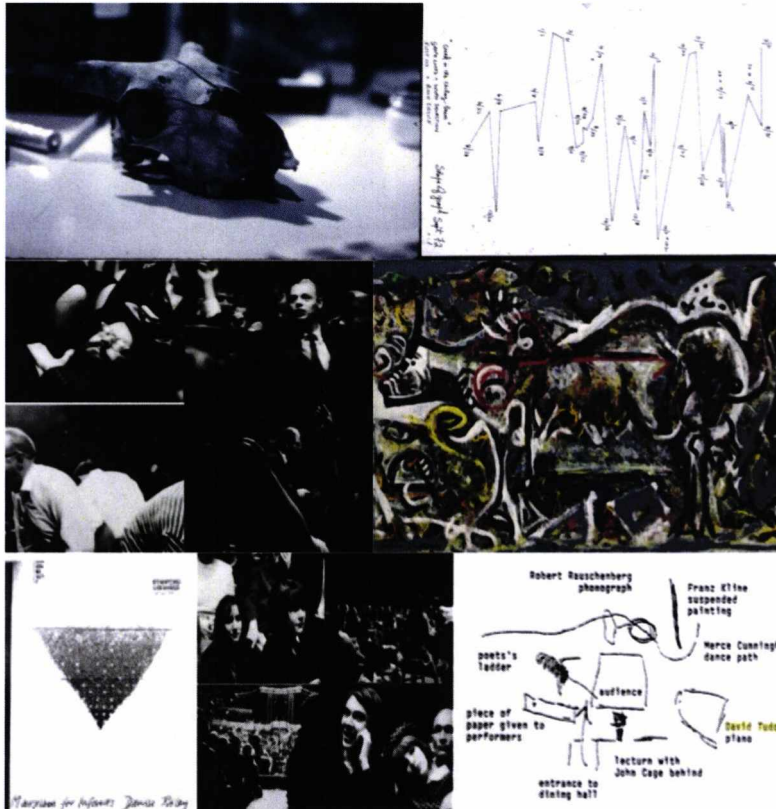# INNOVATIVE POETRY & PERFORMANCE
1950-1980: EVENT/EFFECT

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**Submitted for the degree of
PhD in English and American Literature**

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes three related observations as its point of departure. Drawing upon recent comments from Iain Sinclair and Robert Sheppard, I initially present it as an investigation that intends to bring hitherto 'invisible' histories to a more tangible field. Specifically, the histories in this thesis address the interactions between innovative poetry and performance. While this field of research has already produced several significant monographs and anthologies, they often focus almost exclusively on American poetry. Moreover, many of these studies seek to analyse the macroscopic phenomena of poetry readings with reference to elocution and rhetoric. Instead, this thesis concentrates on selected 'event histories' between 1950 and 1980, which are all subjected to a detailed investigation. Broadly, I approach each case study through an overview of the performance (i.e. the 'event') and a close examination of its techniques and contexts (i.e. the 'effect'). The individual chapters discuss Charles Olson's relationship to John Cage's 'Theatre Piece # 1'; Allen Ginsberg's reading at The First International Poetry Incarnation in 1965; Denise Riley's first public reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977; Eric Mottram's collaborative performance *Pollock Record*; and Allen Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain* project from the 1970s. During the course of these investigations, I address concepts such as event (via Whitehead), space (via Lefebvre), gender and performativity (via Butler), memory and forgetting, as well as the body without organs (via Deleuze and Guattari). I also incorporate additional perspectives from Debord, de Certeau, Derrida, Lyotard and others. Throughout, I explore the parallels between the performance and the poets' respective works, as well as the socio-political contexts of each event. In the conclusion, I draw upon this versatility to problematize certain aspects of 'the performance of authorship' that appears in previous studies, before turning to speculate upon further developments that might make this—and the current—period of poetry seem a little less 'off-piste' in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 'The work is...'

Short overview of poetry and performance; framing the investigation

I would like to begin with a brief anecdote. On March 20th, 2011, I sat down in my bedroom to enjoy a documentary about Bob Cobbing on BBC Radio 4.[1] The programme featured several speakers, including Iain Sinclair, Peter Finch, Peter Barry, Paula Claire and Lawrence Upton; each of them recounted personal memories and broader analyses of Cobbing's work. The discussions alluded to his career as a poet, artist and composer; his role at the Poetry Society during the 'poetry wars' of the 1970s;[2] his influence as an activist within the British Poetry Revival;[3] and as the leader of the Writers Forum workshops, which also acted as a small press publisher. Some of the contributors' voices already felt familiar to me, as I had heard them speak in person during conferences, poetry readings or other public events. Yet, hearing the voices disembodied on a radio broadcast that could not be paused, I often failed to recognise the identity of each individual speaker. Thus, when the latter parts of the documentary turned to reflect upon the legacy of Cobbing—and the Revival in general—I was unable to name the voice that raised a compelling proposition. This male speaker suggested that in recent years, younger poets and academics have developed a fresh interest in this episode of poetry, and consequently, this once "invisible history" is now "becoming visible."[4] Although I continued to ruminate over this utterance long after the programme had finished, the identity of the speaker

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[1] *Make Perhaps This Out Sense of Can You*. A Falling Tree Production for BBC Radio 4. 20.03.2011. Hereafter cited as *Make Perhaps This Out Sense of Can You*.

[2] See, Barry, P. *Poetry Wars: British Poetry of the 1970s and the Battle for Earl's Court*. Salt. Cambridge. 2006. Further references to discussions in Barry's text will be made during the course of this thesis, particularly in Chapter 5.

[3] The term is broadly used to describe the innovative poetries formulating in the UK (roughly) between 1965 and 1977. Eric Mottram is credited with coining the term. See, for example, Mottram, E. 'The British Poetry Revival'. *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (eds. R.Hampson & P. Barry). Manchester University Press. Manchester. 1993. pp. 15-50. Also see Barry's *Poetry Wars*.

[4] Sinclair, speaking in *Make Perhaps This Out Sense of Can You*.

remained a mystery to me. Over a year later, I attended a lecture delivered by Iain Sinclair at the University of Kent.[5] As I listened to Sinclair speak, his voice seemed eerily familiar, until I realised it was identical to the commentator from the radio documentary. After a considerable period of anonymity, I was finally able to ascribe a name to the earlier utterances about invisible histories.

This thesis is not about Cobbing. Nor is it about Sinclair. In fact, although this thesis is vitally interested in the period of the Revival, it is not *exclusively* about poetry from the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, this anecdote contains multiple concepts that pertain to the themes of my project. Firstly, the efforts to render 'invisible histories' visible are also integral to the scholarly undertakings of this thesis. Sinclair's comments in the documentary suggest a certain development from his introduction to *Conductors of Chaos*, where the British Poetry Revival was described as an "off-piste, unnoticed" episode, which was exiled to a "plethora of original pamphlets and chapbooks" that cannot be "located without a team of private detectives and a hefty bank balance."[6] In other words, the 1996 volume—perhaps justifiably—seems to lament the lack of attention dedicated to this important period. Similar remarks are also present in Robert Sheppard's more recent *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, which concludes with a "recent opinion piece" on what Sheppard regrets "most about the poetry scene now."[7] There, he writes:

> What I regret most about the scene at the moment—I try not to harbour resentments—is the way in which it fails to embrace its own history. Avant-gardes are notoriously looking the other way, of course, as a part of their strategies, but I researched the history of the British Poetry Revival [...] at the same time as developing my own poetics, and I wish others would do something similar (that is: different). Whether it is the *English Intelligencer* or the Albert Hall Poetry Reading, events need pegging into history, and it is the duty—yes, I think I will use that word—for those who follow to respect that history, which means neither wilfully ignoring nor turning it into mythology, but acknowledging its specificity and evaluating it.[8]

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[5] Sinclair, I. ''Bad Journeys, Marvellous Voyages: The Homeric imperative as revealed through Malcolm Lowry, Charles Olson, and local clowns peddling a fibreglass swan from Hastings to Hackney'. Delivered at the University of Kent. 16.05.2012

[6] Sinclair, I. 'Introduction'. *Conductors of Chaos* (ed. I. Sinclair). Picador. Great Britain. 1996, xiv

[7] Sheppard, R. *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry: Episodes in the history of the poetics of innovation*. Shearsman. Exeter. 2011, 12

[8] *Ibid*, 215

Although Sheppard commends studies such as Barry's *Poetry Wars* or Andrew Duncan's *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*[9] and *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry,*[10] he still holds that there "aren't enough histories"[11] available. However, other relevant texts were already obtainable in 2007,[12] when Sheppard wrote the piece, and important developments have also emerged in more recent years.[13] Moreover, if one accepts Sinclair's earlier observations regarding academia's new surge of interest in these 'invisible' histories, perhaps there is reason to be optimistic. Perhaps Sheppard's call for more vigorous studies is presently being answered. These circumstances are a fundamental motivation for my investigations. While the researches of this thesis focus on multifarious materials, I too intend to approach several unobserved histories in order to make them more visible. I will also endeavour to document these events without resorting to uncritical mythology; instead, I will interrogate them through a wide range of perspectives. However, while this thesis will draw upon some of the elusive pamphlets and chapbooks that Sinclair alludes to in *Conductors of Chaos*, my primary 'objects' of study are even more ephemeral than these fugitive publications. Primarily, I will investigate individual events that took place between 1950 and 1980, and involved poets such as Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Riley, Eric Mottram and Allen Fisher. More specifically, this thesis will examine these poets—and poetries—in *performance*.

I have chosen to use the word 'performance' in order to suggest a broader frame of reference than the ones implied by a 'poetry reading'. Although I will discuss readings, my investigations will not be restricted to vocal articulations of a written text. Indeed, 'performance' suggests a wide scope of practices, which may draw upon performance arts and experiment with the performative presentations of the poem. In addition, as the term denotes a variety of activities, it will also allow me to observe the numerous theoretical and socio-political aspects of these events. Of

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[9] See Duncan, A. *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*. Salt. Cambridge. 2003

[10] See Duncan, A. *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry*. Liverpool University Press. Liverpool. 2005

[11] Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, 215

[12] See, for example, Miller, D. & Price, R. *British Poetry Magazines 1914-2000: A History and Bibliography of Little Magazines*. British Library Publishing Division. London. 2006; or Sheppard, R. *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000*. Liverpool University Press. Cornwall. 2005; or Stevenson, R. *The Last of England? The Oxford English Literary History Volume 12. 1960-2000*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2004, pp. 165-270

[13] For instance, *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, edited by Sheppard and Scott Thurston, was launched in 2009.

course, 'performance' can also evoke thoughts of 'performance poetry' and poetry slams, which I will not discuss in this thesis.[14] Instead, I will investigate poets associated with the linguistically innovative modes of the avant-garde.[15] In this respect, my studies also involve a further notion of 'invisibility'. Although 20th century poetry and performance has been discussed in various articles, anthologies and monographs,[16] the scholarly study of this field is still in a nascent state. In 1995, Joseph Roach argued that the phenomenon of performance is particularly challenging for English departments, where everything "from cityscapes to Madonna videos are *read as texts*." [17] While the claim may sound more polemical than analytic, contemporaneous volumes about the performance of poetry share some of Roach's exasperations. For instance, Charles Bernstein's introduction to *Close Listening* provides an apt characterisation of academic approaches to this field:

> Since the 1950s, the poetry reading has become one of the most important sites for dissemination of the poetic works in North America, yet studies of the distinctive features of the poem-in-performance have been rare [...] A large archive of audio and video documents, dating back to an early recording of Tennyson's almost inaudible voice, awaits serious study and interpretation.[...] In [*Close Listening*] we have tried to integrate the modern history of poetry into a more general history of performance art and philosophical and linguistic approaches to the acoustic dimensions of language. The absence of such a history has had the effect of eliding the significance of the modernist poetry traditions for postwar performance art.[18]

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[14] I have titled this thesis as 'Innovative Poetry and Performance' in order to avoid the possible misconceptions involved with 'performance poetry'.

[15] To echo Peter Middleton in *Distant Reading*, I acknowledge that the term 'avant-garde' may be inadequate, and the appropriate terminology for the poetries I discuss is still under some dispute. See, for example, Middleton, P. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry.* The University of Alabama Press. Tuscaloosa. 2005, 222. While I appreciate the contestable nature of these various terms, this thesis will use them more broadly. Primarily, I will refer to these poetries as 'innovative', 'radical' or 'avant-garde'. For a more detailed analysis of these—and other—terms, see Barry, *Poetry Wars*, pp. 6-8; Also see Sheppard, R & Thurston, S. 'Editorial'. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 1.1 (2009), 3

[16] Many of these studies will, of course, be discussed during the course of this thesis. Additional publications on the subject include: Clunies-Ross, P. 'Promoting Poetry Events' *Poetry Live: British and Irish Poetry.* (ed. J. Medlin). Poetry Society, London. 1987; Glasco, J. 'A Real Good Noise: The Poet as Performer'. *Insecurity of Art: Essays of Poetics* (eds. K. Novies and P. Vantoorn) Vehicule Press. Montreal. 1982, pp 57-59; Hall, D. 'The Poetry Reading: Public Performance/Private Art'. *The American Scholar 54.1*(1985) pp.63-77; Levertov, D. 'An Approach to Public Poetry Listenings'. *Light Up the Cave.* New Directions. New York, 1981; Thompson, D.W. (ed). *Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives.* University of Press of America. Lanham, M.D. 1983. Vincent, S. & Zweig, E. (eds). *The Poetry Reading: A Contemporary Compendium of Language and Performance.* Momo's Press. San Francisco. 1981

[17] Roach, J. 'Culture and Performance in the Transatlantic World'. *Performativity and Performance* (eds A. Parter and E.Kosofskky Sedwig,) Routledge. London 1995, 61. My emphasis.

[18] Bernstein, C. 'Introduction'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.

Of course, *Close Listening* provides significant contributions towards demonstrating "the crucial importance of performance to the practice of"[19] contemporary poetry, and Bernstein's introductory essay makes several astute observations about the proliferation of poetry and performance since the 1950s. For instance, Bernstein is correct to note the parallel developments between poetry and performance art. Broadly speaking, dramatic innovations such as Happenings often promoted the use of group collaborations that sought to re-structure the relationships between the performers and their audience.[20] Comparably, post-war poetics at times involved re-configurations that regarded poetry as an exchange of energy between the poet and the reader,[21] or invited its "audience to participate in the recreation of language, sound and syntax."[22] Perhaps these participatory practices could also be associated with the socio-political developments that took place after 1950. For example, political activities such as the protests against the Vietnam War—as well as demonstrations and occupations at university campuses—frequently incorporated performance techniques;[23] vice versa, a considerable proportion of performance arts continue to be closely motivated by political activism.[24]

At the same time, Bernstein's comments tacitly reveal the limitations of *Close Listening*. Firstly, the explicit reference to 'poetic works in North America' highlights a considerable bias within the anthology. Although its essays address Gerard Manley Hopkins, F.T. Marinetti, Apollinaire, Picabia and others, the discussions of poetry and performance after 1950 are almost exclusively based on American poets. Indeed, with the exception[25] of Marjorie Perloff's references to Maggie O'Sullivan and Caroline

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Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998 p. 5

[19] *Ibid*, 3

[20] See, for example, Moore-Gilbert, B & J. Seed. 'Introduction'. *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (ed B. Moore-Gilbert & J.Seed). Routledge. London. 1992 pp. 1-15

[21] See Olson, C. 'Projective Verse', *Collected Prose* . (Eds. D. Allen & B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 241. I will provide a more detailed discussion of 'Projective Verse' and performance in Chapter 2.

[22] Mottram, in Skejlt, P (ed.) *Prospect into Breath: Interviews with North and South Writers*. North and South. UK. 1991, 22

[23] See, for example, the descriptions of a demonstration outside The Pentagon in October 1967 in Roszak, T. *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Faber and Faber. London. 1970,124. Allen Ginsberg was present at the event.

[24] For instance, Baz Kershaw notes that "radical performance always participates in the most vital, cultural, social and political tensions of its time". See Kershaw, B. *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. Routledge. London. 1999, 7

[25] Bernstein mentions J.H. Prynne, but only in order to make a passing reference to one of his essays. Maria Damon includes two quotations from Benjamin Zephaniah as epigraphs in her essay, but does

Bergvall,[26] as well as Peter Middleton's discussion of O'Sullivan,[27] poets based in the UK receive no attention.[28] Yet, Bernstein's estimations about the significance of performance are equally true for British poetry. Allen Fisher's recollections of readings and events in London during the 1960s and 70s describe an active milieu:

> By 1964, Better Books was getting really interesting in central London, just off Charing Cross Road [...] Big basement with a lot of installation art, eventually, but a lot of performances [...] which included film. Around that time the ICA, set up in Dover Street, [...] was very vibrant. For instance, I remember a notable exhibition called Between Poetry and Painting. It showed a relation between concrete poetry and visual poetry, and spoken poetry as well. [...] Towards the end of the sixties, I was involved in the small press scene: Association of Little Presses, exhibitions, performances, events, fairs, that sort of thing. [...] At the same time, Better Books is still going on, until it ran out of money, and moved to the front of Charing Cross Road. The readings became much tighter; less performances, more just poetry readings. Eventually, the poetry scene moved [...] to Indica, first of all. [...] There were events at the Roundhouse, and there was the London Musicians Collective, and the London Film Co-op, which were in the same building. We would use it for poetry performances. All of this is going on at the same time, more or less, and the pubs were also [...] socially linked to it. [29]

Of course, some of these locations were equally important for Britain's countercultural underground.[30] Similarly, many of these proceedings coincided with wider cultural movements such as protests against the Wilson government's verbal

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not discuss the poet specifically. See Damon, M. 'Was that "Different," "Dissident" or "Dissonant"? Poetry (n) the Public Spear: Slams, Open Readings, and Dissident Traditions'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998 pp. 324-359

[26] See Perloff, M. 'After Free Verse: The New Nonlinear Poetries'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, pp. 86-110

[27] See Middleton, P. 'The Contemporary Poetry Reading'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, pp. 262-299. Parts of the essay are also reprinted in Middleton's *Distant Reading*.

[28] Of course, this issue is not restricted to Bernstein's anthology. Keith Tuma's *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, which was also published in 1998, notes upon the American misconceptions of British poetry as a staunchly antimodernist practice. The stark opening of the text goes some way toward clarifying the reasons behind the bias in *Close Listening*: "In the United States, British poetry is dead". See Tuma, K. *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Readers*. Northwestern University Press. Evanston, Illinois. 1998, 1

[29] Fisher, A. *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009*. London. [Digital recording in possession of author] Hereafter cited as Fisher, A. *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009*.

[30] See, for example Nuttall, J. *Bomb Culture*. Paladin. London. 1970. Also see Nelson, E. *The British Counterculture 1966-73: A Study of the Underground Press*. MacMillan. Basingstoke. 1989. These ideas will also be discussed in Chapter 3.

support of the Vietnam War.[31] However, these events were also an important site for the dissemination and development of innovative British poetry. As Eric Mottram argued in 1993, the vast majority of the Revival poets were published in "a large number of small presses and magazines,"[32] which were largely ignored by the "the literary establishment" and "attacked by charity-giving bodies like the Arts Council and the radio and television controllers and censors."[33] As a consequence, apart from specialist bookshops such as Better Books or Compendium, and exchanges between friends,[34] performances became integral for the distribution of new work. Regardless of the inhibitions felt by certain poets, "poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package."[35]

In addition, certain poets on the peripheries of the Revival seemingly developed a preference for performance over print. Michael Horovitz's editorials to *New Departures* frequently lamented the delays caused by his inability to "pay for printing."[36] Paradoxically, the same articles would also proclaim that his *Live New Departures* and its "emanations naturally took precedence over book production."[37] Performances could also act as a formative induction for several younger poets. For example, Lee Harwood's 1965 publication *title illegible* "contained beat and surrealist work that had been aired"[38] at Writers Forum. Likewise, such events were a crucial component to Fisher's early involvement:

> Initially, it wasn't very public. I would attend readings, but wouldn't let it be known that I was also somebody doing stuff. I attended readings, and music performances in central London. Places around Great Newport Street. There was a small place in Herne Hill that I

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[31] See, for example, Seed, J. 'Hegemony Postponed': The Unraveling of the Culture of Consensus in Britain in the 1960s' *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (ed B. Moore-Gilbert & J.Seed). Routledge. London. 1992 p 34. Also see, Coupe, L. 'Tell Me Lies About Vietnam': English Poetry and the American War'. *Tell Me Lies About Vietnam* (ed. A. Louvre & J.Walsh). Open University Press. Great Britain. 1988. pp. 167-180

[32] Mottram, 'The British Poetry Revival', 15

[33] *Ibid*

[34] Among the archived letters Eric Mottram received from Bill Griffiths, several sent during the time Griffiths lived in Germany contain requests to forward any interesting new pamphlets and journals to him. See MOTTRAM 5/100/1-36

[35] Riley, D. *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*. London [Digital recording in possession of the author]. Hereafter cited as *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*.

[36] Horovitz, M. 'Foreword'. *New Departures 7-8 + 10-11* (ed. Michael Horovitz). New Departures. London. 1975, xix.

[37] Horovitz, M. 'New Departures 5'. *Resurgence vol 2 n2 new departures 5 joint issue* (Spring 1975), 7

[38] Sheppard, R. 'British poetry and its discontents'. *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (ed B. Moore-Gilbert & J.Seed). Routledge. London. 1992, 169.

would go to, for smaller poetry readings. Quite early on, I would attend concerts where jazz and poetry were being mixed [...] It wasn't always very good, but it was socially quite interesting [...] That kind of introduced me to the performance side of things; hearing poetry read, and hearing music with it. It was to do with the live ambiance, not just of the reading itself, but the social ambiance; meeting people, joining a kind of nexus of people. And of course they start publishing magazines and you take part in them.[39]

In this context, it is no surprise that Mottram would later describe performance as such a large "part of the general poetics" today that without it, "no proper account of twentieth century poetry is possible."[40] Yet, the Americanist perspectives of *Close Listening* overlook these events entirely. Recent scholarship by poets including Tony Lopez[41] and Caroline Bergvall[42] has reflected upon contemporary aspects of performance, but the events of the 1960s and 1970s are still largely invisible.

The scope of *Close Listening* also features another peculiar omission. While Bernstein regrets the rarity of studies about the distinctive features of 'poem-in-performance', many of the anthology's essays scarcely mention the phenomenon. Instead, they address the visual performances of a printed text, or analyse the general concepts of sound and 'aurality.'[43] By contrast, certain earlier monographs—such as Douglas Oliver's *Poetry and Narrative In Performance*[44]—have attempted to study the vocal articulations of a written text through more specific methodologies. However, Oliver's approach is restrictively exacting. Although he would later describe performances as dynamic events, where "artistically [...] the action is, where the possibilities begin,"[45] *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* focuses exclusively on the sound of poetic stresses as a factor that unifies our sound perception with "some conception of the meaning and emotional significance of the stress-bearing syllable in relation to the overall meaning"[46] of the poem. This emphasis on stressed syllables is problematic in itself. In order to assert his thesis "within the public

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[39] *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009.*

[40] Mottram, E. 'Notes on Poetics'. *The Journal of Comparative Poetics* 1.1. (Spring 1989), 38

[41] See, for example, Lopez, T. 'Poetry and Performance'. *Meaning Performance*. Salt. Cambridge. 2006. pp. 73-88

[42] See, for example, Bergvall, C 'What do we Mean by Performance Writing'. [Online] Available from: www.carolinebergvall.com/content/text/BERGVALL-keyonote.pdf (last accessed 16/08/2011).

[43] In his introductory essay, Bernstein refers to the 'aurality' of the reading in order to emphasize the sounding of the writing. See Bernstein, 13

[44] Oliver, D. *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*. Macmillan. Basingstoke. 1989

[45] Oliver, D. 'Poetry's Subject' *PN Review* vol.21, no.7 (1995), 52

[46] Oliver, *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*, 5

domain,"[47] Oliver openly omits certain "out-of-the-way passages of literature" and "the more avant-garde views of poetic prosody in the Poundian and post-Poundian traditions."[48] Furthermore, Oliver conducted his investigation by recording "several readers" reciting the "same lines of verse", in order to evaluate the tapes with a "group of experienced listeners."[49] The panel's decision on the 'best reading' was subsequently deployed as the "standard" to which Oliver compared "all other readings"[50] in his study. In other words, while Oliver described performances as occasions where 'possibilities begin', *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* approaches written texts strictly as instructive scripts. Moreover, Oliver's focus on a 'best reading' considers the performance of poems in a narrow sense, which disregards the range of potentialities presented by this medium. For instance, Günther Berghaus has argued that while "most of the texts presented at Cabaret Voltaire and the Galerie Dada were poems", their "full artistic potential" was only realised "in a live performance", with sounds "produced by voice and instruments" as well as "gesture, mime and movement."[51] That is to say, these performances demanded to be both heard and *seen*.[52] The notion of a 'best reading' is also problematized within more contemporary debates. As Fisher recalls:

> John Seed [...] was at one time very reticent about giving public performances, because he thought it over-stabilised the meaning within the poetry's line, because you put an emphasis here or there, rather than make it available as a multiple [...] There was a debate about that. Anthony Barnett, a musician as well as a poet, would argue that poetry is composed and music is improvised. I was in a group of poets that did not think that at all. It is as open as music is, or is not [...] I find that where I'm reading something that on the page might seem to be the same thing, but read in three different audience situations it would feel and be understood differently [...] the meaning is complexed by that, or it's made varied by that, and this is encouraged rather than worried about.[53]

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[47] *Ibid*, xiv

[48] *Ibid*

[49] *Ibid*, 25

[50] *Ibid*

[51] Berghaus, G. *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde*. Palgrave Macmillan. USA. 2005, 169

[52] See Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde*, 168

[53] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

To extrapolate, Fisher's conception of poetry as something found "in the process of its making"[54] presents a clear challenge to Oliver's methodology, while Seed's reticence suggests that concepts of authoritative best readings may actually estrange poets from the praxis of performance. Clearly, an investigation to the performable practices of 'avant-garde' or 'post-Poundian' traditions requires a broader frame of reference.

Baz Kershaw's *The Politics of Performance* begins with the central assumption that radical theatre enacts "an ideological transaction" between the performers "and the community of their audience,"[55] where the "spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction"[56] of the event. While these characterisations cohere with my earlier remarks about Happenings, Kershaw's conceptions extend the scope of these correspondences. Drawing upon Richard Schechner's "indeterminate"[57] definitions of "the precinct"[58] where a performance occurs, Kershaw argues that the *"production* is simply the most concentrated part"[59] of the event. In addition, everything that is done "in preparation for, and in the aftermath of"[60] the performance may significantly affect its efficacy. Of course, such connections are not always transparent; however, Kershaw's concepts allow studies of poetry and performance to investigate these events through wide cultural nexuses of poetical, theoretical and socio-political receptions, interventions and reinventions. This approach is not entirely dissimilar from the one Peter Middleton assumes in certain sections of *Distant Reading*. Middleton identifies poems as "heterogeneous material objects", which cannot be contained in a singular format; instead, they are manifested through "multiple versions, published copies and performances."[61] Consequently, *Distant Reading* argues that poetry takes place in an "intersubjective

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[54] Fisher, A. 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud'. *Reality Studios 3.1.* 1982, 1. This idea will be discussed in more detail during Chapter 6.

[55] Kershaw, B. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention.* Routledge. London. 1992, 16

[56] *Ibid*, 17

[57] *Ibid*, 22

[58] Schechner, R. *Performance Theory: Revised and Expanded Edition.* Routledge. London. 1988, 39

[59] Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, 22

[60] *Ibid*,

[61] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, xi

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process" of "publication, performance and reception histories" where "meaning is constantly in flux."[62]

Although this thesis will utilise similar concepts, my frame of reference differs from Middleton's. *Distant Reading* is primarily interested in the theory and history of "the modern poetry reading", as well as "arguments about the performance of authorship" and the "intersubjectivity of oral performance."[63] As Middleton analyses poetry and performance from a macroscopic perspective, *Distant Reading* features surprisingly few detailed discussions of individual events.[64] By contrast, although this thesis will inevitably address some wider issues in poetry and performance, I will conduct my studies through a series of closely investigated minor histories involving individual events and effects. In sum, my approach is episodic as opposed to panoptic: this thesis hopes to reveal several previously invisible 'event histories.'[65] In each chapter, I will endeavour to document the proceedings of the performances studied. Some of these events—such as Cage's 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' or the First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall—are already widely known. However, I contend that underneath the prominent stature of these performances, there are unseen facets and perspectives that can enhance our understanding of them. Other episodes, such as Denise Riley's first public reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977, or Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record* have remained largely undocumented and are, consequently, invisible. Thus, by pegging these events into history, I hope to deliver them from the archive to a more tangible field. However, my case studies are not solely focused on narrative accounts. Rather, I will approach these historical events in order to place them under 'serious study and interpretation'. In doing so, I aim to further demonstrate some of the depth and breadth involved with poetry and performance between 1950 and 1980.

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[62] *Ibid*, xv

[63] *Ibid*, xvi

[64] Middleton conducts relatively extensive analyses of Allen Ginsberg's reading at the Six Gallery, Susan Howe's reading in Southampton, and a reading by John Ashbery in Cambridge. However, these discussions are still quite brief, and rarely last for more than a few pages.

[65] I have adopted this term from Barry's *Poetry Wars*.

1.2 'Open the portals to what Is'?

Methodological issues; how to consult ephemeral events

The approach I outlined within the previous section involves several of methodological challenges. During the course of this thesis, I will investigate each performance through a variety of methods, which are determined by the format and scale of the available documentation. However, all of the subsequent chapters face the same general question: how should one consult *events* as *objects* of study? Tony Lopez opens his essay on poetry and performance with an epigraph from Peggy Phelan, which succinctly identifies the issue at hand:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology and subjectivity becomes itself through disappearance[66]

Although the event did not involve a performance per se, Phelan's position can be illustrated by revisiting the anecdote I recounted at the beginning of this thesis. As I was unable to identify certain voices from the documentary on Cobbing, many of their insightful comments remained anonymous and unattributable. The notes I wrote while listening to the programme were of little assistance, as I had failed to list the names of the contributors when they were introduced. Effectively, my experiences of hearing the documentary could not be saved, and the details of the event ultimately disappeared. Had it not been for my encounter with Sinclair a year later, the aforementioned anecdote would conclude very differently. Moreover, Phelan might suggest that the actual 'performance'—i.e. the utterances of the various contributors—was always beyond my reach. By being recorded and repeated during a radio broadcast, these occasions had already entered into the 'economy of reproduction' and become 'something other than performance'. Such debates take place across the entire field of performance studies. As Middleton notes, contemporary performance art is often discussed through rhetoric that centres on "the intransmissibility of events", where even the most "lucid explanation" is unable to

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[66] Phelan, P. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London. Routledge. 1993, 73

"convey the passions,"[67] aroused by the lived experience. Likewise, if poetry readings and performances are "bounded in time and place"[68], they too are conditioned by Phelan's ontology of disappearance. When we miss a line during a reading, the experience cannot be reclaimed; even if we hear "the same poet read the same poem" during a different event, the text is "unlikely" to "emerge quite same."[69] Many studies of poetry and performance seem acutely aware of this predicament, as the writers frequently base their analyses on readings they have personally attended. When Middleton refers to readings by Susan Howe or John Ashbery,[70] he does so from the perspective of an audience member; Tony Lopez frames his arguments with recollections of readings by David Antin and Steve Benson;[71] even Sheppard, who provides a historical account of Cobbing's New River Project,[72] draws upon personal diary entries from the period. In each example, the critic possesses a privileged first-hand experience of the intransmissible event.

While I do not wish to refute the validity of Phelan's position, the investigations of this thesis must inevitably follow a different tact. Indeed, certain constituents of performance studies are suspicions about "the myth of a lost moment that can only be described in its non-existence"[73], and argue that such views can be too restrictive. For instance, Phelan seemingly rejects the 'economy of reproduction' because she views documentation as a process that converts a performance into a cultural commodity, which consequently invalidates the authenticity of the event.[74] However, as sections of my chapter on Allen Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain* will demonstrate,[75] certain facets of performance art from the 1960s and 1970s adopted "the moment of production"[76] as an integral part of the event. Scholars have also problematized the valorised advantages of first-hand accounts. During the

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[67] Middleton, P. 'How to Read A Poetry Reading: A paper given at the University of Pennsylvania October 2003'. [Online] Available from:http://www.soton.ac.uk/~bepc/forum/middleton _readingessay.htm (last accessed 10/05/11). *Distant Reading* incorporates sections of this essay.

[68] *Ibid*

[69] *Ibid*

[70] See Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 96-101

[71] See Lopez, pp. 80-87

[72] See, Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, pp.108-133

[73] Clausen, B. 'After the Act-The (Re)presentation of Performance Art'. *After the Act-The (Re)presentation of Performance Art* (ed. B.Clausen). Museum Moderner Kunt Stiftung Ludwig Wien. 2005, 7

[74] Similar views will also be discussed in Chapter 5.

[75] See, for example, section 6.4 in Chapter 6.

[76] Clausen, 13

Cosmopoetics conference at Durham University in 2010, April Pierce presented a speculative report on various contemporary performances in New York.[77] One of her examples involved a poetry reading for the deaf, which was communicated solely via sign language. As these gestures were alien to Pierce, the performance felt inaccessible to her. Although she had a privileged access to the lived experience, this unitary phenomenon did not represent the primary datum as a whole.[78] The methodologies of my investigation mediate between these myriad views. On the one hand, I acknowledge that the documentation consulted throughout this thesis will inevitably offer ambivalent and limited perspectives. As Deleuze writes in *Cinema 1*, any framing of the camera can be a "limitation"[79], as it "ensure[s] the deterritorialisation"[80] — or a re-structuring—of the event. Furthermore, audio recordings remove all traces of visuality, and written documentations may approach the event from an entirely speculative space. At the same time, it seems counterproductive to over-valorise the primacy of first-hand experience, as this can also be conditioned and limited by numerous circumstantial factors. Thus, rather than reject performance documentation as an *otherness* that betrays the integrity of the event, I will approach these artefacts as "tool[s] that" subject "the apparently non-graspable"[81] to new methods of interpretation and analysis.

To some extent, the ambivalences within this approach may seem familiar to those conversant with the various tenets of poststructuralist literary analysis. For the past thirty years, as Middleton noted in 2003, academia has repeatedly challenged the "reification of literary texts as icons, autonomous units of meaning, material objects or intentional expressions of an author."[82] As a consequence, hierarchical concepts of absolute meaning are generally met with suspicion. Therefore, modern readers of innovative poetry are well accustomed to the 'life of the writing' that Sheppard described in 2011:

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[77] See Pierce, A. 'Where does the poem go?' delivered at *Cosmopoetics: Mediating a New World Poetics*. Durham University, Durham. 08.09.2010

[78] My phrasing borrows slightly from Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where the "compound-expression 'Being-in-the-world' indicates in the very way I have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole". See Heidegger, M. *Being and Time* (trans. J.Macquarrie & E. Robinson). Basil Blackwell. Southampton. 1983, 78

[79] Deleuze, G. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. (trans. H. Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam). The Athelone Press. London. 1997, 13

[80] *Ibid*, 15

[81] Clausen, 15

[82] Middleton, 'How to Read A Poetry Reading'

> [The poem] both reveals itself—its poetic artifice is its undeniable facticity laid bare—and conceals itself, leaving the reader feeling that he or she has not finished, could indeed never finish, the work of reading. The text is inexhaustible in terms of both form and content and in terms of the unstable relationship between them. The writer is also strangely both present—as artificer—and simultaneously absent, from the poem; once the poem is read the only agent in and around the text is the reader. Any poem is thus *a site of human unfinish twice over*.[83]

In other words, while the poem in a book may seem to be "an enduring, stable structure of meaning that corresponds directly with a set of verbal signs contained in a single material form,"[84] contemporary theories and poetics often argue that this is not the case. As a site of human unfinish, the poem is mediated by several absences. The work will continue to be inexhaustible, as any absolute meaning will always "remain inaccessible and impenetrable;" indeed, "to gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is a lie."[85] Naturally, the full extent of these theories is far more complex. However, even this cursory overview exposes a broad similarity between these readerly practices and the aforementioned issues in performance documentation. As the various tapes, photographs, films and notes cannot reproduce the intransmissible event, they also simultaneously reveal and conceal the performances they depict; the 'authentic' occasion is forever an absence. In this respect, both poetry *and* performance documentation present themselves as sites of ongoing and unending "undone business."[86] Of course, such similarities are not comprehensive, and I have no intentions to 'read' the performances in the subsequent chapters as *texts*. Rather, I outline these resemblances in order to clarify the necessarily inconclusive nature of my case studies. Effectively, my methodological approach echoes 'The author's preface' in Fisher's *Unpolished Mirrors* in its wish to "grasp the world / without gripping it."[87] To this end, I will attempt to survey each performance across multiple perspectives: the research will draw upon a range of documents, which include written accounts, audio recordings, film footage and

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[83] Sheppard, *When Bad Times Meant for Good Poetry*, 7 (my italics)

[84] Middleton, 'How to Read A Poetry Reading'

[85] Derrida, J. *Writing and Difference*. (trans. A. Bass). Routledge. London. 2004, 84

[86] Olson, C. *The Maximus Poems* (ed. G.F. Butterick). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1983, 57

[87] Fisher, A. *Place*. Reality Street. Hastings. 2005, 343

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interviews conducted in person. Thus, by "crossing borders between media,"[88] the methodologies of this thesis are themselves intermedial.

In order to demonstrate the practical demands of this research, I will briefly detail the various approaches adopted within my case studies. As Lesley Wheeler notes in *Voicing American Poetry*, although poetry readings and performances are rarely chronicled through comprehensive written accounts, individual reports are often included within various memoirs and biographies.[89] Undoubtedly, Wheeler's statement is at least partially motivated by the observations that Middleton makes regarding Allen Ginsberg's seminal performance at the Six Gallery. In *Distant Reading*, Middleton draws upon a series of biographies in order to formulate an overview of this historic event[90]. Likewise, when this thesis investigates renowned performances such as 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' or The First International Poetry Incarnation, I will draw upon the existing biographical accounts. Of course, these materials are not consulted in order to simply paraphrase existing publications. Rather, I will collate a wide range of accounts in order to explore the correlations between these documents. More specifically, I will also pay attention to any discrepancies among the reports, and analyse the issues arising from these anomalies. Furthermore, I will expand upon these brief biographical summaries by incorporating more samizdat accounts within my deliberations; in addition to relevant essays and notes, these will include perspectives from various interviews that originally appeared in various small press magazines and anthologies. Alongside comments from the performers, these accounts will also include audience impressions.

