Listening Out Loud:
The Performance of Poetry in Robert Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major*
and George Elliott Clarke’s *Québécité*

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Abstract

A poetics of voice in motion.

— Dennis Lee, “Body Music.”

Performing poetry and poetry that performs both call for a critical attuning to what I understand as performative listening — a concept that combines the critical contexts of both performance theory and theories of performativity, meanwhile invoking a critical context around the term audience. Rather than keeping each of these spheres separate, my thesis examines how their intersections uncover sites that test the possibilities and limitations of listening with one’s whole body. George Elliott Clarke’s jazz opera *Québécité* and Robert Bringhurst’s masque *Ursa Major* invite performative readings of their textual forms. These two works perform through what Dennis Lee calls “a poetics of voice in motion” that involves thinking of poetry as being in a state of motion — a return to the meaning of *poiesis* as making. The “voice in motion” that Lee hears as poetics gives acoustic material to this process of making. Lee’s essay, “Body Music,” in which he speaks of this kinetic state of poetics, appears in the collection, *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy* — a book composed of essays that inform this paper through their content and even more so through their approach to writing about poetry as listening to poetry. As Tim Lilburn characterizes the essays in his preface to the book: “all of the writing has an open ear, proceeds by this ear: a certain form of speech can be an attempt to hear” (2). In considering Clarke’s *Québécité* and Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major* as forms of speech that attempt to hear, I focus
on what strategies the poetry employs in order to perform; moreover, while the writing itself attempts to hear, the reading of this writing requires more than a simple scanning with one’s eyes. In his introduction to the essay collection *Close Listening*, Charles Bernstein re-introduces the term *reading* to refer to the poetry reading as a performative event in need of critical attention. With this notion of reading as performance, I ask how the reading of poetry translates into an embodied, vocalized performance and how we, in turn, *perform as listeners*. 
Table of Contents

Abstract................................................................................................................................. ii
Table of Contents.................................................................................................................. iv
Introduction............................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter One: Performing Language..................................................................................... 6
   I. Speech Acts................................................................................................................... 6
   II. Writing Performances................................................................................................. 10
Chapter Two: Listening Through Dance.......................................................................... 20
   I. Dance as Metaphor....................................................................................................... 22
   II. Writing Dance — Speaking Dance........................................................................... 26
   III. Semiotics of Dance................................................................................................. 31
   IV. Bracketed Language................................................................................................. 36
Chapter Three: Sound Writing............................................................................................ 42
   I. Recordings.................................................................................................................... 43
   II. “Listening Otherwise” – Recordings and Their Audiences.................................... 50
   III. Improvisations: From Libretto to Performance..................................................... 55
   IV. Voice: Sounding Difference.................................................................................... 61
Chapter Four: Polyphonic Mapping.................................................................................. 76
   I. Translating Performance............................................................................................ 79
   II. Dancing the Voice Map............................................................................................ 83
Conclusion............................................................................................................................. 86
Bibliography......................................................................................................................... 95
Introduction

To write — pushing words onto the page, and brushing them off, with a hand or with a breath — is an action that inscribes kinesis into its textured ink. If we listen, closely, to this kinesis, we hear the words longing to move in what Dennis Lee calls “a poetics of voice in motion” (198). The argument that moves the kinesis of this paper is that listening constitutes its own performance. I write this paper as a listening — a critical listening that performs itself on the page. The medium of writing is important in that it situates this paper within print culture, although I intend, by no means, to limit the scope only to the written word. Building from the performance strategies possible through writing, the first chapter questions the extent to which language itself can perform and how this notion of linguistic performance has been shaped through speech act theory and, more recently, through theories of performativity. Rather than keeping the concepts of theatrical performance and citational performativity separate, I argue that the intersections of these concepts provide spaces through which to explore the material implications of performance. I speak of these intersections as producing spaces not in the sense of amorphous voids but rather as spaces that have a material shape. My use of the term space further builds upon Roland Barthes’s notion of textual abrasions — “the abrasions I impose upon the fine surfaces: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again” (11-12) — that can be both pleasurable and productive. In addition to the images of abrasion, Barthes speaks of linguistic edges and cuts, an unsettling
of language in which “such redistribution is always achieved by cutting” (italics in original, 6). When I propose a tracing of theoretical contexts of performance, I see these tracings as outlining textured cuts — cuts that mark the spaces of theoretical intersections, colliding in the style that Bringhurst describes in his preface to the poem “Blue Roofs of Japan”: “The female voice cuts lyrically across. Sweetly, I suppose, but deeply enough to draw the necessary blood” (81). When theory cuts across itself, it too can draw blood; and although this action does not often fit the adjective of lyrically, it too can produce material textures, not always blood, that allow the body to resurface amid language.

In the second chapter, I argue that dance is a form of listening. In a June 2003 performance of Evocative Language, Dance Imagery, Andrea Nann’s interpretation of Michael Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion and Anil’s Ghost offered a version of this listening through dance. In discussing the potential for dance to listen, I apply Charles Bernstein’s concept of “close listening” that he develops in relation to his interest in the poetry reading as an embodied performance by the author him/herself (22). The live reading by Ondaatje, placed on the evening’s program between Nann’s dance pieces, provides a site through which to consider not only how her dances listen to the poet’s words but also how the poet himself becomes part of the performative event. However, to speak of dance in general does not take into account the range of stylistic and philosophical differences among global concepts of embodied movement. Writing that uses dance as a metaphor often glosses over dance without asking what is meant by it. In the spirit of dance theorist Anne Cooper Albright’s
question of Derrida — “What do the ‘incalculable choreographies’ actually look like? Whose body is dancing, and what is it dancing about?” (159) — I ask what it means to invoke dance metaphorically and what can be uncovered about materiality when this metaphor is challenged. The intersections between dance and writing, and spoken language too for that matter, provide further sites of cutting across that open up possibilities and conflicts as each medium responds to the other, and as the body in dance reminds us of what is at stake in this cutting.

The third chapter centres upon the audience’s performance of listening. With reference to George Elliott Clarke’s poem Québecité, I examine how a reading of this poem takes the shape of both the Guelph premiere of the jazz opera Québecité in September 2003 and the subsequent performance in Vancouver in October 2003. Composer D.D. Jackson, along with the renowned musicians and singers that collaborated in these performances, perform a reading of Clarke’s text that listens, while asking us to listen to their listening. What makes this jazz opera even more suited for study in this paper is that musical improvisation adds a critical layer to the question of how sound constructs itself as outside of written linguistic codes, such as in scat singing, and how this improvisational medium challenges the audience’s discursive practices in talking about sound. Moreover, vocal improvisation, particularly for the female characters of Clarke’s jazz opera, presents itself as a speaking back to conventional modes of representation that seek to construct this sound as silence. Building upon what jazz theorist Jed Rasula calls “the sound of not understanding”
(233), I ask how to theorize a listening to scat singing that *makes sense*, and how the material shape that Rasula speaks of in relation to this *sound* reveals the extent to which understanding emerges from the points at which embodiment cuts across listening.

The fourth chapter examines a textual mapping of sound in a poem by Robert Bringhurst that reads as a performance text: *Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers and Dancers*. The typographical poetry in the voice map that composes the second section of this text foregrounds a visual rendition of what a reading of this *might sound like* — a foregrounding of polyphony that beckons its readers to perform the words aloud. What I hear in both this text and the libretto for Clarke’s *Québécite* is language that longs to be sung. I speak of singing because it invokes the embodied fullness of sound that the written language aspires to resonate with — an aspiration for the language not simply to be recited, but to be spoken as a listening — this is what I mean when I speak of listening out loud.

Listening is a practice that underscores the essays in *Thinking and Singing* not only thematically but also materially in the form that the essays take as pieces of conversation. Editor Tim Lilburn explains how the book emerged out of the “five-pointed conversation” (1) among himself and fellow poets: Robert Bringhurst, Dennis Lee, Don McKay, and Jan Zwicky. The phrase *pieces of conversation* that I use to describe the chapters in this book brings to mind the title of Robert Bringhurst’s book of poems, *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music*. These pieces have a material texture yet are incomplete, spaces for listening lie
between them — pieces of conversation and pieces of listening that resonate with the philosophy of Bringhurst’s poem “Sunday Morning” that appears in the book, *Pieces of Map*, *Pieces of Music*:

What is is not speech.

What is is the line

between the unspeakable

and the already spoken. (69)

In this poem, the line drawn amid sounds and silences of what we listen to is what Bartlett further gestures towards in introducing us to “the thinking and singing of five poets, who’ve listened to each other while listening to whatever floats in, literally audible or inaudible, through the windows of their houses” (15). Listening takes place not only between the essays themselves but also among the silences. These silences are not still; they call for a closer listening to what lies between the words, and this texture can either be “literally audible or inaudible” as Bartlett notes. To hear these silences moving involves more than listening to words — it involves listening to the words as they speak. As they move. And even to move the words, again, yourself. Listening that performs.
Chapter One: Performing Language

Performance is writing, but not only writing. Writing is one form of performance, a form that often forgets the body, only to be reminded that it is written by a body and even constitutes its own performing body. Words upon a page create an illusion of disembodiment, almost — but the words are doing something, and this motion upon the page connects itself to the hand that writes these words. We become aware of the physicality of the "we" reading and of the "I" writing, as each of these pronouns extends itself through media in a McLuhanesque manner. But when McLuhan proclaims that "the book is an extension of the eye" ([The Medium is the Massage](34-37)) he does not specifically refer to performance; yet what he speaks of as an extension translates into a version of performance, although the implications of this translation highlight the question of how I am using this term performance and how it differs from performativity. Writing is a performance; performativity is a reiterative act — both performance and performativity are discursive and bodily to the extent that they cannot be separated along the lines of textuality and embodiment. I would like to begin by tracing the theoretical contexts of both terms in order to explore how the intersections between them speak to the space of intersection between a libretto and a jazz-opera or between a voice map and a polyphonic masque.

I — Speech Acts

J.L. Austin begins his discussion of performative utterances with a statement that acquires a certain irony when placed in the context of contemporary theory: "You are more
than entitled not to know what the word ‘performative’ means” (1430). Although the word “performative” is as difficult to define now as it was then, it is no longer unknown. In fact, the popularity of ‘performative’ as a critical concept has diffused across western academia, rendering obsolete Austin’s positioning of the performative as something new. In referring to its newness, Austin does not imply that the performative has not hitherto existed, but rather that it has not been theorized in such a manner that distinguishes its capabilities as active language. Citing examples such as “I do” (as in a marriage ceremony), Austin argues that “if a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is doing something rather than merely saying something” (1432). For Austin, the utterance itself performs an action, as opposed to simply stating a description.¹ But Austin does not go so far as to suggest that this declaration exists completely independent of the speaker. Austin acknowledges that, in order to do something, the person needs to have “some inward spiritual act” (1432) corresponding to the linguistic pledge; moreover, he claims that performative utterances cannot fall under categories of true or false, rather they can be classified as “unsatisfactory” when “an infelicity arises — that is to say, the utterance is unhappy — if certain rules, transparently simple rules, are broken” (1433). What constitutes a breakage of these rules draws our attention to what Austin sees as performative limits and to the breakages within his argument that reveal the philosophical and cultural contexts within which he imagines performative utterances to function.

As an example of an infelicitous situation, Austin imagines the naming of a ship during which someone “snatches the bottle out of your hand, breaks it on the stern, shouts out
'I name this ship Generalissimo Stalin,' and then for good measure kicks away the chocks” (1434). This example exposes the fact that Austin’s “rules” can be based largely on cultural conventions, particularly because his example is deeply situated within British Cold War discourse. Thus, when Austin discusses what exactly goes “wrong” in this example and comes to the conclusion that it is “a bit arbitrary” (1435), paralleling the situation to ones in which lawyers must make “numerous rules about different kinds of cases” (1435), the disruptive speaker who misnames the ship becomes a figure who does not subscribe to the value system shared by the community involved in the linguistic procedure. In addition to the breaching of rules, a performative utterance can ‘go wrong’ due to a misunderstanding: “You may not hear what I say, or you may understand me to refer to something different from what I intended to refer to” (1435). With the same unsettling tone as in the misnaming of the ship, misunderstanding allows Austin to consider the disjunction among the words themselves, a speaker’s intention, and a listener’s perception. Even though Austin maintains language itself cannot perform without a proper context — for instance, he asserts that “we agree that the ship certainly isn’t now named […] but we may not agree as to how we should classify the particular infelicity in this case” (1435) — he returns to this notion of infelicity that reminds us that this sort of mis/naming, mis/understanding, unsettles those who notice the so-called inaction of the performative utterance. In the context of Sedgwick’s work on affect, Austin’s recognition of this unsettlement points towards a theory of how witnessing a mistaken performative utterance affects the listener to the point that he or she cannot remove the touch of such language, even if the language is “hollow” (1441) as Austin calls it.
The notion that occasionally performative utterances don't work raises the question of in what sense do or don’t they work. Austin’s well-known title, *How to Do Things with Words*, displays Austin’s intention to theorize a speaking subject who does these things with words. For Austin, the words do not act by themselves. Or do they? The position of agency becomes complicated when Austin describes utterances in terms of emotionality, such as when “the utterance is unhappy” (1433). Although this moment within Austin’s argument discords with his underlying interest in the person speaking the utterance as controlling the felicitousness or infelicitousness of the linguistic situation, one cannot help but notice that, in making such an almost whimsical claim as “the utterance is unhappy,” Austin invokes an ontological position of language as being. With its suggestion that language itself performs independently of the speaker, the idea of language as being echoes Heidegger’s position, “language speaks” (1122). Heidegger does not disregard the interaction between language and the speaker and he, in fact, acknowledges its complexity in his summation of how language speaks and bespeaks us: “Man speaks only as he responds to language. Language speaks. Its speaking speaks for us in what has been spoken” (1134). Between the “he” who is speaking and the “us” who is listening, Heidegger posits language itself speaking. In doing this, he moves towards the position that Derrida will later take on Austin’s work on performative utterances: namely, that all language is performative. As Sedgwick rightly observes, the distinction is blurred between performative and nonperformative utterances even in Austin’s work (5). The problem of classifying speech-acts as either performative utterances or descriptive statements results in Austin’s admission that “the distinction between the performative and the statement is considerably weakened, and indeed breaks
down” (1441). In addressing this breakdown, Austin returns to the notion of what the utterance means, or what he calls the force of the utterance (1442); when combined with a list of “explicit performative verbs” (1442), the force of the utterance makes a final attempt to theorize a language that cannot speak on its own. However, the breakdown that Austin acknowledges between performative and nonperformative language is taken up by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, both of whom explode the possibilities for antiessentialist projects when all language is performative and both of whom complicate the overlap between language that performs and language that speaks.

II — Writing Performances

"Language speaks” as Heidegger rhythmically reiterates; but once these words are removed, does something — or the absence of something — speak? And can these words themselves speak? Perform?

...in a conversation that had perhaps always already begun, Derrida responds to Speech Act theory in Limited Inc, a work that is as much a response to John Searle as it is to J.L. Austin, and as much a response to the pre-Socratics as it is to contemporary questions of what language is — or is not. What emerges from Derrida’s writing is writing itself,
enacting a critique of Austin through the handwritten signature that ends the essay, “Signature Event Context.” Even though the signature doesn’t appear until the end, the effect of the signature is already there in the first paragraph, which posits the question, “Is it certain that to the word communication corresponds a concept that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmittable: in a word, communicable?” (1). We read, backwards through the signature — an act of backwards reading that coincides with Derrida’s own description of deconstruction at the end of the essay: “Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the nonconceptual order with which it is articulated” (21) — we read backwards, through the signature, an argument that vehemently resists its inevitable conclusion, yet when this conclusion comes in a signing of “J. Derrida” we are suspicious of this script, just as the writer’s own notation concedes in the margin:

Remark: the—written—text of this—oral—communication was to be deliv—ered to the Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française before the meeting. That dispatch should thus have been signed. Which I do, and counterfeit, here. Where? There. J.D.) (21)

The signature that accompanies this remark attests to his argument that there are singular instances of signatures in daily life, yet these instances are predicated upon their conformity
to a standard of reproducibility; in other words, a signature needs to be perceived both as original (in order to signify an individual’s identity) and as repeatable (in order to be read as legitimate). I reproduce the typography of the signature on this page; but, even in its repeatability, the performance exists within in its own temporality. What appears above reproduces a reproduction. Earlier I spoke of reading Derrida’s argument backwards through the signature; but, in fact, performance is a temporal event that must balance its singularity with its potential for repetition. The temporality of performance becomes an obstacle when attempting to speak about a performance that has already happened, as Peter Sanger conveys in his title “Late at the Feast: An Afterword” that follows the text of Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major*. Just as in the case of *Ursa Major*, we arrive late to the signature in *Limited Inc*, but what this late arrival allows us to perceive is how a particular performance becomes constructed as a discursive event that folds into multiple layers of performance.

