of words that any actual ‘voicing’ can take place, where the inner voice of the poet has become the outer voice of declamation. A poet must then be both on the page and on the stage if their poem is to be fully a poem. There may be strong pushback to this view, and at least intuitively one might be inclined to agree. Any poet born before the advent of recording has left only their texts behind and may not have intended to read their work out loud regardless. Conversely, many renowned poets (I am thinking of Neruda and E.E. Cummings, but examples abound) either read their poetry in a way that limits the rich inner experience of a reader by providing a readymade ‘how this poem sounds,’ (akin to seeing one’s favorite characters from a novel brought to the screen in a film adaptation—so much was possible until those possibilities were realized) or read their poetry in a manner that proves unsatisfactory to the listener, potentially causing a retroactive distaste for the written version of the work. I argue that the poem never really exists fully on the page and truly exists when it is interacted with, even if that interaction is done by a silent solitary reader. This is no different from music or language itself, both really ‘happening’ when the music is heard or speech is uttered (or signed). In terms of music, the general audience needs no nudge to understand that lyrics and sheet music are not a song, but rather ingredients in that song’s composition to be ‘savored’ in the performance of the song and the performer-listener interaction it yields.

In the field of language studies, contemporary linguistics has relocated language, first through programs like Generative Linguistics, which took Structuralism’s idea of a disembodied system of symbols existing independent of speakers and reconceptualized it as something innately mental, and more recently through Cognitive Linguistics, where language, and cognition more generally, are essentially embodied and interactive. In simple terms, there is no language without speakers, no music without listeners and performers. What a poet must endeavor then to do is to set up the necessary conditions for that interaction to take place, and whether it is that solitary reader or a room full of listeners during a reading, the poem exists in its full form when it is recorded on some more or less permanent surface and in parallel

that record is set to sound.¹ The *voice-parenthesis-voice* tryptic then offers a poet a trajectory for their work that answers that first voice, records that answer on a surface and then tests out that answer in a voice of their own and leaves that record available for others to test out as well, be it in their internal reading voice or aloud. If we abandon the page/stage split or, more positively, merge them into a necessary fork springing from the desire to answer that inner voice, the poet then can view their aim as more than producing either the *artifact* of a text or the *event* of a performed reading and start seeing the poem as a loop from voice to text to voice, where neither the parenthesis nor the second voice are ever still or completely fixed, rather in a state of flux open to interaction. What opportunities and challenges present themselves for the poet in this light?

Performance as interaction

The second point of import to consider if we assume Bravo's view is what becomes possible for the poet in their composing of a poem. Seeing the practice of poetry-making (something I have called *poetizing*) as the need to answer some dwelling voice, leave evidence of that answer and recite that evidence as testimony of having come up with an answer presents the poet with unique perspectives and opportunities, a few of which I will outline next. The first opportunity is to see the text as a perpetual work in progress, or at least a perpetual template for future interactions. No two interpretations of a song are identical, even if performed by the same artist, and purists notwithstanding, no version is more authentic or genuinely 'the song' than any other. "Wild is the Wind" can arguably be said to find its best interpretation in Nina Simone's version, with a special place for David Bowie's version (which he professes to have been inspired by Simone), but neither are versions of the original composer or performer of that song, Dimitri Tiomkin and Johnny Mathis, respectively. It is said that Rachmaninoff, a virtuoso in his own right and privy to available recording technology to imprint his own performances of his pieces, claimed after hearing Vladimir Horowitz play

1 Or gestured. I confess having no knowledge of deaf poetry beyond instances like ASL Slam, but would assume that the underlying principle holds: you can write down or sequentially arrange photographs of the body gestures involved in the poem's language but it is only when the poet (or another interactor) exercises those gestures and "plays" the poem to an audience (even an audience of one).