Many of these small press publications are now housed in various special collections and archives. Consequently, these documents already indicate the necessity of archival research. However, because my analyses are not exclusively focused on published accounts, these archival investigations will also examine more unusual items. As some of the performances within this thesis involved more elaborate practices than vocal articulations of a written text, they incorporated numerous materials that now appear more or less invisible. However, they can still be approached within the archive. For example, the sheets that were used during the

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[88] Rajewsky, I. 'Intermediality, Intertextuality and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality. *Intermedialites 6* (Autumn 2005), 46

[89] See Wheeler, L. *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present.* Cornell University Press. Ithica. 2008 pp.3-4

[90] See Middleton, *Distant Reading*, pp. 61-65.

performance of Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*[91] have been catalogued, amongst the rest of his papers, at King's College, London. Similarly, during the 1980s, Allen Fisher published seven sets of microfiche notes, which contained 784 pages of materials associated with his 1970s performance project *Blood Bone Brain*.[92] Among the contents, Fisher included several notes made in preparation for these events. Today, copies of the microfiche documents are housed at the Special Collections in Templeman Library, as a part of the University of Kent's Valerie Eliot collection. When the two performances are investigated in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, the discussions will build upon these archival documents. In this respect, my investigations traverse between the narratives produced after the event and the preparatory materials developed for the performance itself.

Between these polarities, this thesis will also engage with audio-visual documents that were recorded during the event. These items will comprise both audio and video, and at times, they will be examined in unison. For instance, as I will argue in Chapter 3, Peter Whitehead's film *Wholly Communion* presents only an artfully framed glimpse to The First International Poetry Incarnation.[93] However, as the event was recorded in full, all of the readings are currently housed at the British Library's Sound Archive. As a consequence, these two medias can be twinned in order to develop a more comprehensive account of the event. Certain recordings will also act as vital commentaries for performances that I will investigate elsewhere in this thesis. For example, Eric Mottram's talk at the 1975 Cambridge Poetry Festival, which was recorded and later archived at the British Library, features brief discussions of Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain*.[94] Likewise, Denise Riley and Wendy Mulford's performance at the 1977 instalment of the festival[95] was followed by a discussion concerning poetry readings. During the conversation, Riley and Mulford make certain proposals that provide additional insights into aspects of their performance. Therefore, these archival files will serve two purposes. Firstly, they contain indispensable primary documentation of some of the performances studied in this

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[91] See Chapter 5
[92] See Chapter 6
[93] See Chapter 3
[94] See section 5.1 in Chapter 5 and section 7.1 in Chapter 7
[95] See Chapter 4

thesis. Secondly, they can also provide further tools for analysing the events themselves.

Alongside these archival materials, this thesis has also produced entirely new documents. During the course of the research, I interviewed both Allen Fisher and Denise Riley. Primarily, our conversations focused upon the individual performances and events examined in Chapters 4 and 6. However, both poets were also kind enough to provide more general comments about poetry and performance, as well as their respective experiences of readings in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, this component of the investigation unearths previously undocumented perspectives involving the invisible histories of these events. For example, Riley's comments will recount how her anxieties were so intense in the weeks preceding her reading that she had to be medicated on the day of the performance. During the interview, she also describes her mode of reading as 'barrage of words'. Fisher's responses will provide details of the publications related to *Blood Bone Brain*, as well as the project's overall schemata. Segments of these interviews will be incorporated within the appropriate chapters; indeed, the previous section already featured comments from both poets. In addition, I have included edited transcripts of the interviews as appendices. Ultimately, I hope that in addition to containing valuable commentary for the investigations of this thesis, these interviews will also present broader contributions for further studies.

Although I have listed these various formats individually, the subsequent chapters will of course consult them in a more symbiotic manner. Depending on the range of available documentation, I will approach each performance through a mixture of written accounts, recordings and archival materials. In addition, these studies will draw upon numerous other resources, including poetry, criticism and various theoretical perspectives. I will also make reference to the wider socio-political and historical contexts of these performances. In other words, I will investigate these ephemeral events as an archaeologist might study fragments of a pre-historic vase. Each separate object of study, medium or source is brought together to give a more complete impression of the ambiguous occasion. The assembled fragments may not conjoin perfectly, and several dimensions of the event will remain absent and inaccessible, but as the archaeologist is able to infer conclusions from his vase despite the remaining cracks, so can a synthesis of texts (both from the public sphere and

from the archives), audio-visual documents and interviews provide sufficient data to judiciously examine the details of these performances.

1.3. 'impulse renewed over and over again'

Some perspectives on 'the event'

I have subtitled this thesis 'Event/Effect' in order to indicate my primary modes of analysis. Broadly, each performance will be explored through first delivering an account of the proceedings (the 'event'), which will subsequently be subjected to closer analysis (the 'effect'). However, I also acknowledge that several key terms in my title may carry problematic connotations. [96] This is especially true for 'performance' and 'event', as both have been deployed across a wide array of critical and theoretical discourses. For instance, recent decades have often seen 'performance' associated with descriptions of postmodern conditions. For Nick Kaye, performance acts as the format that most frequently tends "to foster or look towards postmodern contingencies and instabilities more than any other mode of work."[97] Similarly, Michel Benamou's studies, which precede Kaye by a number of years, identify performance as "the unifying mode of the postmodern."[98] However, contemporary poetry is often far more reticent to be associated with postmodernity. Specifically within Britain, Redell Olsen notes, many poets associate the term "with delusions of cultural capital and a culture industry which is intent on commodifying intellectual labour."[99] As a result, alternative terms such as 'late modernist' or 'neo modernist', or 'linguistically innovative' have proliferated in recent decades.[100] At the same time, notions of 'event' are also associated with postmodernism, as demonstrated by Lyotard's characterisation of the term:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in the presentation itself; that which denies the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to

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[96] The decision to use the term 'innovative' was partially informed by the title for *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*.

[97] Kaye, N. *Post-Modernism and Performance*. Macmillian Press. Basingstoke. 1994, 23

[98] Benamou, M. 'Presence and Play'. *Performance in Postmodern Culture* (Eds M. Benamou & C.Caramello). Coda Press. Wisconsin. 1977, 3

[99] Olsen, R. 'Postmodern poetry in Britain'. *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry* (ed. N. Corcoran). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2008, 43

[100] See note 15.

share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work [...] The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*.[101]

How should this thesis negotiate between these various perspectives? In her article, Olsen draws a distinction between the questionable socio-economic modes of commodification and cultural capitalism, and the "conceptual and formal possibilities"[102] for postmodern artworks. In particular, she explores the postmodern poetry of Britain through the Lyotardian understanding of the term[103]. Olsen is not alone in developing this reading. When Sheppard's *Poetry of Saying* refers to postmodernism, it does so strictly in relation to Lyotard's text.[104] Thus, if these poetries are situated alongside Lyotardian terminology, they would—by implication—also exhibit the characteristics of an event.

Of course, similar characteristics can also be perceived within key theories of the avant-garde. In 1968, Renato Poggioli noted that in the absence "of exhaustive critical elaboration or even of a simple definition" of the concept, one might anticipate that we may only evaluate "avant-garde art *when we meet it*."[105] On one interpretation, as Poggioli situates our evaluation of the avant-garde within the event of 'meeting', he implicitly associates the concept of these aesthetics with a series of *encounters* and *apprehensions*. This view is affirmed in Berghaus' studies, where he argues that the avant-garde idealises itself as "an ephemeral phenomenon, and not as an institution"[106]. Consequently, these artworks aspire to exist through brief encounters, as Picabia's famous dictum, "Dada works must not exist for any longer

[101] Lyotard, J.F. 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?'(trans. Regis, Durand). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi). Manchester University Press. Manchester. 2004, 81

[102] Olsen, 44

[103] See Olsen, 44

[104] "Postmodernism is a term I wish to use exclusively in Lyotard's sense". See Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 3

[105] Poggioli, R. *The Theory of the Avant Garde* (trans Gerald Fitzgerald). Belknap Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1968, 3 (my emphasis)

[106] Berghaus, G. *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies*. Palgrave Macmillian. London. 2005, p. 19

than six hours," [107] demonstrates. Although "Poggioli's name is now rarely mentioned" [108] among theorists of the avant-garde, subsequent studies contain allusions to patterns of encounter and event. For instance, when Bürger asserts that the avant-garde works towards an "aesthetic experience as a specific experience"[109], the statement implicitly places the art process within an encounter between the work and the viewer. Murphy's study, which extends from Bürger, describes the historical avant-garde's use of the montage as a technique that demands each image to be "interpreted in its own right, rather than gaining significance merely to the extent it contributes to the overall image."[110] While there are grounds to contest Murphy's claim,[111] his concept of isolated images also involves ephemeral encounters within a temporal structure. Considering the propensity of these references, it is little wonder that Berghaus notes how the avant-garde has continually turned to "employ the most ephemeral of all media, performance, to express their artistic concerns."[112]

Thus, when Murphy notes that the avant-garde's resistance to "binding norms and universal criteria" is also present in the "heterogeneous and [...] pluralistic character of the contemporary art of postmodernism," [113] his use of the term is broadly similar to Lyotard's aforementioned definition. Both the avant-gardist and Lyotard's postmodern artist seek to avoid the conventions of formal and stabilized boundaries, by constantly operating within a "nascent state." [114] As a consequence, both avant-garde art and Lyotard's postmodern 'text' are presented as an *event*. While I do not necessarily wish to impose these problematic designations upon the poets and performances discussed within this thesis, similar concepts of occasion and event recur throughout the subsequent chapters. In the broader sense, although they represent a wide variety of approaches, each of the examined poets—in their individual ways—demonstrate a particular awareness of the fluidity and permeability

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[107] *Ibid*

[108] Schulte-Sasse, J. 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant Garde'. Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (trans. M. Shaw). University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. 2004, vii

[109] Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (trans. M. Shaw). University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. 2004, 33

[110] Murphy, R. *Theorizing the Avant Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1998, 22

[111] I will outline some alternative perspectives on montage during Chapter 2.

[112] Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance*, 19

[113] Murphy, 12

[114] Lyotard, 79

implicit in the theories above. This is present in Olson's approach to the poem as a transmission of energy "from where the poet got it [...] by the way of the poem itself [...] to the reader;"[115] in Ginsberg's reliance on the "natural inspiration of the moment"[116] to keep the poem moving; in Riley's identification of the instability in "the individual temporality of being a woman;"[117] in Mottram's striated ambivalences that regard the poem as a "process of relationships;"[118] and in Fisher's conception of poetry as something "always 'yet to be found' in the process of its making."[119] Therefore, as I will argue in certain sections of this thesis, performance can serve as a medium in which aspects of these poetics are put into practice.

The perspectives from Lyotard's postmodern art and the theories of the avant-garde do not, of course, exhaust the conceptualisations of 'the event'. For instance, in Terry Eagleton's *The Event of Literature*, the notion is analysed as a continually transformative encounter.[120] Likewise, in Badiou's philosophy, the event is broadly theorised as a rupture from being; more specifically, Badiou's 'events' represent that which is outside of ontology.[121] However, Deleuze—who also differs from Badiou in their respective concepts of 'being' and 'multiple'[122] —follows a slightly different approach. During a brief chapter in *The Fold*, Deleuze valorises the philosophies of A.N Whitehead as the third time, following the Stoics and Liebniz, when philosophy uttered "the echo of the question, *What is an event?*"[123] In doing so, Deleuze situates his notions of event alongside Whitehead's theories, where being and becoming, as well as permanence and change, operate on equal footing. Whitehead first approaches

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[115] Olson, C. 'Projective Verse'. *Collected Prose* (ed. D. Allen and B. Friedlander) University of California Press. USA. 1997, 241.

[116] Ginsberg, A. 'Notes on Finally Recording 'Howl''. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*. (ed. B. Morgan). Penguin. London. 2000, 229

[117] Riley, D. *'Am I that Name?' Feminism and the Category of Women in History*. Macmillan. Basingstoke. 1993, 96

[118] Mottram, E. 'Declaring a Behaviour'. *Ramz 1* (1977), n.p.

[119] Fisher, 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud', 1

[120] See Eagleton, T. *The Event of Literature*. Yale University Press. Cornwall. 2012. This study was published too late to be more fully incorporated into the investigations of this thesis.

[121] See, Badiou, A. *Being and Event* (trans. O. Feltham). Continuum. USA. 2007, pp. 173-265

[122] Broadly, Badiou disagrees with Deleuze's organicist approach, while Deleuze argues that Badiou's use of paradigm sets is only capable of producing numerically quantitative multiplicities. For a more detailed discussion of the distinctions between the respective theories of Deleuze and Badiou, see, for example, Badiou, A. *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (trans. L. Burchill). University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. 2000

[123] Deleuze, G. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (trans. T. Conley). Continuum. London. 2006, 86

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the notion of 'event' in *The Concept of Nature*, where he directs the reader's attention to Cleopatra's Needle, situated on the Thames Embankment in London:

> At first sight we should hardly call [the Needle] an event. It seems to lack the element of time and transitoriness. But does it? If an angel had made the remark some hundreds of millions of years ago, the earth was not in existence; twenty million years ago there was no Thames; eighty years ago, there was no Thames Embankment, and when I was a small boy Cleopatra's Needle was not there. And now that it is there, none of us expect it to be eternal.[124]

In other words, "the static timeless element" of the Needle's existence at the Embankment is a "pure illusion."[125] Instead, Whitehead identifies the presence of this monumental object as an event. Even as the Needle stands on the Embankment, it is undergoing a series of intricate changes; a physicist would observe that the Needle loses "some molecules" and gains "others" during the course of the day, and even "the plain man can see that it gets dirtier and is occasionally washed." [126] Consequently, we may only regard the Needle as a static permanence if we define it in exceptionally abstract terms. A more accurate explanation of the object, Whitehead argues, would note that within the general "structure of events", one can detect a "certain continuous limited stream of events" where "any chunk of that stream, during any hour, or any day, or any second has the character of being the situation of Cleopatra's Needle."[127] Ultimately, we might note that "at every instant, the mere standing-in-place of Cleopatra's Needle is an event: a renewal, a novelty, a fresh creation."[128]

Whitehead's treatment of Cleopatra's Needle arguably demonstrates his first tentative steps towards a theory where the 'event'—or *events*— are the "ultimate components of reality."[129] He provides a more systematic development of the concept within *Process and Reality*. Whereas the references to certain 'limited streams of events' in *The Concept of Nature* might be ambiguous, *Process and Reality* outlines distinctions between (eternal) events—which Whitehead also calls 'actual entities'— and actual occasions. An event, Whitehead argues, refers to "the more general sense

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[124] Whitehead, A.N. *The Concept of Nature*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1926, 166

[125] *Ibid*

[126] *Ibid*

[127] *Ibid*

[128] Shaviro, S. *Without Criteria: Kant, Whithead, Deleuze and Aesthetics.*.MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusets. 2009, 18

[129] *Ibid*

of a nexus of actual occasions, inter-related in some determinate fashion in one extensive quantum" while an actual occasion is defined as a "limiting type of an event with only one member." [130] In the context of Cleopatra's Needle, an actual occasion denotes the isolated incident where one glances at the monument; it is, as Steven Shaviro notes, the process "by which anything becomes" [131] and is experienced. By contrast, Whitehead's eternal event is broadly identified as a group of these incidents, such as the obelisk's presence on Thames Embankment throughout the day and beyond. In other words, Whitehead's theory invokes a world made of events, and nothing but events: "happenings rather than things, verbs rather than nouns, processes rather than substances," [132] where every day, hour, minute and second, "the continuing existence of Cleopatra's Needle is a new event." [133] However, Whitehead recognises that while we can theorise our interactions with the Needle as 'actual occasions', we may not discern these encounters empirically. Instead he posits that we "cannot recognize" an actual occasion, because "once it is gone" [134] it only exists as bygone data. In this respect, each actual occasion is discontinuous, as it is always ruptured by new encounters. At the same time, however, because each encounter inherits the data of the past occasions, these transformations are more akin to inflections rather than upheavals. Nevertheless, as each occasion is a new encounter, the continued existence of Cleopatra's Needle "needs to be actively produced." [135] Consequently, Whitehead situates the Needle in a continuous state of becoming, where the perceiver and the perceived are joined. [136] Ultimately, in this conception of the event, it becomes difficult to identify the perceiver and the perceived as two discrete objects with clearly defined positions and characteristics. More appropriately, they ought to be presented as the endpoints of a particular line.

I have only surveyed Whitehead's schemata in brief, but this construal already exhibits some similarities to the previously outlined concepts of 'event'. For instance, as Whitehead's theory of Cleopatra's Needle associates its stable presence with

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[130] Whitehead, A.N. *Process and Reality: An Essay In Cosmology*. (Corrected edition: ed. D.R. Griffin D.W. Sherburne). The Free Press. New York. 1978, 73

[131] Shaviro, 18

[132] *Ibid*, 17

[133] *Ibid*, 20

[134] Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 169

[135] Shaviro, 18

[136] By identifying the perceiver as something that "emerges from the world" as opposed to observing it, Whitehead situates us within the flux of actual occasions. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88

continuous inflections, it bears some resemblance to Lyotard's postmodern work. Specifically, by placing the monument in a state of becoming, Whitehead describes it in a nascent state, and intimates that this state remains constant.[137] At the same time, although Lyotard's artwork reveals the rules of 'what will have been done', Whitehead's actual occasions are perpetually renewed. How do these concepts relate to Deleuze's aforementioned chapter, which features[138] allusions to *The Concept of Nature*? Although Deleuze primarily discusses the notion from a cosmological position, he concludes the chapter with a description from a different sphere:

> A concert is being performed tonight. It is the event. Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space with their harmonics or submultiples. The sounds have inner qualities of height, intensity, and timbre. The sources of the sounds, instrumental or vocal, are not content only to send the sounds out: each one perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own. These are active perceptions that are expressed among each other, or else prehensions that are prehending one another: 'First the solitary piano grieved, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin hear its wail and responded to it like a neighbouring tree. It was like the beginning of the world...'[139]

This is a significant gesture. When Whitehead discusses the arts,[140] he appeals to an "aesthetic delight" that supersedes "judgement."[141] Deleuze, on the other hand, approaches the aesthetic encounter by analysing it alongside Whitehead's theorisation of an event; the descriptions of the cooperative perceptions and prehensions among the orchestra are analogous to the aforementioned active production between the perceiver and the perceived. Therefore, Whitehead's continuous becomings, and the multiple interconnected shifts within 'events' can also be applied to a performance.

Curiously, *The Fold* is not the only text in which Deleuze draws upon a musical analogy of this kind. The description of the concert bears a likeness to a passage that Deleuze, together with Guattari, articulates within *A Thousand Plateaus*:

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[137] This can be compared with Lyotard's nascent state of postmodernism. See Lyotard, 79

[138] When Deleuze argues that an "event does note just mean that 'a man has been run over" and that the Great pyramid is also an event, the first example is a direct reference to Whitehead's discussion of the event in *The Concept of Nature*, while the second is a variation on the discussion of Cleopatra's Needle. See Deleuze, *The Fold*, 86

[139] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 91

[140] Whitehead's 'lure of feeling' appears somewhat out of step with his metaphysical innovations. As Charles Olson notes in 'A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn', Whitehead is just the greatest, if you only read his philosophy. If you read him on anything else, especially [...] beauty, you realize [...] a man can't do everything". See Olson, C. 'A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn'. *Collected Prose* (ed. D. Allen & B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 302

[141] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 185

> When Glenn Gould speeds up the performance of a piece, he is not just displaying virtuosity, he is transforming the musical points into lines, he is making the whole piece proliferate. The number is no longer a universal concept measuring elements according to their emplacement in a given dimension, but has itself become a multiplicity that varies according to the dimensions considered[142]

As I outlined above, *The Fold* depicts the concert as an event where each of the performing voices and sounds, rather than standing out as individual, discreet points, form a nexus of connections where one 'perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own.' A similar relationship takes place during Gould's transformation of the musical points into lines. Thus, both situations are amenable to being considered alongside Whitehead's events, which emerge as a multiplicity of becomings. However, Deleuze and Guattari's references to Gould are not explicitly about events; instead, they describe the modalities of the 'rhizome'. In this respect, it is possible to parallel notions regarding Whitehead's 'inter-related nexus' of events with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomic interconnections. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, rhizomes are presented as an alternative model to the structures of a tree or a root. As these arborescent formations serve to plot points and fix "an order,"[143] they consequently generate fixed hierarchies and limitations. By contrast, a rhizome avoids such fixities. Within it, "there are no points or positions […] such as those found in a structure, tree, or a root," but "only lines"[144] which connect and expand across multiple dimensions. During this branching, the rhizome may also assume multiple forms: when it is broken, "shattered at a given spot" it "will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines,"[145] and it may also develop as "ramified surface extension[s] in all directions" or concretise "into bulbs and tubers."[146] While these descriptions are not unconditionally identical to Whitehead's philosophies, the rhizomic interconnections correspond with the broader implications of his theory. If reality is composed of actively produced events, it is difficult to distinguish between

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[142] Deleuze, G & Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (trans. B. Massumi). Continuum. London. 2004, 9

[143] *Ibid*, 7

[144] *Ibid*,9

[145] *Ibid*,10

[146] *Ibid*,7

subject and object within this flux. Consequently, an event cannot be surveyed through arborescent hierarchies and fixities, and a more plural approach is required.[147]

As the overall structure of this thesis is episodic, the intellectual frameworks of the subsequent chapters will vary according to the respective features of each performance. Therefore, I will not attempt to impose a unified theory of 'events' across the duration of this study. Although I will often deploy ideas from Whitehead and Deleuze, the discussions of this thesis will also draw upon the works of Derrida, Lefebvre, Foucault, Butler, Vaneigem and others. In this respect, perhaps the investigations of the case studies consistently share the spirit of Whitehead's theories, if not their specific contents. The position Whitehead outlines in *The Concept of Nature*, *Process and Reality* and *Adventures in Ideas*[148] is never presented as an avowal of absolutes. Rather, it promotes the viability of speculation and invention,[149] and remains open to revision. As the following chapters will demonstrate, similar contingencies and instabilities will often emerge during the moment of performance. Likewise, the intermedial methodologies of this thesis might also exhibit a certain rhizomic quality within the research itself. Ultimately, perhaps this pluralistic character could also be related to the manner in which some of the examined events traverse a multiplicity of cultural, political and poetical discourses.

1.4 'times / laid out in the woven arena'
An itinerary of the subsequent chapters

This episodic structure contains some further implications. As the trajectory of my study is focused on investigating invisible 'event histories', I have deliberately attempted to avoid centring the case studies in accordance with partisan delineations. For instance, although a number of the subsequent investigations focus on performances that took place in London, the chapter on Denise Riley's performance in Cambridge is not included in order to evoke the frequently debated binary divisions between the two cities.[150] Likewise, although the case studies begin with a discussion

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[147] I will discuss some of these ideas through Whitehead's theories in section 2.3 of Chapter 2.

[148] See Whitehead, A.N. *Adventures of Ideas*. Free Press. New York. 1967

[149] Also see Shaviro, xiii

[150] See, for instance, Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 55. Also see Duncan, A. 'Such that commonly each: *A Various Art* and the Cambridge Leisure Centre'. *Jacket 20* [Online] Available from: http://jacketmagazine.com/20/dunc-camb.html (Last accessed: 16/6/12)

of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' at Black Mountain, it is not my intention to position this performance as the point of origin for the events I examine during the following chapters.[151] At the same time, by analysing these events episodically, I will inevitably be unable to provide more than minor vignettes of innovative poetry and performance between 1950 and 1980. Indeed, throughout researching this project, I have been continually aware of the enormous scope of these histories. These three decades feature such a wealth of relevant material that it would take several volumes to address them in detail. Furthermore, due to methodological demands of this research, a lack of appropriate documentation may cause certain events to be difficult to examine. Nevertheless, I regret the absence of case studies on poets such as Bob Cobbing. His manifold performances and numerous activities as the organiser of Writers Forum would be too difficult to investigate via a single event. Indeed, Cobbing's work is more suitably addressed through a dedicated dissertation such as the one currently pursued by Steven Willey at Queen Mary University, London.[152] The activities around the 'Orpington Talks' of the late 1970s,[153] Mottram's Kings Poetry Series and the readings in Morden Tower in Newcastle would all provide academics with rich histories to investigate. I also regret that poets such as Bill Griffiths are only mentioned in passing during this thesis. Maggie O'Sullivan, Brian Catling, Carlyle Reedy and Lawrence Upton are just a few of the other poets who engaged with performance practices during the 1970s. Likewise, although poetry and performance in the American context has been subject to more analysis than its British counterparts, Jackson Mac Low's work is deserving of further attention. From 1980 to the present day, a long list of poets (and their performances) awaits closer study. To this end, I will conclude this thesis with brief observations about the current state of poetry and performance within the UK.

However, what is the itinerary for the studies of this thesis? In 'Chapter 2: No one remains, nor is, one', I will focus on the renowned 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' staged by John Cage at Black Mountain College during the summer of 1952.

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[151] See, for example, Middleton, *Distant Reading*, pp. 72-92, which contests the conventional view that the proliferation of readings since the fifties is an entirely new response to Olson's poetics of 'Projective Verse' by offering a larger history of poetry in performance from the Renaissance to Dada. Space does not permit this thesis to recount this history again, but I will discuss the presence of some more immediate sources for Cage's event. See Chapter 2.

[152] See http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/poetryinperformance/index.php

[153] See Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 118

Among the piece's many performers was the poet Charles Olson, but the nature of Olson's involvement remains ambiguous. The existing studies provide contradictory information regarding his contributions to the event, and the majority of these accounts also depict Olson as a reticent participant. This chapter, however, will trace alternative perspectives, based on statements by Olson and others, in order to suggest that some shared spaces can be opened up between the performance and Olson's poetics at that time. In doing so, the chapter will not seek to attribute any ownership of "Theatre Piece ♯ 1' to Olson. Rather, it will portray the event as and emblem of the communal convergences that formed a significant part of Black Mountain's ideology. To set the context for this investigation, I will first discuss Olson's frequent presence in studies of poetry and performance, before outlining the similarities and discrepancies among the various narratives regarding the event in Black Mountain. These will largely focus on Olson's responses to the event, and draw upon some of the poet's lectures and letters from his time at the college. Based on the suggestions within these documents, the chapter will develop an analysis of the parallels between 'Theatre Piece ♯1' and Olson's conception of kinetics and composition by field in 'Projective Verse', as well as some of his later prose.

To some degree, 'Chapter 3: Be kind to this place, which is your / present habitation?'[154] serves as a transition from American performances to those in the UK. The primary site of analysis for this case study is the First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall in 1965. However, while I will discuss the event from a wider perspective, and make references to a number of the readings that night, the chapter will ultimately focus on Allen Ginsberg's performance. As I will note during the chapter itself, this structure is not developed in order to depict the Incarnation from an Americanist perspective. Rather, it is chosen as a response to Ginsberg's key position within the event. Subsequent testimonies have often depicted the occasion as a mythical evening where, "for whoever suspended disbelief", poem after poem "resonated mind-expanding ripples of empathy" like "uncut and precious stones in a translucent pool,"[155] but my intention is to re-evaluate the proceedings and provide a more thorough, critical analysis of the evening. The chapter will begin with

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[154] Components of this chapter are a redevelopment from my MA dissertation on Ginsberg. See Virtanen, J. *'Voices crying for kindness': the Aesthetic and Social Functions of Allen Ginsberg in Performance*. MA dissertation. University of Kent. 2008

[155] Horovitz, M. 'Afterwords'. *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain*. (ed. M. Horovitz). Penguin. London. 1970, 337

brief references to Ginsberg's earlier performance at the Six Gallery, which will focus its analyses on the event's location. These observations will provide a context for exploring the relationship between the Incarnation and the cultural history of the Albert Hall. These discourses will draw considerable influence from Lefebvre's theories, as well as the broad ideological differences between the counterculture and the New Left. Within this context, I will approach Ginsberg's performance as an event that negotiates between numerous discordant aspirations. In part, these analyses will also challenge Theodore Roszak's claim that Ginsberg did not need to "even read his verses" in order to "make his compelling statement[s]"[156] to his audience.

The final stages of Chapter 3 will involve some speculations on the social situation of the Incarnation, and similar themes will also form a part of the investigations in 'Chapter 4: This blank space from which I speak'. Beginning with brief observations about the oddly homogenous roster for the Incarnation, this chapter ultimately focuses on Denise Riley's very first public reading, which she gave together with Wendy Mulford during the 1977 Cambridge Poetry Festival. The chapter first examines aspects of Riley's first collection, *Marxism for Infants*, in order to provide a frame of reference for the performance itself. Although a prima facie approach to the event might regard it as an exemplar of what Frederick C. Stern calls the formal poetry reading,[157] I will propose that Riley's performance actually enacts aspects of her poetics. In particular, the chapter will argue, Riley's reading exhibits early examples of the pronominal ambivalences contemporary critics have identified within her work. In addition to feminist performance art and the works of Foucault and Butler, I will draw upon my interview with Riley and recordings housed at the British Library, along with several other sources, in order to demonstrate how recurrent themes and ideas in Riley's work can already be detected in her first public performance. Ultimately, the chapter will suggest that certain aspects of the performance in Cambridge are consciously developed as challenges to the notion of performing authorship.

Questions regarding the performance of authorship are also present within the investigations of 'Chapter 5: Memories arrested in space'. This case study will focus on Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*, a collaborative performance from the late 1970s

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[156] Roszak, 128

[157] See Stern, F.C. 'The Formal Poetry Reading'. *The Drama Review* 35.3. 1991.pp. 67-84 Stern's essay will be discussed in more detail during Chapter 4.

involving Mottram, Bill Griffiths and Allen Fisher, and examine the myriad ways in which documentation, collaboration and memory may contribute to destabilising the poem and even the performance itself. As the event was never documented, the case study will develop these proposals from a more speculative space. By drawing upon the striated ambivalences within Mottram's essays about poetry and performance, the materials Mottram prepared for the event, his many articles about poetry and performance, as well as his key works on poetics such as 'Open Field Poetry' and *Towards Design in Poetry*, I will attempt to illustrate the peculiar relationship between Mottram's poetic fragments and the painter Jackson Pollock. The chapter will then analyse the distinctive features of *Pollock Record* in performance, based on Mottram's descriptions in published interviews, as well as Allen Fisher's personal recollections of the event. This section of the chapter will propose that while the work is seemingly designed to operate as an action-poem, the event of reading transforms *Pollock Record* into a multi-faceted performance concerned with memory.

The final case study of the thesis continues to explore poetry and performance via more elaborate, collaborative events. 'Chapter 6: You are invited to perform' focuses on Allen Fisher's performance project *Blood Bone Brain*, which took shape through several publications and performances during the 1970s. The chapter will begin by tracing the various genealogies of the project from Devon in 1972 to London in 1974. This section will entail discussions of the published and performed elements of the project in an attempt to demonstrate how the diverse components of *Blood Bone Brain* inform and influence one another as Fisher elaborates, changes and extends previous works in order to arrive at a new production. This overview will then centre on one particular version of the project, which was performed at The National Poetry Centre in London on October 28th 1974. The close analyses of this section will investigate the various intersections between the performance and its predecessors, as well as other projects such as *Edible* magazine and sections of the first book of *Place*. The chapter will eventually argue that the performance enacts many of the concepts involved with Fisher's poetics of 'facture', and consider the project in parallel with the Body without Organs in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I will finally conclude with suggestions regarding performance documentation in the context of the continued production of *Blood Bone Brain*.

In the aftermath of these myriad case studies, I will begin the concluding chapter with a synthesis of the performances from the preceding case studies. However, rather than attempt to enclose all of these disparate practices within one concept, the synthesis will outline general convergences between these events. This will be followed by an overall summary of the developments throughout this thesis, as well as the broader implications they hold for scholarship on poetry and performance. Specifically, these discussions will address the concept of performing authorship, and consider the significance of investigating the 'invisible' histories of innovative poetry and performance. In doing so, I will ultimately present broader suggestions that problematize such notions of invisibility. The postscript to the conclusion will provide some perspectives on the contemporary scene.

CHAPTER 2

'No one remains, nor is, one'
Olson, Black Mountain, and 'Theatre Piece # 1'

2.1 'The will to change'

Some contexts for Olson, performance and 'Projective Verse'

Charles Olson's presence within studies of poetry and performance is strikingly prevalent. For instance, if Bernstein's introduction to *Close Listening* is included in the calculation, ten of the anthology's seventeen essays make some reference to Olson.[1] Likewise, the poet features frequently in Middleton's *Distant Reading*. The apparent reason for this prominence is clarified in Lesley Wheeler's *Voicing American Poetry*. At the end of her study, Wheeler includes an appendix featuring a 'Selected List of Poetry Soundings since 1950', in which Olson appears twice. He is first mentioned in the second entry, which describes Cage's 'Theatre Piece # 1'[2] as a "mixed media event including poetry readings by Charles Olson and Mary Caroline Richards."[3] However, the second entry is far more revealing. When she mentions Olson's attendance at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965, Wheeler refers to him as the "godfather of post-war American poetry performance."[4] In some respects, the statement does not appear overwhelmingly radical. Indeed, Wheeler's comments are preceded by Benamou's views on performance. When Benamou argues that "performance has changed the scene of the arts" so much that both "poems and art events"[5] are now best regarded as performances, he cites Olson as the point of origin for these new poetics. Of course, not all critics agree with Benamou's estimations. For instance, *Distant Reading* seems suspicious of conventions that regard Olson as the

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[1] Bernstein, Perloff, Middleton, Damon mention the poet, as do Steve McCaffery, Dennis Tedlock, Bob Perelman, Peter Quartermain, Lorenzo Thomas and Ron Silliman. Some of their arguments will be discussed during the course of this chapter.

[2] The performance has also been called 'untitled event', or simply as 'the first happening'. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the event as 'Theatre Piece # 1'. In doing so, it is not my intention to investigate possibly connections between the performance at Black Mountain and Cage's later works with similar titles.

[3] Wheeler, 169

[4] *Ibid*, 170

[5] Benamou, 3

sole source for the new "proliferation of readings"[6] since the 1950s; instead, Middleton contextualises these events in a wider history of orality, rhetoric and elocution. While I do not wish to further pursue Middleton's specific line of enquiry, Olson's relationship to poetry and performance demands some deeper analysis. In particular, the frequency with which these studies refer to Olson can seem peculiar in the context of certain biographical details. For example, Tom Clark's description of Olson's performance at the San Francisco Poetry Center in 1957 is not necessarily indicative of a confident performer:

> To calm his shaky nerves, Olson began drinking some hours before the event, and when the time came to go, could not rouse himself to leave the apartment where he was staying. [His wife] Betty phoned [Robert] Duncan, who rushed over. "He was huddled under the covers, drunk. Here was this big man, scared to death by the occasion of performing verse before his peers. So exaggerating it that he had become totally intimidated. I had to reassure him—'Charles, you're just reading your poetry among friends, it won't have to last for days.'"[7]

This was not an isolated incident. When Clark recounts the aforementioned performance at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965, his biography depicts an uncharismatic and unfavourable image of the poet:

> Loaded on Dexedrine and gulping liberally from a fresh fifth of Cutty Sark, Olson managed only two poems before the 'reading' degenerated into a wandering, confused monologue on politics and poetry. Only intermittently coherent, laced with personal references that were largely obscure to his present audience, the long, swaggering confessional speech was actually more like a filibuster[8].

In this respect, because Clark identifies performances as a source of so "much psychic strain"[9] that they reduced Olson to an incoherent drunk, the valorising assertions by Wheeler and Benamou may seem strangely out of touch.

Naturally Clark's portrayals have not gone uncontested. They receive fierce criticisms in Ralph Maud's biography of Olson, which praises the poet's prowess in public speaking and debating during his time as a student.[10] Maud also argues that

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[6] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 72.

[7] Clark, T. *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poets Life*. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. 2000, 263

[8] *Ibid*, 325

[9] *Ibid*, 289

[10] See Maud, R. *Charles Olson at the Harbour*. Talon Books. Vancouver. 2008, pp. 27-28

these skills were a crucial facet to Olson's "development" as a "poet."[11] Thus, when Maud discusses the reading in Berkley, his impressions are the polar opposite of those in Clark's study:

> Olson did not ignore dissension, but he handled it with off-the-cuff remarks that are honest, self-assured and usually funny in a bemused sort of way [...] recognising he was talking about poems, instead of doing a poetry reading, he asked, along with the good humoured laughter of the audience "would you read the poems I mention. I mean literally?" There's lots of this good-humoured laughter throughout the evening, Olson functioning remarkably as a public poet, a poet thinking on his feet and being absolutely delightful.[12]

Evidently, the perceptions of the event embody a set of "contradictory dynamics."[13] Today, a recording of the reading in Berkeley is available online[14], which fortunately allows readers to form their own judgements of the event. Nevertheless, while Clark and Maud formulate starkly contrastive accounts of the evening, their disagreement centres on the audience response to Olson's performance. Neither account seeks to dispute the implicit notion that Olson's poetry occupied a secondary role during the evening. For instance, the newly available recording and the previously published transcripts[15] indicate that Olson read only a handful of poems during the entire evening. These performances can also seem quite tentative. When Olson prepared to read 'An Ode on Nativity', he began the poem three times before finding the right tone.[16] Moreover, the poem was left unfinished as the poet digressed to comment on how "moved"[17] he felt by his own material. In this respect, when Olson refers to the evening as a "political occasion" and expresses his wish to address "the convention floor"[18], he draws upon a very specific tradition of public poets. As Wheeler notes, both Emerson and Poe engaged in public lectures during the nineteenth century, and

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[11] Maud, *Charles Olson at the Harbour*, 26

[12] *Ibid*, 190

[13] Rifkin, L. *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde*. The University of Wisconsin Press. Madison. 2000, 14. My use of the phrase departs from Rifkin's.

[14] See Olson, C. 'Reading at the Berkeley Poetry Conference, July 23, 1965'. [Online] Available from: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Olson.php#7-23-65 (last accessed: 01/08/2012)

[15] See, for example, Olson, C. 'Reading at Berkeley'. *Muthologos: Collected Lectures and Interviews Vol. 1*. (ed. G.F. Butterick). Four Seasons Foundation. Bolinas, California. 1978. pp. 97-156. Butterick bases his edition on Ralph Maud's transcript of the reading, which was published in a limited edition in the 1960s. See Olson, C. *Reading at Berkeley*. Small Pr Distribution. USA. 1966. In addition, Maud has recently published a new edition of *Muthologos*. See Olson, C. *Muthologos* (ed. R. Maud). Talon Books. Vancouver. 2010. My references to 'Reading at Berkeley' are from Butterick's 1978 edition.

[16] See Olson, 'Reading at Berkeley', 100.

[17] Olson, 'Reading at Berkeley', 104

[18] *Ibid*, 110

many of the High Modernists were "accomplished poet-lecturers."[19] Indeed, this was the primary mode of performance for poets such as T.S. Eliot: when Eliot attracted a crowd of 14,000 to a baseball stadium in Minneapolis, it was for a lecture on 'The Frontiers of Criticism' instead of a poetry reading.[20] Likewise, when Olson declines audience requests to read his poems in Berkeley,[21] he appears to demonstrate a preference for discourse as his primary mode of performance. This approach seemingly supports Libbie Rifkin's estimation of Olson as "a pedagogue, more comfortable in the class room"[22] than a poetry reading.