In foregrounding the constraints under which the signature functions, Derrida responds to Austin’s discussion of infelicitous speech acts and how Austin frames the so-called failure of such infelicitous acts as not subscribing to an “iterable model” (18). Seeing that the utterance relies upon its citationality, Derrida questions whether a performative utterance could succeed “if its formulation did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance” (18). The signature relies upon a recognizable code — a code that could be categorized as what Judith Butler calls a constitutive constraint; thus the signature as an example of citationality already moves in the direction of subjectivity and gender studies that Butler takes performativity in her readings of Austin through Derrida. In understanding the
divisiveness of the signature's citationality, Derrida points out that "it is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [sceau]" (20). This division results from the utterance performing a citational act, thereby raising the question of how to distinguish the "relative purity" (qtd in Derrida 18) that Austin ascribes to performatives if we are to read them as simultaneously splitting their singularity with their citationality. In fact, Derrida refuses to engage with this typology of performative and nonperformative; rather he argues that "this relative purity does not emerge in opposition to citationality or iterability, but in opposition to other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which constitutes a violation to the allegedly rigorous purity of every event or discourse or every speech act" (18). Resulting from this new typology, Derrida further argues that "the 'non-serious,' the oratio obliqua will no longer be able to be excluded, as Austin wished, from the 'ordinary' circumstances of language" (18). All language is performative — but what are the consequences of interpreting Derrida's dissolution of the distinction between ordinary and non-ordinary language to mean that there is nothing outside of language?

"Language speaks" —

if the word language were to be removed from this phrase
we would feel the action of its removal, the wind
of its exit swooped up in a breath of the remaining
verb, left hanging off the sentence,
still speaking — its motion
left over from a language broken apart:
Derrida's reading of speech-act theory opens up the possibility of deconstructing essentialist ideologies through the premise that language constructs reality; yet, at the same time, this premise challenges us to confront the question of whether everything is language. "Language speaks" as Heidegger reminds us, but when we pull language apart is anything left? What *speaks* once we disassemble language or once language disassembles itself? Before beginning to explain how I see certain instances of Canadian poetics as engaging with this question of *speaking*, I will continue outlining the theoretical perspectives on how language speaks with a discussion of how Judith Butler has interpreted Derrida's reading of Austin's performatives and how her focus on the body brings us to the materiality of language itself — a materiality that perhaps answers the question of what we are left with when we attempt to pull language apart.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler complicates the binary of the constructivist versus essentialist debate in taking up the position of identifying the "constitutive constraints" that regulate constructions of sexual identity (94). If we understand these constraints as also applying to language, we can apply Butler's critique of the constructivist versus essentialist debate in order to enable us to speak about how we are spoken through language in as much as we ourselves speak. Recalling the regulative structures that Austin outlines in his study of
performatives, we see how these rules form a set of constraints that, rather than being the enabling factors that permit the utterance to function, are themselves places in which language has already spoken us over.² Moreover, Butler argues against language as being referential in relation to a space of alterity: “To posit a materiality outside of language, where that materiality is considered ontologically distinct from language, is to undermine the possibility that language might be able to indicate or correspond to that domain of radical alterity” (68). By aligning constitutive constraints with alterity, I am not suggesting that that they are somehow outside; in fact, constitutive constraints exemplify Butler’s point that alterity itself is mediated through language because the constraints themselves are embedded in language. Moreover, the discourse of regulatory practices enables us to employ a different choreography in our approach to subjectivity than is otherwise permissible in a binaristic debate — an approach that spirals around our speaking about and through language with a recognition of our place within it.

“...speaks”

verb, left hanging off the sentence, still speaking — its motion is what is left over from a language broken apart: something,

[...] language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is
The body embedded within language provides a model through which to understand how materiality is regulated through its constitutive constraints and how performativity differs from the theatrical discourse of performance. Since Butler argues that these constraints are “the very condition of performativity” (94-95), performativity must be differentiated from any sort of voluntarism that posits the subject as self-consciously acting a role:

[Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that “performance” is not a singular “act” or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (95)

To say that “‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ (95)” employs a theatrical vocabulary and yet it is here that Butler most emphatically distances her theory from any misinterpretation that performativity can somehow be equated with acting. Her language foregrounds what
Sedgwick will later note as the two contexts for the word 'performative': "'Performative at the present moment carries the authority of two quite different discourses, that of theatre on the one hand, and that of speech act theory and deconstruction on the other" (7). Although Sedgwick aptly describes these discourses as "quite different," the points at which these discourses intersect, and conversely the points at which they most sharply oppose each other, tell us what is at stake for keeping these discourses apart and what might be gained from bringing them together. For instance, the body provides a medium through which to discuss performativity as either a linguistic concept or as a theatrical concept. In a moment in which we as readers are suddenly made aware of the body who has written the text of Bodies that Matter, Butler reflects on how she differentiates between the bracketed "I" and the unbracketed "I" (unbracketed in her prose but still bracketed in mine as I am not speaking from her "I" — a marker of how the text has transferred into different hands): "I bracket this 'I' in quotation marks, but I am still here" (123). Although Butler is not suggesting a phenemonological approach, her reference to the "I" and particularly to the practice of bracketing that she employs enacts a form of performance that illustrates the slipperiness of the citational and theatrical: we see the brackets signalling a reiterative system, a "grammatical fiction" (99); yet we cannot but think of the body that is performing the act of writing with an awareness of a reading audience.

The image of the writing body leads into questions of how to theorize the performing body — a question that calls for a theoretical context of dance studies in order to contrast and intersect with the linguistic context of bodily signification. In response to whether the body
itself is purely discursive, Butler phrases the interconnectedness of language and materiality as an ongoing negotiation: "fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed in one another" (69). It is a negotiation that involves a rethinking of the body as a texture of language in as much and as a referent to a signifying system in which it willingly or unwillingly participates. A physical shape of speaking that embodies its own mediation, the body is where citationality and theatricality intersect, leaving us with a medium that has the potential to be outside of writing on the page yet still very much within language.

"Language

if this

swooped

verb, off

motion,

apart:

still,

( )

...speaks.
In summarizing how J.L. Austin’s speech act theory pertains to “how language constructs or affects reality rather than merely describing it” (5), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains how the performative utterance has impacted deconstructive and post-structuralist theories. As Sedgwick comments in her introductory remarks on performativity, “this directly productive aspect of language is most telling, for antiessentialist projects, when the utterances in question are closest to claiming a simply descriptive relation to some freestanding, ostensibly extradiscursive reality” (5). Sedgwick clearly outlines what is at issue in the essentialist/antiessentialist debate for pursuing performativity in all language, not simply in the specific examples of declarative speech acts; yet, rather responding directly to this debate, Sedgwick introduces her work in *Touching Feeling* as performing through a topos of *beside* (8). I see my paper as taking up this position of being *beside* in its preoccupation with the space between textual and embodied performances. The space between can be characterized as *beside*, particularly in terms of how it performs the actions that Sedgwick describes this preposition as doing: “*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8). With the textual and embodied performances existing *beside* one another, Sedgwick’s *beside* is a helpful way to spatialize their interaction; moreover, I would argue that the space of *beside* in this paper is defined through the interactions among embodied and linguistic notions of performance and performativity.

Butler’s notion of constraints aligns her argument with other discourses that have tried to negotiate a space outside of a binary structure. For instance, Homi K. Bhabha’s discussion of the Third Space has provided post-colonial studies with a term through which to theorize a negotiated space outside of the colonizer-colonized paradigm. Although Butler places her work within the context of gender studies rather than post-colonialism, I mention Bhabha here in order to highlight Butler’s theoretical maneuver of stepping outside (or perhaps inside, around, and between all at once) of the essentialist-constructivist binary as invoking the politics of Bhabha’s notion of a Third Space. Butler performs this maneuver through a discussion of mimesis, bringing her work even further into a dialogue with Bhabha’s even if they are each operating in two different theoretical spaces.

Butler’s example of drag as performative in *Gender Trouble* became popularized to the point that *Bodies that Matter* attempts to clarify the complexity of this example: If drag is performative, that does not mean that all performativity is to be understood as drag. [. . .] The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining [. . .] Moreover, this embodying is a repeated process. And one might construe repetition as precisely that which undermines the conceit of voluntarist mastery designated by the subject in language. (230-231)
Chapter Two: Listening Through Dance

Choreography is a practice of mapping that involves a writing both of the body and with the body. To read this writing requires an understanding of how dance interacts with language — interactions that function through the physical and poetic interpenetration as implied by Bringhurst in the title of his poem “The Blue Roofs of Japan: A Score for Interpenetrating Voices” (79). Moreover, I propose that dance is not only a writing of the body, but that dance also performs an act of listening. As a performative medium that foregrounds the importance of simultaneous attention to expression and reception, dance listens out loud with one’s body.

*Language speaks — but does it dance?*

*Dance speaks — but is it language?*

The body speaks language and language speaks the body through a complex series of performances within which each is always already overspeaking the other. Language and the body are inseparable to the extent their interaction must be theorized as more complex than simply one of mimetic reflection. Dance positions the body as both a writing instrument and a subject being written, thus complicating any attempt to separate the body and language as reflective components. But when mimesis is critiqued as a viable model of representation, the question then becomes how to theorize dance as a referential art, or rather how to theorize a dance when there is no referent. Dance theorist Mark Franko posits primary mimesis as “a
doing, a physical participation” (210), which repositions the relation between dance and language “not as reproduction (copy) but as the capacity to perform anew” (211). In the context of Mallarmé’s *Mimique*, Franko calls for a rethinking of the Derridean trace that takes into account “the inscriptive force of gesture” (211). In particular, Franko’s recovery of the materiality with this “inscriptive force of gesture” complicates Derrida’s concept of mimesis as “reference without a referent” (qtd in Franko 211); but, while Franko focuses more on the spacing of memory than on the material rupture of this gesture, I ask what happens when the gesture refers to “no-thing” (211) and yet the gesture itself still consists of something.

*Dancing is language; language is dancing* — these metaphors aspire towards a performance that moves, a performance of *poiesis* that foregrounds itself as making. But although these metaphors have a desirable appeal, especially in certain poetry that longs to dance, we must ask what is at stake in equating dance with language and vice versa. First of all, such metaphors oversimplify the complexity involved in the conversation between language and dance — these forms are in dialogue because even when a language may not be perceived as dancing, it is perhaps still in dialogue with dance through the very act of ignoring it. Language that does engage with movement often falls under the name of poetic language — poet Robert Bringhurst has defined poetry as “the musical density of being” (*Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music* 10), which situates poetry within an ontological position yet allows it to have a physical denseness of touch. In his essay, “Everywhere Being is Dancing, Knowing is Known,” Bringhurst makes a parallel ontological statement that replaces
“musical density” with dancing: “what poetry knows, or what it strives to know, is the dancing at the heart of being” (52). Although these metaphors are slippery in their generality (for instance, what kind of dancing is Bringhurst referring to?), they pull us towards a materiality in both dance and poetry. Bringhurst claims, “poetry’s flesh are the bones of the dance” (61), thereby gesturing towards the choreographic textures underlying both of these art forms. Whether Bringhurst interprets these textures as phenomenological or semiotic, or perhaps as something else, is a question that I will pose later in this paper’s discussion of his work, *Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers and Dancers*. But before addressing what happens to Bringhurst’s theoretical concepts of language and dance when performed in this production, I would like to consider how poetry and dancing act as metaphors for each other and how this action influences our perception of each as language.

**I: Dance as Metaphor**

Making the transition from spoken language to writing, Franko challenges the act of equating writing with dancing: “Must we choose between writing and dancing? Has deconstruction set us at liberty to believe dance and writing are identical forms of inscription?” (205). Already the metaphors are overlapping and requiring further explanation because writing is part of language, but there is more to language than writing. For instance, the meaning of the phrase shifts when we re-write *dance writes* as *dance speaks*, yet these phrases both articulate an aspect of language. Writing the body itself has theoretical resonances with Helen Cixous’s *écriture féminine*. This concept centres upon marking the page with an essentially female texture: “There is always within her at least a little of that
good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink” (2045). In leaving its trace upon the page, *écriture féminine* enacts a version of Franko’s understanding of primary mimesis in which the process is not reflective but rather “a doing, a physical participation” (210). But, if what is being represented is a version of the essential feminine, then how can we escape from this being read as referential? In other words, the questions that arise from Cixous’s *écriture féminine* are the same ones that arise from a consideration of how dance writes the body — in both cases, we find ourselves questioning whether the body and the writing become necessary reflections of each other. Can the body ever write outside of itself? Can the body write what it is not?

Anne Cooper Albright’s reading of performance artist Marie Chouinard through the theoretical lenses of Cixous and Derrida addresses this very question of what is possible in a writing of the body. As Albright notes in outlining her approach, “I place Chouinard’s physical choreography (specifically *Marie Chien Noir, S.T.A.B.* and *La faune*) in the midst of Cixous’s and Derrida’s theoretical ‘dances’ in order to address what is frequently absent from contemporary theory — an awareness of the material consequences of the live performing body” (157-158). It is this awareness that I see as most relevant to this paper’s overarching focus on the materiality of linguistic and embodied performances. Just as I ask what Bringhurst’s “dancing at the heart of being” (52) *looks like* in its dancing form in order to re-insert materiality into a metaphoric equating of dance and poetry, Albright refuses to accept Derrida’s use of the phrase “incalculable choreographies” to describe innumerable difference; instead, she poignantly asks: “What do the ‘incalculable choreographies’ actually
look like? Whose body is dancing, and what is it dancing about?” (159). Although Bringhurst’s poetics and Derrida’s deconstruction appear to be vastly divergent pieces of conversation, the ways in which they speak about dance as a subversive medium call for a similar response: namely, to re-insert materiality in order to challenge what assumptions are being made about what and who is dancing.