his third piano concerto that it was Horowitz's now, and valued Horowitz's performance as equal or even superior to his own. The weight then falls on the poet to compose a poem that will yield the type of interactions the poet desires, or more broadly to compose a poem that will be interacted with in ways that, though potentially unforeseen, nevertheless resonate with the poet's intent to answer that first voice. The performance of the poem then can occur between poet and text or reader and text in iterative cycles: the poet performing the answer to the first voice, the reader playing out the poet's answer. This if nothing else provides a quasi-answer to the stock question poets get asked, 'when is a poem finished?', the answer under the tryptic view being 'never, because performances (interactions) with the poem are potentially endless and therefore each new interaction makes up part of the set of all interactions with the poem and in a way make up part of the poem itself.' It would be like asking when the ocean is finished. In a spatial sense the ocean has its limits imposed by land and temporally it oscillates depending on how much water is elsewhere on the planet, but both are dynamic cycles where erosion and evaporation change the parameters and make up of the ocean. The poem then is the same in that it is bound by a text and bound by the relative time it takes to be recited, but both are far from fixed and available for interaction and editing, high tide and low tide.

Implications for engaging with poetry.

So we return to 2005 and a younger version of me reading a poem on a stage in front of people. I was not performing the poem because I did not consider it as part of what the poem was. I had generated a text to answer that first voice and I felt done. If I could have passed out the poem and everyone had read it silently that would have sufficed. I was stuck in the parenthesis. I did continue going to the open mics and seeing how others did it. One night I saw a poet do with his words what we would associate with actors doing with choice lines. "Pen to paper" was the only line that stuck, but it stuck in a deep, lodged way. The way the p's in 'pen' and 'paper' collided p-p-p, the way the vowels boomed between the consonants. I was scared, really. None of that was on the page and I thought I was missing something in the way I wrote my poems. 'How to write like that?' I thought. But what I was seeing was the interaction

between that text held in front of the mic and the poet reciting that text aloud, aiming to voice that parenthesis, and in that interaction answer that first voice that set the whole endeavor in motion. We spoke after the open mic and I handed him a short poem I had brought along. Within seconds he was at it again, juking his body, making the paper juke with him. He was Horowitz making a music student's piece sound tiers above its grade. It took me years to juke with my poems in a way I felt satisfied, and I have only recently discovered Bravo's tryptic, but those open mics nudged me toward looking for the interaction between text and voice, seeing that connection as the poem rather than separating them into different outlets. Bravo calls poetry multimodal, and indeed the way we respond to the voice of inspiration is multimodal, having a structure but also a motion, a look but also a sound.

Since that time, I have hunted for little open mics wherever they pop up. In Miami I drove an hour to a nearby city (Ft. Lauderdale) to take part in poetry contests hosted at a house cafe called DADA. In New York I would wait three hours to read seven minutes at a theater in downtown Manhattan that had monthly Open Mic Thursdays. Like a comedian trying out jokes in bars, I tried to rub text and voice together. In 2011 I arrived in Santiago, Chile and could find nowhere to read, nowhere to generate a poetic interaction, the lone exception being the now defunct Phonebox Pub which had open mics for musical acts and let me take the stage for five minutes on a random night. It would be another 10 years until I found that space again, and it would be at Universidad Catolica's Faculty of Letters where I teach. There, along with a rich community of academics and students interested in poetry, we have been slowly building a space where poets can answer their inner voices and test out those responses among other enthusiasts. How this has started changing students' perspectives on what poetry is will be the final section of this paper.

Application of these principles in workshops

As part of the 2020 Creación Artística Fund provided by the Vicerectory of Research, my colleague Pablo Saavedra and I set out to compile and edit an anthology of poetry from students and academics from the Faculty of Letters. The response was overwhelmingly positive