At the same time, a 1966 film[23] of Olson reading at his home in Gloucester demonstrates that the poet was able to deliver extremely powerful renditions of his work. His verse dramas and dance plays[24] also indicate a strong interest in performance. Thus, in light of the evident discrepancies in Olson's public performances, it is unsurprising that the aforementioned studies primarily address his work from a different perspective. Indeed, Olson's relationship to performance is most frequently discussed through 'Projective Verse'. Wheeler's study is representative of a common approach to this manifesto. She regards the text as a treatise on poetry as musical scores or scripts for a "vocal performance,"[25] and subsequently argues that Olson positions the human voice as "poetry's primary element."[26] Similar notions are also presented in Perloff's essay, where Olson's lines are identified as "the embodiment of the breath" and the "signifier of the heart."[27] These arguments derive their inspiration from Olson's conception of poetry as a product of breath, "from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment he writes", which release the text from the "manuscript, press" and "the removal of verse from its producer and reproducer, the voice."[28] In other words, Olson wants the poem to record both the acquisitions of the poet's "ear" and the pressures of their "breath."[29]

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[19] Wheeler, 8

[20] See Ackroyd, P. *T.S Eliot*. Hamis Hamilton. London. 1984, 341

[21] See, for example, Olson, 'Reading at Berkeley', 130

[22] Rifkin, 20

[23] See *Outtakes from the NET film series: Charles Olson reads at his home* Online video accessed 07.07.12. Available from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dr_4xN4iZmM

[24] See, Olson, C. *The Fiery Hunt and Other Plays*. Four Seasons Foundation. Bolinas, California. 1977

[25] Wheeler, 23

[26] *Ibid*

[27] Perloff, 'After Free Verse' 99

[28] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 242

[29] *Ibid*, 241.

Therefore, critics like Wheeler identify the projective as a score for a performance because Olson designs the typographical and spatial aspect of the poem as indicators for the "pauses, the suspensions [...] of syllables" and "the juxtapositions [...] of parts of phrases", which instruct the reader on how the poem should be vocalised, "silently or otherwise."[30]

However, Olson's diction is also dubious, as the dismissive 'otherwise' suggests that 'Projective Verse' still gives primacy to a silent reading. Indeed, the relationship between the poet's 'embodiment of breath' and performance is ambiguous at best. In 'Projective Verse', Olson adopts a pedagogical register[31] that "mimics" Pound's "authoritarian tone"[32] to the extent that parts of the essay may seem unduly dogmatic. How strictly should the reader adhere to this projective 'score'? In Chapter 1, I criticised Oliver's methodology for *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*, where his peculiar insistence on a 'best reading' is an incompatible and alienating approach to post-war poetry and performance.[33] Yet, despite being decidedly 'post-Poundian', Olson's poetics can sound as restrictively stringent as Oliver's technique. The typographical designs are meant to indicate the poet's breath "exactly,"[34] which implies that all readers ought to arrive at an "absolute agreement" regarding the "standard"[35] mode of vocalisation. Of course, such exactitude is wildly improbable, and it is little wonder that certain critics have regarded this "inflated and subsequently redundant image of the poet's breath"[36] with some suspicion. For instance, Tedlock argues that Olson's adamance on invariably articulating the poem as the poet intended continues to subordinate the "voice and ear to the scanning eye"[37]. McCaffery also doubts whether Olson's "blinding fixity" on "a printed text" is capable of conveying the energies of the poem as well as the "anasemantic

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[30] *Ibid*, 245

[31] As evidenced by phrases such as "There it is, brothers, sitting there, for USE". See Olson, 'Projective Verse, 240

[32] Thomas, L. 'Neon Griot: The Functional Role of Poetry Readings in the Black Arts Movement'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, 308

[33] See section 1.1 in Chapter 1.

[34] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 245

[35] Oliver, x

[36] Herd, D. "From him only will the old state-secret come': What Charles Olson Imagined'. *English* (2010), 14

[37] Tedlock, D. 'Towards a Poetics of Polyphony and Translatability'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, 192

expenditure of performance"[38] might. Ultimately, as Silliman notes, "Olson's text is a deceptive score at best."[39] While Olson's commitment to the body and physiology is certainly clear, the 'breath' of 'Projective Verse' does not present a convincing poetics of embodiment. The intended departure from the "manuscript"[40] of closed verse seems tantamount to a sidestep towards the typescript.

The relationship between Olson's breath and performance is patently a fraught and problematic issue. Yet, I still maintain that 'Projective Verse' contains useful proposals regarding poetry and performance, particularly if the essay is approached from a different perspective. The dogmatic tones of the text belie the origins of its inception. Maud, for instance, has expressed doubts regarding the text's appropriateness as a manifesto. Because it was written closely after the composition of 'The Kingfishers'[41], Maud argues that the essay depicts "the kind of poetry-making [Olson] had just done, as he perceived it"[42], and consequently, its applicability "to any individual poem"[43] is subject to question. Nevertheless, although Maud rejects the notion that 'Projective Verse' outlines a thoroughly considered poetics, he argues that it does perform a "great act of liberation." [44] By cautiously rejecting the most dogmatic passages in the essay[45], Maud proposes that many of Olson's concepts were "vague enough to be useful"[46] for a new generation of poets. Behind its prescriptive pedagogy, 'Projective Verse' remains a speculative text that is open to revisions and contingencies. Furthermore, I would suggest that if we accept Maud's account of the essay's radix, 'The Kingfishers' actually exhibits features of Lyotardian postmodern texts. Like the artist in Lyotard's description, Olson writes the poem in search "for

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[38] McCaffery, S. 'Voice in Extremis'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, 170

[39] Silliman, R. 'Who Speaks: Ventiloquism and the Self in the Poetry Reading' *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, 370

[40] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 239

[41] See Olson, C. *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson (Excluding the Maximus Poems)*. (Ed. G.F. Butterick). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, pp. 86-93 Hereafter, this all quotations from collection will be cited as *Collected Poems*.

[42] Maud, R. *What Does Not Change: The Significance of Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers'*. Associated University Presses Inc. USA. 1998, 44

[43] *Ibid*, 60

[44] *Ibid*

[45] For Maud, 'Projective Verse' only "slipped when it tried with the typewriter business to be prescriptively specific". In this respect, Maud's criticisms of the essay relate to the problematic tones I outlined earlier in this chapter. See Maud, *What Does Not Change*, 60

[46] Maud, *What Does Not Change*, 60

new presentations", and operates "without rules"[47], which are only formulated after the act in writing 'Projective Verse'. In this respect, the poem might feature some "characters of an *event*."[48]

It would be tempting to pursue these parallels further by focusing exclusively on the concept of postmodernism,[49] but such a trajectory might quickly become mired in the external debates that surround the term.[50] In a letter to Robert Creeley, dated August 20th 1951, Olson declared, "my assumption is that any POSTMODERN is born in the ancient confidence that he *does* belong."[51] For Maud, this implies that the poet's understanding of the term did not involve an intensification of modernity's alienating effects, but a reversal of them.[52] Yet, in a subsequent passage of the same letter, Olson makes a more enigmatic statement: "there is nothing to be found. There is only [...] the search."[53] Here, the poet seemingly identifies 'the search' as a keyword for his postmodern human; like the personas of 'The Kingfishers', they too must "hunt among stones."[54] Thus, although Olson would almost certainly disagree with Lyotard's valorisation of Joyce's work[55] as an exemplar of modes that allow "the unpresentable to become perceptible [...] in the signifier,"[56] the two nevertheless share some common ground. Both identify the action of the postmodern artist as an *event* of searching. A similar movement is also evident in 'Projective Verse.' As the essay describes, the dynamics of the poem emerge during "the split second acts" of the composition, where one perception must "MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER" and where "*all* points [...] keep moving [...] as fast as"[57] they can. Indeed, while the concepts of breath may not be discernible throughout Olson's

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[47] Lyotard, 81

[48] *Ibid*

[49] Anderson finds Olson's use of the term to be "affirmative", and argues that in his work "aesthetic theory is linked to a prophetic history, with an agenda allying poetic innovation with political revolution in the classic tradition of the avant-gardes of pre-war Europe". See Anderson, P. *The Origins of Postmodernity*. Verso. London. 1998, 12

[50] See section 1.3 in Chapter 1.

[51] Olson, C & Creeley, R. *The Complete Correspondence: Vol. 7* (ed. G.F. Butterick). Black Sparrow Press. San Francisco. 1987, 115

[52] See Maud, *Charles Olson at the Harbour*, 133

[53] Olson & Creeley, 115

[54] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 93

[55] As Maud Notes, Olson was frequently critical of Joyce's writing, as well as his "attitude to language itself". See Maud, R. *Charles Olson's Reading*. Southern Illinois University Press. USA. 1996, 12

[56] Lyotard, 80

[57] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 240

oeuvre[58], the process of acting within an event is present in both *A Special View of History*'s notion of life as "the historical function of the individual" [59] and the ongoing "undone business" [60] of *The Maximus Poems*. Consequently, despite its problematic veneration of breath, perhaps Olson's essay still presents a compelling "stance toward reality."[61]

The present intention for this chapter is to consider the dynamic process of relationships that is enacted during a performance event. In due course, I will conduct a more detailed analysis of how these concepts appear in 'Projective Verse'. However, rather than investigate them from a broader perspective, I will observe them in one particular time and place: Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952. Specifically, I intend to study these concepts in parallel with Cage's 'Theatre Piece # 1', as well as the wider context of the communal convergences that took place at the school. In the subsequent sections, I will first detail Olson's contributions and responses to the event, before pursuing a closer examination of the poetics in 'Projective Verse' alongside the effects of the performance.

2.2 'The features are...'

What happened during 'Theatre Piece # 1' and how did Olson respond to it?

The significant contributions that Black Mountain College made to Olson's poetic development are now largely a matter of academic consensus.[62] However, it is interesting to note that Olson's own descriptions of the institution are charged with the same dynamism as his aforementioned letter to Creeley and the speeds in 'Projective Verse'. For example, when writing an open letter to the faculty in 1952, the poet compared Black Mountain to Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies, and argued that if Princeton's Institute was "a kind of assembly point of ideas", Black Mountain should aspire to be "an assembly point of *acts*."[63] The emphasis on acts is

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[58] For instance, when listening to tapes of Olson reading, Silliman finds that the poems are not always performed according to the typescript. See Silliman, 370

[59] Olson, C. *The Special View of History* (ed. A.Charters). Oyez. Berkeley. 1970, 18

[60] Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 57

[61] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 239

[62] See, for example, Fredman, S. *The Grounding of American Poetry: Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition*. Cambridge University Press. USA. 1993; Sherman, P. *Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain and recent American Poetry*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge. 1978

[63] Olson, C. 'A letter to the faculty of Black Mountain College'. *Olson: The Journal of the Charles*

by no means an isolated occasion. Earlier, I argued that 'Projective Verse' identifies the poem as 'split second acts', and the term frequently features in essays Olson wrote during his involvement with the college. In 'Human Universe' the poet describes the contrast between 'speech' and 'discourse' as the difference "between language as an act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant."[64] Similarly, when *The Special View of History* describes life as the 'historical function' of the individual, it also identifies 'function' as "how a thing acts."[65] In other words, Olson consistently identifies each split second event as an instance of *doing*. Therefore, when the poet reportedly declared that he required a college to think with,[66] he did not simply call for a multiplicity of perspectives. If colleges were an assembly point of acts, such 'thinking' would emanate from active and participative exchanges.

When 'Theatre Piece # 1' was performed as a part Black Mountain's summer programme in 1952, it involved many of the college's faculty members, including Olson, in its proceedings. As a mixed media arts event, the performance could be considered a paragon of the types of gatherings that Olson sought. Yet, the various accounts concerned with the poet's participation in the performance present polarised views. The issues generated by these contradictions are also compounded by the peculiar standing that 'Theatre Piece # 1' holds today. It is a 'canonical' performance of which there is hardly any direct evidence. The event was not recorded, and the only surviving component of its score is a rather cryptic note for "the projectionist,"[67] which was discovered among Cage's papers after his death in 1992:

> Projector:
>
> > Begin at 16 min
> >
> > play freely until 23 min
> >
> > Begin again at 24:30
> >
> > play freely until 33:45

Olson Archives 8 (Fall 1977), 28

[64] Olson, C. 'The Human Universe'. *Collected Prose*. (Eds. D. Allen, B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 156

[65] Olson, *The Special View of History*, 18

[66] See, for example, Creeley, R. 'On Charles Olson'. *Jacket Magazine 12* [Online]. Available from: http://jacketmagazine.com/12/olson-p-cree.html (last accessed: 07/07/12)

[67] Fetterman, W. *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performance*. OPA/Harwood Academic Publishers. Amsterdam. 1996, 103

<center>Begin at 38:20</center>

<center>play freely until 44:25.[68]</center>

Consequently, the current understanding of the performance is largely based on several oral and written histories. Cage first discussed the event during an interview with Schechner and Michael Kirby in 1965;[69] seven years later, Duberman's study of Black Mountain[70] included a range of commentaries from various participants; although Harris' account[71] primarily uses these antecedent documents, she also incorporates new interviews to her study; Fetterman elaborates upon these sources and conducts further investigations in order to collate a panoramic history of the performance, which openly discloses the contradictions therein. Yet, irrespective of this proliferation of reports[72], the details of 'Theatre Piece # 1' still remain speculative. Even general facts and circumstances, such as the event's duration, "the time of day it was performed and the date are all"[73] contestable issues.
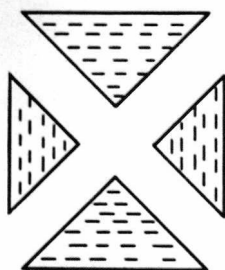
<center><i>Fig. 2.1</i>: Seating plan for the event, as described by Cage.
Reproduced from Schechner & Kirby, 53</center>

Due to the imprecisions within these disparate documents, all in-depth examinations of the performance—including this chapter—are necessarily tentative.

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[68] Reproduced in Fetterman, 103

[69] The interview originally appeared in *Tulane Drama Review*, but it has since been reprinted in an anthology of essays on Happenings. All quotations in this chapter are from the latter publication. See Schechner, R & Kirby, M. 'Interview with John Cage'. *Happenings and Other Acts* (ed. M.R. Sandford). Routledge, New York. 1995, pp. 51-72

[70] See Duberman, M. *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. E.P Dutton & Co. Inc. New York. 1972

[71] See Harris, M.E. *The Arts at Black Mountain College*. MIT Press. Cambridge Massachusetts. 2002

[72] Shorter, more fragmented accounts have also been published. See, for example, Kostelanetz, R. *Conversing with Cage*. Lime Light Editions. New York. 1988; Lane, M (ed). *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds- An Anthology of Personal Acounts*. The University of Tennessee Press. Knoxville. 1990; Katz, V (ed). *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*. Museo Nacional Arte Reina Sofia. Spain. 2002

[73] Fetterman, 97

However, the proceedings can be briefly summarised as follows. Cage devised the event "one afternoon after lunch and" presented it "that evening"[74] in the dining hall, where the audience was seated in a "square composed of four triangles."[75] Each performer was assigned individual time brackets during which "they were free to act as long as they wanted,"[76] and although the some performers used pre-prepared materials, no "specific assignments"[77] were given. All of "the performances were independent"[78] and they all began at various points throughout the event. In this respect, although 'Theatre Piece # 1' was performed only once, it still demonstrates the general features of Cage's indeterminate compositions:

> The division of the whole into parts, the structure, is determinate. The sequence of these parts, however, is indeterminate, bringing about the possibility of a unique form, which is to say a more unique morphology of the continuity, a unique expressive content for each performance[79]

The individual performances included a lecture by Cage,[80] Merce Cunningham "dancing in and around the chairs,"[81] and David Tudor "on piano performing a Cage [...] composition."[82] Rauschenberg's paintings were displayed, as was a motion picture by Nicholas Cernovitch. At some point, M.C. Richards climbed on a ladder and read poems to the audience—although it is unclear whether these poems were her own[83] or by Edna St. Vincent Millay.[84] In the end, the event concluded with a "ritual"[85] where coffee was served from cups that had previously been left on the chairs in the audience.[86]

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[74] Harris, 227

[75] Cage, in Schechner & Kirby, 53

[76] *Ibid*

[77] Harris, 227

[78] Fetterman, 99

[79] Cage, J. 'Composition as Process;' *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Marion Boyars. London. 2009, 35

[80] According to Fetterman, recollections regarding the possible topics for the lecture vary between Meister Eckhart, Zen Buddhism, Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence. Fetterman also notes that although Cage, later in his life would not remember what he had performed, "in 1961 he would state that it was the Juilliard Lecture" If this is so, Fetterman notes, the "total duration of...[the event] would have been 45 minutes". See Fetterman, 100

[81] Harris, 228

[82] Clark, 227.

[83] See Fetterman, 99

[84] See Duberman, 354

[85] Cage, in Schechner & Kirby, 53

[86] See Harris, 228
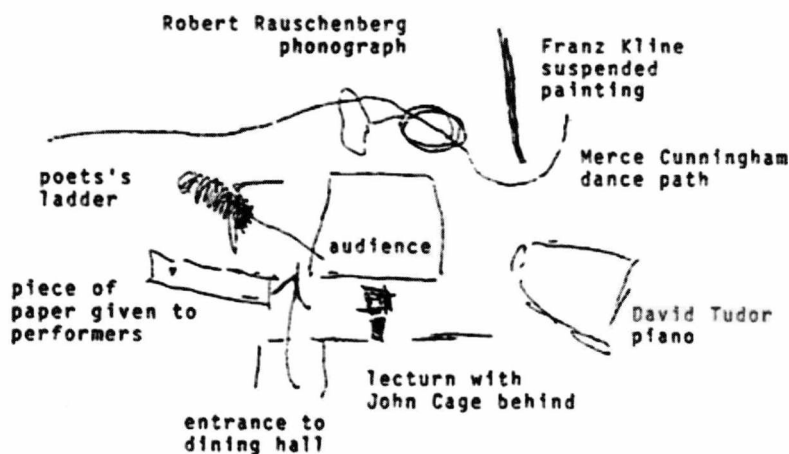
Fig 2.2: The location for the various performers, according to M.C. Richards
Reproduced from Fetterman, 100

Although this summary portrays 'Theatre Piece # 1' as spontaneous activity, the performance was not created in a vacuum. In fact, mixed media events were relatively commonplace in Black Mountain. For instance, Katz has noted that the summer programme of 1951 featured several Light Sound Movement Workshops, which became an important precedent to Cage's event.[87] Described by W.P Jennerhan as "sparks which glowed briefly" before they "were done,"[88] these events were rapidly devised intermedial performances that often developed via indeterminate structures, and incorporated staff from across faculty:

> Events were limited to a minute or so. All costumes were hand-done for the bit [...] all the components in the final version of the piece were thrown into the mix early on. No adding in of the music late in the game and costume and lighting in the last minute.[89]

Moreover, when Cage developed his aesthetics during the 1940s, he frequently adopted and adapted "earlier avant-garde ideas,"[90] such as those of Italian Futurism. This practice of adaptation was continued with the inception of 'Theatre Piece # 1', which arose from some of the active exchanges at Black Mountain.[91] During the summer of 1952, Cage, Tudor and Richards were all reading Antonin Artaud's *The*

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[87] See Katz, 187

[88] Jennerhan, in Katz, 188

[89] *Ibid*, 187

[90] Joseph, B.W. '"A Therapeutic Value for City Dwellers": The Development of John Cage's Early Avant-Garde Aesthetic Position'. *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1935-1950* (ed. D.W. Patterson). Routledge. New York. 2009, 135

[91] In addition, Kirby argues that Cage "integrated various dominant strains of the Futurist-Dada tradition in his work" and that the simultaneous presentation of unrelated events which characterises 'Theatre Piece # 1' is "clearly derived from Dada activities". See Kirby, M. 'Introduction'. *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (ed. M. Kirby). Sidwick and Jackson. London. 1965, 30

Theatre and Its Double, where the essays criticized Eurocentric theatre for its over-emphasis on dialogue. By doing so, Artaud argued, practitioners failed to recognise the "physical language" of theatre, which was "aimed at the senses and independent of speech."[92] As Derrida notes, such logocentricity effectively confined theatre to a 'theological' stage that was "dominated by speech, by a layout of primary logos which does not belong to a theatrical site and governs it from a distance."[93] Artaud did not argue for the abolition of speech in its entirety, but he intended to dismantle the logocentric hierarchies of European theatre by reconfiguring the "intended purpose" of speech, especially in order to "lessen its status" and "to view it as something other than a way of guiding human nature."[94] In particular, Artaud insisted on developing a style of theatre that was not "derived from any other art,"[95] and where dialogue was treated "as something concrete" that was deployed in a "spatial sense, uniting it with everything in theatre that is spatial and significant in the tangible field."[96] For Artaud, one progenitor for his 'theatre of cruelty' was Balinese theatre,[97] but while Cage was also drawn to Eastern culture, his response to Artaud's text followed a different course. Cage combined *The Theatre and Its Double* with the implicit proposals in the Huang Po *Doctrine of Universal Mind*—where "the centricity within each event is not dependent on other events"[98]—and set out devise performances where music, dance, poetry and painting would "go together independently", instead of "one controlling the other."[99] Consequently, 'Theatre Piece # 1' was profoundly connected to the milieu at Black Mountain: the ideas and acts exuding from the college all fed into the performance.

But where is Olson? I deliberately omitted his contributions from the summary above, as his relationship to the performance is far more complex. On a prima facie reading, one would assume the poet was an enthusiastic collaborator. During the previous summers at Black Mountain, Olson frequently participated in mixed media events. In 1950, Nick Cernovich and Frank Moore converted his poem 'Pacific

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[92] Artaud, A. *The Theatre and Its Double*. (trans V. Corri). Calder Publications. London. 2005, 27

[93] Derrida, 296

[94] Artaud, 53

[95] Derrida, 300

[96] Artaud, 53

[97] See Artaud, pp. 38-48

[98] Duberman, 350

[99] Cage, in Kostelanetz, 104

Lament' to a dance "with slide projections to simulate the movement of water."[100] The poem itself—written in memory of a drowned member of the crew for "U.S.S Growler"[101]—is hardly Olson's finest achievement, but its frequent repetitions of 'turn' and 'stir' conceivably provided Moore and Cernovich with a basis for movement. The following summer, Olson took part in an elaborate "evening of 'glyph gifts'"[102], where the performances took place across numerous interfacing practices:

> Olson presented Ben Shahn with a glyph poem and in turn Shan presented Olson with a glyph painting. [Katherine Litz] then presented the community with a glyph dance with music by [Lou] Harrison and décor utilizing the Shahn painting enlarged.[103]

It would appear as if the 'glyph gifts' were an inspiring occasion for Olson. Later that summer, on August 7th, the poet wrote to W.H Ferry, the former director of communications at the CIO Political Action Committee founded to support Roosevelt. Although Olson's recurrent comments about Black Mountain's finances suggest that the letter was written as a plea for fundraising, his enthusiasm for the performance appears sincere. He refers to the evening as "a happy business"[104], and describes the event as more enriching "than any other educational"[105] system he has encountered:

> despite the wearing *closeness* of everything and everybody [...](and a little because of it?) Shahn teaches Olson one hell of a lot about his verse, Katy [sic] Litz picks up clues for pushing her own important advance in dance, Harrison makes music for Abby Shahn and others, Bernarda comes to listen to Olson when she can and shoots in shots of perceptions about the stuff he reads to the students which opens the eyes of sd [sic] students and lets them find out how to hear, how to dig the jug out of their own ears and clear the gurry of their senses[106]

Indeed, Olson valorises these collective and mutual developments as a paradigm of modern scholarship:

> I do not that think that one can overstate—at this point in time, America, 1951—the importance of workers in different fields of the arts and of knowledge working so closely together [...] that they find

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[100] Harris, 210

[101] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 15

[102] Harris, 221

[103] Litz, in Katz, 186

[104] Olson, C, 'A letter to W.H. Ferry'. *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives* 2 (Fall 1974), 13

[105] *Ibid*, 8

[106] *Ibid*, 10

out, from each other, the ideas, forms, energies, and the whole series of
kinetics and emotions now opening up out of the quantitative world[107]

In other words, the letter to Ferry presents collaborative performances and exchanges
as a part of the poet's proposed solution to "the problems of education"[108] in 1950s
America.

Considering that 'Theatre Piece # 1' was staged only a year after Olson wrote
to Ferry, his relationship to this particular event is quite bewildering. Firstly, there is a
great degree of ambiguity in the accounts related to Olson's contribution. The specific
poems he read are unknown. Duberman briefly suggests that a part of the text "was in
French,"[109] but provides no further details and none of the subsequent studies
corroborate this claim. In fact, the various reports disagree on the very nature of
Olson's performance. Both Cage[110] and Richards[111], for example, remember that the
poet climbed on the same ladder that Richards had used, and read some of his poems
from there. However, Tudor[112] and David Weinrib claim that Olson had written a
poem in fragments, which was distributed to "a section of the audience"[113] who would
then act as readers. Perhaps the only plausible conclusion is that both activities took
place. [114] Moreover, the comments regarding Olson's overall approach are
dramatically different from his fervid letter to Ferry. Tudor suggests that Olson, in
distributing his fragments to the audience, was attempting something "subversive,"[115]
which implies that he planned to challenge the procedures of the event. According to
Weinrib, Olson seemed noncommittal about the performance, and only took part to go
"along with the joke."[116] In either case, the poet appears to regard the event with a
certain degree of disapproval. Although 'Theatre Piece # 1' shares broad similarities
with the collaborative events that Olson had praised a year earlier, it would appear as
if he was a reluctant participant at best.

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[107] *Ibid*, 11

[108] *Ibid*, 15

[109] Duberman, 357

[110] See Kirby and Schechner, 53

[111] See Fetterman, 191

[112] In an interview with Fetterman, Tudor commented: "Charles Olson didn't do anything himself, but he organized some of his students". See Fetterman, 101

[113] Weinrib, in Duberman, 354

[114] Also see Duberman, 357

[115] Tudor, in Duberman, 354

[116] Weinrib, in Duberman, 355

It would be inaccurate to construe Olson's antipathy as a dramatic change of heart. As his aforementioned letter to the faculty demonstrates, he still regarded Black Mountain as an 'assembly point of acts' in 1952. Instead, his hostility seems specifically focused on Cage. Several texts by Olson—all of them dated between 1952 and 1962—contain explicit or implicit criticisms about the composer, of which the final stanza to 'A Toss, for John Cage' provides an apt example:

> We come to it: is it any more than something
> we don't need analogy for, or anecdote, no quote
> not even on magnetic tape, no matter how we need
> all the means that any of us, in fact just such tricks
> as you have taught us, so long as not one last of us forgets
> —so long as you don't leave out—that you too, have in mind
> you taught yourself the tricks[117]

Although the poem does not address 'Theatre Piece # 1', Olson's attack is contemporaneous to the performance. The references to 'magnetic tape' relate to *Williams Mix*, which Cage had begun composing in the summer of 1952.[118] Like 'Theatre Piece # 1', *Williams Mix* combined determinate and indeterminate structures. Cage organised the taped sounds to six different categories, which he also divided to subcategories according to "their frequency, timbre and amplitude."[119] However, the collation of these materials was also subjected to *I Ching* manipulations,[120] whereby Cage would arrive at his decisions through chance.[121] It is this technique that Olson's poem dismisses as 'tricks', although his actual argument is rather more specific. In 1954, the poet's 'Against Wisdom as Such' criticised the *I Ching* for treating "wisdom as separable"[122] from the human; in this context, when 'A Toss' reminds its addressee that they taught themselves the tricks, Olson declares a claim for agency. In

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[117] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 273.

[118] See, Katz, 137.

[119] Pritchett, J. *The Music of John Cage*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1993, 90

[120] See Ross, A. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. Picador. London. 2008, 402

[121] "The *I Ching* is based on the interpretation of figures made of six solid or broken lines, which represent the basic the basic principles of weak and strong, *yin* and *yang*. There are sixty-four such hexagrams, which are numbered one to sixty-four, and which are said to represent various situations in life. To consult the *I Ching*, one throws three coins to determine each individual hexagram. These lines, whether strong (solid) or weak (broken), may be either stable or moving; moving lines are considered to be in the process of changing into their opposites. If the hexagram obtained in consulting the book contains any moving lines, a second hexagram is formed in addition to the first by changing all the moving lines into their opposites". See Pritchett, 70

[122] Olson, C, 'Against Wisdom as Such', *Collected Prose*. (Eds. D. Allen, B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 260

part, Cage was drawn to chance operations as a "negation of impulses"[123] that extended beyond "personal taste and ego"[124] and thus avoided the seemingly 'oversimplified' structures of a single mind.[125] Olson's riposte, however, asserts that because these procedures are still imposed by Cage himself, he is unable to disassociate his ego from his 'tricks'. Furthermore, as the 'Theory of Society' in 'Proprioception' demonstrates, Olson found the implications of Cage's work to be deeply objectionable:

the greatest present danger

the area of pseudo-sensibility:

games

randomness

haphazard

(I Ching-
ness)

sorts

accidence

(anything goes or
all *is* interesting Or
nothing is[126]

Here, all listed symptoms for 'pseudo-sensibility' involve aspects of Cage's aesthetics. Therefore, the joint criticisms of 'A Toss' and 'Theory of Society' indicate that Olson allowed no concessions for Cage's work: his indeterminacy was either insincere, or it amounted to haphazard games that lacked an appropriate gravitas.

In the case of 'Theatre Piece # 1', Olson's objections seem motivated by the latter notions of 'pseudo-sensibility'. In a memo written to Cage and Stefan Wolpe in 1952, the poet chastises the two for failing to articulate the "actionableness"[127] of their

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[123] Cage, J. 'Art is Either a Complaint or do Something Else'. *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words Art Music* (ed. J. Retallack). Wesleyan University Press. Hanover. 1996, 5

[124] Richards, S. *John Cage As...* .Amber Lane Press. Oxford. 1996, 10

[125] See Cage, J. 'Indeterminacy'. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Marion Boyars. London. 2009, 260

[126] Olson, C. 'Proprioception'. *Collected Prose*. (Eds. D. Allen, B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 186

[127] Olson, C. 'Me-mo to Stefan and John' *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives # 8* (Fall 1977), 41

art. Considering the primacy that 'acts' occupy in Olson's lexicon, this is a serious charge. Although recent critics such as Perloff or Joan Retallack have celebrated Cage for "making us look at the [...] sights and sounds we really see,"[128] alongside presenting his aleatory technique as "a living practice" that values the "freedom of all elements,"[129] Olson deemed this style to be a "metaphysical circus"[130] that is incapable of delivering more than a hollow pageant. On this reading, his criticisms relate to a specific moment in time. During the late 1960s, some of Cage's work began to express an explicitly political outlook,[131] but in the summer of 1952, the composer's approach was still one of aestheticized quietism. Consequently, by promoting the independence of the performances during 'Theatre Piece # 1', Cage designed the event as an experimental action that was "not concerned with its excuse", as – like "the sand" or "air"—it needed "none."[132] However, while Cage delighted in the "disinterestedness" of merely presenting "what happens,"[133] Olson insisted on the value of statements; as his memo to Cage and Wolpe declares, "vocabulary does not lag behind—it has only not been sufficiently circulated."[134] In this respect, perhaps Olson found the 'actionableness' of 'Theatre Piece # 1' insufficient because it lacked a specific statement. Without it, perhaps a performance of unrelated solos could only exist as a spectacle and—for a man who regarded poets as "the only pedagogue[s] left, to be trusted"[135]—a mere spectacle would not suffice.

Such a conclusion could only be asserted with caution, as it overlooks certain crucial facts. Despite Olson's scathing criticisms, certain documentation indicates that he did not reject 'Theatre Piece # 1' in its entirety. For example, Francine Du Plessix Gray—who was one of Olson's students during the summer programme of 1952—recalls a class where the poet enthused about the performance, hailing it as "one of the

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[128] Perloff, M. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Northwestern University Press. Evanston, Illinois. 1981, 338

[129] Retallack, J. 'Poethics of a Complex Realism'. *John Cage: Composed in America* (eds. M. Perloff & C. Junkerman). The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1994, 258

[130] Olson, C. Theatre Institute Lecture on Language'. *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives # 8* (Fall 1977), 52

[131] For a more thorough discussion of this, see, for example, Leonard, G.J. *Into the Light of Things: Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1994, pp. 174-185

[132] Cage, 'Composition as Process', 39

[133] Cage, J. 'Lecture on Nothing' *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Marion Boyars. London. 2009, 111

[134] Olson, 'Me-mo to Stefan and John', 41

[135] Olson, C. 'The Gate and the Center'. *Collected Prose* (ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander) University of California Press. USA. 1997, 170

glories of the twentieth century."[136] Moreover, a lecture Olson prepared for Black Mountain's theatre arts institute in the autumn of 1952 includes a more comprehensive analysis of the event. Of course, the lecture reiterates many of Olson's aforementioned criticisms: the poet advises his students to avoid the principle of "chance", as this will only lead them to the "ultimate ennui" of "sensationalism—that nothing really matters."[137] Yet, a crucial component of the discourse also articulates certain favourable views about the innovations in 'Theatre Piece # 1'. In particular, Olson argues:

> there is a very exciting school—of which I have found myself often more a member than the story telling way [...] And it is a school which says essentially *that the theatre itself* is its own story— there is, in fact, no play—no text—there is only the action—the sensation—of the audience & actors or things together at that one time in that one place & that what happens then & there amongst them all is all the drama there is. In short, that the drama as the theatre, is not any written thing at all! [138]

Given that the lecture was scheduled to take place relatively soon after the performance, it seems likely that 'Theatre Piece # 1' is at least one of Olson's referents. The procedures of the occasion certainly seem isomorphic with the poet's description. The lecture continues:

> this is a more valuable principle of attack that you might think— especially, I'd say, exactly to any writer for the theatre—& exactly for the reasons like those I say govern (1) speech as it now is & (2) story-telling as it has become once more an oral, not a literate or syntactical phenomenon. And I think the reasons can be wrapped up in one word: *kinetics*[139]

Immediately after this claim, Olson expands upon the significance of this such *kinetics*:

> Man has hugely shifted his attention from things to what happens between things. And as a result all manner of new forces have been let loose & once loose involve each of us in a further act of attention, what do we do with them[...] how do you make *motion itself* a solid? By

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[136] Gray, F.D.P. 'Black Mountain: The Breaking (Making) of a Writer'. *Black Mountain: Sprouted Seeds—An Anthology of Personal Accounts* (ed. M. Lane), The University of Tennessee Press. Knoxville. 1990, 306.

[137] Olson, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language',52

[138] *Ibid*

[139] *Ibid*

what stance do you turn it into something human attention can focus on?[140]

Here, the key idea is the shift from 'things' to 'what happens between' them. Olson uses the phrase several times during the early 1950s. Butterick notes that the expression originated from Natasha Goldowski, who taught physics at Black Mountain,[141] but Olson used it far and wide. In the letter to the faculty of the college, the dictum spearheads a call for interdisciplinary collaborations;[142] it is used to a similar end in Olson's earlier correspondence with W.H. Ferry,[143] and likewise in 'The Gate and the Center', where working "no longer alone but in teams" is depicted as one of the "last acts of liberation"[144] offered by science. Ergo, the lecture makes a significant statement. Despite his reservations, Olson appears to connect the *kinetics* of this particular 'school' of theatre with his pedagogical ideologies. In this respect, it would appear as if the poet is tentatively constructing parallels between his work and that of 'Theatre Piece # 1'. Ultimately, this section of the lecture concludes:

> I *insist*, let's not one of us—especially we of language—think that the theatre of theatre isn't capable of teaching us big lessons. For what it does is two valuable parallel things to what the breakdown of language forms has done. First, it declares the several elements of theatre are a *field* in which & by which the composition has properly to be achieved; & (2) sharply dramatizes that *it is motion* [sic] is the problem, even if—I take it—it offers us no hope that it itself can achieve any *morality of motion*[145]

Olson's position becomes clear. In the end, his 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language' neither explicitly praises nor denounces 'Theatre Piece # 1'. On the one hand, he recognises that such events can reconfigure the dramatic and linguistic relations within a performance. At the same time, he appears troubled by some of these reconfigurations. The lecture's neologism, theatre of theatre,[146] is plausibly a reference to Artaud's theatre of cruelty, which—as I argued earlier—sought to challenge the 'theological' stage where an absent "author-creator" regulates "the

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[140] *Ibid*

[141] See the editor's note to Olson, 'A Letter to the Faculty of Black Mountain College', 33

[142] See Olson, 'A Letter to the Faculty of Black Mountain College', 32

[143] See Olson, 'A letter to W.H. Ferry', 15

[144] Olson, 'The Gate and the Center', 169

[145] Olson, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language', 53

[146] As 'Theatre Piece # 1' was first performed without a title, I believe Olson is offering this neologism as a possible description for the event.

meaning of representation" to a "seated public" of "consumers" and "spectators."[147] Olson had also read *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1952,[148] and despite their mutual distaste for spectatorism,[149] the poet seemingly disagreed with Artaud's views on language. For Olson, "theatre is language" more than "all the other things"[150] it involves; the "music, light, colour, sets and no-sets" all amount to "intensifications"[151] of its lexical content. If the hierarchy of these boundaries were to be disrupted, Olson believes that the 'theatre of theatre' would be unable to present a discrete message. Yet, Olson's boundaries also seem paradoxical. His keywords for the innovations in the 'theatre of theatre'—*kinetics* and *field*—are both directly derived from 'Projective Verse'. Indeed, his description of theatre's several elements as a 'field' is remarkably similar to the "several forces"[152] that the poet must examine during field composition. Ultimately, despite his severe reservations, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language' reveals that Olson was tentatively attempting to establish connections between 'Theatre Piece # 1' and his poetics at the time.

2.3 'Despite the discrepancy, this is also true…'

A parallel analysis of 'Theatre Piece # 1' and Olson's poetics

In light of 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language', perhaps a more complete understanding of Olson's relationship to 'Theatre Piece # 1' may be approached via 'Projective Verse'. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that one of the more compelling facets of the essay is its stance towards reality, which broadly involves a demand for active participation during the instance of composition. Is it possible to discern a similar stance in the kinetic field of 'Theatre Piece # 1'? What is the

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[147] Derrida, 296

[148] Butterick argues this was possibly as early as May that year. Olson would later advise Cid Corman to publish Richard's translation of *The Theatre and Its Double* in Corman's *Origin*. See the editors note to Olson, 'Me-mo to Stefan & John', 42

[149] "Spectatorism crowds out participation as condition of culture [...]All individual energy and ingenuity is bought off—at a suggestion box or the cinema. Passivity conquers all". See Olson, 'Human Universe', 160

[150] Olson, C. 'Notes of Language and Theatre'. *Collected Prose*. (Eds. D. Allen, B. Friedlander). University of California Press. Berkeley. 1997, 259

[151] Olson, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language', 54

[152] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 240

correlation between the performance and the poetics? Perhaps this line of enquiry is best to begin by observing how 'kinetics' and 'field' act within Olson's poetry.