Albright’s argument centres upon a conversation entitled “Choreographies” between Derrida and Christie MacDonald in which he presents the idea of “incalculable choreographies” (154) as a concluding comment to “dreaming of the innumerable” (154) in regard to sexual difference. Albright notes that, even though Derrida has spoken of the dance (la danse) in terms of the feminine, his final discussion of choreography widens out to a vision of the masses, which he describes as “this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of nonidentified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each ‘individual,’ whether he be classified as ‘man’ or as ‘woman’ according to the criteria of usage” (154). It is in the context of the innumerable that Derrida speaks of “incalculable choreographies” — a phrase that has sparked much controversy in dance studies because, even though it makes an important link between deconstructive theory and dance theory, the phrase problematically invokes a rhetoric of dance without taking into account how such an idea could take a physical shape. As dance theorist Janet Wolff asks, “Why is it that the concepts of ‘dance’ (which recurs throughout the interview with Derrida) and ‘choreographies’ are employed to do the work of radical destabilization?” (243). Wolff seeks to uncover the assumptions that lie beneath the use of dance terminology in critical
theory, and the assumptions that she finds include the belief that dance is somehow extra-
linguistic and that dance “provides access to what is repressed in culture” (244); although, as
Wolff admits, “perhaps the metaphor of choreography works better than that of dance, as it
too registers the possibility of a different, non-linear movement, but does not pretend to
endorse a claim of ungrounded, unconstrained mobility” (246), the metaphor of
choreography, as Derrida employs it, still raises the question of how effectively this
metaphor translates into critical theory when it is used as a generic concept. Albright takes
issue with Derrida’s “incalculable choreographies” for this very reason of not being able to
see it translated onto the stage: “Real dancing bodies carry the signs of sexual difference in
much less ambiguous ways; even movement choruses are often divided by sex” (159).
However, Albright does acknowledge that there are “ways in which the gender of the dancer
can be worked over, played with, and exceeded in an effort to disrupt these traditional
dancing roles and disconcert the audience’s reception of that bodily image” (159). For
Albright, rather than moving towards the innumerable, these disruptions enable dance to
become a site of Derridean difference:

Based on the motion of live bodies, the dancing ‘text’ is singularly elusive. Any
isolated movement or gesture is practically meaningless until it is placed in the
context of what went before or after it. But that context is continually shifting in time
and space [...] In order to make sense of the dancing, the viewer must try to remember
the flickering traces of earlier movements at the same time as s/he is watching the
next series of motions; and for this reason dance can be difficult to watch and even
more problematic to write about. (159-160)
Albright’s reading of dance as a performance of difference imagines what difference itself might look like in its embodied form; but she is careful to qualify that even in its embodied form, difference would not be reified to the extent that it would be static because it would still be “continually shifting in time and space” and even its texture would remain in motion as “flickering traces.” What becomes evident in Albright’s description is that the qualities of dance that enable it to become a site of difference are also those that hinder the process of inscribing dance onto the printed page. However, just as difference resists a reified form, the limitations of writing about dance call our attention to the writing that occurs within and through the body of the dancer her/himself.

II: Writing Dance — Speaking Dance

A dancer writes with the body, yet the body also speaks. Although writing and speaking can often be blurred together in bodily movements, the theoretical differences between written and spoken language provide a comparison to ways in which we interpret languages of dance. For a dancer, whether s/he is writing or speaking, his/her body is still moving; in contrast, the practice of writing involves the inscribing of speech onto paper — a stillness, yet not all writing ends in stillness. Poetic language moves with its rhythm, and polyphonic writing foregrounds the movement of voices within conversation. In aspiring towards a condition of speaking, this writing aspires towards dancing.¹ But dancing also speaks, or rather foregrounds the body’s possibilities and limitations of speaking. As Albright points out, “Contrary to popular opinion, dance is not a ‘silent’ art form” (167). Albright explains how Chouinard’s performance uses the voice to express “the sound of her
body in motion” (167). A passage from Cixous’s “Sorties,” one that Albright quotes in her essay in order to highlight how Cixous’s description of writing is analogous to Chouinard’s dancing, redefines the notion of speaking and posits the voice as a place where this unspeaking is able to be spoken: “She doesn’t ‘speak,’ she throws her trembling body into the air, she lets herself go, she flies, she goes completely into her voice, she vitally defends the ‘logic’ of her discourse with her body; her flesh speaks true” (italics added, qtd in Albright 166). Albright notes how “for both Cixous and Chouinard, the voice is a meeting of body and discourse” (166) — it is this intersection that occurs whether this voice is described as writing or speaking since the voice is able to not be restrained by the limits of either one.

When thinking about how the voice represents a sound embodiment of language, we can ask how the language of dance inhabits the body. I purposefully use the word inhabit in order to invoke Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus — a term that draws attention to the social, economic, and cultural regulations that govern a speaker’s performance of language. To be recognized as a speaking subject requires, according to Bourdieu, an internalizing of the legitimate discourse through “situations and practices of everyday life” (51), thereby embodying the codes of a specific language. This state of habitus is laden with hierarchies. Bourdieu explains how one’s unconscious acceptance of the “secret code” (51) permits one to speak in a dialect of socially recognized distinction. Even though voice still originates in and emanates from the body, Bourdieu clearly indicates that ideologies are inflicted upon the body in order to standardize its speech. What is performed in language is ideology. But even though habitus offers a way of thinking about the embodiment of language, does it offer
a satisfactory space through which to speak back to its regulatory codes? When Bourdieu speaks of the speaker's unconscious adoption of these codes, we might compare this to a dancer's internalization of the syntax of not only choreography but also dance culture. Dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster's book *Reading Dancing* concerns the codifications that are internalized by both the audience and the dancers. She argues that, by focusing on "the art of choreography" (xv), we can speak of meaning that emerges not out of intuition but rather out of a deciphering of codes and structures. However, if the dancers come to be read through codes that are beyond their control, how are they to speak against these codes that they have come to inhabit? A model for how to work against these codes is Judith Butler's rethinking of Bordieu's *habitus* because it offers a way in which to imagine how the power of embodied speech can rupture codified language.

In her argument that speech acts are bodily acts, Judith Butler critiques Bourdieu's connection between the body and voice due to his neglect of the "performativity of the *habitus*" (*Excitable Speech* 142). Bourdieu's *habitus* offers a model for how "norms that govern speech come to inhabit the body" (142); but despite Bourdieu's insight into the imposition of these norms, Butler claims that "what Bourdieu fails to understand, however, is how what is bodily in speech resists and confounds the very norms by which it is regulated" (142). Butler critiques Bourdieu for this omission because the bodily performances of speech are what allow speech acts to extend beyond J.L. Austin's notion of speech acts and towards speech acts that perform, construct, and disrupt meaning — or, to employ Butler's definition of performative in *Gender Trouble*, speech acts that act as "both intentional and
performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (177). By introducing performativity to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, Butler highlights the “Derridean ‘break’ with the context that utterances perform” (142), thus enabling speech acts to become insurrectionary as censored speech “emerges into ‘official discourse’ and opens the performative to an unpredictable future” (142). The insurrectionary speech acts offered through performativity further diverge from Bourdieu’s view of the speech act as “a rite of the institution” (145). As opposed to upholding a theory of origin, such as Bourdieu’s presupposition of an institutional origin for speech acts, Butler explodes the notion of origin, or the institutional rite, by positing performativity as ascribing neither to essentialism nor to *mimesis* of an essential original, but rather as endless imitations of that for which there is no original — echoing with endless Derridean *supplements* — or as Butler phrases this playful repetition: “imitation without an origin” (175).

Just as Albright asks what Derrida’s “incalculable choreographies” would look like in their embodied form, I ask what Butler’s “imitation without an origin” would look like as a performance piece because it is the test of embodiment that reveals the viability of this alternative to referentiality. Although it pre-dates Butler’s work, an example of “imitation without an origin” appears on the back of Susan Leigh Foster’s book *Reading Dancing*. I do not mean in the written portion of her book, but rather on the back cover where a photograph of Foster, in mid-flight with arms poised above her head, appears with the title: “Susan Foster in *Repetition and Difference* (1984).” Even though it is only a photograph and does not give us any sense of what this dance piece looked like, the photograph does give us
evidence that such a task of performing post-structural concepts of repetition and difference has been undertaken, and that someone has attempted to explore what Albright calls “the material consequences of the live performing body” (158) through an exploration of theory that uses the performing body itself. In her article, “Women Writing the Body: Let’s Watch a Little How She Dances,” Elizabeth Dempster begins with a description of Foster’s photograph and its implications within the context of Foster’s writings on dance and audience dynamics: “The author’s body asserted as dancing presence exceeds the smooth surface of the page. Her body intervenes and demands that the reader become spectator” (21). Towards the end of her article, Dempster makes a further point that differentiates dance from other arts: “I have borrowed terminology from literary theory, but dances are not books and the body is not a written-upon page. Dance requires its own close watching. It takes time, and the ‘reading’ of dance is an undertaking which may necessitate the development of new critical strategies” (35). These new critical strategies are what I see gestured towards in the photograph of Foster; moreover, I see this photograph as a new pedagogical approach, one that Dempster herself invokes through the phrase “the dancing professor” (21) that she uses to introduce Foster’s photograph. To return to what Albright calls “the material consequences of the live performing body” (158), I see Foster’s photograph as an example of this intersection between theory and practice, calling our attention to the material shape of pedagogy.
III: Semiotics of Dance

Susan Leigh Foster’s book *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* revolutionized dance studies with its semiotic approach to both dance and dance culture. Arguing that audiences learn to read dance just as the dancers learn to speak through the grammar of dance, Foster seeks to undo the myth that dancing is somehow outside of language — a point that then poses the challenge of how to perform subversively within and against language, which Foster herself raises as an editor of *Decomposition: Post-Disciplinary Performance*. In her preface to *Reading Dancing*, Foster outlines her aim: “to take dance out of a model that presupposes a relation between the dance and some intuitive/primal, libidinal expression and into a space in which we can talk about the discursive” (vx). Foster defines the process of *reading dancing* as “this active and interactive interpretation of dance as a system of meaning” (xvii). Considering that dance is primarily a visual medium for the audience member who attempts to *read* it, we see that Foster’s work on dance semiotics intersects with Barthes’s work on the reading of images; what I am interested in is whether the intersection of these semiotic approaches to the visual produces a practice of *close watching* that parallels Bernstein’s *close listening*. Rather than a *watching* that functions solely through the visual structuralism that underlines both Barthes’s and Foster’s approaches to reading, *close watching* attends to the multi-sensory experience of the performance — the affect of dance as providing access to its meaning, but affect not in the purely phenomenological sense but rather in the sense of its discursive texture as felt by both the dancer and watcher. Foster’s own writing calls for a multisensory experience when reading dance — “to comprehend the three-dimensionality of the body” (58) — thereby
making Bernstein’s close listening an even more relevant term in the sense that it too calls for a multisensory reading. But if the reading of dance involves a McLuhanesque all-at-once experience, then why does Foster unpack the codification of dance in a structural series of analyses? Foster speaks of “literacy in dance,” implying Barthes’s semiotic approach in “Rhetoric of the Image,” but as Foster herself acknowledges, there is more to reading dance than watching it: “Only the viewer who retains visual, aural, and kinaesthetic impressions of the dance as it unfolds in time can compare succeeding moments of the dance, noticing similarities, variations, and contrasts and comprehending larger patterns – phrases of movement and sections of the dance – and finally the dance as a whole” (58). But does this type of unfolding and refolding analysis remain productive when the process of codification itself is being challenged, or when the dance refuses to be comprehended as the “whole” that Foster speaks of as the objective? Foster herself raises this question with regard to Merce Cunningham’s rejection of conventional choreographic models: when a dance means nothing, we are left with an empty grammar — a grammar that, after watching the dance, she claims, is not empty at all (34). We read, even this empty grammar, through a recognition of codes that Foster notes as being informed by Barthes and Foucault in its combination of semiotics with representational systems of power (xix); although these codified structures can limit the discourse of dance with their imposition of intended meaning, the layering of codes draws us towards attending to these textures simultaneously in a performance of analysis that not only watches the dance but also listens to it, closely.
In "Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes chooses an image from advertising through which to argue that a mechanically captured image produces the myth of an objective gaze, as if capturing the scene *en abyme*, whereas a hand-drawn image reveals the link more clearly between the connoted and denoted levels of meaning. Thus, a photograph can appear to be "a message without a code" (39), even though when subjected to a close watching, as Barthes performs through his analysis, we see how the layers of signification unfold despite its *a priori* state of naturalness to the extent that one can assert, "the scene is there" (40). In theorizing the framing that occurs in dance, Foster decodes the layers of signification that compose the images of dance that the audience watches:

The following discussion offers a blueprint for choreographic meaning, assimilating many choreographic conventions into five broad categories: (1) the frame—the way the dance sets itself apart as a unique event; (2) the mode of representation—the way the dance refers to the world; (3) the style—the way the dance achieves an individual identity in the world and in its genre; (4) the vocabulary—the basic units or "moves" from which the dance is made; and (5) the syntax—the rules governing the selection and combination of moves. (59)

Foster begins this decoding with a mention of choreography, which explains her structural focus on the grammar of dance. Thus, her theory can be described as one of reading choreography that attempts to read the connoted and denoted messages, as Barthes does with images in advertisements, in order to reveal how these messages are not products of freely moving bodies but rather are intentionally constructed.
Although Foster acknowledges that this blueprint pertains “only to Western concert dance tradition” (59), I am interested in the ways in which modern dance and postmodern dance present challenges to the structural frames that underline Foster’s arguments. To begin with, what happens when the “frame” is ruptured — for instance, what happens when a dance does not set itself apart as a unique event, or when the dancer’s movements push the limits of syntax? Albright describes a poignant moment in Marie Chien Noir when Chouinard reaches a hand down her throat, resulting in a gagging sound that unsettles the audience (161). The aesthetic moment becomes ruptured by the real gagging response of Chouinard — a movement that pushes the limits of choreography by interrupting a controlled action with an uncontrollable bodily response.

In the introduction to Unnatural Acts, Foster discusses a dance performance that challenges the structure of framing that she had outlined in Reading Dancing. Foster begins with this very question of what happens when a performance resists being read as a performance, as in the example, Bio Sentry, that Foster witnesses amid a poolside reception at UC Riverside:

Two women in strangely translucent, baggy bodysuits and brilliantly coloured sun visors, two each and positioned to form a slit through which to view the world, have appeared in the pool area. They carry a small rubber boat between them, with boom boxes in their other hands. Setting the boat down poolside, they extract from it two small chairs which
will host their taped dialogue. Sitting tall and calm, each presses the tape recorder’s On button in turn to produce a question or answer for the other. The voices deliver absurd directions for freeway travel and comment on current events. Seemingly edified by this exchange, they place the boom boxes in the boat and launch it into the pool. A voice not theirs continues on the tape, reciting a collage of quotations concerning bodiliness in cyberspace. [...] The performers enter a crowded area of the reception; their gestures mingle with those of the viewers [...] [T]hey locate a spool of yellow tape, the kind used to cordon off construction sites. Tying one end to the fence, they begin to wrap the crowd in tape. As it unfurls we see the bold black lettering BIO-HAZARD: DO NOT ENTER. Their costumes and neutral manner as well as the boat’s voice with its ongoing recitation of cyber-facts, all take on new significance as the crowd itself becomes a bio-hazard. (3-4)

When Foster describes the moment at which “the crowd itself becomes a bio-hazard” she pinpoints a moment of realization that the event has become framed — literally with the tape — and this frame has given it an otherwise unnoted meaning. This moment of realization parallels the moment when the audience bestows the title of performance upon the event itself. In Reading Dancing, Foster outlines cues that frame an event as a dance performance: for instance, in Reading Dancing, Foster speaks of “the frame—the way the dance sets itself apart as a unique event” (59), but there is no such frame in Bio-Sentry as the performers enter unannounced and mingle with the audience. They very notion of a frame becomes ironic at the closing of the piece when the tape unfurls around the crowd, framing everyone as part of the performance site.
IV: Bracketed Language

In the dance scene of Vancouver, a study in contrasts has emerged that centres upon different approaches to performing language in Kokoro Dance’s performance of “( )” at The Transculturalisms Conference (UBC) in October 2003, and Andrea’s Nann’s performance Dance Imagery as part of Asian Heritage Month in June 2003. Although these pieces represent quite different dance forms — Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi have developed their own style of post- Butoh whereas Nann’s background is in modern dance — I understand these pieces as revealing two models through which to test the limits of performing language. In the case of Nann’s piece, her dancing offers interpretations of Michael Ondaatje’s novels, In the Skin of a Lion and Anil’s Ghost, and the dancing is prefaced with words from his text visually projected onto the stage. Ondaatje himself participated in the performance by reading excerpts from Handwriting and Running in the Family; moreover, his recognizable voice recited an excerpt from Anil’s Ghost as a prelude to Nann’s dance. In contrast, the Kokoro Dance production of “( )” is named after the music by Sigur Rós that includes vocals in a made-up language called “hopelandic” — a language that plays with our expectation for sound to correspond to recognizable meaning. Choreographers and dancers Bourget and Hirabayashi write in the program notes how their dance fills the space between the absence of language in the title and the music: “Our dance is what fills the space between parenthetical brackets. Dance is unspeakable. We cannot tell you what it means. Hopefully you will feel it.” In post-performance discussion, it was clear that we could feel it; but I think that more can be said about the relationship between the body and language in this piece than letting it rest as one of inarticulate feeling. The image
of dance filling in a set of brackets offers a poignant model through which to think about the possibility of stepping, not outside, but perhaps beside, language. The way in which Nann inserts her body into Ondaatje’s texts performs an embodied listening that speaks among his words — and, through the Kokoro Dance piece, we can take these in-between spaces and think about how they invoke a parenthetical absence that performs a map of where language once was.