and surprising in just how much poetry brimmed from so many voices in the faculty, student and docent alike. In addition to publishing the anthology, we have been running regular open mic-style workshops since 2020 to date. In these sessions we have seen particularly shy students unfold their mental answers to the voice and express themselves aloud, often for the first time in their lives. Many of them professed that they wrote in silence and rarely shared. They were essentially compiling unsent letters in response to a voice only they heard. But the workshops, many taking place online due to the Covid pandemic, have allowed students to develop a growing interest in reciting rather than reading, in ‘finding their voice’. At first the interest was to be heard, to put the poem ‘out there.’ But as the months have passed, a new, more personal interest has also developed among some of the most frequent participants: attention to the process, to how the text looks and how it will sound, and how feedback shapes the poems the way tides shape shorelines. What I find truly fascinating and most rewarding about hosting these sessions is that participants express they now pay more attention to what makes a poem a poem, and how that poem manifests itself in various ways, and not just their poems but others’ as well, present and past. Nothing is ever just on the page (or the screen) anymore. It is there waiting, the way a parenthesis signals waiting, for the second voice to interact with. Similar to how translators say they appreciate both source and target languages more when they are moving ideas between them, so can the poets attending these sessions say that they listen more to the inner voice. They care more about what fits within the parenthesis and they work on that second voice, letting all three parts of the tryptic interact with each other, the poet interacting with the text and their own voice and the listener interacting with the responses that emerge.

We find analogous ideas expressed by Charles Bernstein (as cited by Pfeiler 2003):

[live] poetry is constituted dialogically through recognition and exchange with an audience of peers, where the poet is not performing to invisible readers or listeners but actively exchanging work with other performers and participants. (Bernstein 23)

Pfeiler herself explores the notion of performance poetry, tracing its origins back to pre-literature points in human history and outlining its functions:

relevant aspects of what is understood as oral art, or *wordpower*, preceded our concept of literature by thousands of years. Since writing was invented to represent human speech, and since the artful use of human speech has always played an important role in communal settings, one cannot disregard the fact that –even today– one finds a strong link between oral art and what we understand as literature. An analysis of primary oral poems (i.e. originally untouched by the technique of writing) by American Indian poets and secondary oral poems (i.e. written for an oral performance) by contemporary indigenous poets, revealed the following: mentally stored and written poems performed orally in a communal and social context contain not only ritualistic, performative speech acts, but also bear many other similarities on a formal level (e.g. repetition, anaphers, a strong rhythmic quality, additive structures, vocal exploitation of sounds in terms of tone and pitch etc.) (151)

Taken together, Bernstein's and Pfeiler's views frame what the workshop participants are experiencing: closer attention to how the poem is realized as a phonic event as well as an increased awareness of who will be witnessing this event and how their feedback could potentially shape future iterations.

This paper has aimed to situate performance as part of what constitutes a poem, forming the third aspect of Luis Bravo's notion of a poetic process as having three parts. This view shifts away from dichotomies of whether a poet is a stage poet or a page poet, and in part answers the question of when a poem is finished. In a sense, Bravo's view combines the page and the stage and prompts the poet to think of this combination as an open-ended process never fully finished because a poem can always be recited again, performed again, and each performance or voicing of the text adds to the overall aim of composing a poem: answering that initial inner voice. The text itself is set within a metaphorical parenthesis, subject to revision and reworking, being fed both by the inner initial voice and the voice of the poet in response. This interplay creates a necessary interaction that is essentially what performance is, and avails that potential interaction to anyone willing to engage with a poem.

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WHiSTLing AN imAGE, BOUNCiNG POEMs OFF bioACOUSTIC BODiES

montenegrofisher¹

¹ Luna Montenegro & Adrian Fisher are artists, poets and film-makers exploring ideas of transformation and collaboration in writing, performance, sound and digital media. They are based in London working under the collective name **mmmmm** and the pen name **montenegrofisher**. Their work investigates spaces, borders and bridges between the political and the poetic in a multispecies multiverse. They collaborate in making visual & sonic arts, performance, films, books and curatorial projects. They show their work internationally in galleries, film & poetry festivals, artist residencies, museums, public spaces, publications, internet and radio.