In 'Projective Verse', the two concepts are closely related. Olson describes the kinetics of the work as a transmission of energy "from where the poet got it [...] by the way of the poem itself [...] to the reader,"[153] which acts as one dimension of the general schemata for composition by field. To achieve such kinetics, the form of the poem should always extend from its content, where each perception "MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO ANOTHER."[154] In practice, Olson translated these theorisations to poems that manifest as objects—or poetic units—on a field—that is, the page—which quickly shift between a range of materials and resources. As the essay originated from Olson's work in 'The Kingfishers', it is unsurprising that the poem ably illustrates many of these features. The opening of the poem moves at great speed. The famous first line, "what does not change/is the will to change"[155], provides a legend that quickly dissolves into memories of a party:[156]

> He had left the party without a word. How he got up, got into his coat,
> I do not now. When I saw him, he was at the door, but it did not matter,
> he was already sliding along the wall of the night, losing himself
> in some crack of the ruins.[157]

However, while the first section of the poem is primarily centred on this dramatic scene, its concerns quickly develop to questions about the kingfishers' feathers, and the question, "why / did the exports stop?"[158] During the second section, the speed of the poem only increases. There, the first line juxtaposes Plutarch's "E on the stone" with "what Mao said,"[159] after which the section deftly manoeuvres through encyclopaedic data involving the poem's eponymous bird, before finally returning to Mao. In this respect, the direct and immediate perceptions in 'The Kingfishers' persistently flicker between vast arrays of material. Occasionally, the poem shifts through starkly contrasting resources: although the lines, "around an appearance, one common model, we grow up / many,"[160] are derived from Plutarch,[161] the following

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[153] *Ibid* 2

[154] *Ibid*

[155] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 86

[156] See Maud, *What does not change*, pp. 25-27

[157] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 86

[158] *Ibid*

[159] *Ibid*, 87

[160] *Ibid* 86

stanza utilizes Norbert Weiners' *Cybernetics*.[162] To paraphrase Olson's text, composition by field ensures that the reader hardly ever steps into the same river twice,[163] as the poem's contents are not one, but many.

In this respect, 'The Kingfishers' illustrates that the kinetics of field composition are partially developed through the use of montage. Maud's extensive archaeology of the poem identifies Eisenstein's theories as an influence for this component of Olson's poetics.[164] In *The Film Sense*, Eisenstein characterises montage as a presentation of "a narrative that is *logically connected*", as its juxtapositions "*inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality.*"[165] Therefore, Eisenstein did not consider montage as a disjunctive medium, but rather as a "coherent and practical" resource for "realistic narration."[166] But while *The Film Sense* construes the technique as a tool for mutual unity, subsequent theories of montage regard it differently. As I briefly noted in previous chapter, Murphy argues that the method releases individual images "from their subordination to the organic whole."[167] Consequently, Murphy proposes that instead of producing an automatically integrated representation, montage develops a "reflective approach towards each individual component" of the work, which refuses to treat these discrete fragments "as merely the subsidiary means to an ending."[168] These opposing theories can also be associated with Olson's composition by field. While Maud insists that the relationships between the disparate elements of the poem remain fluid,[169] the manner in which this fluidity is organised remains unclear; indeed, as Fredman notes, "the continuity" between the various poetic units "can be hard to detect."[170] As a consequence, the montage of 'The Kingfishers' is marked with ambivalence. Are the references to—or from— encyclopaedias, Plutarch, *Cybernetics*, Mao and beyond *all* meant to converge upon one specific proposition? Or does the poem actually exude the significations of its kinetic field from the unresolved tensions between these individual fragments?

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[161] See Maud, *What does not change*, 74

[162] See Maud, *What does not change*, 81

[163] "Into the same river no man steps twice". See Olson, *Collected Poems*, 89

[164] See Maud, *What does not change*, 59

[165] Eisenstein, S. *The Film Sense*. (ed. & trans. J. Leyda). Faber and Faber. London. 1977, 14

[166] *Ibid*, 19

[167] Murphy, 21

[168] *Ibid*

[169] See Maud, *What does not change*, 59

[170] Fredman, 24

This ambivalence reveals certain broad similarities between 'Theatre Piece # 1' and Olson's 'field'. Earlier in this chapter, I described how the performance incorporated music, speech, dance, poems, projections and other materials within its proceedings, where some of these occurred simultaneously. For Cage, this process involved "integrating the opposites,"[171] but perhaps these uneasy groupings also resemble the complexities presented by Olson's kinetics. If the open field in 'Projective Verse' is constructed through "OBJECTS", it focuses on "how they got there" and "how they are to be used"[172] during the composition. Correspondingly, the individual performances of Cage's event were orchestrated in a similar manner. As Kirby notes, while 'Happenings'—of which 'Theatre Piece # 1' was a progenitor—allow space for a performer's unique qualities, they frequently treat each participant "in the same fashion as a prop or a stage effect."[173] While such procedures may initially seem dehumanising, they are not entirely dissimilar from Olson's conception of theatre as the medium where "human beings" are "the matière"[174] of the work. In other words, 'Theatre Piece # 1' utilized the bodies of its performers according to their usability. For instance, when he danced, Merce Cunningham's body formulated the material for his particular time brackets, which was presented to the audience as one fragment within a vast intermedial montage. In this respect, the structure of the performance is isomorphic with the breakdown of syntactical and narrative structures that takes place in composition by field.

Hitherto, I have paralleled Olson's poetics and 'Theatre Piece # 1' strictly in terms their technique. However, while these comparisons have exposed some shared characteristics, they may be unable to counter the core of Olson's criticisms about the event, which primarily involve its content as opposed to its forms. Indeed, although the exact relationships between the fragments in 'The Kingfishers' remain ambiguous, Olson insists on the possibility of a precision[175] that maintains "the syllables and all the lines [...] in their relations to each other."[176] As a consequence, certain fragments

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[171] Cage, 'Composition as Process', 18

[172] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 243

[173] Kirby, 19

[174] Olson, C. 'The Theatre'. *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives 8* (Fall 1977), 49

[175] To quote 'The Kingfishers', "We can be precise". See Olson, *Collected Poems*, 90

[176] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 243

of the poem explicitly question the monopoly of violence[177] that upholds the social order in the West:

> with what violence benevolence is bought
> what cost in gesture justice brings
> what wrongs domestic rights involve
> what stalks
> this silence[178]

Such authorial statements are not immediately present in 'Theatre Piece # 1'. Because the montage of the performance was structured "by chance operations"[179] it promoted an absence of relations between its various activities. Cage's interview with Schechner and Kirby simply refers to broad statements of spatial awareness,[180] and in 1967—when pressed by Duberman—Cunningham reluctantly offered broad reflections on the values of the performance:

> I think the values—if you're going to use that word—is [sic] in respect to the way life itself is all these separate things going on at the same time. And contemporary society is so extraordinarily complex that way. Not only things going on right around you, but there are all the things that you hear instantly over the television, that are going on someplace else...that idea of separateness, of things happening even though they are separate, they're happening at the same time[181]

Was Olson correct in his assertion that 'Theatre Piece # 1' is incapable of offering a 'morality of motion'? In order to pursue deeper interconnections between the poetics and the performance, this issue demands some closer attention.

To begin my response, I would like to return to some of the event's immediate influences, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. After reading Artaud, Cage began to develop ideas regarding a performance where various activities were presented independently, instead of one controlling the other. As we have seen, Olson seemingly views this independence as the fundamental error that turns the 'theatre of

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[177] In part, my observation draws upon Benjamin's critique of violence: "one might perhaps consider the surprising possibility that the law's interest in a monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is explained not by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, the intention of preserving the law itself; that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law". See Benjamin, W. 'Critique of Violence'. *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926* (eds. M. Bullock & M.W.Jennings). Belknap/Harvard. London. 1996, 239

[178] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 92

[179] Cage, in Schechner and Kirby, 53

[180] "We live in, and are more and more aware of living in, the space around us". See Cage, in Schechner and Kirby, 54

[181] Cunningham, in Duberman, 357

theatre' into a "theatre of nonsense."[182] However, Artaud's theories themselves would be difficult to characterise as indeterminate, haphazard 'tricks'. His concepts, as Derrida writes, imagined theatre as a "nontheological space,"[183] where its various elements are united in an event "aimed at the whole anatomy."[184] This terminology appears to hold multiple meanings. On a prima facie reading, Artaud could refer to 'anatomy' in order to valorise performances that engage with every human sensation. However, on a deeper level, I also take him to mean the 'anatomy' of the event itself. In this respect, the notions of a 'nontheological space' may have nothing to with matters of theology. Instead, the term functions as a metaphor for Artaud's subversion of the hierarchical structures in Eurocentric theatre. A similar interpretation is also proposed in Derrida's analysis:

> Released from […] the author-god, mise en scène would be returned to its creative and founding freedom. The director and the participants (who would no longer be actors *or* spectators) would cease to be the instruments and organs of representation[185]

It would be a misconstruction to suggest that Artaud's liberty from 'representation' fails to express a statement. Rather, it demonstrates that as Artaud's theatre moved away from the hierarchical control of the stage over the auditorium, he initiated a space where the event is produced by the social activity between the audience and the performers. Ultimately, in Artaud's 'nontheological' space, the 'anatomy' of theatre is not a thing or an object, but a cluster of relationships.

These components of Artaud's writing are closely comparable to some of the principles that underlie 'Theatre Piece # 1'. In addition to suspending the control of one mode of performance over the other, the event extended this suspension to the control of the performers over the audience. As I described earlier in this chapter, Cage seated the audience in four triangles pointing towards the centre.[186] As the seats were not affixed in "one particular direction,"[187] the audience was able to observe the performance through multiple fields of perception. Famously, when Johanna Jalowetz

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[182] Olson, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language', 52

[183] Derrida, 296.

[184] Artaud, 66

[185] Derrida, 300

[186] Also see Schechner and Kirby, 52

[187] Cage, in Kostelanetz, 104

arrived to the dining hall early in order to secure a good seat,[188] Cage informed her that the seats were all *equally* good:

> The audience could see itself [...] The large part of the action took place outside that square [...] [Jalowetz] had no way, nor did I, of telling where the best seat was, since from every seat you would see something different[189]

Effectively, these multiple fields of vision go some way toward explaining why the history of 'Theatre Piece # 1' is populated by contradictory accounts.[190] However, it also highlights that the performance crucially involves the crowd in its artistic production; in other words, the audience authors the event. As a consequence, Cage's attempt "to use the audience-presentation relationship artistically"[191] creates a situation that is analogous with the "movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization"[192] that occur between the wasp and the orchid in *A Thousand Plateaus*. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the wasp is deterritorialized, as it becomes "a piece of the orchid's reproductive apparatus" while simultaneously, the wasp "reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen."[193] As result of this process, both parties are altered, as the "becoming-wasp of the orchid" and the "becoming-orchid of the wasp [...] interlink and form relays in circulations of intensities."[194] In the context of 'Theatre Piece # 1', similar interconnections occur across the auditorium and the various performances. As each member of the audience was free to forge new connections between the seemingly isolated actions, their encounters with the event merged through an intricate rhizomic[195] spreading. As a result, perhaps 'Theatre Piece # 1' depicts 'morality *in* motion', as its message assumes "diverse forms"[196] across a series of perspectives throughout its duration. In this respect, perhaps the performance could even be characterised as a complex, non-

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[188] See Harris, 228

[189] Cage, in Schechner and Kirby, 53

[190] Harris also notes on this possibility. See Harris, 228

[191] Kirby, 25

[192] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11

[193] *Ibid*

[194] *Ibid*

[195] See section 1.3 in Chapter 1

[196] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10

linear and multidimensional figuration of the dispersal of energies from poet—
through poem—to reader that makes up the kinetics of composition by field.[197]

Indeed, these dynamics of 'Projective Verse' might be "most fully realized in
the interactive performance of poetry"[198]—although, as I indicated above, the poet's
own interpretation of such interactions may initially appear somewhat linear. When
Olson identifies the poem as a transmitter of the poet's energies, he tacitly connects
the kinetics of his work with what Middleton calls a 'performance of authorship'.
Broadly, this practice positions the poet "as the originating subject" who utters "the
words of a written text as if every single one bore the indelible mark of their
composer"[199]. Of course, as Olson understood reality as an ongoing process, his
oeuvre is far closer to a continuous exploration[200] than a conclusive asseveration.
However, his performances still centred upon his presence. The aforementioned
reading in Berkeley attests this: while his mode remains discursive, the event
positions Olson—as poet, pedagogue and public speaker—at the very centre "of the
constellation of poets"[201] gathered in the room. Yet, this view may be slightly at odds
with the subject-object relationship Olson presents during 'Projective Verse'. As he
outlines the stance towards reality necessitated by his versification, the poet writes:

> Objectism is the getting rid of the [...] interference of the individual as
> ego [...] that peculiar presumption by which western man has
> interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature [...] and
> those other creations of nature, which we may, with no derogation, call
> objects. For a man is himself an object [...] the more likely to
> recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at
> that moment he achieves an humilitas [sic] sufficient to make him of
> use[202]

According to Maud, when Olson advised Ed Dorn to study Whitehead's work in
1955,[203] he had only just begun to read *Process and Reality*.[204] Nevertheless, the above

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[197] See Olson, 'Projective Verse', 240

[198] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 28.

[199] *Ibid*, 33

[200] "Olson's history is an activity of enquiry, based on observation, reflection, generalization, and re-examination of the bases of understanding". See Middleton, P. 'Charles Olson: The Short History' *Parataxis 10* (2001), 64

[201] Rifkin, 14

[202] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 247

[203] See Olson, C. 'Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn', 302

[204] See Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading*, 102. Robert Von Hallberg notes that Olson had most likely read Whitehead's *Adventures in Ideas* earlier that year. See Von Hallberg, R. *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art*. Harvard University Press. USA. 1978 , 83

passage from 'Projective Verse' prefigures some of the ideas Olson would find therein.[205] As I briefly intimated in the previous chapter, Whitehead's doctrine focuses on events and becomings instead of subjects and beings, which consequently shifts from "morphological" perceptions to descriptions of a "dynamic process"[206] where reality is experienced through a nexus of actual occasions[207] that are *causa sui.*[208] Thus, *Process and Reality* characterises these occasions as "sheer actualities", and argues that while an analysis of "them increases our understanding, it does not lead us to the discovery of any higher grade of reality."[209] As he rejects the notion of a higher reality, Whitehead overturns essentialist distinctions between subject and object, or human and non-human entities. Instead, he asserts, "all actual things are alike objects [...] and all actual things are subjects"[210]. While the manifold components of nature and reality still exhibit significant differences, Whitehead insists that these are primarily circumstantial distinctions of degree, as opposed to essence or kind.[211] In this respect, Whitehead's non-anthropocentric stance towards reality is remarkably similar to the one in 'Projective Verse', in that both repudiate the imposition of hierarchical categories within nature. To rearticulate the analogy I used in the Introduction, Olson and Whitehead do not regard objects of nature as discreet entities, but as multiple coordinates along a particular line.

'Projective Verse' is not the only text where Olson expresses a comparable position. For instance, although it lacks the precision of the previous example, the calls to "wash the ego out" in 'Proprioception' tacitly situate "the thing" within a larger flux, instead leaving it to 'wallow' on the "outside." [212] Unsurprisingly, given its Whiteheadian influence, *The Special View of History* also contains similar ideas.[213]

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[205] Anne Charters' introduction to *A Special View of History*—a text heavily influenced by Olson's encounter with Whitehead—acknowledges that these lectures "expanded" on ideas from 'Projective Verse'. See Olson, *The Special View of History*, 1. Similarly, Bram's recent study proposes that "Whitehead's assumptions realize the concepts Olson anticipated in 'Projective Verse". See Bram, S. *Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead: An Essay on Poetry.* (trans. B. Stein). Lewisburg. Bucknell University Press. 2004, 41. Whitehead's significance for Olson is also discussed in, for example, Von Hallberg, pp. 82-125; and partially in Sherman, pp. 67-114

[206] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7

[207] See section 1.3 in Chapter 1.

[208] See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 222

[209] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7

[210] *Ibid*, 56

[211] See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 59

[212] Olson, 'Proprioception', 181

[213] Von Hallberg also notes on this. See Von Hallberg, 83

When Olson outlines the 'Factors' for his view, he begins: "One will get nowhere in catching the traffic of the human universe if one does not recognize that a man is both subject and object."[214] Indeed, as this assertion implies, 'Human Universe' also recognizes "that man and external reality are so involved with one another that [...] they had better be taken as one."[215] Finally, even as he neared the end of his life, Olson reiterated similar concepts. When he spoke to students at Beloit College in 1968, the poet claimed he no longer believed "in something called 'Projective Verse'" but maintained that the essay's understanding of an "inertial field", which is "affected and" changed as "particles" dissolve into "vibration"[216] remains a viable concept for art. Here, the import again involves a shift from discrete objects—or 'particles'—to flows and movements—or, 'vibration.' That is to say, Olson ultimately intimated that the enduring proposal of his early 'manifesto' was a stance towards reality where "[n]o one remains, nor is, one,"[217] as they are all situated in a network of multiplicities.

Could a similar stance be enacted through the rhizomic spreading of 'Theatre Piece # 1'? Of course, Cage's insistence on the separateness of each individual activity might seem at odds with Olson's stance towards reality, but as I argued above, the performance allowed the audience members to develop their own impressions of the event. In this respect, perhaps 'Theatre Piece # 1' is also amendable to certain aspects of Whitehead's philosophies. During the Introduction, I recounted the example of Cleopatra's Needle from *The Concept of Nature*, and noted that Whitehead's 'actual occasions' would roughly denote an isolated incident where one notices the monument, whereas its overall presence on the Thames Embankment constituted an actual entity (or eternal event). I also suggested that the Needle's existence is actively produced in a continuous state of becoming, and each of our encounters with it will be—if only minutely—unique.[218] This situation is already analogous with 'Theatre Piece # 1', where the audience impressions varied across the hall in accordance with the vantage offered by each seat. However, these parallels can be pursued even further. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead argues that since each

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[214] Olson, *The Special View of History*, 32

[215] Olson, 'Human Universe', 161

[216] Olson, C. 'On Black Mountain'. *Muthologos Vol 2* (ed. G.F. Butterick). Four Seasons Foundation. Bolinas. 1979, 73

[217] Olson, *Collected Poems*, 89

[218] See section 1.3 in Chapter 1.

actual entity is temporal, reality is "a process of generation" where each entity has its "own absolute self-attainment."[219] Because each actual entity is self-attained, Whitehead argues that they maintain a certain singularity, just as one is able to plot an individual co-ordinate within a line. At the same time, as he discards the distinctions between subject and object, Whitehead's actual entities are also *all* connected to each other, and "consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations."[220] If this formulation is applied to 'Theatre Piece # 1', it resolves the conflict between Cage's ethos of unrelatedness and the rhizomic perceptions of the audience. The individual acts of the performance—like Whitehead's actual entities—are simultaneously unique and connected in a multiplicity of experience. Consequently, they are also pliable to the stance towards reality that Olson outlines in 'Projective Verse'. Their 'use' is ultimately the prehensions they contribute to the "larger force"[221] of the event.

Therefore, 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' does not simply utilise similar structural developments as Olson's composition by field. Additionally, if we examine what neither Olson nor Cage explicitly declare, the performance and the poetics enact an isomorphic stance towards reality. Despite the apparent discrepancies between them, the two can be made to perform in parallel. Of course, they may not converge completely. Although the performance and 'Projective Verse' convey a similar 'morality of motion', Olson still believed in the value of explicit statements, whereas Cage—at least in 1952—insisted on "purposeless, anarchic"[222] situations. Given that most of the lexical content in 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' is now unknown, it is impossible to estimate the asseverations that *may* have occurred during its proceedings. However, perhaps the action of the performance itself, particularly in its historical context, declares a certain politics.

In McCarthyist America, any association with the "liberal causes of the 1930s was sufficient to frighten people from" affiliating "with a person or an institution,"[223] and 1952 was no exception. In January that year, Republican assemblyman Kenneth O. Trucks had introduced a bill "designed primarily to require the registration of Communist [...] members" and to "exclude 'probable communists' from public

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[219] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 60

[220] *Ibid*, 61

[221] Olson, 'Projective Verse', 247

[222] Cage, in Duberman, 351

[223] Harris, 168

jobs."[224] Eventually, the bill was "stalemated within a few days of it becoming law,"[225] but its questionable antagonisms were not unique. Indeed, the "majority of academic purges"[226] of university staff who were suspected of Communist affiliations—along with employees who refused to cooperate with the anti-Communist investigations—took place between 1952 and 1954.[227] Black Mountain College was not immune from such invasions. In the winter of 1952, two FBI agents arrived on campus to question Olson about his "suspect war-time associations"[228] during his employment in the Foreign Language Division of the Office of War Information. In particular, the agents wanted to know about the poet's work with labour and "ethnic groups during the 1944 presidential campaign as well as his post-war activities as a lobbyist for Polish interests at the Security Council."[229] By the time the interview was over,

> the growing realization of how well the agents seemed to know *his* past made [...] [Olson concerned for] his chances of getting away to the Near East or Central America; in fact he would soon be denied an expected Fulbright to Iran, a rejection he would attribute directly to the FBI's interest in him. Afterwards, his fear was replaced by anger against the violation of his privacy and outrage against the interference with his fate[230]

Thus, when Olson—a year earlier—wrote to Ferry about the value of collaboration between "different fields of the arts and [...] knowledge,"[231] perhaps his urgency was partially motivated by a cultural climate where anti-Communist investigations actively sought to incriminate these disciplines.[232] Yet, this is also the climate where 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' was staged. Perhaps the event, especially in relation to its multiplicity of experience, can be seen as an act against this cultural closure. Perhaps its momentary convergence of personalities and practices is in fact emblematic of

[224] Heale, M.J. *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation 1935-1965*. The
    University of Georgia Press. Athens. 1998, 137

[225] *Ibid*, 138

[226] Schrecker, E. *The Age of McCarthyism*. Bedford Books. USA. 1994, 83

[227] See Schrecker, pp. 82-85

[228] Anderson, 12

[229] Clark, 218

[230] *Ibid*

[231] Olson, 'Letter to W.H. Ferry', 11

[232]"Over time, an increasing number of instances of perjury by informers became manifest. An early
example, in 1948, involved a Washington state legislative committee that imported informer George
Hewitt to testify in its investigation of alleged Communist activities at the University of Washington.
[...] Hewitt's false accusations against Melvin Rader, an English professor at the university, gave rise
to perjury charges against him". See Lightman, R.M & Cohen, R.D. *Deadly Farce: Harvey Matusow
and the Informer System in the McCarthy Era*. University of Illinois Press. Chicago. 2004, 13

Black Mountain's "belief in democracy as a way of life."[233] For if 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' was an event where no body, not even the performance itself, remained one, then—to paraphrase Fredman's observations from a different context—its 'field' is also a social space, in which resistant individuals are invited to contribute to their resistant community.[234]

2.4 'the feedback is the law...'

Summaries and further movements

This chapter began with observations about Olson's pervasive presence in the existing literature about poetry and performance. In particular, I attempted to discern the motivation behind these references, as many of Olson's most famous public engagements involved surprisingly little poetry. As the majority of these studies drew upon the poetics outlined in 'Projective Verse', the first section of the chapter primarily concentrated on an analysis of this essay. There, I outlined some of the problematic notions presented by approaching Olson's poetics as a score for a performance. I suggested that some of the essay's explicit declarations on the matter seem unduly dogmatic; simultaneously, while critics such as Wheeler suggest Olson outlines a method for vocal articulations of a written text, the essay itself appears more focused on a shift from manuscript to typescript. However, I also proposed that although the notions of breath may not deliver a convincing poetics of embodiment, 'Projective Verse' might still provide some useful concepts for studies of poetry and performance. I observed that—in writing the essay to describe the composition of 'The Kingfishers'—Olson acted analogously to Lyotard's postmodern artists; as a result, perhaps his work also exhibits some characteristics of an event. These discussions provided a point of departure to consider Olson's commitment to 'acts' in the context of the dynamic processes that take place during a performance.

The second section of this chapter provided a close investigation of Olson's relationship with 'Theatre Piece # 1'. I acknowledged that despite the performance's iconic status, primary documentation of it is non-existent. Consequently, the present understanding of the event is almost entirely based on interviews with its participants.

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[233] Harris, 7

[234] "The field is a contained social space, in which the resistant individual enters the resistant community through the agency of a initiary secret". See Fredman, 72

After providing a brief outline of the proceedings for 'Theatre Piece # 1', including some of its immediate influences, I focused on Olson's responses to the event. In particular, I argued that while the poet's writing often articulated a caustically critical view of Cage, he had participated in mixed media events at Black Mountain during the preceding summers. Moreover, I paid close attention to documentation that suggests Olson did not reject 'Theatre Piece # 1' in its entirety. 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language' was a crucial source for these analyses, as it reveals that Olson—despite his objections—tentatively connected certain facets of 'Theatre Piece # 1' to key terms from 'Projective Verse'.

Such lines of connectivity were developed further in the third section, which analysed 'Theatre Piece # 1' and Olson's poetics in parallel. These discussions drew upon a variety of perspectives to address the structural and behavioural similarities between the two. In particular, I focused on the use of montage and the reconfigurations of the theatrical space within Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double*. Ultimately, I extended the latter analyses via Whitehead's non-anthropocentric conception of nature in order to demonstrate that 'Projective Verse' and the performance of 'Theatre Piece # 1' converge upon a comparable stance towards reality. In other words, this section sought to examine what neither Olson nor Cage explicitly declare, and hence arrive at an alternative interpretation of the event. Of course, I do not wish to associate any ownership of such concepts in either direction. Rather, this chapter configures the performance—particularly in its historical context— as an emblematic demonstration of the spirit of Black Mountain College:

> [The] conception of society in America, as well as in government, [lacks] something that in a sense was an intensification principle at Black Mountain, operative for everybody that was in it. In other words, that the social is total, that the search for striving or the offering to other human beings has to be something which is not intentional but is motive, occurs, is active in the sense that it does occur[235]

Therefore, while this chapter began by adhering to a conventional tendency to address Olson's poetics within studies of poetry and performance, its trajectory followed a different course. By focusing on the significance of 'act' and 'use' as opposed to 'breath', it approached Olson's poetics and Cage's performance as two discrete practices that are nevertheless difficult to separate from their interactions with each

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[235] Olson, C. 'On Black Mountain (III)', *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives 8* (Fall 1977), 75

other. More broadly, if these convergences are extended further, this chapter has also demonstrated that the performances of poetry are not solely in dialogue with the history of rhetoric and elocution. These events can additionally engage with a range of modalities, including their spatial and cultural surroundings. Both of these themes will be addressed in further detail during the following chapter, which focuses on The First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall, with particular reference to Allen Ginsberg's reading that night.

CHAPTER 3

'Be kind to this place, which is your present/habitation'

Allen Ginsberg and The First International Poetry Incarnation

3.1 'while you are not safe, I am not safe'

Situating Ginsberg and his performances

Olson was not the only American poet who articulated their poetics with references to breath. As Perelman notes, the post-war years featured a "wide range of aesthetics from" Olson to "Allen Ginsberg", where breath is "a key element of composition."[1] In the previous chapter, I argued that Olson's treatment of the concept is a fraught and problematized issue.[2] Contrarily, Ginsberg's understanding of the line as a "single breath unit"[3]—particularly in poems such as 'Howl'—is also perceivable in some of his performances. While his early recordings of the poem demonstrate a "heightened" and "elastic"[4] technique of "long breathed verse,"[5] later performances grew in length. For instance, when he read at Columbia University's McMillin Theatre in 1981, Ginsberg

> gave a twenty-seven-minute rendition of *Howl*. The poem used to take him twenty to twenty-two minutes to read, but he no longer had the long breath of his youth.[6]

Perhaps this sense of physicality gives some credence to the notions of embodiment that are frequently associated with the poet's performances. When Middleton alludes to a reading of 'Howl', he argues that Ginsberg's "magnificent assertion of prophetic judgement filled" the poem "with his substantial presence from the very first word."[7]

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[1] Perelman, B. 'Speech Effects: The Talk as Genre'. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (ed. C.Bernstein). Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1998, 202

[2] See section 2.1 in Chapter 2

[3] Ginsberg, A. 'Notes Written on Finally Recording *Howl' Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995* (ed. B. Morgan). Penguin. London. 2000, 230

[4] *Ibid*

[5] Ginsberg, A. 'Notes on Selected Poetry Vocalized'. *Holy Soul Jelly Roll: Poems and Songs (1949-1993)—Booklet*. Rhino Word Beat. USA. 1994, 10

[6] Miles, B. *Allen Ginsberg: A Life*. Simon and Schuster. New York. 1989, 495

[7] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 33

Consequently, Middleton depicts these readings as an exemplar of the performance of authorship.[8] In addition, Ginsberg's appearance in Columbia is also indicative of his engagement with the public sphere. Whereas Olson's reading in Berkeley veered more towards pedagogy than poetry, Ginsberg was a renowned performer of his work. Indeed, during an interview in 2001, Lawrence Ferlinghetti suggested that Ginsberg's final publications were afflicted by a "shocking decline in the quality of his poetry on the printed page,"[9] which he credited to Ginsberg being "more and more successful as a performer"[10] of poetry.[11]

This particular contrast between Olson and Ginsberg is also apparent in a transcript from a panel discussion during the Vancouver Poetry Conference in 1963.[12] As Olson dominates the conversation, with occasional interjections from Duncan and Creeley, Ginsberg remains oddly silent. Primarily, he only asks the other poets to clarify their arguments, or provokes laughter from the auditorium with witty remarks that describe Olson as a "kind of father figure who has now become a great baby."[13] Instead, one of Ginsberg's more significant contributions to the conference took place during the concluding festivities. The poet had arrived to Vancouver immediately after his extended visit to India, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan.[14] As the event coincided with Ginsberg's return to the Occident, the conference also became the first occasion where he chanted the Hare Krishna mantra to a large public audience.[15] This performance seemingly left a lasting impression on the poet. Soon after, he wrote to Peter Orlovsky and declared: "I'm telling you the cold war's over, Hurrah! All we got do is really love each other."[16] In this respect, when the poet informed the conference

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[8] See section 2.3 in Chapter 2. I will also refer to this concept in more detail during this chapter.

[9] Ferlinghetti, in Vale, V. *Real Conversations: Henry Rollins, Jello Biafra, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Billy Childish*. RE/Search Publications. San Francisco. 2001, 206

[10] *Ibid*

[11] This may explain why Ginsberg's performances are sometimes presented as a progenitor of slam poetry. See, for example, Raskin, J. 'Allen Ginsberg, Howl, and the Six Gallery Reading'. *Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in the Poetry Performance*. (eds. C. Grabner & A. Casas). Rodopi, Amsterdam. 2011, 13

[12] See Olson, C. 'On History', *Muthologos: Collected Lectures and Interviews Vol. 1*. (ed. G.F. Butterick). Four Seasons Foundation. Bolinas, California. 1978, pp. 1-19

[13] Ginsberg, in Olson, 'On History', 6

[14] See, for example, Morgan, B. *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. Penguin. London. 2006, 377

[15] See Miles, *Allen Ginsberg*, 328

[16] Ginsberg, in Morgan, 377

delegation that his history "as a Beatnik"[17] was finished, he unknowingly uttered a vatic statement. During his "second vogue"[18] in the 1960s, Ginsberg became such an iconic countercultural[19] figure that he eventually became a topic of discussion in Theodore Roszak's study of this cultural movement:

> More than a poet, he has become, for the disaffiliated young of America and Europe, the vagabond proselytizer whose poems are [...] a subsidiary way of publicizing the new consciousness he embodies and the techniques for his cultivation [...] the hair, the beard, the mischievous grin, the total absence of formality, pretence or defensive posturing [...] they are enough to make him an exemplification of the countercultural life[20]

This chapter will also approach the countercultural Allen Ginsberg. However, rather than affirm Roszak's questionable[21] estimation of his poetry as 'subsidiary', I will examine the striated modes in which Ginsberg's poems and performances interact with the aspirations and actualities of The First International Poetry Incarnation in 1965. During the course of these investigations, I will provide an account of the event's proceedings, where I will interrogate some of the myths perpetuated by the currently available histories. As a response, I will focus on the regal venue of the performance in order to develop further contexts for the event's social and theoretical representations. Ultimately, I will explore these perspectives through a close analysis of Ginsberg's performance, before concluding with brief suggestions regarding the Incarnation's reverberations.

However, I will first focus on an earlier performance. Although Ferlinghetti's previous characterisation of Ginsberg's oeuvre seems reasonable, it would be erroneous to construe his comments as a tacit assertion that Ginsberg's performances were extraneous activities that gradually superseded his work as a poet. More accurately, the two practices were closely interlinked throughout Ginsberg's career, as demonstrated by the events that lead to the publication of *Howl and Other Poems*. Before the Six Gallery reading on October 7th, 1955, Ginsberg was still relatively

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[17] Ginsberg, in Olson, 'On History', 6

[18] Oppenheimer, M. *Knocking on Heaven's Door: American Religion.* Yale University Press. New Haven. 2003, 22

[19] See, for example, Kramer, J. *Allen Ginsberg in America.* Fromm International Publishing Corporation. New York. 1997

[20] Roszak, 129

[21] Tytell describes Roszak's trajectory as gratuitous and foolish. See Tytell, J. *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs.* Grove Press. New York. 1976, 219

unknown as a poet, particularly in San Francisco. Nevertheless, when he read the first part of 'Howl' that night,

> rather surprised by his own power, drunk on the platform, becoming increasingly sober as he read, driving forward with a strange ecstatic intensity, delivering a spiritual confession to an astounded audience — ending in tears[,][22]

it was a pivotal moment. Michael McClure would later recall that the performance left everyone in the room "standing in wonder, or cheering"[23] and many biographers[24] note that soon after the event, Ferlinghetti sent Ginsberg an enthusiastic telegram: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career. When do I get the manuscript?"[25] In this respect, it is unsurprising that Middleton depicts Ginsberg as a paragon of performing authorship. His "sheer presence" as he chanted his impassioned "testimony"[26] catalysed his arrival as a poet.

Of course, the story of the Six Gallery reading is now firmly pegged into history. Contemporary critics generally regard the event as a prominent example of poetry readings from the 20th century, and it has consequently received a considerable amount of scholarly attention. It has been documented in first-hand accounts by poets such as McClure; in various biographies[27] of Ginsberg; in studies concerning the San Francisco Renaissance;[28] and in monographs dedicated to the composition of 'Howl.'[29] Furthermore, the reading has also been re-imagined in both fiction[30] and film.[31] As a result, although disagreements over certain details continue to exist,[32] a

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[22] Ginsberg, A. 'The Six Gallery Reading'. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995* (ed. B. Morgan). Penguin. London. 2000, 241

[23] McClure, M. *Scratching the Beat Surface*. NorthPoint Press. San Francisco. 1982, 15

[24] Morgan disputes this version of events, and argues that Ferlinghetti was already interested in publishing *Howl* before the Six Gallery reading. See Morgan, pp. 203-204

[25] Ferlinghetti, in Miles, *Ginsberg*, 197

[26] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 62

[27] In addition to aforementioned works by Miles and Morgan, see Schumacher, M. *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg*. St. Martin's Press. New York. 1992.

[28] See, for example, Davidson, M. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1989; or Suiter, J. *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades*. Counterpoint. Canada. 2002

[29] See, for example, Raskin, J. *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*. University of California Press. Berkeley. 2004

[30] See Kerouac, J. *Dharma Bums*. Penguin. London. 1976

[31] See *Howl*. Dir. R. Epstein & J. Friedman. [DVD]. UK. Oscilloscope Laboratories. 2010

[32] For example, estimates of those in attendance vary from "a low of seventy-five to upwards of 250". See Suiter, 148

broad consensus about the proceedings has been reached.[33] As such, I do not wish to reiterate this poetic folklore further. Instead, I want to concentrate on the gallery itself. As recently as the summer of 2011, Raskin claimed that the Six Gallery was "significant" only "for its insignificance" as "no major cultural or social event had taken place there" before the reading in 1955, "and never would again." [34] In fact, the venue provided an intriguing locale. According to McClure, the space "had been converted from an automobile repair shop"[35] to a "cooperative art gallery run by young artists"[36], and it regularly housed various avant-garde performances. On one notable occasion, during a staged reading of Robert Duncan's play "*Faust Foutu* (Faust fucked)", the poet "stripped off his clothes at the end of the play."[37] The gallery also hosted exhibitions for "notable contemporary Californian artists such as Jay DeFoe."[38] For the reading in October 1955, the décor and set-design were sourced from local artists. These included the "splintered, weeping shapes" of sculptures by Fred Martin; the figures were based on orange crates, which Martin had deconstructed by first swathing them "in muslin" and then dipping them "in plaster of Paris."[39].Similarly, the podium where the poets read was constructed from former fruit crates, and the poets were all seated on "six battered up chairs"[40] arranged in a semi-circle. In this respect, the Six Gallery aspired to provide a multifaceted autonomous space for its bohemian community.

At first, this location may not seem remarkable at all. As Middleton notes, most poetry readings

> are ragged affairs taking place in venues temporarily liberated from other activities—pubs, bars, lecture rooms, art galleries, halls, and theatres[...] The space is precariously and only partially transformed from its mundane use as gallery, pub, or lecture hall, whose signs remain prominently in evidence [...] Unplanned sound, material objects that insist upon other social purposes [...] and insistent temporariness are [all] common features[41]

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[33] Of course, aspects of these reports might still be tentative, but they are generally in agreement with each other. In comparison to the testimonies regarding 'Theatre Piece ♯1', there are relatively few contradictory accounts of the Six Gallery reading.