The evening titled *Evocative Language, Dance Imagery* included three components — the world premiere of “Alice and Cato,” a duo by Andrea Nann and Gerard Michaud that interprets a section of Michael Ondaatje’s novel *In the Skin of a Lion* — a reading by Michael Ondaatje of excerpts from *Handwriting* and *Running in the Family* — and “Meditation #5: On Loss and Desire,” a solo piece by Andrea Nann inspired by Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*. Words and dance overlap in these performances. In “Alice and Cato,” a word from Ondaatje’s text is projected on the stage backdrop before each sequence begins, creating a number of effects ranging from each sequence appearing to be an attempt to translate the projected word into movement to the dancing wrapping itself around the word and unfolding more meaning than a single word can hold. The way that each sequence of movements calls our attention to it — even a slow, plodding crawl across the stage by Michaud with Nann carefully and lovingly rolling underneath him captures our attention, accompanied by the intriguing syncopation of John Gzowski’s industrial sounding instruments — results in the dancing not simply miming the text but rather engaging the text in a way that offers a critical interpretation. The music conveys a similar dialogue between
the composer and text, as the program notes mention how Anne Bourne drew upon the
 elemental metaphors in *Anil's Ghost* to compose her accompaniment to Nann’s “Meditation
 #5: On Loss and Desire” (4). The idea of interpreting literature through dance raises the
 question of the extent to which dance can comment upon linguistic work, but Nann’s
 performance shows how dance can have a meaningful conversation with written texts, one in
 which we can see the dance listening.

 The conversation between Ondaatje’s texts and Nann’s dancing operates through a
 series of spaces that open up each medium to the possibility of performance. But what
 happens to this dialogue between text and dance when the text is erased? Whereas Nann’s
 dancing *listens* to Ondaatje’s words, the dancing in Kokoro’s “( )” *listens* to sound without
 words. The title “( )” immediately draws our attention to the absence of language, or rather
 to the remnants of language because language is still there, even in those empty brackets. As
 the Kokoro Dance program notes explain, the music and dance are attempts at letting go of
 *logos* and, in this sense, of letting go of language:

 The Sigur Rós CD ‘( )’, to which this piece has been choreographed, has no other title
 and the eight tracks on the CD also are untitled. There are no notes on the CD liner.
 The lyrics in the songs are of a made up language called ‘hopelandic.’ You can
 interpret them any way you like. Like the CD, our dance is about the unsayable and
 the invisible. Our dance is a commitment of ourselves to the moment. We want to
 stretch that moment to create a space and time that has room for reflection and
 meditation. Parentheses are used to interject explanatory remarks. Our dance is what
 fills the space between parenthetical brackets. Dance is unspeakable. We cannot tell
you what it means. Hopefully, you will feel it.

At the Transcultural Improvisations Conference, the performance of “( )” took place on a circular floor-stage at the UBC First Nations House of Learning. With the audience encircling dancers Bourget and Hirabayashi, there was a physical space within which they were able “to create a space and time that has room for reflection and meditation.” Moreover, the circular stage created the impression that the circle itself became the space between the parentheses. Thus, we had a physical representation of the parenthesis, and within this space there was an absence of the logic of language, but a presence of the logic of movement. This logic, of course, is bound by feeling rather than intellect — thus making it a sort of illogic — but the post-Butoh style of Bourget and Hirabayashi focuses on movement to the extent that it guides the shape of the dance. In post-performance discussion, both Bourget and Hirabayashi spoke of how they have an overall structure to the dance, but the movements take on improvisational qualities that differ in each performance. In this sense, their dance itself operates through a series of brackets that they fill with improvised movements.

The parenthetical marks that encircle the Kokoro Dance piece are pieces of punctuation that function like a map, gesturing towards what is not there. Foster’s Reading Dancing speaks of the frames that encode dancing into readable material; but what if the frame is all that is left? What we see in Kokoro Dance’s “( )” is that even the frame itself has a material shape, and this is what we can apply to poetic maps that leave us with a similar frame. For instance, Bringhurst’s voice map in Ursa Major shows only the traces of sound.
His score for "Blue Roofs of Japan" resembles the mapping of the parenthesis "( )" when we see the dim words printed behind the right-hand page's type. When we think of "( )" as a map, we can further connect this piece of punctuation to choreography — a mapping of dance. And just as Bringhurst describes writing as precipitate, "the solid form of language" (9), the writing of the body that is the practice of choreography takes a material shape, waiting for movements to spill over its brackets.
Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* is an example of a fictional-autobiography that dances in its textual form. Unsettling the meaning of dancing itself, Castro’s performance improvises a family history in a style that mimics the dancing he speaks of, yet does so with a profound awareness of this act of doubling.

In her recent work, Foster parallels anti-disciplinary performances with Michel de Certeau’s writing on the possibility of the tactical to disrupt strategic power structures (*Decomposition* 6). Particularly in relation to “Walking in the City,” I am interested in the connections between choreography and de Certeau’s idea of walking amid the grammar of a city. An example through which to consider this theory is Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* because it is the city itself that architecturally choreographs the dancing of the text.

In *Lyric Philosophy*, Jan Zwicky performs a close reading of the word analysis in which she breaks down the word into its etymological roots of *ana* and *lysis*, as though enacting one of the meanings of analysis:

*analysis*, n., separation of a whole into its component parts [. . .] to unloose, release, set free. (3)
Chapter Three: Sound Writing

Sound is language’s flesh, its opacity as meaning marks its material embeddedness in the world of things. Sound brings writing back from its metaphysical and symbolic functions to where it is at home, in performance.

— Charles Bernstein, Close Listening.

Poetry’s words aspire to wordlessness in their musicality, and in their physicality poetry claims words as resources of embodiment, reconnecting poetry with music on another plane.


The writing of sound translates embodied performances into representations that are detached from the body yet can still gesture towards it. Writing need not only include print, since the writing of sound can take place in a recording studio or in the annotations of a score. Even though sound itself exists in the oscillations of particle waves, sound is often not thought of as material until it is translated into this form of writing or recording. As Charles Bernstein writes in his introduction to Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word, “Sound is language’s flesh” (21), which anticipates the title of Robert Bringhurst’s book, The Solid Form of Language. Whereas Bernstein draws attention to the corporeality of sound, Bringhurst imagines language as the condensation left behind from sound: “the precipitate” (9). Each of these images draws attention to the materiality of sound and questions how its
vibratory oscillations can be translated into writing. Jazz theorist Jed Rasula addresses a number of these representational issues in his essays, one of which appears in Bernstein's *Close Listening*. In this essay, Rasula proposes that historical context informs what we construct as musical sound, or rather, to apply Bernstein's metaphor, how the flesh of language is constructed. Theoretical approaches to the question of how to write sound reveal an underlying negotiation between embodied performance and textual performance. I place Rasula's theories in dialogue with this negotiation in order to suggest that this process involves a writing of sound that hears itself being written.

**Recordings**

In "The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History," Rasula proposes that jazz recordings can be read as artifacts that testify to the politics of representation. For Rasula, sound recordings reveal even more than written documents do about the history of jazz. Part of this relates to jazz's foundations upon oral history and how this oral history has often been treated as suspect because it cannot be grounded in what is perceived as documented facts. Rasula argues that the oral history of jazz is one of sound, just like the music itself. Thus, Rasula's focus on recordings integrates the representational issues involved in writing sound with those of writing history. Orality presents itself as a representational problem in the writing of both sound and history because it is a form that, by definition, resists inscription. In *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World*, Bringhurst explains how the Haida myths that he translates belong to a genre called *qqaygaang* — "Oqay, the root, means full or old or round; the suffix
-gaang means *enduring or continuing to be*“ (27). But since the written word leaves us with what Bringhurst calls “a dehydrated voice” (27) there must be a compensation for this lack of voice in order to keep the fullness of the story moving in the spirit of its suffix -gaang, or *continuing to be*. As a translator not only of language but also of medium, Bringhurst negotiates the transition that occurs once an oral culture encounters one of print. Most notably, his inclusion of the quotative *they say* in the translations of Ghandl’s myths foregrounds the intersection of orality and textuality in a way that exemplifies a writing of sound that hears itself being written. Bringhurst’s use of quotatives leaves traces of orality in his translation, as though applying Walter Benjamin’s notion of leaving “an echo of the original” (76). When the practice of leaving traces in translation intersects with Barthes’s sense of tracing as tracing a cut, the quotatives in Bringhurst’s translations outline cuts in the language — spaces that open up to orality.

The self-reflexive quotatives look outwards toward their audience just as much as they look inward on themselves; in other words, they call towards the reader to speak these lines as they were once spoken aloud while, at the same time, the quotatives call attention to their own status as written language, and to the awkwardness felt in the disjuncture between the *they say* and the fact that this utterance is now written, not spoken. Through quotatives, Bringhurst not only conveys the style in which the myths were spoken but also forms a rhythm of desire for speech that marks the text, such as in the opening to one of Ghandl’s poems:

There was a child of good family, they say.
He wore two marten-skin blankets.

After he took up the shooting of birds,

he went inland, uphill from the village, they say. (33)

The translated myth oscillates between the written and the spoken just as Bringhurst does in describing his work as both “a poem and a piece of spoken music” (62), slipping between these terms in order to evoke what he hears as “a vision painted indelibly in the air with words that disappear the moment they are spoken” (63). The importance of these myths as oscillatory builds upon their place in the genre called qqaygaang, in which their ontological status as myth rests in the voice itself that enables the suffix -gaang to keep its meaning as “continuing to be” (27). In this sense, Bringhurst’s work performs an act of recovery — but in order to do this, Bringhurst needs to articulate how this recovery gives us something even though what it is he is recovering is exactly what cannot be reified into a static form. Instead, he offers us the fluid material of orality. He hands us this material as though invoking the title of the Haida myth, The One They Hand Along — handing along the story itself, the qqaygaang, which moves through the “they” in a series of traceable exchanges through language.

In recovering orality, Bringhurst’s translations perform a version of what Rasula hears in the recovery of sound as history. Bringhurst works with a different medium than Rasula does, but the representational issues involved in their theories of sound recording are closely aligned. For instance, Bringhurst addresses the question of how rhythms can be transferred into written transcripts. Rather than speaking in terms of the audio, Bringhurst
explains that orality can be transferred into written form through what he calls, "noetic prosody" (*A Story as Sharp as a Knife* 168). Although noetic prosody gestures towards its previous oral form as clearly as does the inclusion of quotatives, noetic prosody performs a style of storytelling that retains traces of its oral form through its connection to thought — "music of the mind more than music of the ear" (168). As Bringhurst explains, noetic prosody performs through patterns of thought rather than sound: "Words and phrases are repeated; so therefore are their syntax and their sounds [. . .] But the pattern in the foreground, and then pattern in control, is a pattern made of thought" (168). In proposing that Haida myth functions through noetic prosody, Bringhurst does not mean that the visual imagery constitutes the material shape, but rather that the material rhythm of Haida myth is one of thought. However, to posit that rhythm contains both sound and thought complicates the question of how language performs in his texts because language can no longer be held as simply pieces of sound: "There is always an idea, envisioned in the substance by the artist, and clinging to the substance, yet perfectly able to leave the substance behind" (160). Inasmuch as this reminds us of the artist behind the words, the idea of thought and substance as separable suggests that Bringhurst is proposing a space of alterity beyond substance of language — but how can this space resist being informed by the material shape that it once took? Through this separation of thought and substance, we are being asked to reconcile two perspectives that Bringhurst articulates in his lecture, "Poetry and Thinking": namely, that "poetry is not manmade; it is not pretty words" but rather "the thinking of things" (italics in original, 155). If thinking is poetry, then the challenge to speak about its material shape is a
process of thinking through the intersection of thought and substance; and, in the case of oral poetry, it is a thinking through the intersection of thought and sound.

A more thorough explanation of how noetic prosody incorporates philosophical rhythm as one component within the larger context of material sound appears in Bringhurst’s most recent work, *The Solid Form of Language*, in which the term prosody figures again and, this time, the connections between noetic prosody and materiality are more clearly developed:

In essence, when writing a spoken language, one can focus on *meanings* or on *sounds*. Sounds can be written in clumps (the sonorous unites called syllables) or parsed, at least roughly, into phonemes and written as consonants and vowels. If the writing of meanings ran on a parallel track, then meanings would also be written as clumps (the conceptual units called words) or parsed into morphemes and written as lexical roots, affixes and inflections [...] But no writing system works in quite that way.

When people approach the task of writing by trying to represent what they *mean*, not what they *say*, they produce an alternative to speech and not a record of it. (57)

To write orally, Bringhurst plays with mimesis because the textual form mimics speech yet it does so with an intense awareness that it is not. If done with such an awareness, the recording of oral speech thus becomes a medium that asks the reader not to read but to listen. In introducing his translations of Haida myths, Bringhurst explains how “once it is transcribed, oral literature *looks like* writing — but as every reader senses, that is not quite
what it is” (15). The dissonance, within the illusion of the transcriptions looking like writing, performs an abrasion within the medium itself, leaving a conscious space for breath to return.

Recording sound is writing history. Rasula’s insistence that sound must be heard as a credible history seeks to overturn the misconception of African-Americans as being “without history” (137) simply because their history is not written in forms accepted as writing. In his response to historian Marshall Stearns, Rasula writes that Stearns acknowledges “that African music is played without notation,” but Rasula points out how Stearns fails to apply this same reasoning to history: “namely, that history might already be inscribed in some medium other than writing” (137). Rasula’s argument that sound recordings constitute historical documents calls for a practice of listening that takes into account the constructive process of these documents. In other words, one must listen for what is left out as much as what is left in. It is in this sense that Rasula understands recordings as performing an act of testifying: “Jazz has been a constant testimony to things that will never be known, people that will forever go unheard, words that will remain unsaid” (152). For Rasula, this is a matter of violent dispossession rather than a failure to archive certain performances.

Given that music is not simply sound waves but rather a politicized construction of audibility, I propose that Rasula’s argument requires a listening to the regulative forces that
control what is constructed as ‘sound,’ or in this case what is constructed as ‘jazz.’ In order to hear these underlying forces I bring Jacques Attali’s *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* into dialogue with Rasula’s work, especially since Attali calls for a similar listening to the stratifications that classify sound and silence: “Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that is essentially political” (6). Attali argues that music is “the organization of noise” (4) and that this organization becomes a reflection of society, or rather “the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society” (4). Rather than speaking of these waves in terms of Bernstein’s physical metaphor of “flesh” (21), Attali uses the image of material waves in order to reveal how materiality gives sound its economic power. Attali’s focus on the economics of music intersects with Rasula’s reading of history in a specific cultural site: in the object of the record. When Attali’s and Rasula’s theories combine with Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, the object of the record comes to occupy a complex space of being invested with both cultural memory and cultural capital. Rasula explains how “the specific challenge of jazz’s recorded legacy is to admit a broader range of media to the historical palate of memory” (153); yet, at the same time, he admits how even sound recordings result in the reification of improvisation, which complicates his rejection of the archival model. However, the economic isolation of an individual record must be taken into context of Rasula’s point about the overarching trajectory of jazz history as folding in on itself, as it begins and ends in *medias res*. Nonetheless, there is tension in how the record functions as a fetishized object of cultural memory and capital while, at the same time, only serving to provide a limited amount of audio recovery. As Rasula himself admits, “It is a perennial
irony that we trace the legacy of improvised music by listening to ‘definitive’ performances on records” (144). As a model through which to reconcile the fetishized ‘archive’ of the record with the limitations of it, Rasula offers a model of history that takes into account the spaces between these recordings; but he importantly notes that these spaces only need to be filled “if one aspires to superimpose aesthetic order on an otherwise heteroglot profusion by the persuasively simple hypothesis of progress” (145). Rather than imposing this “aesthetic order,” Rasula leaves the spaces unfilled in what he understands as a rhizomatic history of jazz. Rasula invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome in order to highlight how “the music we hear is always encountered in midstride, rounding a corner, a crowd already gathered, and another already dispersing” (147). Rasula’s suggestion that jazz history performs itself rhizomatically offers a rethinking of the archival model in such a way that theorizes the archive as not limited by its material form because it is encountered within a history that is always already speaking through and around the archive itself. However, this requires a listening practice that attunes itself to history’s state of speaking in medias res, instead of a reading practice that simply scans unmoving pieces of once-spoken sound.