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“Inner Galaxies / Galaxias Interiores” 14min. Bilingual English / Spanish Performance.
<https://vimeo.com/472627766>

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| <p>The ToNGUE DiSTANT from iTSELF La LENgua TRAINing tO CURVe As CHiLLi Or isLAND</p> <p>LearnING AND BURNING beSIDE THE GANGES or ValPARAíso IMROVISING WiTH 'R' At SOMEONE's OíDO LIVING ROOM or GarDEN</p> <p>THE EAR MAKING WorD inTO GESTURE GRUNTing PALabras DISSOLVING SiLAbas TiempO</p> <p>GRANULATiNG the unpreDICTABLE SPICES EsPAciO BReaTH INTENCión CoLLUding MOUTH with ARM CHesT WiTh HEART UNiVERSo SUSPENDido Your LiMBs UtteRing IN 8 SHaPE</p> | <p>VARYING the UppER LiP DiNáMICas TONE ATOMisation someTIMES REVERBeración</p> <p>VisUAL complexION IdioMATIC BURiaLS SonIC COMPLEXIONS BACTERiA ALLoWING WEEDS To GROW IN betWEEN verSE COLLECTivaMENTE WRITTEN iN THE PARK EdiTing RooTS interCONTiNENTAL MOVimiento ASSOCiATION & DISSOCiATION CULTURAL TENSION & RELAXation ALLOCATION ARTiculation</p> <p>UNDERstanding CaviTIES WITHin THE THROAt DIFFERENT MOTions FEET TOES ANKLES SoLES MAKiNG CONTACT WiTH CARPET CONCRETE sANDy Beach TACTile FLooR BOARDs</p> | <p>CHEWing TEXTTo SPELLing an OBJECT WHiSTLing AN imAGE BOUNCiNG POEMs OFF bioACOUSTIC BODiES</p> <p>FLiRTING WiTH TermS BarbeCUING an 'A' WorKiNG ICE With AiR WhISpeRING eVOCACIONES MONtañas CASTING pictogrAMAs WATCHING THE subLIME WoRK the FLeSH PENETRAte iT WiTH FRECUENCia SILENCiO</p> <p>iNTERACT ViBRATe STill - DISTiLL CONVersATION PENTAmeter IMPROVisED PRESENTness InterCONNECTed FLiCKERing PULSE PERPLExED PiLGRiMage iN EXILE MUTTER VoiD MEASURE THE DiSTANCE</p> <p>ear tO EAR UN ACCOUNTED EX</p> | <p>PLOSiONS POIsON'S POISSON ferMENTING SPLAtTERING DRinKiNG SPiTting DRyING FiXiNG FRAMiNG WRAPpiNG STORiNG UNboxiNG a dÉRIVE</p> <p>BiLiNGuaL ADJUSTed A-LiNGUAL MULTiLinguaL PolyGLOT EXPEriMENT ExiSTiNG wiTH iN/OuT SpeECH beYOND WoRD iN GAZE OR HaND REPETITION ANd TRiM CARESSiNG EXPLORation DISinfectiON THE EaR MiND BoDY MOuTH WALLs PARK-Air-SKY UNPLUGGED SOUNDSCAPE LODGes iN faLLING CRuSHED POPPAdomS SquEEzed BETWEEen Two BoDiES PHoTO FRoM beLOW visual ARCHiVe LoUD POEM BLACK & WHiTE SUBVERSiON</p> |
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| LENgua | SToNE STEPS | DeeP GLoW | exPANding |
| RHYMING | DESCENDING | LiCk, LisP | FUSiON |
| OPEN / CLOSED | LARyNX | LiNe CRoSSeD | SiNGiNg WiTH |