[34] Raskin, 'Allen Ginsberg, Howl, and the Six Gallery Reading'. 23

[35] McClure, 13

[36] *Ibid*, 12

[37] *Ibid*

[38] Raskin, 'Allen Ginsberg, Howl, and the Six Gallery Reading'. 23

[39] McClure, 13

[40] Suiter, 147

[41] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 30

Yet, although the Six Gallery reading coheres with many of these descriptions, it also reveals a more intricate relationship with its venue.[42] As a space, the Six Gallery demonstrates how any material, once appropriately challenged, can be made to perform. For instance, both the podium and Martin's sculptures were found objects that were subsequently remodelled into entirely different artefacts. Moreover, the origins of these materials signify further nuances. As Ebeling observes, California's citrus industry had been a contributory force to the state's economy since the early 19th century;[43] in this context, the 'weeping, splintered shapes' of Martin's sculptures become comparable to the monstrous commodity forms[44] that arise in Ginsberg's "neon fruit supermarket"[45] and the apocalyptic passages of 'Howl':

> Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb![46]

Thus, although Ginsberg did not perform 'A Supermarket in California' or the second part of 'Howl' during the Six Gallery reading, the event's décor nevertheless reverberated with his contemporaneous cries about the "the tobacco haze of Capitalism."[47]

This relationship between the Six Gallery reading and its location can be extended even further. The venue's previous life as a garage presents a strangely profound association with Ginsberg's writing. On one interpretation, automobiles recall Ford's pioneering modes of mass production, which are intrinsically connected to Moloch's "factories" and "smokestacks"[48]. At the same time, cars denote a source

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[42] Others have observed that the event defied the system of academic poetry readings that took place at venues such as the Library of Congress. See Raskin, 'Allen Ginsberg, Howl, and the Six Gallery Reading', 24

[43] See Ebeling, W. *The Fruited Plain: The Story of American Agriculture*. University of California Press. Berkley. 1979, pp. 352-361

[44] My phrasing borrows loosely from the seventh chapter in Marx's *Capital*: "By turning his money into commodities that serve as material elements of a new product, and as factors in the labour-process, by incorporating living labour with their dead substance, the capitalist at the same time converts value, i.e., past, materialised, and dead labour into capital, into value big with value, a live monster that is fruitful and multiplies". See Marx, K. *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production Volume 1* (ed. F. Engels). Lawrence & Wishart. London. 1974, 189

[45] Ginsberg, A. 'A Supermarket in California'. *Collected Poems* 1947-1980. Harper Perennial. New York. 1984, 136. Hereafter, quotations from poems in this volume will be cited as *Collected Poems*

[46] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 131

[47] *Ibid*, 127

[48] *Ibid*, 131

of liberation for the "best minds"[49] of 'Howl', as the vehicles enable them to traverse the country "down the highways of the past" in search of "a vision to find out Eternity"[50]. Therefore—to borrow from de Certeau—the dramatis personae of 'Howl' utilise cars as a subversion "from within" that attempts to use "the dominant order […] in another register" in order to divert "it without leaving it."[51] A similar shift is enacted by the gallery's conversion of a commercial space into a cooperative creative venue. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre provides a brief description of events that occurred at Halles Centrales—a former wholesale market in Paris—between 1969 and 1971:

> For a brief period, this urban centre, designed to facilitate the distribution of food, was transformed into a gathering-place and a scene of permanent festival—in short, into a centre of play rather than work—for the youth of Paris[52]

Lefebvre identifies this transformation as a *détournement*, a concept derived from Guy Debord's Letterist and Situationist publications. Although the term primarily designates "the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble,"[53] Debord asserts that it is possible to "detour entire situations by deliberately changing" one of their "determinant"[54] conditions. Lefebvre draws upon this broader definition, and argues that:

> An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one[55]

The reappropriation of the site for the Six Gallery is broadly analogous with the *détournement* of Halles Centrales, as both the space and Martin's fruit crates were consigned to roles that resisted their governing functions. These developments, in turn, correspond with the symbolic action of Ginsberg's invocations. 'Howl' is

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[49] *Ibid*, 126

[50] *Ibid*, 129

[51] de Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (trans. S. Rendall). University of California Press. Berkeley, 1988, 32

[52] Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*. (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith). Blackwell. Oxford. 1995, 167

[53] Anon. 'Detournement as Negation and Prelude'. *Situationist International Anthology*. (ed. & trans. K. Knabb). Bureau of Public Secrets. Berkeley. 1981, 55

[54] Debord, G & Wolman, G.J. 'Methods of Detournement'. *Situationist International Anthology*. (ed. & trans K. Knabb). Bureau of Public Secrets. Berkeley. 1981, 14

[55] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 167

ultimately a poem of empathy: while Carl Solomon "is not safe"[56] the speaker remains under threat as well. In this respect, the efforts to "recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose"[57] are also an attempt to divert the "lacklove" of Moloch, "whose name is the Mind,"[58] and reappropriate language to a more compassionate use. Therefore, if Ginsberg's performance sought to annunciate "a temporary halt"[59] to the dominant cultures of America, the location of the reading resonated with comparable aspirations.

3.2 'Tonite let's all make love in London'

Détournements in The First International Poetry Incarnation

The manifold *détournements* involved with the Six Gallery reading provide an important context for another performance in which Ginsberg participated ten years later. The First International Poetry Incarnation took place at the Royal Albert Hall in London on June 11th, 1965. The event attracted an estimated audience of seven or eight thousand, which makes it one of the largest poetry readings in living memory. As a consequence, the Incarnation—like the Six Gallery reading—is widely chronicled in various memoirs and biographies, although these reports are frequently conveyed with such ornate language that they yield surprisingly little information. For instance, in a short statement by the Austrian sound poet Ernst Jandl, the event is characterised as a moment where "no-one was one, but we each were the thousands, re-shaped in one beautiful body of voices and echoes, with Allen Ginsberg on our soul."[60] While Jandl's comments undoubtedly address the event's intended ambiance, they also epitomise a form of register that has mythologised the Incarnation as a moment of "common dreaminess in which all was permissive and benign"[61] and where "poem after poem resonated mind-expanding ripples of empathy" like "uncut and precious stones in a translucent pool."[62] Contrarily, more recent recollections of

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[56] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 130
[57] *Ibid*
[58] *Ibid*,
[59] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 168
[60] Jandl, in Horovitz, M. (ed.) *The POT! (Poetry Olympics Twenty05) Anthology* New Departures. London. 2005, 11
[61] Nuttall, 183
[62] Horovitz, 'Afterwords', 337

the evening dismiss it as an "incredibly long-winded"[63] event, which felt "kind of foreign,"[64] or even "one of the worst poetry readings"[65] of all time. In this respect, the Incarnation presents a similar predicament as 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1': although both are prominent performances, their histories are fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. However, unlike 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', real time footage from the Incarnation survives to this day. Thus, it is possible to begin developing a deeper understanding of the occasion by interrogating the discrepancies between these different documents.

What happened on June the 11th, 1965? Although the Incarnation arose from a nexus of activities in London, much of the available literature places Ginsberg at the event's inception. The poet arrived to London in the summer of 1965 after facing deportation from Prague, where his "presence" and "sexual theories"[66] had attracted unwanted attention from the authorities. On Ed Sanders' advice,[67] Ginsberg visited Better Books,[68] where he quickly performed an impromptu reading. The bookshop is also credited as the place where the concept of the Incarnation was first formulated, although disagreement exists over the persons present. Michael Horovitz recalls that he "hatched"[69] the plan together with Ginsberg and Alexander Trocchi, whereas several others remember that the idea emerged when Ginsberg—together with Barbara Rubin, Barry Miles, Sue Miles, Daniel Richter and Jill Richter—realized that Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso were also due in London that summer.[70] The planners were additionally excited by the prospect that Andrei Voznesensky, Pablo Neruda and Pablo Fernandez might also participate. Ultimately, none of the three would read, although Voznesensky was present in the audience.[71] Most accounts agree that Barbara Rubin booked the venue, while the Richters were responsible for financing

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[63] Logue, in Green. J (ed.) *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1976.* Pimlico. London. 1998, 70. Hereafter, quotes from this text will be cited as *Days in the Life*

[64] Brown, in *Days in the Life*, 73

[65] Miles, in *Days in the Life*, 71

[66] Schumacher, 442

[67] See Miles, B. *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London Since 1945.* Atlantic Books. London. 2011, 145

[68] See section 1.1 in Chapter 1.

[69] Horovitz, in *Days in the Life*, 67

[70] See *Days in the Life*, 66. Also see Miles, B. *In the Sixties*. Pimlico. London. 2003, 57

[71] There is some confusion regarding reasons why poets such as Voznesensky did not take part. Miles suggests that Voznesensky was not enamoured with the Incarnation's chaotic atmosphere, while others maintain the poet was prevented from reading due to pressure from Soviet authorities. See, for example *Days in the Life*, pp. 66-71

the booking deposit.[72] The event's publicity and administration were coordinated by the Poets Cooperative, which included Ginsberg, Horovitz, Ferlinghetti and Trocchi—along with John Esam, Harry Fainlight, Simon Vinkenoog, Dan Richter and Julie Felix.[73] As a part of the promotional campaign, John Hopkins photographed the poets beside the statue of Shakespeare "on the Albert Memorial"[74] near the venue, and the performance was also mentioned in major newspapers such as the *Sunday Times*. Clearly, the Incarnation was put in motion with considerable aspirations. If the organisers intended to stage a "poetry breakthrough"[75] comparable to the Six Gallery reading, they approached the occasion on a much grander scale.

Although the Incarnation is occasionally identified as a Happening,[76] the event was primarily composed of various poetry readings. Trocchi hosted the affair, where everyone involved with the Poets Cooperative—except for Felix—performed, as did Corso, Jandl, Adrian Mitchell, Anselm Hollo, Pauolo Leonni, Pete Brown, Christopher Logue, George Macbeth, Spike Hawkins and Tom McGrath. During the intermissions, the audience heard taped recordings of William Burroughs, and the guitarist Davy Graham closed the evening with an improvised song. A full recording of the event was captured on the BBC's "fixed live feed from the hall,"[77] while Peter Whitehead filmed brief segments of the performances. In his most recent memoir, Miles describes the night:

> A centre dais stood where a boxing ring was often employed meaning that the poets needed to keep turning around in order to address the whole hall, and seated in the rows of seats surrounding it were poets, organizers and friends. There was no real division between the audience and the poets. The floor was strewn with armfuls of flowers, salvaged after the Floral Hall at Covent Garden Market closed for the day. Bottles of wine and glasses circulated, three-paper joints were passed discreetly round, thick clusters of joss-sticks masking their smell.[78]

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[72] See *Days in the Life*, pp.66-67; or Miles, *In the Sixties*, 57.

[73] See Horovitz, M. 'Introduction'. *The POT! (Poetry Olympics Twenty05) Anthology* (ed. M. Horovitz). New Departures. London. 2005, 9. Also see *Days in the Life*, pp. 67-69; Miles, *In the Sixties*, pp. 58-59; Miles, *London Calling*, 146; *Days in the Life. The Gathering of the Tribes*. Dir. E.Coulthard [VHS] UK. BBC. British Library Sound Archive. 2000. V4648/1. Hereafter cited as *The Gathering of the Tribes*.

[74] Miles, *London Calling*, 146

[75] Schumacher, 446

[76] See Schumacher, 448

[77] Miles, *London Calling*, 150

[78] *Ibid*, 148

Whitehead's film provides a similar impression. As the title *Wholly Communion* suggests, the director presents the Incarnation as an iconic moment of Britain's surfacing counterculture, with its "separate audiences" all at the "one place at the one time."[79] The film opens with an image of the sun above a statue, before moving to a panoramic shot of the Hall, accompanied by a voiceover of Ginsberg chanting. When

Fig 3.1: Scenes from The First International Poetry Incarnation
Extracted from *Wholly Communion*

filming the performances, Whitehead follows the poets as if he were another observer in the crowd.[80] Thick clouds of smoke drift onto the screen. At one stage, Ginsberg is shown reclining on Barbara Rubin's lap, smoking and enjoying a drink. In another scene, Brown and Horovitz join Jandl for a performance of 'The Furore of Sneezing' by Kurt Schwitters. While Ginsberg reads, Whitehead focuses on a woman in the audience, who dances to the rhythms of the poem. These images instil a compelling portrait of the "sense of connection and liberation"[81] that is frequently associated

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[79] Nuttall, 182

[80] See Whitehead's interview in *The Gathering of the Tribes*

[81] Horovitz, 'Introduction', 8

Fig 3.2: Scenes from The First International Poetry Incarnation
Extracted from *Wholly Communion*

with the Incarnation. Even the more incongruous moments, such as Vinkenoog's mescaline-induced [82] interruption of Fainlight's reading [83] by screaming 'love' repeatedly, appear demonstrative of the event's free and festive spirit. As Trocchi tells the audience, such incidents seem unavoidable when one puts a crowd of thousands "in a hall with a few poets trying to be natural." [84] The performance in *Wholly Communion* is ultimately akin to a Bakhtinian carnival, where "everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people", and during which "life is subject only to its laws, that is; the laws of its freedom." [85]

This carnivalesque spectacle would cohere well with aspects of Ginsberg's activities during the summer of 1965. While in Prague, the poet famously participated in the May Day celebrations, where he chanted mantras to the crowds and was

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[82] See Vinkenoog's interview in *The Gathering of the Tribes*

[83] In actuality, the reading was a disastrous experience for Fainlight, who remained deeply scarred by it for the rest of his life. See, for example, Miles, *London Calling*, 149; or *Days in the Life*, 71.

[84] Trocchi, in *Wholly Communion*. Dir. P. Whitehead. [DVD] BFI Video. 2007

[85] Bakhtin, M. *Rabelais and His World* (trans. H. Iswolsky). Indiana University Press. USA. 1984, 7

ultimately chosen as the King of May.[86] Likewise, Horovitz—who was committed to promoting the arts "as a public festival"[87]—often valorised similar carnivalesque practices[88]. However, it would be limitating to merely frame the Incarnation as a "utopian realm of community" and "freedom."[89] As film was an expensive material, Whitehead was forced to shoot frugally, and could only capture less than one hour[90] of footage; in actuality, the Incarnation lasted for nearly eight. Through editing, this already limited resource was further reduced to the 32 minutes of *Wholly Communion*. Therefore, while the film is an invaluable document of the occasion, Whitehead portrays a carefully orchestrated sequence of events. A wider survey of the evening depicts the proceedings as a site of multiple conflicts and confrontations. At one level, there was a great degree of suspicion and resentment among the poets present. For instance, when interviewed at the turn of the millennium, Jeff Nuttall explained that he was so displeased about being excluded from the roster of performers that he and John Latham intended to interrupt the proceedings by charging at the stage covered in paint.[91] Similarly, while the recording of Jandl's performance[92] indicates his sound poems were extremely well received by the audience—so much so that the crowd joins in—Pete Brown would later dismiss Jandl's work in no uncertain terms:

> Put it this way, you couldn't dance to it. There was a poet there who read a poem consisting solely of sneezes. I think he was German. Well, that may have been may have been very avant-garde but it was a throwback to the bohemian artistic crowd of the 50s and the early 60s[93]

Furthermore, when Brown and Horovitz then joined Jandl on stage, the recording captures several voices from the background objecting to this, and even commanding the two to sit back down.[94] Confrontations also occur between the poets and the

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[86] See, for example, Morgan, 408; and Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, pp. 353-4

[87] Nuttall, 182

[88] In 1966, Horovitz composed a poem to celebrate the inaugural Notting Hill Carnival. See Horovitz, M. *Wordsounds & Sightlines: New and Selected Poems*. New Departures. London.1994. pp. 7-9

[89] Bakhtin, 9

[90] See Whitehead's interview in *The Gathering of the Tribes*

[91] The full idea was to conduct the interruption as a happening, where he and Latham would be covered in paint and pages of books, and stage a fight with one another, ripping these pages off in the process. This never took place, however, because Latham had blocked his pores by spreading the paint too thickly, and passed out before they were able to get on stage. Ultimately, Nutall had to bathe Latham in order to scrub out the paint. See Nuttall's interview in *The Gathering of the Tribes*.

[92] See Various Speakers. 'The First International Poetry Incarnation'. British Library Sound Archive, 1CDR0010807. 1965.06.11. Hereafter, cited as 1CDR0010807.

[93] Brown, in *Days in the Life*, 73.

[94] 1CDR0010807

audience. Miles notes that Ginsberg was privately suspicious about many of his fellow performers, and particularly doubted whether any of the British poets "were good enough."[95] In fact, the recording of Ginsberg's reading evinces that the poet was unable to maintain his discretion during the performance. Early on, while he is leafing through his poems, Ginsberg drunkenly complains about having to "re-navigate through all this bad poetry"[96] read by others. Moments later, when the audience applauds after the word 'shit' is read out during Ginsberg's rendition of 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*'[97] he furiously orders everyone to shut up, exclaiming they have heard enough shit already.[98] The audience responds to these exclamations with derisions against Ginsberg. The first part of his reading is frequently interrupted by protests from the crowd. Not all of these are clearly audible on the surviving recordings, but some, such as "may I have some poetry, sir?" and "bring back Christopher Logue,"[99] directly attack Ginsberg and his work. Evidently, the communion is not wholly achieved. The myriad tensions amongst the participants—as well as those between the audience and the performers—indicate that the Incarnation involves a more complex set of relations than a carnivalesque spectacle.

If the invocations of a "great spiritual event"[100] appear somewhat inadequate, a closer investigation of the Incarnation demands a different approach. Earlier in this chapter, I examined the resonances between the Six Gallery reading and its immediate surroundings. As the Incarnation aspired to be a comparable 'poetry breakthrough', perhaps it also presents a certain mutuality with its locus. For instance, a prima facie analysis might regard the venue hire as an attempt to emulate rock concerts by artists such as Bob Dylan or The Beatles. In 1963, the Albert Hall had hosted a rare concert from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones,[101] and Dylan had performed there for two nights in May 1965—the first of these occasions coinciding with Ginsberg's arrival to

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[95] Miles, *London Calling*, 146

[96] Ginsberg, in 1CDR0010807

[97] The particular line in question is "Shit! Intestines boilin in sand fire" See Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 325

[98] See 1CDR0010807

[99] *Ibid*

[100] Ginsberg, in Miles, *In the Sixties*, 61

[101] See Williams, R. *The Royal Albert Hall: A Victorian Masterpiece for the 21st Century*. Fitzhardinge Press .UK 2003, 77

London.[102] Such interpretations are affirmed by the ambitions of certain participants: Ginsberg[103] and some of his fellow poets[104] are known to have coveted the scale of celebrity enjoyed by these musicians. However, I would suggest that the performance could also be paralleled with further contexts and histories. The Royal Albert Hall, as its name intimates, is a space encoded with particular representations. Named after the deceased Prince Consort by Queen Victoria in 1867, the building is both historically and symbolically intermingled with the memorial that faces the entrance to the hall.[105] Indeed, built "in fulfilment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort"[106]—as a part of the inscription on the building's terracotta frieze declares—the venue itself acts as a type of monument, and consequently, it performs certain duties. To quote Deleuze and Guattari, a monument's "action is not memory but fabulation,"[107] and the Albert Hall does indeed emanate a myriad of narratives. In its inception, the Hall was funded through the profits of the Great Exhibition in 1851, which is generally portrayed as an egalitarian occasion: entry to the "Exhibition's Crystal Palace" was kept "inexpensive,"[108] so that it was affordable to all. Yet, the building itself signifies discourses of privilege and power. Its neo-classical architecture is a conscious allusion to the arenas of the Roman Empire[109], and Queen Victoria's only recorded comments about the building stated: "it looks like the British Constitution."[110] In other words, while its design recalls empires of antiquity, Queen Victoria's comments tacitly associate the Hall with a nebulous doctrine[111] of a more recent imperial power.

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[102] Ginsberg attended the concert, and spent time with Dylan and The Beatles afterwards. See Schumacher, 445.

[103] Morgan's biography notes on Ginsberg's wish "to be a rock star and reach ten thousand people at one time". See Morgan, 414

[104] Horovitz's early Live New Departures fused music and poetry. In addition, Pete Brown would later become a lyricist for the rock group Cream. See, for example, Miles, *In the Sixties*, 27

[105] After Prince Albert died, the building of the Hall suffered some delays, as funds originally earmarked for the construction were diverted towards the memorial. Queen Victoria attached Albert's name to the Hall when she laid the building's foundation stone on May 20th, 1967. See, Williams, 10

[106] The full inscription reads: "This hall was erected for the advancement of the arts and science and works of industry of all nations in fulfillment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort". See Williams, 10.

[107] Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. *What is Philosophy*. (trans. G. Burchell & H. Tomlinson). Verso. London. 1994, 168

[108] Williams, 9

[109] "The inspiration for the South Kensington Hall [as the Albert Hall was initially called] came from the Roman arenas at Arles and Nîmes in Provence". See Williams, 10

[110] Williams, 10

[111] Unlike countries such as the United States, British law has never adopted a written constitution. Consequently, the notion of a 'British Constitution' is more accurately defined by practice and convention.

In Lefebvre's writing, such constructions represent both "the prestige of the State and the power of the rulers" as well as "all the artificiality of empty celebrations, ceremonies and rituals." [112] Yet, Lefebvre also identifies these monuments as sites of ambivalence, even conflict. He argues that their structures simultaneously speak of "the greatness and the strength of the people who built them and *against*"[113] those for whom they were built, and that they often involve such diverse purposes that no "functionality can characterise them, or exhaust their social function."[114] Analogous tensions can be associated with the history of the Albert Hall, as it occasionally hosted events that departed from its symbolic discourses of power.[115] For instance, the suffragettes held several meetings there from 1907 onwards, and would often disrupt other political gatherings in the Hall as a form of protest; at one such occasion, one campaigner even planned to hide in the pipes of the Hall's organ in order to project their message.[116] Likewise, as a report from 1921 demonstrates, the Hall was also used by groups that were sympathetic to the Russian Revolution:

> although the Hall was meant as a memorial to royalty, I have heard there thousands of English pro-Bolsheviks cheer the Russian Revolution and yell wildly when Lenin's name is mentioned[117]

These examples can be scrutinized alongside the limitations that the Hall's authorities imposed upon its uses. As Miles' aforementioned recollections indicate, the Albert Hall occasionally served as a venue for boxing matches; before 1908, however, such events had been banned from the premises, as Edward VII was "firmly against"[118] the sport. Other restrictions were enacted much later in the century. In 1972, amid concerns regarding the profanities in his lyrics, Frank Zappa was asked to present a script to the venue's management in advance of his approaching concert. His refusal

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[112] Lefebvre, H. *The Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1* (trans. J. Moore.) Verso. London. 2000, 232

[113] *Ibid*, my emphasis

[114] Lefebvre, H. *The Critique of Everyday Life Volume 2: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* (trans. J. Moore). Verso. London. 2002, 309

[115] In addition to the examples above, Sir Oswald Mosley's Fascists would hold four meetings in the Albert Hall between 1934 and 1936, thus demonstrating that the Hall's incongruous diversion were not always liberally minded. Later cultural events were also deeply involved with the political developments of the world: during the Cold War, for example, the Hall would often host performances by Soviet and East European acts, but after Soviet tanks entered Prague in the spring of 1968, the Hall's authorities revoked their invitation to the Red Army Ensemble. See Williams, 48; pp. 77-78

[116] See Williams, 47.

[117] Swaffer, in Williams, 47. The report originally appeared in *Sunday Graphic*.

[118] Williams, 45

to abide by these orders not only lead to the cancellation of his concert, but also to a prolonged ban that prohibited all 'pop groups' from performing at the Hall.[119]

To recapitulate, the space of the Albert Hall signifies certain discourses that often privilege one form of cultural practice while supressing others. Concurrently, the history of the Hall also includes occasions that, to one degree or another, act in opposition to its dominant modes and representations. While these instances do not demonstrate a clear *détournement*—as exemplified by Halles Centrales or the Six Gallery—they still exhibit similar formulations. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the "cautious but fundamental inversions"[120] of particular objects and practices are enacted through maintaining "their difference in the [...] space"[121] of the dominant culture. Consequently, such diversions bear a slight resemblance to de Certeau's 'tactics' that can "change the organization of a space"[122] without delineating a discrete locus. In this respect, the aforementioned events during the Hall's history can be understood as occasions where the venue's function was diverted from the fabulations of its spatial narratives. For instance, the suffragette's intervention rendered the Hall's majestic musical instrument to an organ of protest, while the pro-Bolshevik gathering inverted the Hall from a royal monument to a centre that partly celebrated an overthrow of royalty. As we have seen, Lefebvre's notion of *détournement* derives partially from the Situationists, who viewed a constructed situation[123] as a "unitary ensemble of behaviour in time."[124] Therefore, by diverting some of the venue's determinant[125] circumstances, perhaps these occasions also performed a "temporary halt"[126] on the Hall's cultural discourses.

Does the Incarnation demonstrate any similar developments? Possible parallels certainly exist. The host of the evening was intimately aware of the concepts for both *détournement* and 'situations' as "a temporary field of activity;"[127] Trocchi

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[119] See Williams, 117. The ban was to last until the 1980s.

[120] de Certeau, 31

[121] *Ibid*, 32

[122] *Ibid*, 38

[123] Commonly defined as a "A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events. See Anon. 'Definitions' *Situationist International Anthology*. (ed. & trans K. Knabb). Bureau of Public Secrets. Berkeley. 1981, 45

[124] Anon. 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation'. *Situationist International Anthology*. (ed. & trans K. Knabb). Bureau of Public Secrets. Berkeley. 1981, 43

[125] See Debord & Wolman, 14

[126] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 168

[127] Anon. 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation'. 43

had been connected to Debord's Letterist International "since 1955,"[128] and remained a member of the Situationists until the mid-1960s. Furthermore, many participants recall that the antics of the Incarnation severely disturbed the personnel of the Hall.[129] In fact, although Horovitz was permitted to hire the venue for his "chaotic Festival of the New Moon"[130] in 1966, the Hall's management eventually attempted to "ban"[131] the participants from performing there again.[132] In this respect, perhaps the event's carnivalesque performances attempt to divert the Hall—which represented a space of Establishment culture—to a countercultural space of play. Yet, as Kershaw observes, a radical performance is rarely disentangled from the "social and political tensions of its time,"[133] and certain characteristics of the Incarnation would later resurface in explicitly political situations. In November 1965, Ginsberg advised a group of demonstrators in Berkeley to arm themselves with "masses of flowers—a visual spectacle—especially concentrated on the front lines."[134] In light of the Incarnation's proximity to this march, it is likely that the poet derived his idea from the floral décor of the performance. But what about the event itself? Of course, the Incarnation's free and festive spirit could be construed as a celebration of individual "freedom from traditions and conventions that had ceased to be liberating,"[135] and perhaps the carnivalesque antics produced a temporary sense of liberation from the "existing systems of formalised power."[136] However, as we have seen, these carnivalesque practices may not demonstrate the full scope of the proceedings. What particular forms of diversion did the performance enact?

The evening was not without specific political statements. Simon Vinkenoog, who was the first to read, opened his performance by declaring that the Incarnation

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[128] Miles, *London Calling*, 136

[129] Nuttall remembers that the steward who found him bathing John Latham after their failed intervention ran away in terror. See Nuttall's interview in *The Gathering of the Tribes*.

[130] Nuttall, 182

[131] Horovitz, 'Afterwords', 341

[132] "None of us who had even the remotest connection with that event have ever been able to hire the Albert Hall again. Ever, ever, ever, ever, ever. They check. All those one-armed British Legion commissionaires had never in their lives seen anything like it. And hoped to never see it again." See Miles, S. in *Days in the Life*, 74

[133] Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance*, 7

[134] Ginsberg, A. 'Demonstration or Spectacle As Example, As Communication or How to Make a March/Spectacle'. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995* (ed. B.Morgan). Penguin. London. 2000, 10

[135] Nelson, 9

[136] Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance*, 19

presented the world's poets on 'peace alert.'[137] Later, when Trocchi introduced Tom McGrath to the crowd, he explained that *Peace News*—which McGrath edited—had become a particularly pertinent publication during the previous three months.[138] Both utterances refer directly to the Vietnam War, where US ground units had first been deployed in March that year. Although Wilson's Labour government—who supported the American foreign policy—did not commit troops to Vietnam, the younger generations in Britain nevertheless felt a growing discontentment about the escalation of the war.[139] Such sentiments resonate with the performances during the Incarnation. For instance, poems by McGrath and Ginsberg feature unfavourable references to the war, and one of the biggest ovations for the evening, as Miles has recently noted,[140] was given to Mitchell's 'To Whom May it Concern (Tell Me Lies about Vietnam)'. Given the poem's lack of nuance, the applause was most likely inspired by a commonality of sentiment:

> I smell something burning, hope it's just my brains.
> They're only dropping peppermints and daisy-chains.
>> So stuff my nose with garlic
>> Coat my eyes with butter
>> Fill my ears with silver
>> Stick my legs in plaster
>> Tell me lies about Vietnam.
>
> Where were you at the time of the crime?
> Down by the Cenotaph drinking slime
>> So chain my tongue with whisky
>> Stuff my nose with garlic
>> Coat my eyes with butter
>> Fill my ears with silver
>> Stick my legs in plaster
>> Tell me lies about Vietnam.[141]

In the Introduction,[142] I briefly observed that Kershaw defines the politics of performance as an ideological transaction between the performers and the audience. More specifically, he argues that the two share a "collective" and interactive "ability"

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[137] See outtakes from Whitehead's film in *The Gathering of the Tribes*.

[138] See 1CDR0010807

[139] See for example, Seed, 34

[140] See Miles, *London Calling*, 149

[141] Mitchell, A. 'To Whom it May Concern'. *Children of Albion* (ed. M. Horovitz). Penguin. London. 1970, 221. Hereafter, poems from this volume will be cited as *Children of Albion*

[142] See section 1.1 in Chapter 1

to recognise the "signs used in" the "performance." [143] Mitchell's reading confirms that the Incarnation featured several moments of similar transactions, which revolved around asseverations of dissent against the war in Vietnam. As a consequence, it is possible to regard the event as a performance that attempts to temporarily divert a space encoded with signs of bygone imperial powers, and use the site as a place of protest against a war that was considered a symbol of "American corruption, interventionism and *neo-imperialism*."[144]

If the Incarnation aspired to be a protest against the war in Vietnam, the evening could be regarded as one of the UK's first demonstrations about the conflict. Staged so quickly after the war had commenced in full, the occasion preceded both the 1966 and '67 demonstrations organised by CND, as well as the emergence of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in 1968.[145] Yet, these aspirations are not devoid of ambivalences. If considered exclusively as a rally against the war, the message of the event may seem somewhat muddled. Although individual performers and poems vocally abhorred the war, several others made no gestures toward such statements. Furthermore, the invocation that the Poets Cooperative prepared [146] as an announcement for the event features no references to the conflict. If anything, it places a prominent emphasis on "personal rather than political"[147] change:[148]

> World declaration hot peace shower! Earth's grass is
> free! Cosmic poetry visitation accidentally happening
> carnally! Spontaneous planet-chant Carnival! Mental
> Cosmonaut poet-epiphany, immaculate supranational
> Poesy insemination!
>   Skullbody love-congress Annunciation,
> duende concordium, effendi tovarisch illumination,
> Now! Sigmatic New Departures Residu of Better
> Books & Moving Times in obscenely New Directions!
> Soul revolution City Lights Olympian lamb-blast!
> Castalia centrum new consciousness hungry
> generation Movement roundhouse 42 beat

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[143] Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, 16

[144] Lowre, A. 'The New Radicalism; the politics of culture in Britain, America and France, 1956-73'. *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (eds. B. Moore-Gilbert & J.Seed). Routledge. London. 1992, 57 (my emphasis)

[145] See Seed, 34

[146] Miles is doubtful about the extent to which the invocation was a free collaborative improvisation, and suggests that the majority of the piece was written by Ginsberg. See Miles, *In the Sixties*, 58

[147] Whalen, J & Flacks,R. *Beyond the Barricades: The Sixties Generation Grows Up*. Temple University Press. USA. 1989, 11

[148] Whalen and Flacks are describing the ideologies of the American counterculture, but—as I will argue—similar ideas are applicable to the contexts of the Incarnation.

apocalypse energy-triumph!
                                    You are not alone!
Miraculous assumption! O Sacred Heart invisible
insurrection! Albion! awake! awake! awake! O
shameless bandwagon! Self-evident for real naked
come the words! Global synthesis habitual for this
Eternity! Nobody's Crazy Immortals Forever![149]

In other words, the Incarnation can appear quite confused in its message, which has
led to criticisms that the performance squandered its intended "natural indignation at
global inhumanity" by merely forming an "uneasy consolidation of [a] self-
congratulatory community."[150]

However, perhaps these ambivalences are indicative of broader social and
cultural contexts. Despite their valuable scholarship, the earliest sociological studies
of the counterculture, including Roszak's, did not develop a "sufficiently clear and
analytic" [151] definition of the term. Therefore, while Roszak associates the
countercultural "penchant for the occult, for magic and for exotic ritual" with "the
youthful political activism of the sixties,"[152] subsequent research has developed more
astute observations. Whalen and Flacks, for example, delineate between the New Left
and the counterculture of the 1960s. They argue that while both movements were
characterised by anti-establishment principles,[153] the latter aspired toward different
ideals:

> The counterculture reinforced the expressive rather than the
> instrumental, the personal rather than the political, retreatism rather
> than revolutionary action. It defined the good society as one in which
> liberty and autonomy rather than equality and democracy were primary
> values.[154]

Whalen and Flacks situate their studies in an American context, where they identify
the Vietnam War as a point of convergence between these disparate subversive

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[149] Various, in Horovitz, M. (ed.) *The POT! (Poetry Olympics Twenty05) Anthology* New Departures.
    London. 2005, 9

[150]Coupe, L. 'Tell Me Lies About Vietnam: English Poetry and the American War'. *Tell Me Lies About
    Vietnam*. (eds. A. Lowre & J. Walsh) Open University Press. Great Britain. 1988, 167

[151]Westhues, K. *Society's Shadow: Studies in the Sociology of Countercultures*. MacGraw-Hill
    Ryerson Limited. Canada. 1972, 8

[152] Roszak, 124

[153] See Whalen and Flacks, 12

[154] Whalen and Flacks, 14

movements, as both aggressively opposed the draft policy.[155] While such legislation was not in effect in the UK, many of Whalen and Flacks' concepts remain applicable. Since its emergence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the New Left in Britain saw itself as an "open-ended, participatory [and] spontaneous"[156] movement that was committed to a range of political endeavours. These included direct involvement with the "anti-racist action in Notting Hill and Kensington in the aftermath of the race riots" in 1958, the activities of the CND and "the organization of the Aldermanston marches."[157] Such activism provides a clear contrast to the contents within the first issue of *International Times*. The underground newspaper—founded by Miles in October 1966 and first edited by McGrath—is frequently identified as "the formal arrival of the counterculture"[158] in England. Broadly speaking, the first issue is primarily focused on artistic and cultural matters. Miles' editorial, while wishing to "shake up this city,"[159] places a considerable emphasis on individual autonomy; for instance, he claims one should not "rush to work" but "only work at what"[160] they enjoy. Alongside a poem from Mitchell, the contents include a review of Yoko Ono's exhibition at the Indica Gallery,[161] discussions of the recent 'Destruction in Art Symposium' held in London,[162] as well as information regarding the use of cannabis and LSD[163]. The only article that explicitly discusses foreign policy and politics is Alex Gross' report on the Red Guards in China.[164] In this respect, while *International Times* is not free of politics, the concerns of the publication primarily focus on a desire to "live and produce creatively, preferably as an artist or artisan."[165]

Yet, as Nelson points out, although the British counterculture claimed to "eschew ideologies and politics," they were not "entirely unaffected"[166] by the ideals

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[155] While the groups reacted against the draft in similar ways, their motives differed. For the "New Left, draft resistance was a refusal of complicity with the war machine and a strategy for opposing it. For the counterculture, the draft represented a fundamental obvious threat to personal freedom and self-expressions." See Whalen and Flacks, 15

[156] Seed, 27

[157] *Ibid*

[158] Nelson, 45

[159] Miles, B. 'Editorial: YOU'. *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 1

[160] *Ibid*, 8

[161] See *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 3

[162] See Landesman, J. & Cox, T. 'Two Views of Dias' *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 9

[163] See *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 4

[164] See Gross, A. 'China' *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 8

[165] Whalen and Flacks, 14

[166] Nelson, 11

and activities of the New Left. The first *International Times* also contains a review of The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *US*, where the reviewer condemns the Vietnam War as "organised and accidental mass murder, systematic torture, brazen deceit and chronic duplicity."[167] As the publication developed, especially in the aftermath of May 1968, its discussions about political activism became increasingly explicit.[168] Eventually, some contributors appeared to eschew 'retreatism' in favour of direct action:

> An alternative society cannot exist. An alternative is something alongside but independent of something else. Will our existing government permit a part of the community to break off and live outside its laws? No. The laws have got to be changed. The new society must be made out of the one we've got.[169]

These formulations are mirrored in certain facets of the Incarnation. Although many present that night would later contribute to publications such as *International Times*, several participants, including Nuttall, Miles, Hawkins, Brown and Horovitz had also been "younger CND followers"[170] who took part in the Aldermanston marches. In other words, the event's community featured some convergences between countercultural individualism and direct forms of political action. Perhaps this explains why it is difficult to configure the Incarnation's diverted space explicitly as an imitation of rock concerts, or a carnivalesque celebration of countercultural freedoms, or a protest against the war in Vietnam. Perhaps all of these aspirations are simultaneously present, each colliding with the others.

Ginsberg's performance that evening ultimately epitomises these myriad aspirations. Earlier in this chapter, I briefly intimated that the poet's readings are generally portrayed as a paragon of Middleton's 'performance of authorship'. To a certain extent, this also characterises Ginsberg's behaviour at the Incarnation, where he consciously "occupies the first person"[171] and seemingly closes "the gap between author and text."[172] In fact, this approach is already presaged by some of the poems he performed that night: a line in "The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*' reads, "Allen

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[167] Marowitz, C. 'Who Us? What Us? Why Us?' *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966), 1

[168] See Tasher, R. et al. 'Alternative Society Now: Stop Press Paris Fri 24 May'. *IT 32* (May 31-June 13, 1968) n.p.

[169] Hammerton, P. 'Dear Rebel'. *IT 43* (November 1-14, 1968), 8

[170] Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, 181

[171] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 33

[172] *Ibid*, 62

Ginsberg says this."[173] Furthermore, when Trocchi announces that "it is about time Allen Ginsberg came on stage,"[174] his voice carries a hint of anticipation, and the poet's entrance to the dais is greeted with rapturous applause. It almost sounds as if the entire event becomes centred on Ginsberg's celebrity. In this respect, the welcome gives some credence to Roszak's claim that the poet "need not even read his verses: he need only to appear in order to make his compelling"[175] statement. Indeed, it is tempting to identify these moments as early adumbrations of Ginsberg's shift from a "literary to public prophet"[176] during the second half of the 1960s. How accurate are these preliminary impressions?