“Listening Otherwise” — Recordings and their Audiences

The phrase “listening otherwise” is from the title of a chapter, “Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A Different Type of Question about Revolution” from Rey Chow’s book, Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Contemporary Cultural Studies. I use this phrase listening otherwise here in order to stress that listening to the writing of sound involves a
listening from a place different from the one occupied by a reader whose text stays still. The word otherwise gestures towards a listening from alterity without directly asking the listener to listen completely from the outside; instead, s/he listens otherwise — with the word otherwise appearing after the noun, listening, thereby disrupting the syntactical pattern and leaving the reader hanging on this word: otherwise — otherwise, how? Than what? These questions apply directly to Rasula's notion of jazz history as rhizomatic because, as Deleuze and Guattari aptly point out, the question of how to listen to a rhizome involves a rethinking of what we mean by listening. If listening means something different than reading, then how do we listen to music written on the page? How do we keep words speaking, singing, bodies dancing, once writing takes place? A writing that hears itself being written, longs to keep singing, words that leap off — almost.

In George Elliott Clarke's jazz opera Quénécité, we are offered a model through which to understand how written words articulate this desire to be spoken. During a scene in the third act when the multicultural couples have not yet reunited, they wander in the fog, with voices overlapping while singing of their longings for each other. It is at this point in the jazz opera that we hear a phrase repeated: "I miss you as a kite misses the wind" (81). Even though their voices remain distant and distinct, they overlap to form a collective sentiment of desire that also applies to language itself. In the performance of Quénécité, the written text of the libretto is able to fulfill its desire of being sung as the singers lift the words off the page; but the fulfilment of this desire is fleeting, as it exists in the motion of sound, thus enacting a Barthesian moment of pleasure in which the pleasure itself sifts
through attempts to record it as if slipping through the abrasions of a text. What I hear as the model of desire that underscores the trajectory of this paper is that the words of *Québéécité* long to be performed — and it is this desire to speak that underscores what I call the poetic practice of words hearing themselves being written while still longing to be spoken, missing the breath.

Jazz theory provides a background for the writing of sound not only because it addresses the critical question of how sound, as performance, is represented but also because it theorizes sound that plays outside, through and around the conventions of written music. Jazz improvisation becomes a site through which to explore how embodied musical performances work within and against structural forms such as a score. Moreover, jazz cannot be read with the hermeneutic objective to *make sense* of its sound. In looking at how the dissonance of jazz philosophy has been employed in poetry, Rasula calls this phenomenon "the sound of not understanding" ("Understanding the Sound of Not Understanding," 233). Through placing the notion of a poetry reading, in which reading means reading aloud, in the context of poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins whose sprung verse aspires to a state of orality, Rasula comes to the conclusion that the material rhythm of poetry is the sound of not understanding and, most importantly, "the poem *is* that sound" (256). The knowing in poetry occurs, for Rasula, amid that state of "bafflement" (256). But in order to achieve this state, one must undertake a process of listening that Rasula differentiates from that of simply hearing: "To hear is simply to receive and register what's given; to listen is to correct and displace it" (233). What Rasula means by "correct and
displace” is that the sound of poetry arrests the listener into a state of unknowing: “To submit to the material current of unfamiliarity in a text (which includes the oral sounding) is to apprehend the animation that is poetry [. . .] When you really let a poem occupy you like that, in rhetorico-proproceptive-acoustic pulsation, vocalizing line upon line, the poem accumulating a sheen, a reptile glamour, the husk of your familiar speaking voice shed . . . when you let that happen (or more often find it happening), you discover why poetry is famous for its delinking of pleasure from understanding” (256). Rasula complicates the mimetic performance that occurs when words are read aloud by introducing the layer of the reader’s reaction to hearing his/her voice mirror the written words. In the reader’s reaction, pleasure separates from understanding and, as Rasula suggests, it is within this moment of displacement that knowing takes place.

Rasula’s notion of “the sound of not understanding” is a version of listening otherwise. The anthology, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, that includes Rasula’s article, explores various listening practices that result in the audience participating in the performance process just as much as the performers or the performance of language. In introducing the anthology, Charles Bernstein calls for “close listenings” (4) that involve the careful attention to language as do close readings, but the emphasis on listening widens the scope of what can be heard as poetic performances: namely, “to encourage ‘close listenings’ not only to the printed text of poems but also to tapes and performances (and so to encourage far greater use of sound recordings, which will hopefully, foment greater production of such recordings by publishers)” (4). In particular, Bernstein posits a poetry
reading as its own medium (10). Different from what is considered a theatrical performance “where the visual spectacle creates a perceived distance separating viewers from viewed, the emphasis on sound in the poetry reading has the opposite effect – it physically connects the speaker and listener, moving to overcome the self-consciousness of the performance context” (11). Moreover, a poetry reading can be an impromptu event, as Bernstein explains with reference to Amiri Baraka’s use of his poems as a score to improvise upon during his reading. Bernstein’s suggestion that a poetry reading involves improvisation allows us to think of how the poems themselves can invite such improvisation. George Elliott Clarke’s and D.D. Jackson’s jazz opera *Québecité* enacts a reading of Clarke’s libretto — the libretto is a poem, but the reading of this poem involves four singers, a jazz ensemble, stage directors and technicians, and the collaboration between all of these participants along with a composer and the librettist himself. Moreover, in performing a close listening to this performance piece, whether in its textual form or embodied presence on stage, how are we as audience members to listen? Can we insert ourselves as active listeners? Does the text listen to itself? The question of listening is one that I will pursue in the second part of the discussion of *Québecité* in relation to the sounding of difference represented in the characters’ voices. Both *Québecité*’s hybrid genre of a jazz opera and its multicultural politics foreground a rethinking of listening to and among difference; moreover, Clarke’s jazz opera articulates a fluid, interlocutative approach to these issues of hybridity by opening up its written text through the performers’ improvisation.
Improvisations: From Libretto to Performance

“Oui, let’s scat” (22) not only ends the first scene of George Elliott Clarke’s and D.D. Jackson’s jazz opera Québecité, but “oui, let’s scat” also proposes a participatory practice of scatting that opens up improvisatory space amid the text of Clarke’s libretto. The staging of Québecité, premiering at the Guelph Jazz Festival in 2003, culminates from an improvised collaborative process of its own between performers and composers, and this is why a public reading of Québecité as a poem becomes an exemplary case of how a textual score translates into an embodied and vocalized performance. In the case of Clarke’s score, the libretto of Québecité, published as a “poem; basis for the libretto from the opera of the same name” (publisher’s notes, 111), the poem itself is just as much of a performance as is the embodied and vocalized one. The lush language of the libretto, brimming with words that are occasionally mouthfuls, like “polyhexamethyleneudiapide” (53), pushes against our expectations of what is performable while at the same time establishing its own sense of musicality. As if trying to evoke the sensory experience that will later take place on stage, the text overflows with richness, as indicated by Clarke himself in the preface: “Québecité is an Absinthe-Amarula-Brandy-Champagne-Chartreuse-Chicouti-Cognac-Grappa-Palm-Port-Pastis-Rum-Saki-Sangria-Scotch-Tequila-Vodka opera, one coloured spicily with notes of ebony-dark-cherry, India indigo ink, and bronze-beige the shade of papyrus or bamboo” (12). While the textual performance overwhelms the reader with its sensorial acrobatics, I hear Clarke’s language as poetry waiting to be sung — it is this longing that propels the words into performance.
Among the various instrumental and vocal improvisations in *Québécité*, scat singing provides a resonant medium through which to explore the negotiation between written text and embodied performance, as scat singing itself negotiates between semantic and non-semantic sound. Most notably, Yoon Choi’s evocative scat solo in the Vancouver production of *Québécité* pushes the boundaries of what is speakable and unspeakable, blurring them together as her character, Colette Chan, wages an acoustic battle over rejecting or embracing her Chinese heritage and history. In this talking-back to colonialist discourse, her scat solo foregrounds the limits of language itself and the extent to which language can be performed.

In a legend that epitomizes the orality of jazz history that Rasula speaks of as unrecordable yet unforgettable, the legend of scat singing begins with Louis Armstrong. In his article, “Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat,” Brent Hayes Edwards recounts the story of Armstrong’s famous recording session of “Heebie Jeebies” and how the “fortuitous fumble” (618) changed the history of jazz. Hayes includes the story as Armstrong himself tells it:

I dropped the paper with the lyrics — right in the middle of the tune…

And I did not want to stop and spoil the record which was moving along wonderfully…So when I dropped the paper, I immediately turned back into the horn and started scatting…Just as nothing had happened…When I finished the record I just knew the recording people would throw it out…And to my surprise they all came
running out of the controlling booth and said — “Leave that in.”

Although there are many versions of Armstrong famously dropping the lyrics to “Heebie Jeebies” onto the floor, along with suggestions that scat may have occurred earlier in Don Redman’s “My Papa Doesn’t Two-Time No Time” and Jelly Roll Morton’s claim that he and Tony Jackman scatted years before Armstrong, Armstrong’s fall has characterized the myth of scat’s origin to the extent that its truth or fiction is beside the point. In his article, Edward argues that “what is fascinating about the story is the seeming need to narrate scat as a fall, as a literal dropping of words—an unexpected loss of the lyrics that finally proves enabling” (620). What is further intriguing is how the moment of artistic inspiration comes from a moment of confusion, resembling what Rasula calls “bafflement” in relation to the confusion induced from poetic rhythm. Just as Rasula argues that within this moment of bafflement the sound of poetry takes over as its meaning, the material sound of Armstrong’s phonemic scatting replaces the logic of a musical score — and as we hear in the listeners’ response, “Leave that in” the nonsense of scat was, indeed, meaningful.

Speaking through scat is a way of speaking otherwise — a practice that I liken to listening otherwise — in that it displaces the usual medium used to speak and thus unsettles the listener’s perception of what constitutes speaking. Scat singing challenges the hermeneutic pursuit of understanding in positing a medium that can bypass the tropes of both understanding nor misunderstanding yet still be heard as meaningful. Jazz theorist John Corbett argues that improvisation “fluctuates between meaning nothing, meaning something, and being interpreted as meaning something” (original italics, 221), which resonates with
Rasula's concept of "the sound of not understanding" and Edward's hopeful interpretation of Armstrong's fall as opening up a musical space for non-semantic improvisation that can speak meaningfully.

The lyrics that follow the scat solo sung by Yoon Choi as Colette Chan invite the audience to consider the so-called nonsense of vocal improvisation that they just heard as a performance of speaking the unspeakable. Although her lyrics impose a linguistic explanation of her scatting, her lyrics themselves continue to challenge authoritative discourses through her repetition of the phrase, "Finally I'm called to the bar — the bar of prosecution, / the bar of bars of ripped-up music, / the bar of persecution" (77). In addition to the scene taking place in a bar and Colette being a law student, the repetition of the word bar within the context of speaking the unspeakable strongly aligns itself with Judith Butler's concept of the bar as imposing foreclosure upon language. In Excitable Speech, Butler discusses political speech acts in relation to a bar that functions both as a bar that impedes access and as a judicial body. In reading censorship as a form of foreclosure, Butler argues that censorship "produces discursive regimes through the production of the unspeakable" (139). Since foreclosure takes place not because of a single action but because of "the reiterated effect of a structure" (138), Butler states that one cannot speak against the bar; instead, one must use the "force," consisting of both speech and body, of the performative in re-structuring social utterance (141). In the case of Colette, the anger in her singing — "the bar of prosecution, / the bar of ripped-up bars of Music" (77) — conveys a bodily force already undermining the bar that she stands before; moreover, in addition to the
deconstruction of the various bars in her song, the fervent repetition of the previously quoted line throughout her solo enacts what Butler proposes as “a repetition in language that forces change” (163), forcing change in its articulation of deconstruction: “the bar of ripped up bars of Music” (77).

Before these lyrics make sense of unspeakability, there is an elaborate scat solo by Yoon Choi that, in the Vancouver production, became a conversational duet between Choi and bassist Mark Dresser that Kevin McNeilly locates as speaking from within “a musical space on the verge of score or script” (122). Within this unwritten “musical space,” Choi enacts an emotionally rough, visceral interrogation into the sound of her cultural identity. Fluctuating between deep moans, staccato phonemes, tearful murmurs and high-pitched wails, Choi scats in sounds that foreground their relation to language — sounds that are outside of signification yet still gesturing towards signification through mimicking culturally signifying tones and vocal patterns that even imitate dialogue. What I mean by imitation is that her scatting performs conversational norms that she both critiques and mocks. When we hear her scatting mimicking a dialogism with its varying intonations, we can almost hear the multiple voices that would have been present in the offstage argument with her parents over her choice to love a man from outside of her family’s culture. In addition to imitating sounds of dialogue, Choi layers her scat solo with sounds of cultural inflections that perform what Henry Louis Gates calls “signifyin’” — thus, we can hear how her scatting hovers over language yet remains in a contested, kinetic state of meaning.
Refrains of characters voicing their desire to speak *meaningfully* echo throughout *Québécitated*, as if aspiring towards a semiotics of “signifyin’” that recognizes itself as performative and dialogic. As Ovide insinuates in his opening duet with Laxmi, to be meaningful already lies in the realm of eros because his questions, “Will you fulfill my meaning / Am I meaningful?” (19) are posed as invitations to romance. Laxmi responds, “You invited me to savour jazz […] Why taint it with saccharine hints, / Such sick cadence of decadence?” (19), revealing her attitudes towards Ovide’s seemingly *meaningless* words while foreshadowing a possible reaction to the jazz-opera itself. As if in reaction to Laxmi’s scepticism, the language of *Québécitated* expresses a pre-occupation with being meaningful. When Colette protests to Malcolm, “We can still love. Don’t be so mean!” (69), he responds by reiterating the importance of meaning, “I want to love meaningfully / not meanly” (69). Although performing in a medium that often resists meaning, or at least meaning in a hermeneutic sense of the word, the characters reiterate the desire to be meaningful, which dramatizes the tension within improvisation that Corbett explains as fluctuating among “*meaning nothing, meaning something, and being interpreted as meaning something*” (original italics, 221). Both in the lyrics and in the scatting, *Québécitated* foregrounds the suspiciousness of *meaning* as an abstract concept yet still asserts the importance of meaning, with the characters’ desire to be *meaningful* intertwined with their desire to love — “If you were to die right now, you’d regret / Not having loved, not having been fit,” says Ovide to Laxmi who responds, “Why would I regret not being lied to?” (68). If we read the plot of the love story as revolving around the characters’ attempts to sing and hear *meaning* as performative and dialogic, then the union of the couples at the end suggests that, at least
momentarily, they understand what Malcolm means in his wish “to love meaningfully” (69). Despite the marriages that conclude Québécité, the musical dissonances poignantly refuse to resolve into an assimilated harmony. In reaction to some critics who have responded negatively to Laxmi’s seemingly dissonant voice, improvising often upon Indian melodies, Clarke observes that the very same response was given to jazz (“Lecture: ‘Can Jazz be Opera? A Defence of Québécité’” April 2004). Building upon Ajay Heble’s notion of dissonance as political, McNeill argues that “[Québécité] is not a work about easy resolutions, but an attempt to embody, and to extemporize upon, difference” (123). McNeill further questions the extent to which Laxmi’s scepticism “signals a critical scepticism about the ease with which ethnically distinct interlocutors can actually listen to one another” (123) — a concern that returns to the question of whether we as audience members are invited to participate in the music that Ovide proposes with his nonchalantly wise phrase, “Oui, let’s scat” (22). The answer to this question rests upon the issue of how we are to listen to this jazz opera both in its textual and vocalized forms; moreover, the practice of listening to each of these forms draws attention to the voice itself as a medium through which difference speaks, thus calling for the listener to participate in unfolding the politics of this dissonant sound long after the staged performance ends.