| SHredDING | SWALLOWiNg | FOREhead FReE | GEOMetry |
| SIGNificance | DiFFERENCE | FLowing | ADAPTinG FoR |
| STiCKing To SWEaT | ARRiViNG AT | HuMMing | CHeMical NaviGatioN |
| THROUGH | HiGH StREET | BiRD | ModuLAR SYNtheSIS |
| GENitAL amplifier | opPORtuniTy | OLfacTory CLuES | ORGANiSiNG |
| SCRatCHING | Oesophagus | GeO-BiO textURES | TiME signALS |
| GOLD reCORD | HiCCUPs | PreMONitory cALLs | POINting |
| SPitTING ViNO | CHeAP RECoRDing | OOze RAPIDly | microPHONES |
| ON CANvas | STUDiO | To NeRvE ENDings | CaBLE NeBULA |
| FLUId synTAX | REACTs To CONtext | SpiRaLLiNG ChORds | ProJECTing |
| 3D MODELLiNG | GargLING | No BeATS | oN BARe ChEsT |
| | PickiNG SkiN | SinFóniCa | ConFIGURinG |
| MyceLIUM | on NeCK | ANt LiKE PersistENCY | DiCTIONary |
| FoRMing MiND | Tus LABioS “O” | PARAkeeT PhonETiCS | MEMoRiES |
| ABSORbing BLOOD | LeT imPuLSE | ReWiLDinG SCoReS | TypEsCriPTs |
| CHALLENGing | RELease RANges | TaLKInG AmBiENcE | CRAwLinG |
| CHANGE | BODily Noises | | As BEETles Or |
| CHA-CHA | CLASSical | INGESTing | ZooPLanKtON |
| CHÁ | CONtainment | SPiRiTUouS sToCK | |
| SHiVERiNG FRonT | INNEr spiRITS | STiCKing OuT | PLUGS in LUNGS |
| SHoULDERiNG | | FRom thE unTAMed | iNHALing |
| PRE- CONCEIVED | LA BOCA | GRoWing DEaD | electricity |
| POétICAS | MoMENTS | HAir | exHALing |
| OUTPOURING as | INTERpretation | LiSteNinG scaffOLDS | DuST |
| PRE-COLOMBiAN | ImProVISATION | HEEDinG FoLLicLEs | GATHERinG |
| SANgre | poSSeSSion | WHISPering ceiLiNG | UnderNEATH |
| GHOsTs | EXpect iDEAS | RooFED ClouD | FURNiTURE |
| | WooD TURNing | cOVER | AToMIC |
| | wORds | | BiTs oF |
| PERFO-POETiCS | GaSpS & HiSSeS | RaY LiGHt WhOOSH | FiREBaLLs |
| NOT / EXactLY | ANatOMY ModIFIED | EmPTY FiELD | OuTER SpACE |
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| Of BODiES | To SOurCE | LiChEN Time | MEDuLaR |
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| PhONes SKULLS | SiNG to fLESh | IN FUNgi | SENTenCES |
| BONES | FLASH tonGUE | In MACro | EXPoNENTiAL |
| | ScALE the Room | & MICro | PLeaSURES |
| ARE YOU LOST? | DESERTification | ALGAe | oF |
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| MATERiALiTY, | BorN inTO BreaTH | ArchiTECTuraL fORMs | O |
| ViSCERALiTY | Repetición | BUIldinG FRoWNs | i |
| eSPACiO | PerFORMance | CrEEping LettERs | c |
| LiP READiNG | FORMAción | BuTTERCuP | E |
| SANiTY | | | |