Ginsberg had originally envisioned the evening as a "public incarnation of a new consciousness"[177], and the scenes in *Wholly Communion* present the poet enjoying the role he had first adopted at the Vancouver Poetry Conference two years earlier. His performance occasionally approaches countercultural "religious form."[178] As I observed earlier, Ginsberg both opened and closed the evening with a Tibetan Mantra; in addition, while he reads Hollo's translation of Voznesensky's 'Three Pears/America', Whitehead's film depicts the poet pointing his finger prophetically, as well as contorting his body and gesticulating according to the poem's cadences. A similar performance unfolds in the scenes where Ginsberg reads 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*'. The aforementioned footage of the dancing girl bears a resemblance to the presentations of "trance techniques, magic rites and healing ceremonies"[179] that

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[173] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 327

[174] 1CDR0010807

[175] Roszak, 129

[176] Schumacher, 445

[177] Ginsberg, in Miles, *London Calling*, 151

[178] Eco, U. 'Does Counter-Culture Exist' (trans, J. Condie). *Apocalypse Postponed* (ed. R. Lumley). Indiana University Press. Bloomington, 124

[179] Berghaus, *Avant-garde Performance*, 136
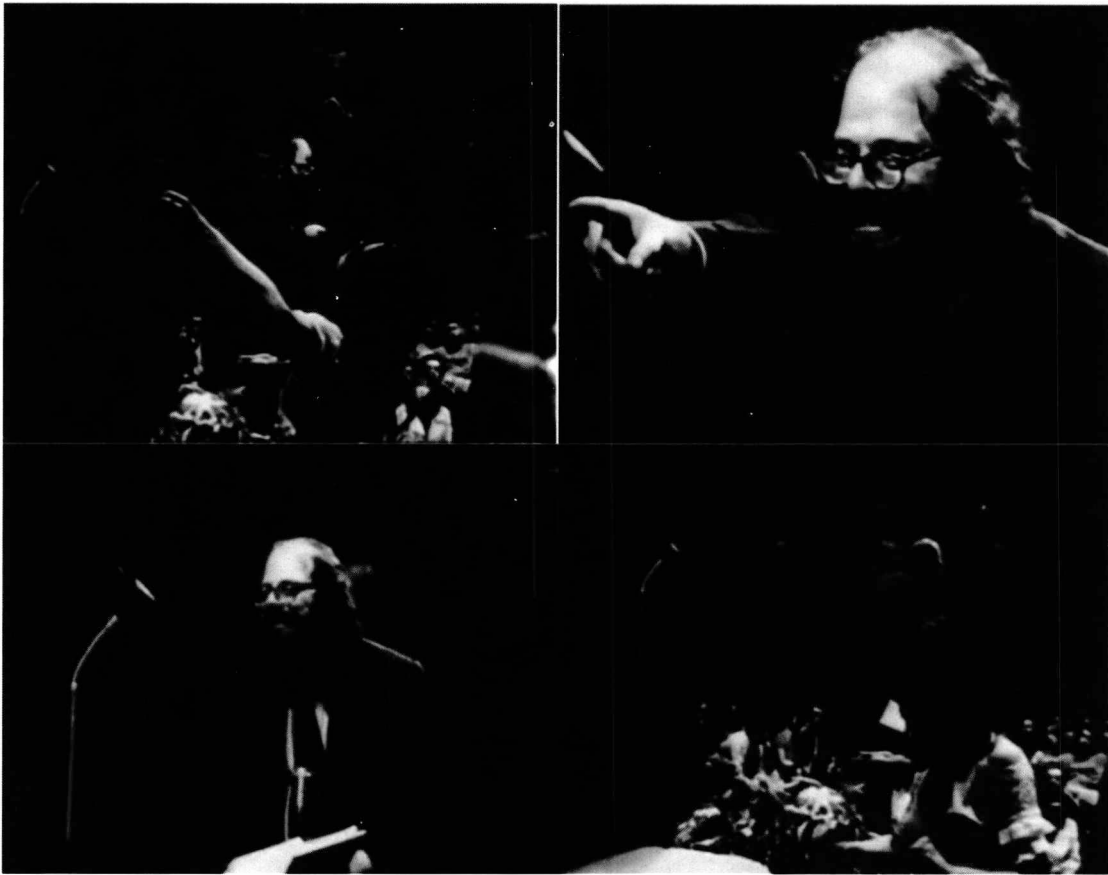
Fig 3.3: Scenes from Ginsberg's reading at The First International Poetry Incarnation
Extracted from *Wholly Communion*

were frequently incorporated into avant-garde performances during the 1960s.[180] The performed text amplifies these representations. Schumacher argues that 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express'* designated "an ending to the visionary quest"[181] that Ginsberg had pursued since 1948, when he allegedly heard William Blake's voice in his apartment.[182] The poet himself recounted this change of heart in a journal entry from January 8th, 1963:

> maybe death—naturally—being beyond the nature of mental flesh perception—thus perhaps telling me—"a sign"—to shut up and live in the present temporary form—that's all that form can be, what it at present is—till it literally dies. After that it's another matter, incomprehensible to that which comprehends flesh universe only— flesh a bad word—Body[183]

Ginsberg's acceptance of 'the present temporary form' is reiterated within the poem:

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[180] See Berghaus, *Avant-garde Performance*, pp. 132-136

[181] Schumacher 447.

[182] See, for example, Morgan, 103

[183] Ginsberg, A. *Indian Journals: March 1962- May 1963*. Dave Haselwood Books & City Lights Books. San Francisco. 1971, 154

> Open the portals to what Is,
> The mattress covered with sheets,
>   soft pillows of skin
> long soft hair and delicate
>   palms along the buttocks
>   timidly touching,
> waiting for a sign, a throb
>   softness of balls, rough
>   nipples alone in the dark
>   met by a weird finger;
> Tears allright, and laughter
>   allright
> I am that I am— [184]

Although the poem recounts a personal change for Ginsberg, it is not performed with confessional tones. Instead, 'Open the portals to what Is' is uttered as if it were an imperative command,[185] through which Ginsberg intends to guide his audience to experience the selfsame transformation. Likewise, references to both 'tears' and 'laughter' as 'allright' appear to inform the listeners of the potential responses to the poem's illuminations. Ginsberg himself claimed to have wept while he composed the text[186]. Thus, the author's performance enacts a shamanic ritual. The poet presents himself as a spiritual healer who has experienced a "dream" or a "vision", which he must now convert into a "song"[187] to "deliver [...] back to his"[188] community.

These perspectives of Ginsberg's performance cohere with Roszak's study, where the poet allows himself "to be transformed by the visionary powers" of his work, which he subsequently presents "as an example to his generation."[189] However, the first section of Ginsberg's reading was a strangely paradoxical affair. As the aforementioned confrontations with the audience indicate, Ginsberg's delivery did not inspire transcendent experiences throughout the Hall. In fact, the phantasmagoria of a shamanic ritual collapses during the performance. Morgan argues that 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*' was structurally modelled on "the traditional mantric-pranayamic-belly-breathing cycle."[190] In effect, the vocal performance of the poem

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[184] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 324

[185] See 1CDR0010807

[186] See Morgan, 376

[187] Rothenberg, J. *Technicians of the Sacred*. Double Day. Garden City. 1968, 424

[188] Schechner,42

[189] Roszak, 128

[190] Morgan, 376

was designed to replicate the "same breathing pattern"[191] in order to produce a "temporary physical change"[192] within the reader. Yet, the recordings from the Incarnation do not convey these impressions. Although the second section of the poem is structured as "one big long sigh,"[193] Ginsberg aggressively snarls his way through lines such as "like a baby crying Fuck / me in the asshole" or "so that I do / live I will die."[194] As a result, sections of the reading—instead of evoking spiritual change—seem incredibly hostile. The poet veers away from the "cathartic and therapeutic rituals"[195] of tribal shamans, and the performance begins to resemble a debate between an evangelical orator and his audience. A few days after the Incarnation, Ginsberg wrote an unpublished letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, in which he deeply regrets his conduct:

> By the time I got up to read I was so confounded by (what seemed to me then) the whole scene turned so rubbish, so drunk with wine, and so short of time to present what I'd imagined possible, that I read quite poorly and hysterically.[196]

As we have seen, the poet 'imagined' a countercultural ceremony that eschewed the "western industrial society"[197] in favour of "a more authentic existence,"[198] where his shamanic ritual would convey a "form of survival" that offered "hope"[199] to his audience. While some in the crowd did experience a sense of elation,[200] Ginsberg's own performance fell short of his grand aspirations. The performance eluded the author's intentions.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that Ginsberg's performance was ultimately a "disastrous"[201] occasion. When the poet closes the evening with a reading of 'Who Be Kind To', the tones of his delivery appear to shift.[202] At this stage, the tumultuous confrontations between Ginsberg and the audience had subsided, and he is able to

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[191] *Ibid*

[192] *Ibid*, 377

[193] *Ibid*, 376

[194] 1CDR0010807. Also see Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, pp. 325-329

[195] Berghaus, *Avant-garde Performance*, 136

[196] Ginsberg, in Miles, *London Calling*, 151

[197] Whalen and Flacks, 11

[198] Berghaus, *Avant-garde Performance*, 136

[199] Mottram, E. *Allen Ginsberg in the Sixties*. Unicorn Bookshop. Brighton. 1972, 12

[200] See interviews with members of the audience in *The Gathering of the Tribes*.

[201] Miles, *London Calling*, 151

[202] See Ginsberg, A. 'Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg Reads a Selection of Poems, International Poetry Incarnation'. British Library Sound Archive. 1965.06.11. C162/7 Hereafter, cited as C162/7

read uninterrupted. The receptive ambiance is fitting, as 'Who Be Kind To' is ineradicably connected with the Incarnation: Ginsberg had composed poem specifically for the occasion on the 8th of June.[203] The recordings also indicate that the poet felt a palpable yearning to read this text. Before he commences, voices from the crowd request both 'Howl' and 'Sunflower Sutra' but Ginsberg declines these suggestions, declaring: "why read something old?"[204] Here, the poet forgoes his renowned works in order to perform material that directly addresses his present situation.

How does 'Who Be Kind To' address the Incarnation? In some respects, the poem traverses the event's myriad aspirations. Although early lines refer to the "napalm cancer and the deathbed in Vietnam,"[205] the poem does not dwell upon such imagery. In fact, it shifts to enthuse about The Beatles, and

> the boom bom that bounces in the joyful
> > bowels as the Liverpool Minstrels of
> > CavernSink
> raise up their joyful voices.[206]

These are soon followed by depictions of Thelonious Monk playing

> lone chord-bangs on his vast piano
> lost in space on a bench and bearing himself
> in the nightclub universe[207].

The comment on Monk recalls the well-established relationship between the Beats and jazz, but the inclusion of The Beatles appears specifically connected to the Incarnation. As I observed earlier, Ginsberg coveted the group's phenomenal popularity, and in the early sixties his admiration verged on idolatry. The poet would often tell friends and associates that this music could "change society once and for all,"[208] and even tried to demonstrate the band's 'melopoeia' to an elderly Ezra Pound during a visit to Rapallo in 1967.[209] Furthermore, in the weeks that preceded the Incarnation, Ginsberg travelled to perform in Liverpool,[210] where he valorised the

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[203] See Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 326

[204] C162/7

[205] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 359

[206] *Ibid*, 360

[207] *Ibid*, 361

[208] Morgan, 394

[209] See Carpenter, H. *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*. Dell Publishing. New York. 1988. pp. 897-899

[210] See Morgan, 410

city's rock 'n' roll scene as the new "centre of the consciousness of the human universe."[211] In this context, the poem's references illustrate a distinct claim. If Liverpool and The Beatles are presented as exemplars of the "kindness" and "joy to be born"[212] that is capable of creating societal change, perhaps Ginsberg wishes to perform a comparable ideological transaction with his audience. This may even explain the proximity between the imagery of Monk and 'the Liverpool Minstrels of Cavernsink'. By conflating the soundtrack of the new 'human consciousness' with the music that inspired the Beats, Ginsberg situates his generation as the precursors of the present zeitgeist.

Yet, the seismic transformations of 'Who Be Kind To' seem primarily expressive and personal. As Ginsberg reads on, the poem progresses—via proclamations of "poets be fools of their own desire"[213]—to an explicit, carefully articulated[214] vision of orgiastic liberation:

> A dream! A Dream! I don't want to be alone!
>   I want to know I am loved!
> I want the orgy of our flesh, orgy
>   of all eyes happy, orgy of the soul
>   kissing and blessing its mortal-grown
>   body
> orgy of tenderness beneath the neck, orgy of
>   kindness to thigh and vagina
> Desire given with meat hand
>   and cock, desire taken with
>   mouth and ass, desire returned
>   to the last sigh!
> Tonite let's all make love in London
>   as if it were 2001 the years
>   of thrilling god—[215]

Thus, despite the poem's early allusions to the conflict in Vietnam, it does not utilise the full force of its fervour to remonstrate the war. Instead, these lines endorse the countercultural ideals of expressing intimate "needs and desires" irrespective of the established "institutions and relationships" that restrict "personal freedom."[216] That is to say, Ginsberg's concluding remarks seemingly augment the Albert Hall as a

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[211] Ginsberg, in Schumacher, 446

[212] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 360

[213] *Ibid*, 361

[214] See C162/7

[215] *Ibid*, 361-362

[216] Whalen & Flacks, 13

carnivalesque place of play. To borrow from de Certeau, 'Who Be Kind To' performs with a "terrain" that is "organised by" Establishment culture, and seeks to create "surprises" in the cracks of its "proprietary powers."[217] Indeed, if the poem intends to invoke the 'new consciousness' arising from Liverpool, Ginsberg's call to 'make love in London' seemingly urges the audience to claim the Hall as one of the "the giant/ auditoriums of the planet," where the "peaceful kiss of sex"[218] might be manifested.

While Ginsberg's reading concluded with a countercultural asseveration for liberty and autonomy, it would nonetheless be fallacious to regard 'the kindness' of the poem as an eschewal of politics. More accurately, 'Who Be Kind To' flickers between the Incarnation's carnivalesque antics and its 'natural indignation' over a global inhumanity. In the process, the poet performs a slightly more nuanced analysis of the war in Vietnam. An early excerpt from the text reads:

> Be kind to this place, which is your present
> 	habitation, with derrick and radar tower
> 	and flower in the ancient brook—
> Be kind to your neighbour who weeps
> 	solid tears on the television sofa,
> he has no other home, and hears nothing
> 	but the hard voice of telephones
> Click, buzz, switch channel and the inspired
> 	melodrama disappears
> and he is left alone for the night, he disappears
> 	in bed—
> Be kind to your disappearing mother and
> 	father gazing out the terraced window
> 	as milk truck and hearse turn the corner
> Be kind to the politician weeping in the galleries
> 	of Whitehall, Kremlin, White House
> 	Louvre and Phoenix City
> aged, large nosed, angry, nervously dialing [sic]
> 	the bald voice box connected to
> electrodes underground converging thru
> 	wires vaster than a kitten's eye can see
> on the mushroom shaped fear-lobe under
> 	the ear of Sleeping Dr. Einstein
> crawling with worms, crawling with worms, crawling
> 	with worms the hour has come—[219]

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[217] de Certeau, 37

[218] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 361

[219] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 359-360

This passage follows soon after the earlier reference to the 'deathbed in Vietnam', which is presented as one feature of the panorama that unfolds across the first part of the poem. In other words, 'Who Be Kind To' presents the war as symptom of a larger malaise that includes urban isolation, alienating technologies, and an overarching fear of a nuclear apocalypse. The amalgamation of these images essentially represents the "cold war [...] borne against" humanity "since the days of the snake."[220] Much like the "Nightmare of Moloch"[221] in 'Howl', this conflict—which is both symbolic and actual—is the fundamental target of Ginsberg's critique. These violent realities also permeate the body. Throughout the passage, Ginsberg fixes upon isolated physical fragments such as tears, eyes, 'large' noses and ears; in fact, as these features are all associated with one solitary part of the anatomy, the dismemberment is effectively twofold. Furthermore, as the 'hard voice of telephones' and 'bald voice box'—a colloquialism for the larynx—demonstrate, speech itself is disassociated through telephones and wires. In effect, the 'cold war' of the poem is enacted with such "brutal techniques" that under its "over-powering forces" the "body fragments."[222] The consequences of this fragmentation are particularly significant for the poem's political figures. Instead of voicing their policies to the public, the politicians remain secluded in their galleries of power, where they feed their mandates into a vast underground network of wires. By doing so, the fragmented statesmen abdicate all responsibility for themselves and their actions.[223] Ergo, if 'Who Be Kind To' is considered via Lefebvre's concepts, it ultimately mourns physical cultures where the body "disappropriates itself"[224] in multiple ways.

Correspondingly, perhaps the 'orgy of tenderness' in which the poem culminates emits an echo of Ginsberg's earlier exclamation from Vancouver: "the cold war's over [...] All we got do is really love each other."[225] Like the imagery of the politicians, the orgiastic moments of 'Who Be Kind To' focus upon details of the body: thighs, vaginas, mouths, hands, 'cocks' and 'asses' are all identified within this section. Yet, these somatic features escape the sense of alienation that is manifested in

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[220] *Ibid*, 362

[221] *Ibid*, 131

[222] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 166

[223] My phrasing derives from *The Production of Space*, where Lefebvre writes: "the body fragments, abdicates responsibility for itself". See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 166

[224] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 166

[225] Ginsberg, in Morgan, 377

the disappropriated politicians. As the dismembered statesmen resign their bodies to an underground convergence of wires, they eventually exist only as "sadistic noises / on the radio,"[226] which are without physical form. By contrast, the organs in the 'orgy of tenderness' are shown to be in harmony with both their 'souls' and their 'mortal grown' bodies. Accordingly, while these body parts are itemised individually, they are in fact "being converted"—or *detourned*—"into something else." [227] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari criticise Freud's study of the 'Wolf Man' Sergei Pankejeff,[228] as his "reductive procedure"[229] of psychoanalysis ignored the fact that wolves are pack animals, and "mistook crowds for a single person."[230] Instead, the two argue:

> In becoming-wolf, the important thing is the position of the mass, and above all the position of the subject itself in relation to the pack or wolf-multiplicity: how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays, how does it or does not hold the multiplicity.[231]

A comparable 'becoming' is signified by the 'orgy of tenderness' in 'Who Be Kind To'. Ginsberg effectively situates this act as a counterforce to the 'disappropriating' physical cultures of the 'cold war' within the poem. His call to 'make love in London' is in fact an invocation for becoming a multiplicity. In this respect, the carnivalesque tones of the poem are not a representation of a simple *joie de vivre*, but—more appropriately—the *jouissance*[232] of a "people who are continually growing and renewed."[233]

As a consequence, perhaps the performance of 'Who Be Kind To' resonates with certain diversions and *détournements* that are connected with the Incarnation. In the first volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre denounces the eroticism of advertising as devoid of any "genuine sensuality"—by which he means "a sensuality

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[226] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 362

[227] Debord, & Wolman, 13

[228] See, for example, Freud, S. 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis ("Wolf Man")'. *The Freud Reader* (ed. P. Gay). Vintage. London. 1995, pp. 400-426

[229] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 31

[230] *Ibid*, 33

[231] *Ibid*, 32

[232] I am using the word a broader sense, and do not wish to exclusively associate it with the different theories developed by Zizek, Cixous, and Barthes. Deleuze and Guattari also refer to *jouissance* in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it is discussed in relation to The Body Without Organs. I will draw upon different aspects of this concept during Chapter 6. See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 171

[233] Bakhtin, 19

which implies" beauty and charm, passion and modesty, as well as "fulfilment."[234] Instead, the "superficial [...] appearance" of adverts presents a "weary" and "mechanical" image that can only lead to "dissatisfaction."[235] In this respect, these images denote certain characteristics of the alienating "brutal techniques"[236] that disappropriate the body in *The Production of Space*. Although Ginsberg's diction is laced with eroticism, the coitus in the poem—as we have seen—symbolises an act of resistance against such dominating forces, as the body is reappropriated and its sociality is realised as a 'subject' within a multiplicity. Therefore, while Ginsberg does not distinguish between bodies and sexuality in accordance with Lefebvre's writings[237], the two share a comparable understanding of the body and *détournement*. If the Incarnation at large sought to reappropriate the representational space of the Albert Hall, Ginsberg's conclusion served as a reminder that any "utopian or realistic" dramatic change must also include "the reappropriation of the body" as a "part of its agenda." [238]

In the end, Ginsberg's performance does not delineate clear distinctions between the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation. Rather, it traverses the complex network of these ambitions. The evening as a whole is ultimately a site of striated ambivalence. Although the occasion seeks to enact a *détournement* of the Hall's representational space, these attempts are almost exhaustingly multifarious. At times, as Ginsberg's rendition of 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*' demonstrates, certain aspirations may derail others. Because the event's carnivalesque practices generated a non-hierarchical space,[239] Ginsberg's shamanic phantasmagoria naturally struggled to present the poet as a "clergyman"[240] above the crowd; moreover, his own intoxication impinged on this mode of performance. More generally, the evening's countercultural indulgences sometimes diluted its protest against the war in Vietnam. In this respect, the performed diversions behave similarly to de Certeau's 'tactics', as they appear to operate in "the chance offerings of the moment" without the advantage of "planning

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[234] Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1*, 35

[235] *Ibid*

[236] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 166

[237] See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 166-167

[238] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 167

[239] See Bakhtin, 9

[240] Roszak, 138

[a] general strategy"[241]. Indeed, the Incarnation's *détournements* are seemingly only enacted through "isolated occasions."[242] Nevertheless, perhaps the performance of 'Who Be Kind To' represents one moment of convergence. Here, Ginsberg is able to manoeuvre through celebrations of countercultural autonomy and a nuanced critique of the Vietnam War, which he eventually identifies as another component of the lacklove Moloch and "the tobacco haze of Capitalism"[243] that he howled against in San Francisco a decade earlier. In this respect, the reappropriated bodies in the 'orgy of tenderness' do not only resonate with the reappropriated space of the occasion, but also with the calls for empathy that echo throughout Ginsberg's career. Yet, in order to arrive at this understanding of the event, we must hear all that Ginsberg has to say. On Roszak's estimation—where the poet "need only appear in order to make his compelling"[244] statements—the reading at the Albert Hall would only amount to an inadequate and inebriated mimicry of an atavistic healing ritual. Despite Ginsberg's considerable charisma, his performance also extends beyond the "individuality of the speaker"[245] and enters into a dialogue with the manifold social situations of his present moment, as well as the multiplex of historical contexts from which the event emerges. In a quasi-paradoxical process, he simultaneously asserts an authorial presence as well as the presence of a multiplicity.

3.3 'Close the portals of the festival?'

A brief coda: reverberations, summaries and further movements

The multifarious facets of the Incarnation also evince the unexpected eventualities that may occur during a performance. It seems as if the organisers themselves were unprepared for the proceedings. When Trocchi first entered the dais, he candidly expressed his enormous surprise over the scale of the audience.[246] Eight hours later, he unexpectedly brought the evening to an abrupt close with a simple "that's all folks"[247] as Ginsberg resumed his chanting. But how did the event's reverberations continue

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[241] de Certeau, 37

[242] *Ibid*

[243] Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 127

[244] Roszak, 128

[245] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 34

[246] See outtakes from Whitehead's film in *Gathering of the Tribes*

[247] C162/7

after the performance had finished? Today, much of the Incarnation's countercultural optimism—which forms a facet of Ginsberg's performance—is difficult to approach without a degree of cynicism. As Nuttall later explained to Jonathon Green:

> There was a shift between '66 and '67 from poetry and art and jazz and anti-nuclear politics to just sex and drugs, legalise pot. It was the arrival of capitalism. The markets saw that these revolutionaries could be put in a safe pen and given their consumer goods. Electronically amplified music and narcotics. You had rock'n'roll, which is the most unchanging, conservative popular music that there had ever been, and continues to be so, under the banner of perpetual revolution [...] I thought we had to invade the media, but what we misjudged was the power and complexity of the media. The media dismantled the whole thing. It bought it up. And this happened in '67, just as it seemed we'd won.[248]

Given the Incarnation's proximity to Nuttall's chronology, Green's own speculations of the event as an early symptom for this 'arrival of capitalism' seem unsurprising.[249] Yet, as I intimated earlier in this chapter, others portray the immediate aftermath of occasion as an incredibly vibrant period. Miles valorises the performance as a "catalyst" that created a "community" and a "framework"[250] for London's emergent counterculture, and this catalytic force apparently spread into continental Europe. For instance, Vinkenoog was so inspired by his participation that he staged a comparable event in Amsterdam a year later. More recently, Dutch scholars have presented his *Poëzie in Carré* (Poetry in the Carré Theater) as "the breakthrough of performance poetry"[251] within the Netherlands.

During the course of this chapter, I alluded to some of the Incarnation's possible offspring, such as Miles' *International Times*. Although this publication was a proponent of wider countercultural activities, other titles were more directly related to poetry. For instance, the Horovitz edited *Children of Albion*—which Sinclair described as "English Intelligencers rubbing shoulders with [...] the Dharma Bums, flotsam from Notting Dale and a few blokes Horovitz met in the pub"[252]—was one of the first volumes to gather several poets of the British Poetry Revival together in one

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[248] Nuttall, in *Days in the Life*, 223.

[249] See Green, in *Days in the Life*, viii

[250] Miles, *London Calling*, 151

[251] Franssen, G. 'Stage Fever and Text Anxiety: The Staging of Poeticity in Dutch Performance Poetry since the Sixties'. *Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in the Poetry Performance*. (eds. C. Grabner & A. Casas). Rodopi, Amsterdam. 2011, 36

[252] Sinclair, 'Introduction', xvi

anthology. Even though its scope reaches much further, the collection persistently presents itself as a scion of the Incarnation. Its epigraph is derived from 'Who Be Kind To', and Horovitz dedicates the book to Ginsberg. Among the poems included, Mitchell's 'To Whom it May Concern' and 'Stunted Sonnet'—as well as McGrath's 'The Evidence'—were all performed during the evening,[253] while Edwin Morgan's 'For the International Poetry Incarnation'[254] is a more general celebration of the event. Additionally, Horovitz's 'Afterwords', which describe the occasion as "the greatest stimulus for poetry this century,"[255] is an early example of the aggrandized accounts about the Incarnation. Yet, some the event's crucial contributions remain difficult to

Fig 3.4: Images of the audience
Extracted from *Wholly Communion*

quantify through material objects. To a certain degree, the space of the performance provided a social nexus where poets could meet. In certain scenes from *Wholly Communion*, Cobbing[256] is shown sitting close to Ginsberg, and in 1995, the Scottish

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[253] See *Children of Albion*, pp. 211-226 & pp. 199-203

[254] See *Children of Albion*, pp. 229-230

[255] Horovitz, 'Afterwords', 339

[256] Steven Willey's doctoral thesis on Bob Cobbing features some discussion of the poet's activities on the peripheries of the Incarnation, including his early championing of Jandl.

poet Hayden Murphy expressed his gratitude over the new friendships he forged that evening. After meeting the "alarmingly pale, bespectacled"[257] figure of Dom Sylvester Houédard, Murphy began corresponding with the poet, who eventually invited Murphy to join him at a performance in Gloucestershire a year later. During the same event, Jandl, Cobbing and Brown collaborated in a reprisal of Schwitters' 'The Furore of Sneezing', which Jandl had also performed at the Albert Hall. This encounter between Murphy and Houédard correlates well with the event's manifold social situations. If Ginsberg concluded his reading with an invocation for becoming a multiplicity, these ideological transactions *within* the audience effectively respond to his call.

But these transactions should be examined with caution. It would be spurious to consider the Incarnation as *the* progenitor for innovative poetry and performance within post-war Britain. Wheeler's brief references to the event in the conclusion of *Voicing American Poetry* come dangerously close to asserting this view:

> As if to return the gift Charles Dickens and Fanny Kemble gave to the United States in their influential nineteenth century reading tours, Ginsberg and others galvanized London through a [...] performance at the Albert Hall.[258]

Here, the image of the returning gift tacitly portrays Ginsberg's performance as a force that activated a dormant milieu of poetry. Of course, the new American poetry was an important influence for writers within the UK, but Wheeler overemphasises the 'galvanization' of London. Although poets such as Nuttall felt that Ginsberg's arrival was a "healing wind on a [...] parched"[259] artistic community, the years that preceded the Incarnation had already experienced an acceleration of small press publishing and performance events. For instance, Horovitz had staged his *Live New Departures* in "colleges, pubs, art galleries and jazz festivals"[260] across the country since 1960. Moreover, Cobbing had initiated his Writers Forum as early as 1951,[261] which had already published a pamphlet of Ginsberg's 'The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo*

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[257] Murphy, H. 'Dom Sylvester Houédard: A Dance Tune for the Cosmic Typewriter'. *Object Permanence 4* (1995), 2

[258] Wheeler, 165

[259] Nuttall, 228. The comment is made in the context of Nuttall's *sTigma* exhibition in Better Books

[260] Miles, *In the Sixties*, 27

[261] I have adopted the date that Peter Barry identifies in *Poetry Wars*. Other studies provide alternative dates. See Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 215

Express' in 1963.[262] More accurately, when the American poet arrived to London in May 1965, the poetry scene of the city was rhizomatically scattered, but incredibly active:

> When Cobbing, Musgrove, Rowan and I were putting on our shows in hired rooms, exclaiming our poetry in public parks, swinging the duplicator handle throughout the long Saturday afternoons of 1963 we had no idea the same thing was happening all over the world.[263]

In other words, the social multiplicities that occurred during the Incarnation are not necessarily unique attributes of a singular event. Rather, as Allen Fisher's comments in Chapter 1 demonstrate, poetry readings frequently generated an "ambiance" that enabled its participants to join a "nexus of people."[264] Of course, as Ginsberg's early clashes with the audience reveal, these convergences may not have occurred throughout the Hall. However, in the moments where the performance did conjoin 'subjects' and a 'pack', it enacted a situation that potentially takes place in all such events.[265] The distinguishing factor of the Incarnation is that its monumental space facilitated these multiplicities at a considerably larger scale.

Indeed, although this chapter culminated in an analysis of Ginsberg's performance, I have also attempted to outline a panoramic view of the Incarnation. Due the iconic status of the event, it might be appealing to consider it as a sui generis occasion that is quite unlike anything else. Contrarily, throughout this chapter, I have endeavoured to resist such perceptions. While acknowledging the specificity of the Incarnation, I have also placed it in parallel with a plurality of events and contexts. Ginsberg's performance at the Albert Hall corresponds with his howls at the Six Gallery; the Incarnation at large is simultaneously in dialogue with carnivalesque spectacles, the broader history of *détournements* within the Hall's representational space, protests against the war in Vietnam, as well as the different aspirations of the counterculture and the New Left; ultimately, in light of the evening's multiplicities, it also demonstrates the social nexuses that may occur during performance events. In this respect, the Incarnation is comparable to 'Theatre Piece # 1', in that both unfold myriad artistic practices and aspirations, communal convergences, as well as a range

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[262] See Ginsberg, A. *The change*. Writers Forum. London. 1963

[263] Nuttall, 161

[264] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[265] Middleton also acknowledges this "interaction of bodies with each other". See Middleton, 'How to Read a Poetry Reading'.

of cultural discourses. Similar themes will also be explored, from numerous perspectives, during the subsequent case studies. However, while the Incarnation was examined through panoramic socio-political and theoretical contexts, the following chapters will investigate how similar discourses are enacted within the performance itself. The first of these will focus on Denise Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977.

CHAPTER 4

'This blank space from which I speak'

Denise Riley at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, April 15ᵗʰ 1977

4.1 'I am neither this nor that'

The British Poetry Revival, female poets and Denise Riley: a brief overview

Although the previous chapter attempted to approach The First International Poetry Incarnation from a panoramic perspective, I must still address a deeply problematic aspect of the event. For an international poetry reading, the roster of the readers and performers appears oddly homogenous. While their nationalities indicate occasional variances, their gender and ethnicity[1] do not: all of the poets were white males.[2] Furthermore, such demographics seemed commonplace in other performances that involved poets from the Incarnation. Libby Houston, who was one of the few women performing in Horovitz's *Live New Departures*, recalls how "in that immediate scene" she "was the only woman"[3] reading. While Houston has also stated that she easily identified "with the boys"[4] she performed with, the extent to which this camaraderie was reciprocated remains unclear. When Horovitz and Pete Brown attempted to start their own reading agency, they immediately assumed that Houston—as "the woman"[5]— was the ideal candidate to oversee its administrative duties. This troubling inequality is also present in *The Children of Albion*. As Barry observes, it is often noted that the anthology contains substantially "more sons than daughters;"[6] indeed, of the 63 contributors, only five were female. Others have suggested that despite the

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[1] Regrettably, while the first section of this chapter will provide a brief overview of relationships between The British Poetry Revival and female authors, I do not have the space to address issues of ethnicity during the course of this thesis. As Mandy Bloomfield's recent review of Sheppard's *The Poetry of Saying* has suggested, the Caribbean Artists Movement, which involved Kamau Brathwaite and others, was started in London during the late sixties, and influenced the oral poetics of later black British poets. This field certainly deserves detailed further investigations, but they are beyond the scope of this present study. See Bloomfield, M. 'Review: Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents'. Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 2.1. 2010, pp. 92-96

[2] After many previous memoirs, Miles briefly acknowledged this issue in *London Calling*. Also see Nelson, 138, where she discusses the sexism present in *International Times*.

[3] Houston, L, 'On Being a Woman Poet'. *On Gender and Writing* (ed. M. Wandor). Pandora Press. London. 1983, 44.

[4] *Ibid*

[5] *Ibid*. Noting the unfairness of the proposal, Houston rejected the offer.

[6] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 37.

egalitarian rhetoric of the anthology, Horovitz's editorial preferences establish "an elite of his own"[7] that is "no more hospitable to women"[8] than the contemporaneous mainstream publications such as Al Alvarez's *The New Poetry*.[9]

Barry additionally notes that this predicament is not unique to publications and activities that were directly associated with the Incarnation. For instance, during his editorship of *Poetry Review* between 1971 and 1974, Eric Mottram[10] "published some two hundred poets, of whom twenty, or around ten per cent were women."[11] Furthermore, the women published by Mottram were generally "more successful [...] than their male counterparts," and it is therefore possible to speculate that "a relatively unknown female poet"[12] would have found it very difficult to have their poems printed in *Poetry Review*. In other words, the comparative absence of female poets is not an issue solely related to isolated publications, but a concern for The British Poetry Revival[13] in general. Recent studies of innovative British poetry have noted that perhaps the "creative environments" such as readings and performances were "particularly intimidating for women."[14] Specifically, scholars have suggested that these occasions were a part of a scene where female participants were "defined in relation to male audiences and male poets,"[15] and subjected to the machismo that accompanied such milieus. Thus, these female poets could be characterised as a

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[7] Booth, M. *British Poetry 1964-1984: Driving through the Barricades*. Routledge & Keagan Paul. London. 1985, 73

[8] Buck, C. 'Poetry and The Women's Movement in Postwar Britain'. *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*. (eds. J.Acheson & R.Huk). State University of New York Press. New York. 1996, 101

[9] See Alvarez, A (ed). *The New Poetry*. Penguin. London 1966. As Buck notes, the original edition, published in 1962, was comprised solely of male poets. The revised edition hardly improved upon this situation: the only female additions were Sylvia Plath and Adrianne Rich.

[10] Mottram's work will be discussed at length in the next chapter. For more on his editorship of the Poetry Society's journal, see Barry, *Poetry Wars*.

[11] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 35

[12] *Ibid*, 36. To balance this speculation, Barry notes that "very few writers were published for the first time in *Poetry Review*", with Bill Griffiths being the only undisputed example".

[13] The issue appears to persist in the subsequent generations of innovative British poetry. As Sheppard notes, later anthologies have continued to evidence a disparity between genders: "Mottram's British Poetry Revival section [in *The New British Poetry*] has only 2 women poets of its 25, Denise Riley and Wendy Mulford. Linguistically Innovative Poetry has not fared much better; Edwards' section, 'Some Younger Poets' has 4 women out of 18 poets, and *Conductors of Chaos* showcases only 5 women out of 36 contributors". See Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 162. Bloomfield questions whether Sheppard goes far enough in addressing these concerns. See Bloomfield, 96

[14] Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, 11

[15] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 161

marginalised gender within an already marginalised creative environment,[16] which deeply affected the politics of their writing. Speaking at a 'Papers on Patriarchy' conference in London in 1976, Cora Kaplan described poetry as "a privileged metalanguage in western patriarchal culture,"[17] and around the same time, Wendy Mulford observed:

> My writing is read and heard mainly by men engaged in poetic practices of differing kinds for whom my work has been of significance because of the attempts I have been making to work at the level of the production of meaning. But I want to join my voice within the voices of other *women* struggling to deconstruct the lie of culture.[18]

These statements intimate aspirations for a community of female authors, performers and readers, as well as audience members. Consequently, it is understandable that when the Women's Movement "grew out of the upsurge of countercultural and sub-cultural political activism of 1968" many female artists found an audience within its constituents and several "feminists turned to art and literature."[19]

Lillian Mohin's anthology *One Foot on the Mountain: An Anthology of British Feminist Poetry 1969-1979* is often cited[20] as a paragon of the poetry that emanated from this environment. While it does not explicitly declare itself as such, Mohin's introduction to the volume reads almost as if it were a manifesto for the poetry she has included. The essay speaks of a growing "community of women"[21] who are determined to bring forth "new truths about" themselves "and the world into a public arena."[22] Mohin also argues that

> Poetry, with its tradition of concentrated insights, its brevity of form, is an ideal vehicle for the kind of politics we propose [...] the nature of women's lives, of course, makes any written work more likely to come out in a short form, as we snatch moments from what we are supposed

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[16] Here, I am drawing upon aspects of Maggie O'Sullivan's introduction to the anthology *Out of Everywhere*. See O'Sullivan, M. 'To the Reader' *Out of Everywhere: linguistically innovative poetry by women in North America & the UK*. (ed. M. O'Sullivan) Reality Street. London. pp. 9-10. Also see Buck, 84

[17] Kaplan, C. 'Language and Gender' in *Papers on Patriarchy: Conference London 1976*. PCD and Women's Publishing Collective. Brighton. 1978, 21.

[18] Mulford, W. 'Notes on Writing' *On Gender and Writing* (ed. M. Wandor). Pandora Press. London. 1983, 33

[19] Waugh, P. 'Feminism and Writing: The Politics of Culture' *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature* (eds. L. Marcus and P. Nicholls) Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2004, 601

[20] See, for example, Buck, 87

[21] Mohin, L 'Introduction'. *One Foot on the Mountain: An Anthology of British Feminist Poetry 1969-1979* (ed. L. Mohin) Only Women Press. London. 1979, 6

[22] *Ibid*, 1

to be doing as mothers, as wives, as workers at the bottom of the heap.[23]

As the references to the autobiographical contexts of composition suggest, the focus of these poems weighs heavily towards a "broadly realist"[24] form of writing, based on "politically committed poems of experience."[25] The editor's own 'sleep/power' serves as an apt example of this style. The poem opens with

> you used to say you couldn't
> sleep first or after I woke[26]

and quickly develops this domestic situation to questions of supremacy, as the second section demonstrates:

> who falls asleep first
> is about power
>
> this time I slept first
> but it was close[27]

The poem proceeds to conclude that these domestic discordances "unfocus / everything / starting with my eyes", and wryly observes that the partner's state of consciousness is "supposed to mean" the speaker is "winning."[28] While the poem's use of punctuation is inconsistent, its form remains relatively conventional. As Buck notes of other poems in the anthology, it depicts an authentic, "private and individual" experience that is comparable to the confessional poems of Plath or Sexton, but then relates the incident through a "feminist political perspective."[29] Therefore, while Mohin may refer to an expanding community of feminist poets, her preference for writing that is "clearly representative of feminist thinking"[30] might not be "unequivocally receptive"[31] to poetry that engages with more avant-garde techniques. As a result, several scholars have come to notice that experimental female poets are

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[23] *Ibid*

[24] Waugh, 603

[25] Montefiore, J. *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity In Women's Writing.* Pandora. London. 2004, 8

[26] Mohin, L. 'sleep/power' *One Foot on the Mountain: An Anthology of British Feminist Poetry 1969-1979* (ed. L. Mohin) Only Women Press. London. 1979, 143

[27] *Ibid*, 144

[28] *Ibid*

[29] Buck, 91

[30] Mohin, 'Introduction', 2

[31] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 162

both "marginal to an already marginal feminist poetics"[32] *and* underrepresented within the communities of the British Poetry Revival.