Voice: Sounding Difference

In his “Acknowledgments” following the libretto, Clarke speaks about the writing process itself as a practice of hyphenation, as he sums up the range of locations in which he wrote Québécité with the phrase, “the Afro-Asian nation with the red, blue, yellow, and
green rainbow flag” (104). Clarke’s poetics of hyphenation proves to be liberating in the writing of Québécité but, when translated into the physical embodiment of characters, and most poignantly into their voices, it presents an acoustic multiculturalism that contests the tenability of such hyphenation. With reference to both the Vancouver production and Clarke’s libretto, I would like to argue that the embodied, vocalized performance of Québécité calls for a rethinking of how we critically approach a listening to difference. In fact, what is being challenged is this very practice of listening to — a practice that separates the listener from the speaking subject; instead, I hear the sound of Québécité as advocating a practice of listening among difference, a practice that applies the sense of ‘among-ness’ implied in cultural theorist Ien Ang’s concept of “living together-in-difference” (193). It is through this positioning of the listener as among that the jazz opera takes on this persuasive role with regards to its acoustic politics, but only when the voice pushes the written libretto into contact with embodiment do the full implications of this amongness come to the forefront and remain there long after the performance itself has ended.

Reviews of Québécité provide a discursive space through which to begin thinking about the practice of listening and how various reviewers as audience members employ this practice. Listening is not a passive act. As Rasula remarks, “To hear is to simply receive and register what’s given; to listen is to correct and displace it” (“The Sound of Not Understanding,” 233); moreover, he elaborates on this attention given to sound: “To listen is to simultaneously attend to what is present and what is absent” (233-234). The actions involved in listening are what makes listening political, and how the attentions of these
actions are distributed can reveal more about the listener than his/her sonic environment.

When Liz Stewart’s review for the *Ontarion* describes how “discordant duets that mixed the traditional Punjabi tones of Laxmi with the jazzy stylings of Ovide made an important social and artistic statement” but then hears these duets as not “necessarily pleasing to the ear,” the initial focus on the “social and artistic” becomes masked in a rhetoric of taste. Not only are these so-called “discordant duets” subjective to the listener’s taste, but the very fact that they perform an overlapping of traditions that produce a dissonant sound make these duets examples of what Ien Ang speaks of when she describes the productive tension within hybridity: “To conclude, rather than seeing hybridity as a synonym for an easy multicultural harmony, or as an instrument for the achievement thereof, I want to suggest that the concept of hybridity should be mobilized to address and analyze the fundamental uneasiness inherent in our global condition of togetherness-in-difference” (200). Critics who try to hear “an easy multicultural harmony” will not find such an answer in *Québécite*, but rather they will find an articulation of the “uneasiness” that Ang refers to. The hybrid form of jazz opera, or what Clarke calls a “gumbo concoction” (11), presents itself not as a way to speak about this uneasiness, but even as a solution to it, as Ajay Heble concludes in his “Postlude” to the jazz opera’s libretto, pairing this state of “uneasiness” with one of hope: “And in an era when demands for tighter controls on immigration and border-crossing threaten the dreams of the aggrieved, the structures of hope, possibility, and momentum embodied in Clarke’s rainbow quartet of lovers seem particularly pertinent” (101).
The quickness of the reviewer to cite Ahluwalia's cultural background as an explanation for her music's so-called dissonant sound overlooks more productive debates that reviewers could engage in, such as how Ahluwalia's music foregrounds boundaries as performative limits through which to speak and be spoken through, and how these boundaries need not solely be cultural. In Vish Khanna's review of *Québécité*, which does focus on tensions between multiculturalism and inclusivity, there is a quotation from a dialogue with Ahluwalia:

"Everyone who knows an Indian singer or a jazz singer sits around thinking, 'you know, jazz and Indian music — they could go quite well together,' but no one ever really does anything about it in a concrete way," explains Ahluwalia, betraying a trace of disbelief at *Québécité*’s daring. "But Ajay had an idea where he said, 'Let me bring this actual composer who does this kind of western music and let me bring all of these singers together with him.' He actually had this idea of bringing it out, and I think it’s definitely something that’s never been done before. I think it’s really quite a pioneering effort in defining Canadian music."

This common space between jazz and Indian music can be heard in her performance of *Québécité*. Before singing the words to "Scene iv: Laxmi sur le quai" Ahluwalia begins with a citational gesture to the ghazal. Her citing of the ghazal performs a version of Henry Louis Gates’s "signifyn'" in the way that her singing invokes a structure of the ghazal. For both Laxmi and Colette, the concept of "signifyn'" allows us to understand how they sing riffs upon culture, particularly in Laxmi's invocation of the ghazal and in Colette's scat solo, in which she mimics the intonations of dialogue as if arguing with her father. The concept of
“signifyn” further highlights Ahluwalia’s singing of Laxmi as a performance — a performance that asks the question of what happens when the ghazal encounters jazz. I stress the term performance because of critics such as Geoff Chapman for the Toronto Star who hears Ahluwalia’s Laxmi as something that relies upon her Indian-ness: “Kiran Ahluwalia was the least effective, except when she could employ her classical Indian style” — a comment that completely disregards the crossing of borders that is at the centre of both Ahluwalia’s musical projects and Québecité itself. On Ahluwalia’s Juno Award-winning CD Border Crossings, the ghazals are poems, written in Punjabi and Urdu by Toronto-based poets, that Ahluwalia has set to music, creating what the liner notes refer to as “Canadian ghazals.” Ahluwalia’s singing of Laxmi in Québecité performs another version of these Canadian ghazals. Just as the ghazals on her CD are poetry set to music, the poetry of Clarke’s libretto becomes the text for the ghazals of Québecité, resulting in the linguistic shift to mark the crossing of borders, as the poetry is no longer written in Punjabi or Urdu but rather in heteroglossic English.

Listening to politics has an important place in jazz history, and the function of dissonance in this listening is what concerns Ajay Heble’s book Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz Dissonance and Critical Practice. Heble argues for the potential of jazz to engage with audiences on multiple levels that apply to both the jazz poetry and the jazz music of Québecité: “Jazz [...] offers a highly purposeful point of entry into some of the key – and most hotly contested – cultural debates and arguments of our era: debates, for example, about the political efficacy of an avant-garde aesthetic, the complex relationship between aesthetics
and ethics, the public function of art, the politics of representation, the authority of history, the possibilities for resistance to embodied systems of culture and knowledge, and the relationship between language and reality" (8). While Québecité may not be particularly avant-garde in its somewhat clichéd plot, the improvisational element of the music and the cultural clashes among characters certainly make Québecité into something different, thereby raising the question of its “political efficacy” to use Heble’s phrase. More specifically, in the context of this paper, how is the music of Québecité performing a political act? Building upon my argument that Ahluwalia comments upon musical and cultural hybridity through performing versions of the Canadian ghazal, I would like to suggest that Québecité offers its listeners a particular sounding of Canada; but the question is left unanswered as to whether this sounding veers towards reifying multiculturalism in what cultural theorist Rey Chow describes as “the difference revolution” (The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 128), or if this sounding of difference is occurring within an acoustic space, to use a term of Marshall McLuhan’s, that is still in discursive flux.

In Chow’s reading of Canada’s Multiculturalism Act, she argues that it provides a site in which high theory intersects with national politics through its grounding in “the difference revolution” — what she describes as a conflation of post-structuralist differentiation with multiculturalism and postcoloniality (129). In Chow’s description of that Act as “an attempt to be inclusive and celebratory [that] serves, in the end, to mask and perpetuate the persistent problem of social inequality” (133), the words “inclusive and celebratory” are particularly relevant to Québecité because they encapsulate the jouissance expressed by the characters as
they sing the last lines, “Vive notre québecité” (92). But where has this word *notre*, this inclusivity, come from and what are the implications of identifying oneself with such a word? Earlier in the jazz opera, for instance, Malcolm angrily sings to Colette, “Do you think our kids’d be striped like zebras? / Or look like Neopolitan ice-cream? Or amoebas?” (71); but in the final chorus they happily sing in unison, “Our children will be / every colour eyes can know / and free” (92). The image of their children as ‘coloured’ appears in both scenes, but by the end this colouring takes on a positive connotation, as if reflected in the multi-coloured Quebec flag that emerges on the screen. The connection that Chow makes between inclusivity and celebration offers a perspective as to why the final scene looks with such optimism into the future. When Chow describes the Canadian Multiculturalism Act as “an attempt to be inclusive and celebratory [that] serves, in the end, to mask and perpetuate the persistent problems of social inequality” (133), she uses the words “mask and perpetuate” to articulate how the logic of inclusivity breaks down; likewise, we could read the hyper-celebratory final chorus of Québécité as drawing attention to itself as a mask, a performance that hides behind its hyperbolic form. Evidence for such a reading exists within Clarke’s own description of Québécité as “an Absinthe-Amarula-Brandy-Champagne-Chartreuse-Chicouti-Cognac-Grappa-Palm-Port-Pastis-Rum-Saki-Sangria-Scotch-Tequila-Vodka opera, one coloured spicily with notes of ebony-dark-cherry, India indigo ink, and bronze-beige the shade of papyrus or bamboo” (12). His superlatively hyphenated definition, when taken in the context of his political message, becomes a serious kind of playfulness. For jazz theorist John Corbett, improvisation functions through sessions of ‘playing’ with an intended pun on both the playing of an instrument and a playing with the semiotics of sound that he
understands as forming the components through which jazz signifies itself (233). Perhaps the word ‘play’ with its double-meaning as a trickster flirtation and a musical performance, best describes the *poiesis*, or linguistic making, of this jazz opera. Including a word like “polyhexamethyleneudiapide” (53) signals a playfulness on the part of the librettist, yet the presence of such a word becomes intensely serious when it transgresses the boundary of what is considered to be singable or speakable. As if commenting upon Clarke’s own linguistic playfulness, the female characters express wariness towards the male characters’ words, as Laxmi says to Ovide, “Ovide, I prefer Puccini with cappuccino [...] to vain talk that bleeds like a vein” (22), and as Colette says to Malcolm, “Words have an annoying tendency / to turn into lies” (40). Yet the sincerity of Clarke’s project emerges from this linguistic play to the degree that, even though the final scene seems self-conscious of its over-the-top-ness, there is a serious message in the image of the multi-coloured flag that needs to be spoken: namely, the message that Clarke articulates in his comments after the CBC broadcast as the possibility “of having people from different cultural, linguistic, religious and racial backgrounds being able to collectively identify, without any irony, themselves as Canadian. To seize that label for everybody and not just a select group.”

Clarke’s comment about a collective identification among a diverse group of people brings to mind Ien Ang’s question of how to “live together-in-difference” (193). Ang’s use of the phrase “together-in-difference” articulates a togetherness that is always already aware of its situatedness *among* difference. Listening in this position of being among involves an attention to the multiple voices of one’s environment, rather than falling into the
dichotomous relationship of speaker and listener that occurs when *listening to* as opposed to *among*. Ang’s “togetherness-in-difference” contrasts the “living *with* difference” (italics in original, 95) that Sarah Ahmed hears in the discourse of Australian multiculturalism. Ahmed critiques this formation of a national identity through the claiming of difference because this allows the nation “to imagine itself as heterogeneous (to claim their differences as ‘our differences’)” (96). Her argument that multicultural discourses can result in a further reification of difference raises a number of questions for *Québecité*: how does the ending re-inscribe difference in the very act of inclusivity and what are the implications of positing this multi-voiced chorus as a national voice of Canada? What Ahmed focuses on in her argument is the figure of the “stranger,” or more specifically the “stranger stranger” who cannot be “taken in” by the nation (97) — to hear Laxmi as performing this role in *Québecité* not only gives insight into how her character functions in relation to a formation of a national ‘we’ but also how Ahmed’s argument becomes complicated by the embodied performance that Ahluwalia gives to Laxmi. Ahmed speaks of how the construction of nation takes place in the space of the body: “The nation becomes imagined as a body in which personhood and place are precariously collapsed” (99). The question of how nation locates itself in the bodies of characters in *Québecité* becomes complicated through the levels of embodiment within a given performance. For instance, there is the description of embodiment that we read in the libretto, the physical appearance of embodiment when we see the characters onstage, and then the acoustic extension of embodiment that we hear. Thus, locating the nation within these levels of embodiment becomes more complex, especially when various
levels often contradict each other. However, in Ahmed’s distinction between the “stranger” and the “stranger stranger,” she outlines only two levels of embodiment:

In one figure, the stranger appears different, but is the same underneath; this stranger can be assimilated, and even welcomed, insofar as it enables the nation itself to appear as different. In the other figure, the stranger’s dress can reveal only a strange being; this stranger stranger cannot be assimilated. The stranger stranger, however, cannot simply be understood as the unassimilable other; rather, such strangers are assimilated precisely as the unassimilable and hence they allow us to face the ‘limit’ of the multicultural nation. (Italics in original, 106)

By including another level of embodiment through sound, a level that invokes Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of the ‘Third Space,’ Québecité challenges Ahmed’s visual language of facing the limits of multiculturalism. Even though sound also foregrounds the limits of what can or cannot be included in the national we, the oscillation among three layers of embodiment gestures towards a space outside Ahmed’s binary of “assimilable” and “unassimilable other.” In Canto II, scene v, the libretto describes Colette as wearing “a Nova Scotian tartan sari” (62) when she meets Laxmi, wearing “a blazing pink sarong— and a turquoise necklace—and white pumps” (62). With expectations of appearances already subverted through clothing, the conversation between these two characters further complicates Ahmed’s analysis of the stranger’s embodiment or non-embodiment of the nation through appearance: Laxmi says to Colette, “I see saris are in vogue, and you’re in love” (62) — her comment highlights the strangeness of Colette’s sari because fashion is
given as a reason for wearing something constructed as out-of-the-ordinary; but, at the same time, Laxmi herself is wearing a sari, an act that might be perceived by Ahmed as a marker of Laxmi as other and yet Colette wears a sari too. All of this confusion of appearance occurs within the larger context of sound, further complicating the extent to which Laxmi embodies the "stranger stranger." Building on what I have argued with reference to the reviews of Québecité, I would like to suggest that a hearing of Ahluwalia's singing of Laxmi through Ahmed's options of the assimilable and unassimilable other does not adequately take into account the fluctuation between multiple forms of embodiment.