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Notes on a Kinopoetics

Scott Thurston¹

¹ Scott Thurston is a poet, mover and educator based in Manchester, UK. He has published numerous books and chapbooks of poetry, most recently *Terraces* (Beir Bua, 2022) and *Phrases towards a Kinopoetics* (Contraband, 2020). Shearsman will publish his selected poems *Turning* in 2023. Scott is founding co-editor of open access *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* and co-organized the long-running poetry reading series The Other Room in Manchester. Since 2004, he has been developing a 'kinopoetics' integrating dance and poetry which has seen him studying with dancers in Berlin and New York and collaborating with three dancers in the UK. Scott is a Professor in the English department at the University of Salford where he has taught since 2004.

My earliest experiences of the innovative poetry performance scene in London in the 1990s were intensely embodied ones – from the visionary mercuriality of Maggie O’Sullivan, the earthy vitality of Bob Cobbing and the dynamic, break-neck phrasing of poets like Ulli Freer, Adrian Clarke and Robert Sheppard, this work was an intense wake-up call to pursue poetry in a multi-dimensional and multi-sensorial way, as something that could leap off the page in performance, but also dazzle with energy on paper. Such an approach was also key to its politics of undoing normative patterns of language use and the conventions of poetry making.

When I began dancing Gabrielle Roth’s Five Rhythms movement meditation practice in the Summer of 2004, I found that this newly conscious attention to my body in motion resembled my experience of reading and writing this poetry: the feeling of a dynamic experience unfolding in time and space, full of meaning, but also exceeding it at every turn – vivid, alive and thrilling. In the years that followed, I undertook a journey into embodied movement practices including Contact Improvisation, Authentic Movement, Movement Medicine, and The Six Viewpoints, documenting my experiences by means of poetry whilst finding ways of making my poems dance, and enabling my dance to speak. Workshops and correspondences with key artists such as Simone Forti, Clarinda Mac Low, Kenneth King, Sally Silvers and Billie Hanne also enabled seismic shifts in my thinking and performing.

In 2013 I began a series of collaborations with professional dancers (Sarie Mairs Slee, Julia Griffin and Gemma Collard-Stokes) to make performances that used both choreography and poetry, and, in 2014 started working with a Dance Movement Psychotherapist (Vicky Karkou) to explore the role of language and words in movement therapy (this latter project developed into what is now known as Arts for the Blues – an evidence-based creative therapy model for treating depression). I also dived deeply into the literary and cultural history of this conversation between dancers and poets, visiting archives, taking workshops and writing articles, and uncovering a range of insights which shed light on the mysterious and beguiling chemistry between words and movement.

The onset of the pandemic and its restriction on meeting other dancers in the studio threw me back on developing my solo practice, which led to a collaboration with filmmaker Maria

Andrews on two short kinopoetic films – *Terraces* and *Intimacy* – both shot on location in Salford and Manchester in the Autumn of 2021 and edited and released in 2022 (*Terraces* on Pamenar; *Intimacy* and two other related works on soundsRite). Both films draw on a series of live-composed kinopoetic performances out-of-doors and in the studio, reworking a single, embodied poem-dance from the sequence *Terraces* (now published by Beir Bua Press) alongside extemporised text and movement.

Failsafe is a new sequence of kinopoetic prose poems, substantial extracts of which have appeared on *Mercurius* and in the *Prototype 4* anthology. I treat all of these texts as fully choreographic i.e. they can be performed as dances.

Terraces (8.13): <https://vimeo.com/653878729/39fe053e5f>

Intimacy (9.07): <https://vimeo.com/691747144>

from *FAILSAFE*

*

Invocation of aim in that sequence accusatory of form let loose to live. With softness many undertones come back to watching blood moon. To not shy away from how you will be read in a house. Would just not work without that engagement – I took it as you walked off the deck. To let you move inside the hedge, head out of the window.

*

Went towards circling around some sort of understanding emerged across a vast gulf waiting for me. Came by and warned you, sort of believed, trusted, indicated the reaction was for you. Lying in the centre of the stone circle, fear of all the challenges above the about.

Just letting go, connecting with a notional sadness at passing of time, incorporated my phrase. Walked out of the circle towards the south-west stone and out to the edge of the summit. Then turned back. Bright ash berries in the centre, crab apples to the west, to the south.

*

for Amy Voris

The feet and the grounding offer articulation; tibia, fibula, malleolus create ankle joint. Talus braces back in the cave, if passing weight, enables leverage down to the ground. Point feet to touch talus, adopt to uneven sentences. Stress is absorbed, to serve the distribution of weight.

In the pre-movement, receiving the mineral body, the dome of the skull. Three types of spine, flight and landing. Pelvis articulates, reaches into space – we are constantly. Grant time to work, take responsibility for your movement – let go in clauses.

*

for Sabine Kussmaul

Making a little face running out into space when I was a bit stripped of ego. Fluid letting go fell back breathe in three dimensions. Against the wall pressure feedback. Close to breath. Fell in places. When on the floor, sink a shaft – wrap caps in white, as if the hill has received a piece of cloud. Hands that hold, lose sensitivity when touch pressed into service.

*

for Jan Thurston

Resisting the idea of making things to sell – getting an idea and putting it away. I understood leaving it alone for a time, cutting and reversing part of the pattern – having the idea first, then working out what it was for later.

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