I have briefly outlined these socio-political circumstances[33] as they provide a crucial context for the performance I will investigate in this chapter: Denise Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977. While feminism informs the concerns and ideas that operate within Riley's work, her poetry is often considered "at odds with the work of the poets"[34] published by Mohin. If the poetics in Mohin's anthology generally embrace empirical poems based on authentic biographical experiences, Riley's works are influenced by poststructuralist tenets of difference— both in language and in gender—ambivalence and resistance to binaries. Such practices would comfortably cohere with the experimental poetics of the avant-garde. Yet, some critics have intimated that Riley appears anomalous for this context as well. For instance, Sheppard notes that compared with the formal practices of other poets included in Maggie O'Sullivan's *Out of Everywhere,* an anthology of experimental poetry by women, Riley's poetry "seems muted" and more in sync with "traditional rhetorical figures."[35] Furthermore, if the British Poetry Revival is commonly considered as an 'underground' phenomena, it might be difficult to identify Riley as an archetypal example of such poetries. When *The Observer* released a list of 'Britain's top 300 intellectuals' in May 2011,[36] Riley was featured alongside mainstream poets such as Carol Ann Duffy and Andrew Motion.[37] The ambivalence surrounding Riley's work is emphasised when it is considered in conjunction with her apparent discomfort with poetry and the public sphere. Her career is frequently punctured[38] with several "years of poetic silence,"[39] and she rarely discusses her work

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[32] Buck, 96

[33] For a more extensive discussion of these themes, see, for example: Kinnahan, L. *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental Poetry and Contemporary Discourse.* University of Iowa Press. Iowa City. 2004

[34] Buck, 84

[35] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying,* 163

[36] See Naughton, J. 'Britain's top 300 intellectuals'. *The Observer.* 8th May 2011. [Online] Available from: http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/may/08/top-300-british-intellectuals [last accessed 02.02.2012].

[37] Other poets on the list included Kevin Crossley-Holland, James Fenton, Seamus Heaney, Christopher Logue, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Tom Paulin, Graig Raine and Derek Walcott. On May 15, 2011, the newspaper printed a correction that removed Heaney from the list, as the poet was identified as someone who would not claim to be British.

[38] Riley's last collection of new poems, *mop mop Georgette,* was published in 1993, and her *Selected Poems* was released in 2000. No new collection has been announced since. Although Riley has continued to publish several works of theory and philosophy, many critics and readers were unsure

in public.[40] Furthermore, while Ginsberg's poems often teemed "with his substantial presence,"[41] Riley seems to actively resist this type of performance of authorship, as 'Dark Looks' ably demonstrates:

> Who anyone is or I am is nothing to the work. The writer
> properly should be the last person that the reader and *listener* need
>> think about
> yet the poet with her signature stands up trembling, grateful, mortally
>> embarrassed
> and especially embarrassing to herself, putting her hair and twittering
>> 'If if only
> I need not have a physical appearance![42]

The intention of this chapter is to examine Riley's early reading in 1977 in order to demonstrate how the event negotiates between these various ambivalences located within her work. In doing so, I also plan to illustrate how several characteristics of Riley's oeuvre as a whole are already present in the performance at the Cambridge Poetry Festival.

4.2 'Who writes in order to have no face'?

Riley's ambivalent bodies of text

Perhaps the more intricate aspects of Riley's performance during the Festival are best understood in the context of her poetry in general. Therefore, I would like to begin by surveying her early publications from the late 1970s. In particular, I will focus on the 1977 pamphlet *Marxism for Infants,[43]* which was first published by Mulford's Street Editions as an edition of 300 copies. First impressions of this artefact appear to cohere with Rachel Blau DuPlessis' characterisation of small press publications as

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whether she was writing any new poetry at all. The recent publication of 'A Part Song' in *London Review of Books* indicates she still is writing new material, and she has also began to give more readings in the aftermath of this publication. See Riley, D. 'A Part Song'. *London Review of Books 34. 3* (2012), 14

[39] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 163

[40] While Riley may not directly speak of her writing, many of the concerns present in her poetry can be elucidated with readings from her theoretical work.

[41] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 33

[42] Riley, D. 'Dark Looks'. *Douglas Oliver, Denise Riley, Iain Sinclair: Penguin Modern Poets vol 10.* Penguin. London. 1996, 89

[43] Riley, D. *Marxism for Infants*. Street Editions. Cambridge. 1977

"analogous to women's cultural products; feminized, disparaged, unread, marginalised."[44] It is comprised of A4 sheets stapled together, with poems appearing only on one side of each sheet. Similarly, while Riley's name features on the cover, the pamphlet also suggests a degree of anonymity. Both page numbers and a table of contents are absent, and—with the exception of 'a note on sex and the reclaiming of language' and 'Making a Liberty Belle'—the poems are all untitled. However, the design of the publication also sets forth more specific statements. The cover image by Julia Ball depicts a downward triangle divided by four horizontal lines. The first of these intersects the triangle at the top, while the subsequent two pierce it in the

Fig 4.1: Cover image for *Marxism for Infants*

middle. The final line crosses the triangle close to its downward tip. The areas demarcated by these lines contain various densities of shading. While the top of the triangle is coloured only faintly, the tones of the lower sections become increasingly bold. Eventually, it is also possible to distinguish white oval shapes amid the thick shading. In other words, the smaller the fragments are, the clearer their definition.

Considering the connotations of downward triangles as a symbol of femininity, the significations of the cover seem clear. The intersecting lines dismember this gendered identity, which seemingly generates a clearer definition of each individual fragment. Yet, where the triangle as a whole remains indeterminable,

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[44] DuPlessis, R.B. 'Knowing in the Real World: review: Denise Riley, *Mop Mop Georgette*'. *Parataxis* 8/9. 1996, 63

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such clarity can only be partial and illusory. Consequently, the identifications of the gender appear inadequate, and the identity remains in a state of flux. Such aspects of the design in *Marxism for Infants* can be contrasted with the cover image for *One Foot on the Mountain*. While the hands on Mohin's cover also resemble visual representations of female genitalia, the implications of the image take a different stance toward gender. These hands could also connote physical experience or vocal projection. To appropriate Kaplan's descriptions of her early desires for self-expression, the image tacitly calls for "a culture where women could, without impediment, exist as speaking subjects,"[45] which is affirmed by Mohin's asseveration,
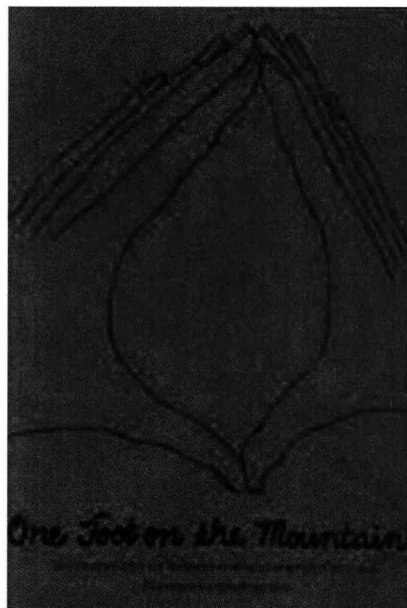
Fig 4.2: Cover image for *One Foot on the Mountain*

"we must begin to change language so that it reflects our experience of the world."[46] In this respect, although both publications evince aspects of the marginality mentioned by Dublessis, they also involve more complex representations, which work in sharp contrast to each other. If the empirical poems of Mohin's anthology are emphatically connected to bodies and their genders, Riley's pamphlet involves a more ambivalent and unstable set of signs and identifiers.[47]

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[45] Kaplan, C. 'Speaking/writing/feminism', 'Notes on Writing' *On Gender and Writing* (ed. M. Wandor). Pandora Press. London. 1983, 58

[46] Mohin, 'Introduction', 4

[47] As Kinnahan implies, Mohin's observations possibly hope to avoid "high powered displays of theoretical agility" due to scepticism regarding the use of "replicating the hierarchical forms of power" represented by the "the authority invested in theory". See Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions*, xv

The poems in *Marxism for Infants* resonate with such ambivalences. The first poem, 'a note on sex and the reclaiming of language', almost acts a statement of intent for Riley's poetic concerns.[48] At the heart of the poem is the difficulty to "write 'she', and for that" to be a "statement / of fact" instead of "a strong image / of everything which is not-you."[49] In other words, Riley is responding to poets such as Mohin, who valorise the task of 'changing' language to "feminist associations."[50] As 'a note on sex and the reclaiming of language' implies, such reclamations are an uneasy project because "language is older than you, it is there before you and you're in it, already"[51]. Therefore, while Riley's feminism was originally inspired by reading de Beauvoir and Woolf during her teens,[52] the poems in *Marxism for Infants* are equally informed by her studies of Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in the early 1970s.[53] At a certain stage in his study, Foucault describes statements as an "enunciative function"[54] that involves units such as sentences, propositions, fragments and other formulations. He posits that instead of providing such units with 'meaning', this 'function'

> relates them to a field of objects; instead of providing them with a subject, it opens them up for a number of possible subjective positions; instead of fixing their limits, it places them in a domain of coordination and coexistence; instead of determining their identity, it places them in a space where they are used and repeated.[55]

Here, Foucault rejects the notion of unchanging essences that one may return to, and identifies meaning as situational. A similar proposal is discernible within the formulation of 'she' in Riley's poem. While one may wish for the pronoun to be a simple 'statement of fact', other 'subjective positions' flock "densely around" the

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[48] See Buck, 95, which describes the poem in similar terms. Also see Dowson, J. & Entwistle, A. *A History of Twentieth Century British Women's Poetry*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 2005. pp. 164-5. Riley also chose to open her *Selected Poems* with this poem. See Riley, D. *Selected Poems*. Reality Street. Hastings. 2000, 11

[49] Riley, *Marxism for Infants*, n.p.

[50] Mohin, 'Introduction', 4

[51] Riley, D. [Poetry Reading]. Cambridge Poetry Festival, British Library Sound Archive. 2CDR000614. 1977.04.15. Hereafter cited as 2CDR000614 (A)

[52] See Riley, D. 'Waiting'. *Promise: Girls Growing up in the fifties* (ed. L. Heron). Virago. London. 1985 pp. 237-248

[53] See Riley, D 'A Short History of Some Preoccupations' *Feminists Theorize the Political* (eds. J. Butler & J.W. Scott). Routledge. London. 1992, pp. 121-129

[54] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (trans. A.M Sheridan Smith). Routledge. London. 2006, 117

[55] *Ibid*

word "seeking a way [...] in between the gaps, like fertilisations."[56] In other words, the discursive formations of 'she' are affected by temporal accumulations and "interplays of differences, distances, substitutions [and] transformations."[57] As consequence, they have no essence to 'reclaim'. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the 'Savage' of the poem is ultimately only offered "wood carvings, which represent"— but are not—herself."[58]

From the start, *Marxism for Infants* asserts a postructuralist perspective on writing and speech, which Riley's oeuvre as whole, both in her poetry and her theoretical work, develops to a sustained critique of the lyric 'I'. Overall, she suspects that the "confessional or self-aggrandising" forms of the pronoun may be "irretrievably outdated."[59] Instead, acknowledging the influence of both Wittgenstein and Derrida, she argues:

> the very structure of the language of self-reference seems to demand and indeed to guarantee an authenticity which is closely tied to originality, while simultaneously it cancels this possibility. Any *I* seems to speak for herself; her utterance comes from her own mouth, and the first person pronoun is hers, if only for just so long as she pronounces it. Yet as a human speaker she must know that it is also everyone's, and that this grammatical offer of uniqueness [...] is radically untrue, is always being snatched away.[60]

To extrapolate, Riley suggests that while a speaker may refer to the 'I' in an attempt to designate their body in space, the temporalities of the pronoun are incapable of such a stable singularity. Instead, the referent to the body exists only at the time of the utterance, and even in that "momentary site of space-time individuality"[61] the identification is liable to change. Consequently, as with Derrida's critique of "contradictorily coherent"[62] centred structures, the pronouns in many of Riley's poems can be viewed as entering into a state of play. For instance, *Marxism for Infants* frequently demonstrates degrees of ambivalence between the pronouns and

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[56] Riley, *Marxism for Infants*, n.p.

[57] Foucault, 41

[58] Riley, *Marxism for Infants*, n.p.

[59] Riley, D. *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony.* Stanford University Press. Stanford. 2000, 94

[60] Riley, D. 'Is There Linguistic Guilt?' *Critical Quarterly 39.1.* 1997, 76. Elements of this essay are reproduced in *Words of Selves*.

[61] *Ibid*

[62] Derrida, 352

their signifieds. In one poem, the reference to a "she-husband"[63] both masculinises the 'feminine' and feminises the masculine. Another text continually refers to a third person pronoun but ultimately declares, "'She' is I,"[64] which generates a state of dubiety regarding the other and the self. This ambivalence is also extended beyond individual pronominal identities. After beginning a poem with "you've met I've met people in rooms before", Riley goes on to write

> & at the mirror your face outdated
> since you are already gone and ahead of it
> to this on which you are embarked & goodbye[65]

Who are the 'people' that the 'you' and 'I' have met before? While the referent could simply be other persons, it could equally be either of the two pronouns specified in the poem's first line. In this respect, the poem again engages in interplays between the self and the other. Such practices are sustained throughout the poem. Who exactly perceives the 'face outdated' at the mirror? Is it the speaker, or the other person, or an entirely different voice? The poem does not allow for these questions to be settled, but instead suspends the referents in uncertainty. All remain destabilised indeterminacies.

Previous studies[66] have surveyed similar developments in poems across Riley's career. However, I have outlined some of the poststructuralist tendencies within *Marxism for Infants* in order to address an issue closely related to the ambivalent pronouns of these poems: namely, the bodies they would commonly designate. As the poets in Mohin's anthology drew upon their autobiographical experiences as a source of their work, the speaker (and their body) is often a clear presence within the poem. Riley, on the other hand, identifies with Foucault's desires to write "in order to have no face"[67] as well as Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "I am

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[63] Riley, *Marxism for Infants*, n.p

[64] *Ibid*

[65] *Ibid*

[66] In addition to previously cited publications by Buck, DuPlessis, Dowson & Entwistle, and Kinnahan, see, for example: Wills, C. 'Contemporary Women's Poetry: Experimentalism and the Expressive Voice.' *Critical Quarterly 36.3.* (1994) pp. 35-52; Kinnahan, L.A. 'Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry: Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford and Denise Riley'. *Contemporary Literature 37.4.* (1996) pp. 621-670; Wheale, N. 'Colours—Ethics—Lyric Voice: Recent Poetry by Denise Riley'. *Parataxis 4.* 1993, pp. 70-77; Herd, D. 'Occasions for Solidarity: Ashbery, Riley and the Tradition of the New' *Yearbook of English Studies, Vol. 30* (2000) pp. 234-249; Kennedy, C. & Kennedy, D. 'Expectant contexts: Corporeal and desiring spaces in Denise Riley's Poetry'. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry 1.1* (2009) pp. 79-101; Watts, C. 'Beyond Interpellation? Affect, Embodiment and the Poetics of Denise Riley'. *Contemporary Women's Poetry: Reading/Writing/Practice* (eds. A. Mark & D.Rees-Jones). Macmillan. Basingstoke. 2000 pp. 157-172

[67] Foucault, 18

from the start outside myself and open to the world."[68] Considering the play between the pronouns in Riley's poems, how do these influences manifest themselves in the personas of these texts? Moreover, what ramifications will this hold for the body that is speaking? Some indication of Riley's views can be deduced from her essay 'Bad Words:'

> To espouse a notion of linguistic impartiality [...] is, I think, the sounder course. I could be more effectively freed by first confronting and then conceding my own sheer contingency as a linguistic subject. I am a walker in language. It is only through my meanders and slow detours, perhaps across many decades, toward recognizing language's powerful impersonality—which is always operating despite and within its persuasive allure of "intersubjectivity"—that I can "become myself". Yet I become myself only by way of fully accepting my own impersonality—as someone who is accidentally spoken [...] by any language whatsoever[69]

To summarise, the concerns of the essay again focus on the ambivalence of expressing a 'self' through language. Consequently, it is plausible that in accepting its 'impersonality', any 'linguistic subject' will also demonstrate an uncertainty regarding its own body. Such thoughts also seem to inform Riley's responses when—in conversation with Romana Huk—she is asked about literary representations of a 'primordial feminine' as a source of recovery for female identities:

> I get so annoyed [...] by 'body reviewing', given the sexual asymmetry of it. There's 'reading of the body', especially of work by women—yet nobody is going to review a man's book in testicular terms! Or rather, if someone says 'it's a load of balls' that's read as sexless abuse. Only women have a sex; only women have a body[70]

Therefore, it would seem as if the uncertainties regarding the pronominal signifiers in *Marxism for Infants* are at least partially motivated by Riley's political position. If these pronouns do not have a stable body, they also avoid the subjective positions of a 'gendered' body.[71]

These formulations provide a crucial context to some of the corporeal references within the pamphlet. Towards the end of one poem, the speaker declares:

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[68] Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & K. Paul. London. 1962, 55.

[69] Riley, D. 'Bad Words'. *Diacritics 31:4* (winter 2001), 53

[70] Riley, D & Huk, R. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'. *PN Review 21.5*. 1995 [Online] Available from: http://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgibin/scribe?file=/members/pnr103/interviews/103in01.txt [last accessed 07.02.12]

[71] "'[F]emale' no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as woman". See Butler, J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge. London. 1999, xxix

> I cannot understand the function of the
> living body
> except by enacting it myself
> and except in so far as I am a body
> which rises towards the world[72]

While the 'living body' *might* be a reference to a book on human physiology by Charles Herbert Best and Norman Burke Taylor,[73] the stanza significantly describes such bodies as an enactment. Such a statement appears multifaceted. 'Enact' is primarily used as a legal term for passing a bill into law, yet it also signifies putting an idea or belief to practice or even acting out a role on stage. Although multiple definitions take part in the poem,[74] I want to focus specifically on this notion of 'acting'. Could the body that 'rises towards the world' be viewed as a performance? The question is difficult to answer without considering how bodies are identified. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler suggests that the "regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity", and goes on to argue that

> the "coherence" and "continuity" of the "person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of the "person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to be the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.[75]

Butler characterises sexual and gendered identities as social performances, which adhere to regulatory modes of normative behaviour, and argues that the body is not a 'being', but "a surface whose permeability is politically regulated."[76] The 'enactment' of the 'living body' in Riley's poem follows similar patterns. In rising 'towards' the world, the body will be made "visible *as* a body, and [possibly even] *as* a female"[77] body under the gaze of culture and politics. Yet, as demonstrated by the pronominal

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[72] Riley, *Marxism for Infants* , n.p

[73] See Best, C.H & Taylor, N.B. *The Living Body: a Text in Human Physiology.* Chapman and Hall. London. 1958. The topics of the publication include cells, the circulation of blood, respiration, digestion, metabolism, the central nervous system, and the physiology of reproduction.

[74] For example, if read as a legal term, 'enacting' could denote the legitimizing rights and restrictions exerted on the body through law. This would hold certain significances for Riley's politics. The Abortion Act was eventually passed in 1967, and came in to effect in April 1968. At the same time, Riley was involved with the Abortion Law Reform Association. See Riley, 'Waiting', 248.

[75] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23

[76] *Ibid*, 177

[77] Riley, *Am I that Name*, 106

play in *Marxism for Infants*, Riley's poems deprive these 'cultural intelligibilities' of their legitimacy.

If rising 'towards the world' results in performing for regulatory gazes, do these early poems feature any means through which bodies can rise *against* the world? As Carol Watts has observed,[78] in the critical work *Am I that Name*, Riley asserts that "there is more to life than the designation"[79] of 'woman.' This proposition is articulated in an effort to

> back off from the supposition that women's bodies are systematically and exhaustively different, that they are unified in an integral otherness [...] women only sometimes live in the flesh distinctively of women, as it were, and this is a function of historical categorisations as well as of an individual daily phenomenology.[80]

To specify, Riley questions the conditions in which the body could be "understood as lived and gendered, or indeed as a body at all."[81] Consequently, to challenge the "gendered self-consciousness"[82] of being a 'woman', it is necessary to act out the "full ambiguity"[83] of that category, which may also result in ambiguous authorial presences. Such ideas are enacted to a fascinating effect in Riley's two collaborative publications with Wendy Mulford. When *No Fee: A Line or Two for Free*[84] was published in 1978, all the poems were printed anonymously, which intentionally confused "the conventions of autonomy and ownership of voice."[85] Similar practices are evidenced by *Some Poems 1968-1978*.[86] This time, the pamphlet includes a note that explains:

> The first 11 poems are from *Bravo to Girls and Heroes*. The next 11 are from *Marxism for Infants*. The next 12 from *No Fee: A Line or Two for Free*, of which the first 7 are by Denise Riley and the last 5 by Wendy Mulford[87]

While *Some Poems* identifies the authors, it only does so on the very last page of the collection. Consequently, the experience of reading the pamphlet is tantamount to the

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[78] See Watts, 157

[79] Riley, *Am I that Name*, 111

[80] *Ibid* 105

[81] *Ibid*, 106

[82] *Ibid*, 96

[83] *Ibid*, 112

[84] Riley, D & Mulford, W. *No Fee: A Line or Two for Free*. Street Editions. Cambridge. 1978

[85] Kinnahan, 'Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry', 647

[86] Riley, D. & Mulford, W. *Some Poems 1968-1978*. C.M.R Press. Cambridge. 1982

[87] *Ibid*, n.p.

ambiguities associated with *No Fee*. In both cases, the authorial bodies feel amorphous. Like the assemblages described in *A Thousand Plateaus*, these books strive to be "unattributable."[88] Such impressions are affirmed by the critical reception of these works. Reviewing *Some Poems* in 1983, Middleton described the poems therein as collaborative quotations where "each speaks the words of the other, as" an "endorsement and extension of their own."[89] Similarly, DuPlessis felt that it was "hard to see where certain poems begin and end."[90] Therefore, if Riley's early poetry[91] intends to resist the normative modes of gender, it would appear as if one strategy for this is to develop techniques that obfuscate easily determinable authorial bodies.

4.3. 'Am I, she asked, going to make feminist scrambled eggs?'

Riley, performance and the social situations of her reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, 1977

As I argued above, Riley's ambivalent voices and play between pronouns and their referents contrast greatly with the politically motivated poems of experience that are commonly associated with the Women's Movement. However, by writing 'in order to have no face', Riley's approach to the body also appears in conflict with some of the major orientations in women's performance art from the 1970s. As the material gathered in Moira Roth's *The Amazing Decade* demonstrates, such events generally related to personal experiences or collective pasts, with occasional divergences to more specific feminist activism.[92] Furthermore, these performances would often derive their material from "medieval witchcraft [...] non-Western goddesses and fertility figures and ancient matriarchal cultures."[93] In other words, while aspects of Ginsberg's poetry from the 1960s demonstrate a countercultural fascination with

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[88] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4

[89] Middleton, P. 'Breaking the Perspex: Recent Poetry of Wendy Mulford'. *The Many Review 1*. 1983, 5

[90] DuPlessis, 68

[91] While this section has focused on Riley's poetry from the 1970s, the techniques and politics discussed here also appear in Riley's later collections. In addition to her *Selected Poems*, and the poems included in *Penguin Modern Poets Vol 10* see Riley, D. *Dry Air*. Virago Press. London. 1985; Riley, D. *Stair Spirit*. Equipage, Cambridge. 1992; Riley, D. *mop mop Georgette* Reality Street. London. 1993

[92] The anthology was based on an exhibition by 38 female performance artists. See Roth, M. *The Amazing Decade*. Astro Artz. Los Angeles. 1981,

[93] Carlson, M. *Performance: a critical introduction*. Routledge. London. 2004, 161

atavistic or shamanic rituals, Riley's poetry would be an uneasy companion to these types of performance art. Instead, as Nigel Wheale wrote in 1993:

> Denise Riley only reads; that is to say, there is no framing conversation, or chit-chat [...] what you do hear are poems without compromise, or any other register [...] the vocal delivery of the poems is very distinctive, it is decidedly a [...] kind of declaiming which is an urgent address to listeners, hardly ever dropping to colloquial speech registers [...] all of this lifts the poem, as it is given for a heightened attention, and a more careful listening on the part of the audience[94]

On a prima facie reading, such impressions present a stark contrast to the case studies from the previous chapters. As we have seen, both 'Theatre Piece # 1' and the First International Poetry Incarnation featured actions and performances that extended far beyond the podium. Contrarily, Wheale's impressions indicate that Riley's approach resonates more closely with Frederick Stern's descriptions of a 'formal poetry reading'. Drawing upon Erving Goffman's study on lectures,[95] Stern argues that the formal poetry reading is a performance where the aim is "the presentation of the poetry, the text" and not the "antics"[96] of the poet. These antics are characterised as the forms of "acting [or] spectacle"[97] that may arise through the "vatic enthusiasm"[98] of poets such as Ginsberg. By contrast, the formal reading primarily focuses on "the text as *voiced*."[99] If Wheale's description were configured according to the binaries that Stern proposes, Riley's readings would evidently provide the 'formal' counterpoint to the 'festival' of the Incarnation or the aleatory 'antics' of 'Theatre Piece # 1'. Nevertheless, while I broadly agree with Wheale's impressions, I would also suggest that Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977 features performances that outflank and challenge certain proposals from Stern's article. In particular, the performance includes several collaborative exchanges between Mulford and Riley, which can be viewed as enacting the theoretical and political commitments of Riley's poetry.

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[94] Wheale, 76-77

[95] See Goffman, E. *Forms of Talk*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Philadelphia. 1981 pp. 160-196

[96] Stern, 74

[97] *Ibid*, 73

[98] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 68

[99] Stern, 73

What was the specific milieu of the performance? In interviews, Riley has described the Cambridge Poetry Festivals as "animated,"[100] large and "ambitiously international affairs," which drew in a wide and generous range of writers "from western and eastern Europe"[101] as well as the United States. Richard Burns had originally conceived the idea for the festival in 1972, although the first event did not take place until three years later. Consequently, the festival in 1977 was only the second instalment in the series. The occasion was co-ordinated by Paul Johnstone with help from Peter Robinson and featured readings and talks from various poets, including Seamus Heaney, Iain Sinclair, Robert Duncan, John James, Robert Creeley, Roy Fisher, Allen Fisher, Michael Horovitz, Jeff Nuttall and Geoffrey Hill. Although the vast majority of participants were male, Frances Horovitz, Jude Walker, Elaine Feinstein, Elaine Randell and Bella Akhmadulia were also present.[102] In this respect, the festival characterises certain traits of the communal nexuses that I discussed at the end of the previous chapter.[103] Due to the high proliferation of poets present, many of the audience members for the readings were not only spectators, but also practitioners. For instance, John James, Douglas Oliver, Martin Thom, Michael Haslam, Nick Totten, Ian Patterson, Andrew Crozier and others were in the audience during Riley's reading.[104] Yet, while the communal elements of these events resemble the performances from the previous chapters, the ambiance of the Cambridge Poetry Festival does not necessarily share the same disordered and anarchic spirit. Riley's reading, for instance, took place at the Cambridge Union hall, a part of Cambridge University that Middleton would later describe as a "a strong reminder of undergraduate political debate" where "the polished wooden panelling and seating evoked a" certain "feeling of permanence."[105] Consequently, despite their communal convergences, the Cambridge festivals correspond closely with Stern's

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[100] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[101] Riley, D & Huk, R. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'

[102] See, Berengarten, R. 'Cambridge Poetry Festival'. [Online] Available from: www.berengarten.com/site/ Cambridge-Poetry-Festival.html [last accessed: 15.02.2012]. Also see, The British Library Sound Archive, Cambridge Poetry Festival Collection 2CDR0006601-2CDR0006679

[103] See section 3.3 in Chapter 3

[104] See 2CDR000614 (A). During the discussions after the reading, some of the aforementioned attendees are heard speaking. I am grateful to Denise Riley (and Samuel Solomon) for their help in identifying some of the audience members. See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.* Also see Solomon, S. *Re: Denise Riley* [Email]. Message to author. 22.02.2012

[105] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 98. Middleton is describing a reading by John Ashbery and Denise Levertov at the same venue in 1985.

article, which identifies lecture halls and similar venues as the appropriate locations for 'formal readings.'[106] Considering the relative renown of participants such as Duncan or Creeley, it is also possible to examine some of the Festival's dynamics along with Stern's analyses:

> the audience wants, above all, to hear the human which it associates with the poem, to see "the man," or the woman, whose face and voice can be associated with the language on the printed page, as flesh, not image; it wants the dancer as well as the dance. The poet as star, yes, but also the poet as human being.[107]

In other words, while Stern valorises the 'presentation of the text', his formal readings are also sites for a performance of authorship.

However, while Stern's characterisations apply to many aspects of the Cambridge Poetry Festival, it would be problematic to consider Riley's reading on April 15th in these exact terms. Although Riley had written poems privately from a very young age,[108] none of her work had appeared in print during the "first half of the 70s,"[109] and *Marxism for Infants* was only published[110] in the year of the second festival. As a consequence, it is likely that aside from close friends and associates, the audience was comparatively unfamiliar with Riley's work in print, and were much more acquainted with Mulford's work.[111] Yet, the structure of the reading itself is far more focused on Riley; Mulford's contribution is scheduled as an intermission for Riley's two readings. Furthermore, Riley herself has described the occasion as the first time she read to a wider audience. She also recalls the dread she experienced during the weeks that preceded the event:

> I was completely new. I can't emphasise strongly enough my horror at having to do any reading [...] the Cambridge Poetry Festival reading [...] was the first poetry reading I had ever done in all my born days. I was so sick with fear and horror and loathing of having to stand up and make a spectacle of myself. It went totally against all my natural

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[106] See Stern, 73

[107] Stern, 77

[108] See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*

[109] Riley, D & Huk, R. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'

[110] Riley herself recalls that she was very reluctant to provide Mulford with the manuscript. When I interviewed her, she even described a "ghost memory, fictional memory" of a dramatic handover of the poems, where the manuscripts were torn away from her clutching hands. See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*.

[111] Mulford's first collection *In the Big Red Chair* was published in 1975. She also began publishing as Street Editions in 1972. Riley tells Huk that when she moved back to Cambridge in 1975, Mulford was one of the "working writers" who were "available in the town" for poets of Riley's age. See Riley Riley, D & Huk, R. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'

inclinations. For at least three weeks ahead of it, I didn't sleep and I got through the event propped up with Valium and a couple of shots of brandy[112]

In this context, the occasion not only places a 'new' poet as its focal point, but also appears to eschew Stern's notion of 'poet as a star'. Instead of featuring a known poet to attract curious spectators, as Stern suggests, the reading acts as a way of 'introducing' a young writer to a larger audience. Riley's account of the event supports such impressions:

> Wendy decided she wanted to make a pamphlet [of the poems that became *Marxism for Infants*], very much to my surprise. But in the small press world, because the channels of disseminating the written work were so slight, so fragile, so vulnerable, so restricted [...] and relied on [...] personal acquaintances in a small town [...], it meant poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package. I quickly found out that, as a newly 'forced into print' writer, you did not have the liberty [...] to not do readings [...] You would be letting down a row of people who had put time and effort into producing your work and hoped to get a few copies around.[113]

Although the second half of Riley's reading at the Festival concluded with a rendition of *Marxism for Infants*,[114] it would be inaccurate to suggest that the occasion served *only* as a promotional tool for the pamphlet. In addition, the proceedings of the event feature frequent diversions from some of the modes described by Stern. In fact, such manoeuvres are performed at the very start of the reading. Out of sync but still in unison, Riley and Mulford start by uttering, "Am I, she asked, going to make feminist scrambled eggs."[115] Mulford begins a fraction earlier, which effectively renders Riley's words to be echoes of Mulford's earlier utterances. Furthermore, as indicated by 'Am I, *she* asked', the opening ultimately involves two voices relating a third. In effect, the beginning of the reading attempts to obscure the centrality of the poet on stage. On first impressions, it is difficult to ascertain which poet is positioned as the principal feature of the event.

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[112] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[113] *Ibid*

[114] Unfortunately, the recording of Riley reading *Marxism for Infants* cuts short, and is thus difficult to discuss in its entirety. Some references to individual moments from this recording will be made during the course of this chapter. See 2CDR000614 (A)

[115] Riley, D & Mulford, W. [Poetry Reading]. Cambridge Union. British Library Sound Archive. 2CDR000613. 1977.04.15 Hereafter cited as 2CDR000613

The ambiguity of the opening is also enhanced by the utterance itself, which is not sourced from any of the pamphlets the two poets had published at the time. What is its point of origin? And, more significantly, what does it communicate? According to Riley, the phrase was based on a private joke she and Mulford had shared with Fielding Dawson the night before the reading, which involved mild irony "about how far and thoroughly one could extend the domain of feminism."[116] Although she insists that the utterance was included almost accidentally and bears no relationship to the poetry that was read during the performance,[117] the phrase still resonates with certain aspects of the event. Immediately after this utterance, Riley commences a polemic about "self-congratulatory feminist poetry", which she describes as "sanctimonious" self-indulgent "half-truths stated as universal law."[118] She also remonstrates such writing for its "fuzzy thinking disguised by passionate sincerity", and argues that if "feminism is to be attended like a pep rally, the group loyalty" of the Women's Liberation Movement will become its "own undoing."[119] In sum, the polemic issues a challenge to the empirical forms of feminist poetry described earlier in this chapter.[120] In this respect, perhaps the soft 'scrambled eggs' could partially resonate with the 'fuzzy thinking' Riley excoriates during her speech. Yet, her charge is not solely grounded on aesthetics. As her concluding remarks indicate, these criticisms also address feminism as a political movement. In 1975, the socialist-feminist newsletter *Red Rag* published an article Riley had written about housing for single mothers. Early in that essay, she notes that despite the "good practical work" of groups tangential to the Women's Movement, the single mother remains "effectively voiceless inside"[121] the movement as a whole.[122] Although Riley's poetry itself hardly

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[116] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[117] *Ibid*

[118] 2CDR000613

[119] *Ibid*

[120] When this speech was mentioned during my interview with Riley, she stated she felt deeply embarrassed by the memory, and said now considered the speech "rude, stupid and overblown", and said her fervor was possibly caused by her terror about performing. She also noted that while she did not agree with the manner in which the polemic was presented, the position she expressed during it was reiterated in a more sophisticated manner in *Am I that Name*. See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[121] Riley, D. 'The Force of Circumstance'. *Red Rag* 9 (1975), 26

[122] A more complete analysis of this text is featured in Samuel Solomon's forthcoming article in the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*. Solomon points out that the debates of the article are rooted in Riley's own experiences as a single mother, which also informs many of the poems in *Marxism for Infants*. However, as Solomon points out, these poems also involve more complex formulations than the generic borders of political theory and personal narrative. See Solomon, S. 'Denise Riley's socialized biology'. Unpublished. 2011, pp. 2-6

speaks "*as* single mothers"[123] –or indeed as any *singular* identity— these concerns might still relate to the political claims that open her performance in 1977. Underneath its intentional irony, perhaps the utterance 'am I, she asked, going to make feminist scrambled eggs' also raises questions about voice, voicelessness and voicing. The blurring of the two voices during the reading represents the inconstancy of the speaker, while the muddled effects implied by 'feminist scrambled eggs' indicate a state of uncertainty regarding the methods through which this political position is best articulated.

If the opening to Riley's reading raises social concerns of how this voicelessness might be rectified, are these ideas enacted elsewhere during the performance? After her controversialist address, Riley pauses for a while, and almost humorously opines, "This stirred everyone up a bit."[124] The sudden rupture to the confrontational opening invites laughter from the audience.[125] In this respect, the first part of the performance continuously seems to change the modes of its presentation. Riley recalls that she and Mulford wanted to challenge "the audience's expectations of what a reading by feminist poets might be"[126] like, and this goes some way towards explaining the defamiliarising tendencies of the opening, where "recognition might lie or a stance or pre-recognition might miss"[127] the actuality of the proceedings. Like the pronouns in her work, the beginning of the performance refuses to settle to a rigidly designated identity. Once Riley begins reading her poems, the proceedings seemingly assume a more stable ambiance. Much akin to Wheale's earlier description, she reads through many of her earlier poems that would later be published in *No Fee,* including 'In 1970' and 'Affections Must Not.'[128] There are hardly any pauses between the poems, Riley rarely mentions their titles, and reads through them at considerable speed. While her voice at times seems more restrained than it did at the start of the performance, there are several points where her cadences give the reading an increased sense of immediacy and urgency. For instance, when reading 'Affections Must Not', Riley slowly utters the line "support, support,"[129] and pauses for a short

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[123] Riley, 'The Force of Circumstance', 26

[124] 2CDR000613.

[125] *Ibid*

[126] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[127] *Ibid*

[128] In addition to *No Fee,* see Riley, *Selected Poems,* pp. 19-21

[129] Riley, *Selected Poems,* 20

while. When she begins the next stanza, her fast pace seems amplified due to the preceding silence:

> the houses are murmuring with many small pockets of emotion
> on which spongy grounds adults' lives are being erected and paid for
>   daily
> while their feet and their children's feet are tangled around like those
>   of fen larks
> in the fine steely wires which run to and fro between love and
>   economics.[130]

Afterwards, she slows her rhythm down once more: when she reads the poem's concluding line, "I. neglect. the house"), she pauses in accordance with her punctuation. The applause on the recording seems almost thunderous.[131] Regardless of Riley's undoubted anxiety, it is a strong and confident performance.[132]

When asked about her reasons for this demeanour and speed, Riley responded:

> My feeling, which wasn't unique to me at the time, |was| that anecdotes or biographical details and stories between poems only serve to make it difficult to whoever's listening to you to listen to the poem. Instead, they'll be thinking about your childhood [...] and the sad death of your favourite spaniel when you were ten, or the boy who pulled your pigtails when you were at school, or whatever it was [...] It knowingly or unknowingly [...] tries to draw out the sympathy of the audience to the persona of the poet [...] As a highly anxious reader, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to notice me.[133]

Yet, although it emanated from an unconscious decision,[134] Riley's praxis as a reader resonates with certain aspects of her poetics. In her own words, over the course of her career, she developed an approach to performance that resists the appeal of these sympathetic biographical anecdotes:

> In time, I worked out a technique for myself, just intuitively [...] of reading quite loudly and quite calmly, without any intervening talk. The way that I described what I was doing to myself was that I was putting up a barrage of words behind which I, the biographical person, could be quite invisible. It was a sort of an illusion of invisibility [...] I hoped that I would make a distancing effect.[135]

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[130] *Ibid*, 21

[131] 2CDR000613

[132] The power of Riley's performances is also noted upon in Wheale's essay. Similar responses have also been associated to Riley's more recent readings. When she read at the Lyric and Polis Symposium at University College Falmouth in February 2012, many audience members felt moved to tears.