Ang's phrase "togetherness-in-difference" intersects with embodiment throughout the singing of music; but her phrase is most poignantly embodied in Canto III, scene vi: Dans le brouillard (80) — a polyphonic scene in which all four characters are "lost in the fog, each oblivious to the others" (80), as though embodying the state of uneasiness that Ang sees as that which hybridity is capable of addressing (200). Yet musically, "their songs interlock" (80-81) as they each voice the lyrics, "I miss you as hurtingly as a kite misses wind" (81). Accompanying this desire for union is the word hurtingly — that conveys the pain of their dissonance yet their undeniable drive to reconcile. But in their voices remaining distinct, we as audience members remain aware that this difference has the potential to hurt. Yet it is in this hurt — a cut, performing a Barthesian abrasion, or allowing for the interpenetration of voices as in Bringhurst's "The Blue Roofs of Japan" — that the possibility for reconciliation lingers. The collision of identities and desires is less optimistic in the music than in the jazz opera's narrative conclusion, but this polyphonic scene, in which voices cut across each
other, performs difference in a way that places dissonance next to a desire for togetherness. Our listening as audience members becomes reconfigured as we listen among, moving us towards a practice of listening otherwise that we ourselves perform.
For Benjamin, translation involves the inclusion of traces from the previous language in order to translate not just the words but also manner in which the poem speaks them. The result of this practice is that the readers of the translation become aware of it as such in hearing the text’s displacement through language. In “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin describes how the translator must find “that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (76).

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes writes of how this displacement of language opens up space for pleasure: “What I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon fine surface” (12). Although the question of how the “I” imposes these abrasions varies from theorist to theorist, what Barthes speaks of as an abrasion echoes throughout Kristeva’s and Butler’s later uses of catachresis and rupture.

Rasula cites Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* as an example of a rhizomatic writing of jazz history. In its retelling of the life of cornet player and improvisor, Buddy Bolden. Ondaatje’s text offers an intriguing inquiry into the representation of sound — from the sonographs of dolphins that precede his text to the improvisatory style of writing that enacts Buddy Bolden’s final horn solo, Ondaatje intermingles the question of how sound can be recorded with the question of how a life can be recorded. Since there were no recordings made of Bolden’s playing, the reconstruction of sound becomes part of the biographical reconstruction of life. As a text that improvises through and around Bolden’s character with the full knowledge of the limitations involved in representing fragments of a life, Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* speaks to what Rasula calls “the itinerant condition of jazz lives,” ones that fit the nomadology that Deleuze and Guattari describe as “coming and going rather than starting and finishing” (qtd in Rasula 146).

In the first chapter of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, we see a visual representation of what the score for rhizomatic music might look like:
1. Introduction: Rhizome

5 Examples of recent poetry publications that have an audio component on CD include: Why I Sing the Blues (ed. Jan Zwicky and Brad Cran), and Wayde Compton’s Performance Bond.

6 Despite skepticism from reviewers about the ‘singability’ of “polyhexamethyleneadiapide” (53), Haydain Neale’s performance as Ovide proved that this word is, indeed, singable.

7 Edwards notes that this use of the word occasion draws upon the Latin sense of the word as a “falling toward” (620), thereby evoking an eros of sound falling, desiring towards a non-semantic form — an uncodified, unformed space reminiscent of the maternal chora referred to by Julia Kristeva as “a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated” (25).

8 In relation to Julia Kristeva’s notion of the Platonic chora as “a non-expressive totality” (25), Choi’s phonemic scat singing awaits our imposition of signification (just as I have already begun in imposing the referent of culture upon Choi’s scatting); however, as Kristeva explains, the chora “moves though the various constraints imposed upon the body always already involved in the semiotic process” (Revolution in Poetic Language, 26). Thus, Choi’s scatting is always already involved in this semiotic process even while her singing attempts to interrogate the boundary between the semiotic and symbolic. The self-reflexiveness of her scatting’s interrogatory process can be read as thetic in the sense that “it posits its own process as an undecidable process between sense and nonsense, between language and rhythm, [and] between the symbolic and the semiotic” (Desire in Language, 103). As if
angrily testing how long her sound can hover between the limits of signification, Choi foregrounds the process of attaching meaning to sound, a process that she argues is a product of hegemony in the lyrics that follow her scatting — “Finally I’m called to the bar — the bar of prosecution, the bar of ripped up bars of music” (italics in original, 76-77) — lyrics that create their own rupture not with scatting but with language, beginning with a word that functions as a speech act to signal the end to scat’s hovering between the semiotic and symbolic: “Finally” (53).

Ahluwalia herself alludes to this point during a conversation cited in Vish Khanna’s review of Québecité:

I am Indian, but I’m Canadian as well so, when I’m improvising, is that Indian music or Canadian music? Well, you know what? It’s a bit of both; I’m doing Canadian music even if it sounds foreign to you.

Ahluwalia’s mention of improvisation clearly articulates a space within which intermediation among cultures can occur, and perhaps even result in the defamiliarization that she speaks of: “I’m doing Canadian music even if it sounds foreign to you” — an invoking of a ‘you’ that speaks back to critics who insist upon labelling her music as ‘other.’ Moreover, as Ahluwalia herself recognizes, blending jazz with Indian styles of music is a significant performative statement, and when the complexities of such a statement are dismissed with an insistence upon hearing her music as “Indian,” it seems to say more about the listener than about Ahluwalia’s performance.
Chapter Four: Polyphonic Mapping

The voice map in Robert Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers and Dancers* enacts its own textual performance while conveying an awareness of itself as a score to be improvised upon. In the same way that Clarke’s libretto for *Québécité* functions as a poetic score (one that becomes reshaped through the improvisations of its performers), Bringhurst’s voice map functions as a score for the speakers and dancers who perform *Ursa Major* (premiered in Regina, March 2002, with dancers from New Dance Horizons and music by Chiyoko Slavnics). However, unlike Clarke’s libretto, Bringhurst’s voice map repeats all five acts of *Ursa Major* again — as though enacting the final words of the text: “all over and over and over again” (48) — but in its repetition, the text is reconfigured into a typographical mapping of polyphony. This mapping has a specific context within Bringhurst’s poetics — an earlier poem of his entitled “The Blue Roofs of Japan: A Score for Interpenetrating Voices” prints the two voices of the poem on opposing sides of the page with the echo of each other’s words typed in lighter font, giving a visual image of what the poem might sound like. Where the words overlap, we visually listen to a version of doubled sound. In his poem’s title, Bringhurst refers to these voices as interpenetrating — an intimate state that the typography conveys through its sensuous overlapping — but in his preface to the poem, Bringhurst further characterizes this interaction between voices as one of cutting: “The female voice cuts lyrically across. Sweetly, I suppose, but deeply enough to draw the necessary blood” (81). In this act of cutting, the voices perform what Barthes describes, in relation to the violent eroticism in
Sade’s writing, as pleasure from “certain breaks (or collisions)” that results in the redistribution of language: “such redistribution is always achieved by cutting” (italics in original, 6). When Barthes extends this argument to place the text of pleasure next to that of bliss, he writes of how the irresolvable tension between them, between one expressible in words and one that is not, arises out of “the trace of a cut” (20). Applying this tension, pushing up against the edges of the expressible and unexpressible, in a Barthesian cut to the ones etched in Brighurst’s poetry, we can think of the written text as outlining the traces left behind by the voice cutting across. Written language takes the shape of what these abrasions leave behind, echoing an image that Brighurst later uses in The Solid Form of Language to describe writing as the “precipitate” (9) — left behind after the water of speech evaporates. As if anticipating this image, Brighurst’s poem “The Blue Roofs of Japan” includes the metaphor: “This music is water, this water / is music”(86), suggesting that the poetry is still moving in the voice, and is not solidified into precipitate yet. As though combining the image of water as fluid sound with the act of cutting that the voice performs, the poem further speaks of itself and explains how “this music is not all about water [...] how the breath / descends how it pools and pours / through the holes in the voice [...] not breath but the silences / between breathing: these / are the song, the rest / is mere singing” (86).

Brighurst’s typographic poetics of voice mapping concerns itself with these “silences between breathing,” opening up interstitial spaces for improvisations, yet they are improvisations that call for an alternate practice of listening — one that involves both speaking and dancing, out loud.
Listeners to Bringhurst’s poetry encounter the “silences between breathing” in similar voice mappings, such as in his poem, “New World Suite N° 3: Four Movements of Three Voices,” a poem in which lines themselves separate the three voices. Moreover, other poets such as Robert Duncan and Jan Zwicky employ the technique of scoring voice in their poetry. (See Duncan’s Faust Foutu: A Comic Masque and Zwicky’s “Mourning Song.”)

One of the most important differences between these poetic scores and Ursa Major is the repetition of the entire piece in order to specifically mark out the intersections of voice. The repetition enacts the layering of performative readings that will take place “all over and over and over again” (48) to echo, once again, the words of the Celestial Janitor. Whenever these readings take place, the reader creates an extension of the oral/aural space that is already on the page because Bringhurst’s typography performs a version of what McLuhan calls “acoustic space” (33). For McLuhan, the word acoustic refers to a multi-sensory experience, rather than solely to the audible: “Acoustic space, always penetrated by tactility and the other senses, is spherical, discontinuous, non-homogeneous, resonant, and dynamic” (33).

McLuhan’s notion of acoustic space explains how Bringhurst’s text of Ursa Major can still be a performance even while on the page. McLuhan’s understanding of this type of textual performance takes the shape of a tetrad: a structural form that enacts a multi-dimensional space, or rather a non-centred form that enacts what classical composer Arnold Schoenberg calls atonality — an acoustic metaphor that applies directly to the multi-voiced sound of Bringhurst’s Ursa Major. In the same way that McLuhan’s tetrads call for a rethinking of what it means to read textual space, the textual polyphony in Bringhurst’s voice map calls for the reader to listen to the material texture of voices overlapping.
Translating Performance

In the production of Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major* with New Dance Horizons (Regina 2002), the speakers and dancers onstage embodied the acoustic and corporeal choreographies of the text. But the poetic language of the text’s voice map enacts its own performance. Although language can be performative in terms of linguistic speech acts, Bringhurst’s text is less concerned with the citational practices than with the poetic performance of language in a mapping of voice. In the case of *Ursa Major*, typographic polyphony produces a mimicry of acoustic performance upon the printed page; but the typography goes beyond mimicry in asserting its own materiality as a viable medium of performance. On one level, the voice map’s creation of acoustic space enables Bringhurst’s typography to enact, rather than simply mimic; but what further positions the typographical performance as integral to the overall performance of the masque is how the textual polyphony enacts the concept of translation. The story of *Ursa Major* places Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in dialogue with Leonard Bloomfield’s *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree*. As the linguistic translations overlap, so do the mythological traditions. The fact that they overlap typographically and vocally foregrounds the process of translation itself and marks it as one of visual and acoustic collision. We hear what Barthes calls the “unsettling of language” but we also hear the unsettling of myth, occurring when these traditions cut into one another. The typography outlines these cuts in its textual overlap, resulting in transferring this textual affect upon the reader, whose eyes, unable to focus as they scan back and forth between lines, and ears, slipping back and forth between languages, slowly recognize sounds only in the their rhythmic repetition. Although the voices do not textually overlap in the same way that two
voices overlap in “The Blue Roofs of Japan,” the voice map assigns different fonts to the multiple languages and voices, enabling us to see them collide, gracefully but forcibly enough to leave the necessary mark — or as Bringhurst describes of the collision in “The Blue Roofs of Japan”: “Sweetly, I suppose, but deeply enough to draw the necessary blood” (81). What we hear in our synaesthetic listening to voices colliding is the sweet taste and sharp pain of translation.

As exemplified in the space shared between the voices of Kā-kīsikāw-pihtōkēw’s Son and the Translator, the text visually represents vocal overlap in moments of translation:

Arcadiae tamen est inpensior illi

Arcadia, bear country: that... (51)

The stage directions indicate that the Translator’s words should be slightly delayed, creating a syncopated delay as the Translator’s voice interrupts midway through the utterance of Kā-kīsikāw-pihtōkēw’s Son. Reading the interruption in Ursa Major through a jazz term such as syncopation does not seem as far fetched when one recalls how Bringhurst describes “The Blue Roofs of Japan” in his preface to the poem: “This is a score for jazz duet, which I hope will function also as a reading text” (81). Thus, given that Bringhurst refers to a poem written in a similar typographic style as Ursa Major as a “jazz duet,” such notions as syncopation resonate with his call for a “slight delay” in the reading of his voice map.

The “slight delay” (12) that begins Ursa Major enacts the process of translation itself. Since translation is a crossing over that takes place in a period of time, it is fitting that the
“slight delay” draws attention to this passage of time that results in a slight incoherence; moreover, in the staged performance of *Ursa Major*, the “slight delay” inevitably varies with the speaker’s rates of speech, thus their voices reveal the limits of the text as a guiding score and improvise their own intersections. The syncopated, improvised rhythm of this “slight delay” becomes the rhythm that underscores the meaning of *Ursa Major*. It is a rhythm that marks out sonic moments of confusion in translating among English, Cree, Greek and Latin, emitting pieces of sound that Rasula speaks of as the meaningful “sound of not understanding” (256). It is a rhythm that exists both in the overlapping text of the voice map and on the stage in the overlapping voices, but only in a vocalized reading of the poem does the sound induce a state of bafflement, one that Rasula speaks of as occurring when encountering the phonemic sound of poetry, whereas such an embodied state can only be foreshadowed on the written page.

The masque ends with the Celestial Janitor’s reiteration of this kinetic translation, which in this case functions as a kinesis that carries language across from one world into the next:

The wounded mother

clammers up the spear shaft,

shinnies up the tree,

transforming earth and water, fire and air,

to fire and air and earth and water:
air transforming into air and earth to earth

and fire to fire and water to water

and blood to water and blood to snow

and hunter to hunted and breath to air

all over and over and over again. (74)

The Celestial Janitor (played by Bringhurst himself in the Regina production, thereby imbuing this role with a layer of authorial intention, as if he holds the promise to clean-up the cosmos as both the Celestial Janitor and poet) speaks of translation in terms of cosmic translations from earth to air, but his words also thematize the linguistic process of translation. In describing how one element transforming into another and sometimes into itself, he posits translation as functioning through the acts of misnaming and renaming, or what Barthes calls “the unsettling of language” but, in this case, the unsettling becomes acoustic. Moreover, in the passage quoted above, the Celestial Janitor’s translation occurs on a linguistic level as he repeats the elemental nouns, but translation also occurs on a mythological level as he carries the thematic content of his language from earth to cosmos in describing how “the wounded mother / clambers up the spear shaft” (74). Ending the poem with the repetitive phrase, “all over and over and over again” (74), the rhythm of translation centres upon the word ‘and’ — the word that carries language across, the word that performs the meaning of translation.
Dancing the Voice Map

In “Everywhere Being is Dancing, Knowing is Known,” Bringhurst speaks metaphorically about poetry as dance: “poetry’s flesh are the bones of the dance” (61); but although dance provides a helpful metaphor through which to convey the kinesis of poetry, Bringhurst remains vague as to what he means by dance. Since dancers are specifically referred to in the title, Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers and Dancers, I turn to the performance of this piece for an answer to what material shape Bringhurst intends to evoke in his poetics. However, except for the small group of about sixty in the Regina audience of Ursa Major, the lack of recordings or documentation of the performance complicates this answer. As Peter Sanger writes in his “Afterword” to the published text of Ursa Major:

The best commentary upon Bringhurst’s Ursa Major can only be its performance. Of the seven choreographies out of which it is made, only one can be offered by a printed text with some accuracy – the choreography of its words [...] The other six choreographies at work in the masque, those of dance, costume, scenery, instrumental music, song, and audience, can be registered only glancingly, if at all, on the page.

(77)

In the same position as Sanger, I too have only the words to work with and what Sanger calls “what those words have prompted me to remember or find out or gather by gift of hearsay” (77). Moreover, even if I research New Dance Horizons and find out that it is a cutting-edge dance company led by Robin Poitras who is well-known for her work in Canadian modern dance, I am still faced with the question of whether this style of dancing represents dance as
Bringhurst imagines it in his essays and poetry. While the lack of documentation about *Ursa Major*’s performance is frustrating, it seems fitting that there is this absence of information on dance for a poet whose own writing on dance remains illusive. In returning to Bringhurst’s own writing, what he means by dance is often intermingled with metaphors for poetry itself — “what poetry knows, or what it strives to know, is the dancing at the heart of being” (52). The closeness, for Bringhurst, between poetry and dance might explain why he resists defining it. Nevertheless, Bringhurst’s invocation of dance raises the provocative questions that Anne Cooper Albright asks of Derrida: “What do the ‘incalculable choreographies’ actually look like? Whose body is dancing, and what is it dancing about?” (159). Since the form and content of Bringhurst’s work reveals intense consideration of the material shape of written and spoken language, an inclusion of the corporeal element would make his voice maps more of a multi-sensory experience. However, if we think about how Bringhurst asks for an interstitial listening to breath — recalling the lines from “The Blue Roofs of Japan” that speak of “not breath but the silences / between breathing” (86) — then the body is there within the voice maps even though we must listen closely in order to hear it.

In *Ursa Major*, the voice map invites a *listening otherwise* by performing its own type of *mapping otherwise*. Bringhurst’s use of the word *map* brings to mind colonial associations between mapping and ownership; yet his voice map seeks to reverse this association in redefining that practice of mapping as one of unmapping. The philosophy behind this approach surfaces in an earlier poem called “Thirty Words” in which Bringhurst circles around the phrase, “knowing, not owning” (66). In acknowledging how these
concepts can be held apart yet slide into each other all too easily, Bringhurst positions his writing, or mapping, as "not owning." In performing this unmapping, the voice map takes on the theoretical meaning of deterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari propose in their notion of rhizomatic mapping. Rather than a map referring to the territory, Deleuze and Guattari theorize maps that are the territories, thereby challenging semiotic referentiality. In this sense, Bringhurst’s voice map does not refer to something but, in fact, is something. In rewriting the entire five acts again as a voice map, Bringhurst begins an endless series of re-performances of the piece, thus writing and rewriting a map that embodies Deleuze and Guattari’s description of an unfinished, open map: “a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (21). Moreover, as the voices interrupt each other, Bringhurst’s voice map continues its aspiration towards "knowing without owning" through the transference of voice. It is a map that disowns itself as the words transfer from voice to voice. In this sense, the voice map longs to be performed as does Clarke’s libretto for Québécité; in this longing, they both resist the very notion of ending because the next performance always lies somewhere outside of the text’s reach. And even if the act of reaching constitutes a desire for completion — a desire for return that poet Tim Lilburn describes with the Greek term, “apokotatostasis” (99), a desire for togetherness that overwhelms the characters of Québécité despite their dissonances — this desire is what keeps the poetry in motion, as each performance continues to dance the words off the map.
Conclusion

Writing can take the shape of a map, a score, a libretto, and the choice to call it one of these forms reveals a longing within the writer—and a longing that can be conveyed through his/her language—for the writing to perform. For writing does not envision itself as standing still on the page, otherwise it would not be called a map, or a score, which gestures towards something outside of itself. What is integral to the choreographies, maps, and librettos that have been discussed in this paper is that they do not see themselves as referring to a singular space of alterity, or rather they do not see themselves as reflections of a specific performance. Not only are the texts themselves performances, but they call for their texts to be layered and layered with performances of them, as though invoking the closing words of Brinhurst's *Ursa Major*: “all over and over and over again” (74). It is an approach to performance that combines Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of deterritorialization with the rhythmic “and...and...and” (25) that they cite as a rhythm of rhizomatic mapping—a rhythm that resounds from the closing of Brinhurst’s voice map in *Ursa Major*. I speak of the closing because this word distinguishes between the act of framing a performance as one layer among multiple performative textures and the finality imposed through such a word as ending.¹ The title of this writing, here, signals that the act of closing will be performed, but I mean to rupture this postlude with a rhythm of repetitive closings, and openings. Although working with different performance limitations than a libretto or voice map, I write this essay as a score, as a choreography—but it is one that asks the questions of what it means to write
in these forms: questions of what it means to speak of choreography as a writing of the body, or to speak of a musical score as a mapping of sound.

In the essay, “Body Music,” Dennis Lee goes further than the question of how poetry performs a mapping of sound in asking how poetry maps rhythm. As Lee argues, the mapping of rhythm is not as organized as metrical analysis might suggest; rather, the organization, or to use Lee’s words, the coherence, of the poem lies in the kinaesthetic improvisation within the poem’s rhythm (205). Kineasthetic is a term that appears frequently in Lee’s work, and it is a word that resonates with the overarching theme of this paper as concerning how poetry makes and, in doing so, how it performs. The title of Ishmael Reed’s poem, “Poetry Makes Rhythm in Philosophy” articulates the making of rhythm that is, as Lee argues, what poetry is about and what gives the poem its kinesis: “a poem thinks by the way it moves” (197). Moreover, while Rasula proposes that “(phonic) materialism registers a sound of not understanding” and that “the poem is that sound” (256), Lee expands this acoustic knowledge to claim that our knowing of the world is that sound: “Acts of rhythmic attention comprise a syntax for knowing the word” (198). But although Lee acknowledges, as does Rasula, that this knowing takes place in the moment of not understanding, he turns to the question — “How do we apprehend rhythm?” (198) — as a way of imagining how we might “scan the world” — a poetic scansion that hears it saying, “the world comes in chunks. Or glissando. Or, there is a deep current. Or a hush. Or cacophony. It says...” (199). Lee’s multi-voiced description portrays the sound of the world as pieces of sound — resembling the pieces of sound evoked in Bringhurst’s collection of poems, *Pieces of Map, Pieces of*
Music in which the pieces of sound as voices interpenetrate in the poem, “The Blue Roofs of Japan,” producing a version of what Lee calls “cosmophony” (214). Or the question of understanding the world’s sound can be left open, and Lee does this when he playfully admits, “Prosody rhymes with cosmology. I know that’s so, but I can’t yet say what it means” (198), as though admitting that the sound is one of not understanding; however, his insertion of “yet” suggests that the process of reading his essay, reading it aloud with a fullness of body, will enclose us with a sound, and that sound is rhythm.

In unfolding what is implied in a common saying such as ‘hearing the beat,’ Lee focuses on how the body becomes part of the poem’s rhythmic sound: “We experience texture and periodicity right at the muscular level — with our kinaesthetic sense. Our body becomes the instrument the rhythm is played on; we register it viscerally, absorb it as carnal knowledge” (198). Although it is an example that involves prose rather than poetry (yet writing that is categorized as prose can also be poetic), Andrea Nann’s dance interpretations of Michael Ondaatje’s novels In the Skin of a Lion and Anil’s Ghost exemplifies this experiencing of text at a corporeal level. As we watch her “register it viscerally,” as Lee describes, we witness a listening through dance — we, as audience members, then layer our own listening upon the listening process taking place. The fact that we watch, yet what we watch is a listening through the body, results in our practicing a close watching that aligns itself with the practice of close listening that Charles Bernstein speaks of in his introduction to Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word. In this close watching, we are not bound by the visual — rather, this close watching involves a multi-sensory experience in the
sense that Bernstein describes as taking place at the level of reading yet incorporates the
acoustics of listening (5). It is this synaesthetic, simultaneous experience that I invoke when
I speak of listening out loud. The poetry of George Elliott Clarke’s jazz opera *Québecité*
calls for this type of listening in its longing to be sung — and the kinesis of this longing is
what moves the language of his text to perform. As Lee notes, there are limitations to the
strategies available when reading a poem aloud or silently: “A free poem is aural, but on the
page it can only gesture at some of its own vocal shading” (212). As a result of this necessity
to hear the poem — to hear the poem singing on the page, as in the case of Clarke’s libretto
— Lee argues that “you have to hear it out loud on the page. You have to absorb its
movement with the eye, the inner ear, and the body sense at once” (italics in original, 212).
It is this embodied sense of a close listening that informs my argument for performative
listening; yet, in addition to this embodied experience, performative listening includes an act
of speaking through this listening that acknowledges the listeners’ contributions to the
reiterative layers of performance.

The voice map of Bringhurst’s *Ursa Major* longs to be sung as does Clarke’s libretto,
but what differentiates the longings of these two mappings is that Bringhurst’s textually
foregrounds the collision of voices that will take place in its embodied performance.
Although Clarke’s libretto does encounter this collision of voice on a thematic level and once
the libretto becomes vocalized through the performers (a vocalization that, in fact, questions
the efficacy of polyphony as a viable trope within multicultural discourse), Bringhurst begins
the layering of performances in the text itself by including the voice map that already
unsettles the voices and places them against and beside one another. The performance of polyphony that Bringhurst creates on the pages of his voice map responds to Lee’s question, “how to enact a polyrhythmic body music?” (215). Although Lee looks to the polyrhythmic “energies” (219) of Hölderlin’s poetry as an example of this enactment, Bringhurst’s voice map provides a recent example in that, through the intersecting voices, “their compound music was the poem” (219) to apply the phrase that Lee applies to Hölderlin’s energies. In dialogue with Lee’s writing on polyphony, Bringhurst writes that polyphonic poetry is akin to polyphonic music: “It is a cohabitation of voices. A poem that (to borrow two good verbs from Dennis Lee) enacts and embodies plurality and space as well as (or instead of) timelessness and unity” (“Singing with Frogs,” 116). The verbs that Bringhurst borrows articulate the level of embodied performance that occurs in both speaking and listening to polyphony. In a comment that further aligns Bringhurst’s thoughts with Lee’s notion of body music, Bringhurst describes how polyphonic music “is singing more than one song, playing more than one tune, telling more than one story, at once. It is music that insists on multiplicity — instead of uniformity on the one side and chaos on the other” (114), and we hear this definition being enacted in the textual polyphony of *Ursa Major*.

The scoring of polyphony returns to the central questions of this paper: how does language perform and how do we write about its performance? Within the limitations of print medium, I write through the performative strategies that Lee recognizes as enabling poetic meditation not to be static on the page: “A meditation doesn’t describe a space; it enacts one. It is the finding-the-grain-of-cadential-space, and a letting-it-breathe-in-voice”
(62). I enact a listening on the page that will be accompanied by an embodied listening in the presentation of it. A reading of a passage from Bringhurst’s poem, “The Blue Roofs of Japan” will enable me to layer another listening upon the one that I have documented here while, at the same time, performing the attention to rhythmic improvisation that can only be articulated through the live performative gesture itself. In the reading, I propose for both voice and movement to accent the spaces among the “score for interpenetrating voices” (79) as an experiment not only in how these voices cut across each other but also in what is produced when embodied movement cuts across these voices. One texture that will be produced in the enactment of this performance is what Lee calls body music, a concept that he defines as “the inner experience of kinaesthetic rhythm, when there is no literal stimulus to the muscles. The occasion may be reading a poem, or listening to music. Or it can be triggered by memory or kintuition” (214). Experiencing this kinaesthetic rhythm involves performative listening — a practice that, within the medium of writing, enacts itself through a listening out loud on the page and off.

Lyric occurs in emptiness.

— Jan Zwicky, Lyric Philosophy (296)

When Lee speaks about the performative strategies of poetic notation, he cites two strategies that appear less frequently yet perform the act of cutting across on the page:

“internal spacing within a line, and deployment of the white space of the page as an active
component, connoting silence” (211). If we apply poetic notation to dance, Kokoro Dance uses this white space in their title “( )” that brackets silence. Bringhurst’s poem “Sunday Morning” articulates a similar bracketing in drawing a line between silence and sound while rendering both as meaningful:

What is is not speech.
What is is the line
between the unspeakable
and the already spoken. (69)

And if we turn to Jan Zwicky’s recent publication of Thirty-seven Small Songs & Thirteen Silences we see another example of the performative potential of silence. The first poem in the sequence, “Six Variations on Silence” offers images of interstices through which to listen to the spaces amid her text: “The door to the season stands ajar. / Through it, crickets sing, / grass ripens in the flat stones of the walk” (63). Through it — we listen to singing. Among the flat stones of the walk, our feet touch grass. In reviewing this poem, Karen Solie addresses these interstitial spaces on the blank pages, ones that she hears as composing “a pause in thought that, though wordless, is full.” The dynamics of a pause as embodying a moment slightly before, yet among, motion echoes Zwicky’s own words in her book Lyric Philosophy: “Grace is stillness in motion” (212). Stillness in motion — a phrase that applies to writing that appears to be still on the page, yet moves. The apparent stillness on the blank pages of Zwicky’s Thirty-seven Small Songs & Thirteen Silences enacts a version of this stillness in motion because the speaking voice rests, yet we hear the sound of the words still resonating.
But what of grace? Why must grace be *stillness in motion*? Dennis Lee’s essay, “Body Music” begins with the question, “What makes a poem cohere?” (197); George Elliot Clarke ends his poem, “Marginalia,” with the questions, “Does the poem cohere? Is it grace?” (153) — and this same poem begins with the metaphor, “Grace is excellence performed casually” (152), which aligns grace with performance, but leaves the relationship ambiguous with the adverb casually. *What makes a poem cohere?* Lee answers with rhythm: “It starts with rhythm, that much I know [...] A poem thinks by the way it moves (197). A poem thinks through its rhythm. In the works discussed in this paper, rhythm is produced through interpenetrations: voices overlapping and bodies speaking words. This rhythm is also produced through the poets’ voices cutting across each other, as they do in response to the question: *What makes a poem cohere?* — a critical conversation of interpenetrating voices that need not cohere but results in being meaningful through its dissonances.³ *Does the poem cohere? Is it grace? What makes a poem cohere? It starts with rhythm, that much I know. I mean the way the poem moves in time... A poetics of voice in motion. Grace is stillness in motion. Grace is excellence performed casually.* Not casually, but sweetly. *Sweetly, I suppose, but deeply enough to draw the necessary blood. The mouth of lyric is an ear. What music does the ear speak? Is it grace? Grace is stillness in motion. Not grace, but grace notes — musical notations that map the anticipation of sound. Listening to this notation of textual performance involves a practice of listening out loud. The mouth of lyric is an ear. And it is this listening that hears notation pausing upon the page. A slight breath before the poem slips, already, into motion.*
Brian Castro’s fictional autobiography *Shanghai Dancing* informs what I mean by the action of closing rather than ending. Castro’s text leaves the reader with an image of closing that suggests a return to the womb, or rather an enclosing. It is through this act of enclosing itself that the text signals an act of closure while at the same time returning us to the beginning — with the repetition reminding us that it is a place where we have already been and will be again: “to where there would be no more of your line, neither word nor will, and with the stern rearing and bow plunging, let it all close above your head again” (447).

The idea of poetry making something through rhythm is conveyed in the title of Ishmael Reed’s poem, “Poetry Makes Rhythm in Philosophy” — a poem that traces the kinesis of poetry back to the etymological root of the word *poiesis*. What remains unanswered is whether Reed’s poem sufficiently explores the complexities of *poiesis* that his title alludes to; in other words, does Reed’s poetry make rhythm? And why does it make rhythm in *philosophy*? The rhythm that *poetry makes* in this poem takes the shape of a metaphor, such as in the simile that compares the kinesis of rhythm to the movement of “walking Paul-Chamber’s fingers” (173). Kinesis is represented through the verbs, ‘to move’ and ‘to swing,’ but also in the corporeal form of Paul Chamber’s fingers “walking” up the strings of his bass. As the poem’s title suggests, the *making* of rhythm is at issue; what the poem implies is that rhythm can be made through metaphors — metaphors that gesture towards what rhythm is through the discursive *making* of them.

The following are the sources for the echoes in the closing paragraph of the paper. Not only do these echoes listen to each other, but placing them side by side enacts a critical polyphony in which we hear their intersections:

> Sweetly, I suppose, but deeply enough to draw the necessary blood. (Brighurst, 81)

> *Grace is excellence performed casually.* (Clarke, 152)

> *Does the poem cohere? Is it grace?* (Clarke, 153)

> *What makes a poem cohere?* (Lee, 197)

> *It starts with rhythm, that much I know. I mean the way the poem moves in time.* (Lee, 153)

> *A poetics of voice in motion.* (Lee, 198)

> *Grace is stillness in motion.* (Zwicky, 212)

> *The mouth of lyric is an ear.* (Zwicky, 336)


———. “Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A Different Type of Question about Revolution.” In *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Contemporary Cultural Studies*. 