[133] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*.

[134] See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*.

[135] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10*.

Early evidence of such practices already appears on the recordings from the Cambridge Poetry Festival. In this respect, Riley's reading not only departs from the trends of contemporaneous feminist performance art and the 'performance of authorship' that sometimes arises in Ginsberg's asseverations. It also questions the procedures of events that emphasise "authenticity and truthful reproduction"[136] and consequently centre their attentions on the (gendered) living body. In other words, Riley's reading corresponds with the pronominal slippage of her poems, as it continues to generate a certain distance between the poetry read and the poet on stage. If the opening to the event was designed to experiment with the rigid definitions of who speaks during the performance, then Riley's utterances issue similar subversions in a more understated fashion.

The implications of these parallel developments should be surveyed further. Earlier in this chapter, I drew upon ideas from Butler's *Gender Trouble* to suggest that certain poems in *Marxism for Infants* resist the normative performances that constitute "the imaginable domain of gender."[137] For Butler, these appearances are achieved "through a performative twist"[138] of discourses that conceal the impossibility of a gendered essence; in other words, these turns produce "the effect of an internal core or substance"[139] on the surface of the body. Yet, because such enactments only intimate but do not reveal any 'essentialist' substances or subjects, Butler identifies performativity as a site through which "the very notion of a subject"[140] may be contested. As she argues:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity [...] the abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *dis*continuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground". The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of the failure to repeat, a deformity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.[141]

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[136] Moi, T. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Routledge. London. 1985, 47

[137] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13

[138] *Ibid*, 25

[139] *Ibid*, 173

[140] Butler, J. 'Gender as Performance'. *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals* (ed. P. Osborne). Routledge. London. 1996, 111

[141] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179

These 'transformations' are analogous with some of the strategies demonstrated during the reading in 1977. The manoeuvres between collaborative utterances, polemical speech and a barrage of words can all be viewed as shifts that characterise a certain '*dis*continuity' within the proceedings. For instance, by Riley's own description, the ironic qualities of the opening sought to question the audience's assumptions about a reading by feminist poets; that is to say, the reading began with a 'parodic repetition' that challenged the anticipated expectations and identifications[142]. Similarly, the 'barrage of words' during Riley's reading serves to emphasise the 'arbitrary' relations between the poem and the biographical persona on stage. These practices contrast greatly with the "theatre of argument"[143] practiced by some feminist performance groups in the mid-1970s, where the intention was to "reclaim the experience of women."[144] The myriad contingencies perceivable in Riley's reading imply that such unifying 'experience' may not exist; that gender is "not 'one', but multiple."[145] As Riley writes in *Am I that Name*:

> That 'women' is indeterminate and impossible is no cause for lament.
> It is what makes feminism; which has hardly been an indiscriminate
> embrace anyway of the fragilities and peculiarities of the category.
> What these do demand is a willingness, at times, to shred this 'women'
> to bits—to develop a [...] versatility[146]

The *dis*continuities of the aforementioned shifts effectively enact such versatilities. If Riley's poems in *Marxism for Infants* and elsewhere resist the lyric 'I' as a singular "heroine"[147] of the text, her reading continues to perform transgressions from the "foundational social structures"[148] that produce these singularisations.

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[142] My use of Butler's 'parodic repetition' differs from the famous example provided in *Gender Trouble*, which describes these performative qualities with reference to drag queens, who, in imitating gender, implicitly reveal the imitative structure of it. However, despite the clear differences between these strategies and the ones practiced during the opening to Riley and Mulford's opening, both modes can be viewed as critiquing the identities they appear to imitate. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175

[143] Wandor, M, *Carry On Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London. 1981, 87

[144] *Ibid*

[145] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14

[146] Riley, *Am I that Name*, 114

[147] Riley & Huk. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'

[148] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 29. I am drawing from a brief note where Middleton suggests Butler's theories articulate how performances of poetry can be an "affirmation or a transgression of foundational societal structures". My analysis elaborates upon the second aspect of this proposal.

These *dis*continuous transgressions are also apparent in further aspects of the performance. After Mulford finishes her reading,[149] Riley advises the audience that she will begin her second set with "a couple of poems by other women." [150] Curiously, when she reads these texts, her demeanour is once again altered. These episodes in the reading involve far more interaction with the audience. For instance, before reading a poem by Elinor Wylie, Riley claims that Wylie had been "struck out of the lists of Penguin [America] for being married three times"[151] and humorously opines, "I feel quite ambivalent about that."[152] Similarly, before reading H.D.'s 'Sea Rose', Riley describes it as an "extremely good poem" that "doesn't get into anthologies very much" [153], although she acknowledges that Robert Duncan had quoted it in one of his poems. To some extent, these events form a further facet to the reading's *dis*continuities; they create an additional distance between the poems and the poets reading, and incorporate more supplementary voices to the performance. Simultaneously, however, they also evince further developments. When asked about her motivations for reading these particular poets, Riley replied:

> The larger motivation was the idea [...] to take some time to introduce something that the audience might enjoy, something they might recognise, which would give their strained ears a break. Or, if they didn't recognise it and they liked it, they could go away and look up the author. [While] H.D. was certainly known and read by anyone who had an interest in the less familiar shores of early 20th century writing [...] it was before the revival of interest in H.D [...] in the very late seventies and early eighties.[154]

In other words, the decision to read these poems seems multifaceted. While it was partially motivated by Riley's own apprehensions regarding her work,[155] it also demonstrates an aspiration to exhibit material that might be unfamiliar to some of the audience. As the selected poems were written by women, it is tempting to construe the act as a declaration for a modernist—or a para-modernist—tradition of feminist

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[149] Mulford also read a poem by Jill Vickers, stating she greatly admired the work. See 2CDR000614 (A)

[150] 2CDR000614 (A)

[151] *Ibid*

[152] *Ibid*

[153] *Ibid*

[154] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[155] Riley recalls feeling a sense of trepidation at the start of the reading when she recognized several audience members were poets she admired. A list of the some of the names in attendance was included earlier in this chapter. See *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

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writing. Yet, although this was one of the possible intentions, the incident also illustrates significant details about how Riley and Mulford approach the social situation of a reading. For instance, the event is followed by a discussion with the audience, during which Mulford states she is politically accustomed to working with "collective networks" and in "collective ways."[156] Solomon, who argues that Riley's deferred and ambivalent speakers are at times reminiscent of a Marxist social individual,[157] associates similar notions of collectivisation to publications such as *Marxism for Infants*. In both cases, the individual is identified as an ensemble of social relations; therefore, perhaps it is possible to consider the decision to read these poems—along with the performance's other *dis*continuities—as aspiring to both speak *for* and *about* social multiplicities.

To specify, I do not wish to configure the social situation of Riley's reading as a binary representation of collectivism *against* individualism. Indeed, when one member of the audience proposes that such notions are both disturbing and unsatisfying, Riley agrees and states she also regards them as dubious.[158] Instead, these relationships operate in a more intricate manner. During my interview with Riley, she described her immediate fascination with poetry to be based on some of its egalitarian qualities:

> What I like for myself, what I still like about poetry, is that there is a kind of democracy about it: it is cheap to produce, it is cheap to circulate, you can write it—as I often did in fact—on the back of an envelope on the top of a bus [...] You don't need a big apparatus to do it.[159]

In this respect, the reading in 1977 demonstrates that Riley's early poetics are already at least as "profoundly concerned with questions of democracy"[160] as her subsequent work. However, as the discussion with the audience in Cambridge reveals, she also considered these questions to be closely linked with issues of gender:

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[156] Mulford, W. & Riley, D. [Discussion]. Cambridge Union.. British Library Sound Archive. 2CDR0006614. 1977. 4.15. Hereafter cited as 2CDR000614 (B)

[157] See Solomon, 'Denise Riley's socialized biology', 6. This part of his discussion draws specifically on Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. See Marx, K. *Theses on Feuerbach* (trans. C. Smith) 2002. [Online] Available from: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm [last accessed 29.02.2012]

[158] 2CDR000614 (B)

[159] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[160] Herd, 'Occasions for Solidarity: Ashbery, Riley and the Tradition of the New', 235. Herd bases his argument on *mop mop Georgette*.

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> If feminism is going to do anything it is going to force you into an examination of economic and emotional realities; at every level force you to penetrate the mystery of production. What is this individual authorial production? What are you as the hero of your own product?[161]

When she elaborates on these ideas later in the discussion, Riley expresses similar concerns about performance:

> I'm talking about structured heroism, which is set up when people pay a quid to come into a room and say, here's a poet, here's a voice of the poet, and here's the text and there is a set of identifying factors going on here.[162]

In other words, Riley's description of the structured heroism that emanates from a performance can be read alongside some of Sheppard's characterisations of poetry readings from the period, where certain milieus evidently aspired towards the "macho ethos" and "pop argot[s]" of "poetry star[s]" and "groupies." [163] Additionally, Mulford also comments on Riley's ideas regarding the 'mystery of production', and describes performance as "the end bit, like the production of a book."[164] Consequently, it is possible that the phallocentric occasions[165] that Sheppard describes[166] are some of the 'realities' that Mulford and Riley wish to contest. The performance's feminist commitments are conjoined with the complications presented by reading one's poetry in public. As Riley argues during the discussion: "one produces the other."[167]

How does this 'mystery of production' operate? I asked Riley to elaborate on these ideas, but she could no longer remember the exact intentions behind her aphoristic remark. However, hearing it again led her to reflect on Heinrich von Kleist's 'On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking'. While she had not read the essay in 1977, she felt that its ideas resonated with her statements at the Festival:

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[161] 2CDR000614 (B)

[162] *Ibid*

[163] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 161

[164] 2CDR000614 (B)

[165] The rock concert ethos is in part evoked during Eric Mottram's interview with Barry MacSweeney in 1978. Mottram asks McSweeney about the role of poetry readings, and the answer makes consistent comparisons to the concerts of Bob Dylan and The Beatles. See McSweeney, B & Mottram, E. 'Barry McSweeney interviewed by Eric Mottram' *Poetry Information 18* (1977-1978), pp. 21-40

[166] Judged by the sources he references, it is likely Sheppard's descriptions are based on the readings involved with Horovitz's Live New Departures. During our interview, Riley stated that while the male poets she associated with in Cambridge did not necessarily ascribe to such views, but sexism still appeared in casual conversations. See Riley, *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[167] 2CDR000614 (B)

Kleist [says]… that having to stand up on your feet and be forced into speech by the dynamics of the occasion will generate an effect, which match your own astonishments. Your thought is formed not a priori in your mind, but on ellipsis […] It's a form of Tristan Tzara's 'thought is made in the mouth'. I believe profoundly in both of those notions as phenomena, which can hit you while you are reading poetry and while you are in that exposed state […] once you are there and there is no possibility of taking flight, a certain inventiveness—which you cannot take credit for, because it is not the inventiveness of thought, but of the occasion of utterance—takes over and that might suddenly produce […] a remark […] which wouldn't have been the result of a premeditated thought.[168]

Although these comments were prompted by the phrase as opposed to its content, they are still applicable to its ideas. In the previous chapters, I have alluded to Middleton's 'performance of authorship', where "the ordinary act of speaking" is assumed "to be a reliable index of the individuality of the speaker", and the poet's physical presence during a reading grants the poem its "relevance to a specific body, point of view and history."[169] In this respect, the performance of authorship also incorporates a tacit assertion for the performance of ownership. As such, this practice can lead to a perilous project. Its 'reliable index' may also be manifested as the 'identifying factors' of the phallocentric hierarchies and 'economic realities' that Riley and Mulford aspired to challenge.[170] Contrarily, Kleist describes the act of speaking as an instance where "it is not *we* who know things", as the knowledge only arises from a "certain *condition* of ours."[171] This formulation—which is tantamount to Riley's 'inventiveness'—complicates the performance of ownership, as it indicates that the utterance may not in fact *belong* to the speaker, but to the occasion itself. Consequently, such moments represent another form of *dis*continuity, which seeks to interrogate the apparent arbitrariness of proprietary asseverations.

Two moments from the latter stages of the reading indicate some of the varying forms assumed by its challenges to ownership. Firstly, when Riley begins reading through the entirety of *Marxism for Infants*, her voice again seems to assume the 'barrage of words' I described earlier. However, an unexpected and unintentional noise soon invades the recording: as she reads on, a faint sound of a vacuum cleaner

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[168] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

[169] Middleton, 'The Contemporary Poetry Reading', 268

[170] 2CDR000614 (B)

[171] von Kleist, H. 'On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking'. *Selected Writings*. (ed. & trans. D. Constantine). Hackett Publishing. Indianapolis. 1997, 408

can be heard on the background.[172] This noise becomes an increasingly disruptive presence and can be heard quite clearly when Riley reaches the following stanza:

> I heard the water freezing in a thousand launderettes
> with a dense white shutter
> I heard the roar of a thousand vacuum cleaners
> stammer away into uncarpeted silence[173]

Before the third line, she pauses for a brief moment, and—as if to acknowledge the noise in the background—interjects with "here it is,"[174] which is met with laughter and applause from the audience. In some ways, this interjection seems out of character for the reading, as it sounds oddly amiable in the context of Riley's urgent addresses. On first impressions, it might appear as if Riley's 'biographical self' was now emerging through the 'barrage of words', but in the context of Butler and Kleist's respective theories, this may not be wholly accurate. Rather, it represents a *dis*continuity that closely resembles an occasion of utterance without premeditated thought. In doing so, the interjection affirms that Riley's impersonal demeanour is itself another performative tactic. To clarify, it suggests that the 'barrage of words' may not actually *hide* the 'persona of the poet' per se. More accurately, it renders that persona entirely indeterminable, so that one is unable to designate a single mode of performance. Therefore, her ironic quip is implicitly aware of how "the performing self may slide into being itself performed,"[175] and indicates that the multiple 'voices' during the performance do not represent collective utterances that simply *belong* to a multiplicity. In fact, they are collective because they "sidle away from anyone's ownership."[176]

While still concerned with ideas of ownership, the second example assumes a slightly different approach. After leading the discussion with the audience, Riley announces that she wishes to conclude the evening "with a bang and not a whimper" and wants to read one of Mulford's poems, which she has not seen or "read in print before."[177] To emphasise the unknown quality of the work, Riley seemingly has to remove the poem from a sealed box—at the very least, the recording captures the

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[172] 2CDR000614 (A)

[173] Riley, *Marxism for Infants*, n.p.

[174] 2CDR000614 (A)

[175] Riley, *Words of Selves*, 153

[176] *Ibid* 162.

[177] 2CDR000614 (B). The reference to Pound's famous line is intentional.

sound of a box being opened. On first blush, this conclusion recalls the beginning of the performance, where the mutual utterance blended Mulford and Riley's voices together. Yet, the event simultaneously anticipates the collaborative quotations that the two would enact in *No Fee* and *Some Poems*. Earlier in this chapter, I noted how several critics found these poems to "speak the words of the other" as an "endorsement and extension of their own."[178] The conclusion to Riley and Mulford's reading performs these practices directly; one quite literally speaks the words of the other. Consequently, if the "boundarylessness" of these collaborative collections renders "authorship" to a "riddle,"[179] the end of the reading equally problematizes the performance of authorship. However, this is not simply achieved with the substitution of Riley's voice for Mulford's poem. As the preambular remarks reveal, Riley is entirely unfamiliar with the poem, which negates any premeditated approaches to reading it. In this respect, the occasion resembles Riley's later readings from Kleist, in that this utterance is also formed on ellipsis. Therefore, the final moments of the reading act as another representation of the meta-commentaries that underlie the occasion. If the event began by voicing suspicions about expressing a socialist feminist perspective through empirical poetry, the readings themselves perform extensive investigations into modes that could better articulate this position. Throughout, Riley and Mulford enter into a manifold play on 'boundarylessness', which does not simply substitute the individual voice with that of a collective. In the process of these continuous *dis*continuities, the idea of 'ownership' itself begins to deteriorate.

Thus, Riley's performance at the Cambridge Poetry Festival operates through various forms of ambivalence. In a certain sense, it appears intent upon manoeuvring away from the hierarchies presented by the events valorised in Stern's essay. While 'The Formal Poetry Reading' asserts that the primary significance of "the presentation of poetry,"[180] Stern also argues that readings overcome the "anonymity" and "loneliness" of "the printed page"[181] through the "communal"[182] experience of the event. To a degree, Stern's acknowledgement of these collective elements resonates

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[178] Middleton, 'Breaking the Perspex', 5. Also see the end of section 4.2 in this chapter.
[179] DuPlessis, 68
[180] Stern, 74
[181] *Ibid*, 77
[182] *Ibid*, 83

with some of the convergences I described in Chapter 3. However, while the encounters between poets such as Murphy and Houédard were ideological transactions that took place within the audience, Stern regards this sociality as simply a "way of paying homage [...] to the poet"[183] and their work. As we have seen, such perceptions are challenged by the *dis*continuities that were enacted during Riley and Mulford's reading, where they interrogate this tacit assertion of ownership. Both Riley's polemic opening address and the discussion that followed the reading serve to destabilize the easy contours of a communal experience, as they invite the audience to reconsider their preconceptions regarding the event. Similarly, the 'barrage of words' during the performance involves a degree of self-annihilation, which places the presence of an authorial persona in a state of flux. Yet, the performance is simultaneously contoured with a degree of restraint. It still attempts to conduct its manoeuvres within the confines of a 'formal poetry reading'. There is no evidence of the intermedial practices exhibited in 'Theatre Piece # 1', or of the anarchic antics that took place during The First International Poetry Incarnation. This reading appears less interested in experimenting with the spectacle of the performance than it is in exploring the margins of the social situations where the event occurs. Ultimately, perhaps the occasion holds a mirror to the slightly ambiguous public estimations of Riley's poetry, which I described at the beginning of this chapter: it is 'neither this nor that', but ambivalently in-between.

4.4 'It strikes as an extraordinary convention'
Summaries and further movements

While this chapter has focused on the multiple nuanced performances that occurred during Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977, it is not my intention to suggest that these were consciously planned procedures. When I spoke to Riley about some of my impressions while listening to the event, she opined that much of what occurred was unintentional and likely to have stemmed from the "horror"[184] she

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[183] *Ibid*

[184] *Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10.*

experienced at the time. Likewise, I do not wish to claim that those in attendance necessarily perceived the events as I have described them in this chapter. Indeed, some of the responses caught on the taped discussion suggest that the crowd felt somewhat sceptical about the acts that challenged the issues of authorship and ownership. When Riley finishes reading Mulford's poem, a woman from the audience interjects:

> I would have liked to [hear the poem] in Wendy's voice because I think it is written in her method, in the way your poems were to your measure. I suspect that the kind of collaboration you envisage […] it may have a very good effect in some respects. It may also lead to a very neutral kind of speech. It seemed to me that one of the things that the readings can convey so far as to demonstrate the varieties of individual's measure, and I would like to be able to […] to separate this rather smeary term individualism from personality. It seems that personality should be used […] more neutrally, without those kinds of connotations which individualism obviously has.[185]

In other words, while the person in question is also unsatisfied with the connotations of 'individualism', she still considers performance as an arena that presents the author's 'personality'. Others in the audience seemingly agree with this. One poet notes that his decision to read his own work is "to do with scarcity" as "you have so little chance to read your own poetry"[186] while another suggests that "you know your own material better."[187] One member of the audience even asserts that readings depend on "a question of voice"[188], where the author's voice offers an authentic vocalisation of the poem. To a certain extent, each of these comments affirms the proposals made by Stern.[189] Thus, while Riley and Mulford seek to challenge some of the social conventions of the reading, the audience does not appear overwhelmingly in favour of their proposals.

Instead, I have approached the event from this perspective in order to arrive at two slightly different claims. Firstly, I want to suggest that Riley's first public reading

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[185] 2CDR0006614 (B) Unfortunately, I have been unable to confirm the name of the speaker.

[186] *Ibid*

[187] *Ibid*

[188] *Ibid*

[189] They also provide some support to the frequent distinctions between various schools of The British Poetry Revival. While many identify the poets based in London to be deeply interested in experimenting with performance, the 'Cambridge School' is usually considered reticent towards it. However, as I stated towards the end of Chapter 1, it is not my intention to pursue these groupings further.

deserves to be considered a significant event.[190] In the context of the British Poetry Revival, it provides additional documentation of the often-noted gender issues associated with this period. The readings and discussion appear deeply informed by Riley and Mulford's feminist politics, which serve to further clarify the troubling inequalities described at the start of this chapter. During the discussion, Mulford notes: "as women, we have found quite a big barrier, in getting over the bit about *doing* the performance."[191] Furthermore, the occasion is also noteworthy in the context of Riley's career. Despite the poet's apprehensions and retrospective embarrassment, she delivers a powerful performance. The 'barrage of words' projected during the event gives early indications of the 'urgent addresses' that Wheale[192] commends while describing Riley's later readings. It also corresponds with reports of her most recent public appearances. When Riley read during the 'Lyric and Polis' Symposium at University College Falmouth in February 2012, several members of the audience allegedly felt moved to tears by her "galvanising"[193] reading, where the cadences appeared to bridge the "affective dimensions of performance" with "those of composition."[194] Such interactions between performance and composition are already present within the *dis*continuities of the reading in 1977. Likewise, the occasion also indicates early examples of Riley's poetics. As I argued above, she and Mulford staged their discussion partially to raise questions of the "privileged relationship" where the poet is the "hero of his own poems and body of work."[195] These ideas resurface nearly three decades later in Riley's interview with Huk, where she expresses concerns about being "the heroine of [her] own work."[196] They also reveal early aspects of the arguments Riley carries out in publications such as *Am I that Name* and *Words of Selves*. In this respect, the recordings provide an important source for a more complete understanding of Riley's poetic and intellectual development.

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[190] Although the recordings are housed at the British Library, they still appear somewhat forgotten. For instance, when I mentioned the recordings to Riley, she was unaware of their existence.

[191] 2CDR0006614 (B

[192] See Wheale, 76-77. Also see the beginning of section 4.3 in this chapter.

[193] Morris, M. *Re: Lyric and Polis*. [Email] Message to UKPOETRY@listserv.muohio.edu. 22. 02. 2012

[194] Solomon, S. *Re: Lyric and Polis*. [Email] Message to UKPOETRY@listserv.muohio.edu. 22. 02. 2012

[195] 2CDR0006614 (B)

[196] Riley & Huk. 'Denise Riley in Conversation with Romana Huk'

On a broader spectrum, I have also tried to demonstrate that Riley's reading is not necessarily as different from the case studies in the previous chapters as it may initially seem. Although Stern discerns distinctive characteristics between a 'formal poetry reading' and the 'antics' of a festival, the boundary between the two is actually a permeable membrane. As the analysis of Riley's reading indicates, even when the performance is primarily focused on the presentation of poetry, the event can still engage with a range of performative strategies. For instance, the parallels between Riley's reading and her ambivalent bodies of text indicate that in certain situations the performance enacts the commitments of the poems. Perhaps more importantly—as Kleist's production of thought indicates—these practices are not necessarily based on premeditated decisions, but rather emerge during the event itself. In other words, perhaps the contours that Stern establishes may be diverted from the apparent 'presentation of poetry' and used to question the mystery of that production. Both Riley and Mulford appear aware of the proximity between the 'performance of authorship' and that of ownership, which leads them to enact tactics that subvert such privileged relationships. Therefore, rather than consider Riley's reading diametrically opposed to my previous analyses, perhaps these performances are better understood as co-existing on a sliding scale. In each occasion, the effects of the event encompass a wide array of practices that extend the action of the performance beyond its elocutionary elements. Yet, this case study additionally marks a further development, as Riley and Mulford's collective resistance to ownership generates a certain distance between the poet reading and the material read. Similar procedures also inform—to a more radical degree—the composition of Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*, which is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

'Memories arrested in space'
Eric Mottram's Pollock Record

5.1 'Declaring a Behaviour'

What did Mottram say about performance?

Scholarship and documentation

In the final section of the previous chapter, I suggested that Riley and Mulford's audience was not unequivocally welcoming to the questions raised during the discussion that followed the performance. However, while several of these spectators appeared more at ease with 'formal poetry readings' than the two poets, the debate primarily remained civil in tone. The same cannot be said about another exchange that took place during the first Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975. When Eric Mottram and Lee Harwood delivered a joint presentation titled 'Imagination and Invention in Contemporary British Poetry,'[1] one attendee found Mottram's binary proposals about static communities and the newness of experimentation so disagreeable that he accused the poet of being "pompous."[2] For a brief interval, this altercation brought the proceedings to a halt. The comparative difference between these anecdotes also represents the developments of this chapter, where my intention is to further explore certain proposals from the previous case study. At the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that the *dis*continuities that Riley enacts during her reading subvert the 'performance of authorship' by generating a certain distance between the poet reading and the material read. In this chapter, I will investigate how such practices may be intensified through the multiple ways in which documentation, collaboration and memory contribute to destabilising the material presented during the performance— that is, the poem and perhaps even the performance itself. I will consider these themes through a close examination of Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*.

On the surface, Mottram may appear an unusual case study for this thesis. While it is difficult to discuss innovative poetry from Britain in the 1960's and 1970's

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[1] Harwood, L & Mottram, E. 'Imagination and Invention in Contemporary British Poetry'. Union Debating Chamber. British Library Sound Archive. 1975.04.20. C40/32 Hereafter cited as C40/32

[2] *Ibid*

without some reference to Mottram, this would usually involve his role as the editor of *Poetry Review* between 1971 and 1977[3] or his position as a mentor to "avant-garde poets" such as Allen Fisher, Bill Griffiths and others who were "either based in London or oriented towards it."[4] Some critics have also described Mottram's impact on poets from farther afield, such as Barry MacSweeney.[5] Yet, references to Mottram's own practice as a poet appear much less frequently. For instance, in *Poetry Wars*, Barry suggests that Mottram's legacy is "predominantly" based on his work "as a critic, reader and editor rather than a poet."[6] However, he also identifies a wider issue for any scholarship concerning Mottram. When discussing the poet's "immense body of work,"[7] Barry notes:

> It is nearly all in fugitive publications, which not even a major university library would possess: *Blood on the Nash Ambassador* of 1989—out of print but obtainable—is the only collection of Mottram's essays a serious enquirer has any chance of gaining access to outside special collections and archives [...] His own difficult and allusive poetry has only once received the kind of sustained explication it requires (in Clive Bush's *Out of Dissent*) and this kind of enterprise would really need to be continued on an almost Olsonian or industrial scale if serious hopes were entertained of facilitating general access to the poetry.[8]

To extrapolate, not only is Mottram's oeuvre somewhat overshadowed by his quasi-Poundian efforts to promote the works of others, but his poems also continue to exist as an "ephemeral phenomenon"[9] on the pages of self-produced pamphlets and other small press publications. Consequently, any contemporary engagement with Mottram's poetic practices requires one to excavate these 'lost' documents in an endeavour to experience Mottram's works in their own right.

Such an excavation is, as Barry observes, undertaken to a commendable degree in Bush's *Out of Dissent*. Drawing upon an array of collections that spans Mottram's oeuvre, Bush aptly and precisely characterises his work as a search "for an

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[3] See Barry, *Poetry Wars*. I made brief references to Mottram's editorship at the start of the last chapter. See section 4.1 in Chapter 4.

[4] Middleton, P. 'Poetry after 1970'. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (eds. L. Marcus and P. Nicholls). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 2004, 783

[5] See, for example, Robert Sheppard's indication that it was Mottram's influence that steered MacSweeney away from the 'celebrity' status of his early career toward a deeper range and authority within his writing. See Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, pp.68-70

[6] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 144

[7] *Ibid*

[8] *Ibid*

[9] Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance*, 19. Berghaus' comment refers avant-garde art in general.

order primarily coaxed into shape by the various demands of the outside, by materials which have been *noticed*"[10] as a result of learning, experience and chance. In other words, Mottram's poetry involves multiple forms of collage and assemblage, which engage "with the contemporary world and with the ever-changing modes and meditations within which we experience it."[11] The depth and breadth of this methodology is apparent in a vast array of the poet's work. For instance, both *Local Movement*[12] and *Tunis*[13] conclude with extensive source lists, which feature both academic publications and a wealth of other materials. These include lyrics from Captain Beefheart and Neil Young, cut ups from issues of *Art News*, as well as Stravinsky's 'Tilin-bom'. In this respect, when Allen Fisher's blurb to Mottram's *The Legal Poems*[14] describes the publication as "a rhizomic research into law, power and confidence" where "this cultural programme is intersected and questioned"[15], the phrasing seems applicable to Mottram's work as whole.[16] As Bush acknowledges, while drawing upon "scientific as well as artistic knowledge,"[17] Mottram's poems remain acutely aware of "the world's open ended multiplicity and of the range of possibilities for the 'self' in relation to it."[18] These relations are also exhibited through Mottram's celebrations of "possible communities"[19] that participate in "revising and expanding the scope of poetry."[20] Many of Mottram's pamphlets attest this spirit, as *Three Letters*[21] demonstrates: not only is the collection published by Fisher, but the poems themselves are structured as 'letters' to friends such as Paige Mitchell and Lee Harwood.[22] In addition, *Out of Dissent* describes Mottram's poems as 'performances'

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[10] Bush, C. *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets*. Talus Editions. London. 1997, 458

[11] *Ibid, 537*

[12] Mottram, E. *Local Movement*. Writers Forum. London. 1973

[13] Mottram, E. *Tunis*. Rivelin Press. 1976

[14] Mottram, E. *The Legal Poems*. Arrowspire Press. Lancashire. 1986

[15] *Ibid*

[16]. The relevance of these practices to *Pollock Record* will be discussed in more detail in the second section of this chapter.

[17] Bush, 438

[18] *Ibid*, 462

[19] *Ibid*, 438

[20] *Ibid*, 448

[21] Mottram, E. *Three Letters*. Spanner. London.1984

[22] Similarly, several of Mottram's poems, including those found in *Raise the Wind for Me: Poems for Basil Bunting*, or his various 'Elegy' poems often operate as addresses to poets and artists either living or dead. The second section of this chapter will make further references to the relationship between

"in which a deadly game of destruction/creation is being played,"[23] and notes that Mottram valorised the expansion of poetry through "insistence in visual play, oral improvisation, the fearless mixing of media and [...] performance."[24] Yet, Bush's study seems curiously silent about the ways in which poetry and performance meet in Mottram's work. It also lacks a strong engagement with the poet's essays about these convergences.

With this in mind, I would like to return to Mottram's participation at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975. During 'Imagination and Invention in Contemporary British Poetry', his contributions seem to assert performance as a site where imagination and invention might occur. Drawing his examples from the work of Allen Fisher,[25] Bob Cobbing and others, Mottram identifies 'performance'—which includes live events and typographical design— as "imaginative inventions through which materials, feelings and connections are made."[26] These intersections, Mottram argues, have the capacity to suggest "the whole body's capability"[27] beyond the "purist definitions of a fixed boundary of poetic form."[28] Mottram also insists that these developments are something "we're going to have to consider seriously."[29] Lamentably, as the aforementioned heated exchange ensues shortly afterwards, the recording does not provide further elaborations about these proposals. However, it is worth noting that Mottram's invitation to speak at the festival[30] left the content of his presentation entirely to his own discretion. In this context, the suggestions that Mottram makes appear all the more significant. While utterances about 'invoking the whole body's capability' and the barriers involved with 'purist definitions' may seem more polemical than informative, Mottram's call to consider performances 'seriously' corresponds with the task he undertakes in several of his 'fugitive publications'.

Pollock Record and this element of Mottram's writing. See Mottram, E. *Raise the Wind for Me: Poems for Basil Bunting*. Pig Press. Durham. 1992

[23] Bush, *Out of Dissent*, 428

[24] *Ibid*, 448

[25] These examples will be discussed in closer detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

[26] C40/32

[27] *Ibid*

[28] *Ibid*

[29] *Ibid*

[30] Documented in Mottram, E. 'Flyers for literary events, primarily poetry readings, featuring Mottram, with some administrative correspondence and contracts, 1965-1992' MOTTRAM: 11/1Hereafter, all references from Mottram's papers will be cited according to their catalogue number.

Whilst interviewing other poets,[31] being interviewed himself, or when writing articles for journals, anthologies or conferences,[32] Mottram's work[33] frequently identifies performance as such a large "part of the general poetics"[34] today, that without it "no proper account of twentieth century poetry is possible."[35]

These declarations reveal a slightly anomalous situation. Although Middleton notes that many poets appear "uneasy"[36] about conducting sustained reflections on poetry and performance, Mottram's publications include a vast quantity of critical engagements with the subject. When surveyed together, these works can be understood as a series of ongoing attempts to define the nature and role of performance within innovative poetry. Consequently, some of Mottram's proposals may now appear somewhat dated or unsatisfactory. For instance, while reading about Gary Snyder's claim that poetry will one day be recorded and heard instead of read, it is hard not to feel suspicious when Mottram optimistically asserts that "today, that day is here."[37] Similarly, his arguments can occasionally seem quite restricted. He frequently associates performance with the dissemination of "the speed of poem, its sounds and rhythms"[38] through the "living presence of the poet,"[39] which only serves to affirm the 'performance of authorship' that Riley and Mulford challenged in the previous chapter. Yet, Mottram's allusions to the 'performance of authorship' are marked with ambivalence. He also speculates that 'to read'—even when this is done in private—"means to be able to perform the poem,"[40] which indicates an awareness

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[31] See, for example, McSweeney & Mottram, 37

[32] Examples include 'Confidence and Performance'—Mottram's introduction for Victor Bockris and Andrew Wylie's collection of interviews *The Life of Poetry*. See Mottram, E. 'Confidence and Performance'. MOTTRAM 9/15/56-57. Another example is 'The Poetry Performance', which Mottram submitted for the first issue *P.S. Magazine* in 1975. See Mottram, E. 'The Poetry Performance' MOTTRAM 9/15/49-55.

[33] Perhaps inevitably, it emerges in Mottram's editorial decisions as well. By this, I do not only mean that some of the poetry selected for publication in *Poetry Review* during his editorship demonstrates an acute awareness of performance. More tellingly, perhaps, on one of the rare occasions these issues included an essay, it proclaimed: "we live in the age of [poetry] recitals". See Southam, B. 'Poetry Recitals' *Poetry Review* 63.1 (Spring 1972), 98

[34] Mottram, Eric. 'Notes on Poetics', 38

[35] *Ibid*

[36] Middleton, 'The Contemporary Poetry Reading', 265

[37] MOTTRAM 9/15/49-55, .2

[38] Mottram, 'Notes on Poetics', 39

[39] Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p.

[40] Mottram, E, 'Eric Mottram interviewed by Mark Wallace' *Poetic Briefs: Interview Issues* (1992) n.p.

of "the illocutionary force of the utterances"[41] that extends beyond typographic signification. Mottram's rhetoric gathers gravitas when it is linked to his later suggestions, which view "the reading of the poem as a part of the production of the poem."[42] This continued production is integral for Mottram, as ignoring it would restrict the poem to a state of "pristine closure," which is an unviable position for a poet who approaches each reading as an event where "something" new "has to be worked out."[43] Consequently, when Mottram describes reading a poem by Marvell "for the umpteenth time," he asserts that by "working it out again,"[44] each reader is able to continue the poem's production. The corollaries of this process are particularly relevant for Mottram's concerns regarding the performance of poetry as a "theatre of interchange", where the poem operates as a "process of relationships."[45] To a degree, these ideas correspond with my earlier examination of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', where a similar process of interchange reconfigures the event's communal elements.[46] Mottram extends these concepts further, as his considerations about poetry and performance also involve a "relationship between densities of recognized and unrecognized information placed in an incremental series of measures."[47] At times, Mottram refers to 'information' as a term that recalls the aforementioned authorial performances that illustrate the appropriate cadences of a poem. At the same time, by recognizing that the interchanges of performance include 'unrecognized', as well as the 'recognized' components, his observations emphasize that each act of reading is a moment of production that remains incomplete. Something is always omitted as well as received; that is to say, poetry as a 'theatre of interface' is an inherently unstable artefact. Although "some of the poetic information may not change at all", others exist "in a continual state of metamorphosis" where "a new kind of authenticity continually arises."[48]

I have focused on these perspectives in Mottram's work with poetry and performance partially in order to demonstrate the poet's deep commitment to this

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[41] Middleton, 'The Contemporary Poetry Reading', 268.

[42] Mottram, in Fisher, A. *Necessary Business*. Spanner. London. 1985, 191.

[43] *Ibid*

[44] *Ibid*

[45] Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p

[46] See Section 2.3 in Chapter 2.

[47] Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p

[48] *Ibid*

medium, but also in order to illustrate a slight distinction between this case study and those in the previous chapters. Mottram's speculations about performance allow us to further investigate the inherent instabilities that arise in events where the poet appears authoritative but is actually unable to control the 'metamorphosis' of the text, and where the poems are information that is both realised yet unrecognizable. We may therefore regard Mottram's work as a reflection of crisis; it is an endeavour to manoeuvre through slippage. By contrast, when I examined Olson's participation in Theatre Piece ♯ 1', the goal of my study was to demonstrate how—despite Olson's objections to Cage's methods—the poetics he describes in 'Projective Verse' are amenable to be brought together with the field of action that occurred during the performance. In their respective ways, the subsequent two chapters on Allen Ginsberg's performance at The First International Poetry Incarnation and Denise Riley' reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977 sought to illustrate how these events enact, divert and challenge their aesthetic and socio-political contexts. Although these case studies have acknowledged the performance of poetry as a site of multiple interfaces, Mottram's suggestions about production shift our attentions away from what a poet enacts during a performance, and towards the transformations that these events perform on the poem itself. To analyse these metamorphoses—and to examine how Mottram's theories about poetry and performance are practiced within his work—I will now investigate the poet's 1978 project, *Pollock Record*, in closer detail.

5.2 'Unframed space / in which to dance'?

What did Pollock Record *attempt to achieve?*

Documentation, materials, methods of composition and performance

While Barry astutely observes that Mottram's oeuvre consists of myriad 'fugitive publications', *Pollock Record* involves a further extremity of transience; the project is in fact more akin to a lost world. Although a version of the poem was printed as a double-page spread in *P.S. magazine*—or *Primary Sources on the International Performing Arts*—in 1979, [49] Mottram designed the project exclusively for

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[49] See Mottram, E. 'Pollock Record'. *P.S. Primary Sources on the International Performing Arts*. (September-October) 1979, pp. 12-13

performance. Yet, no known recordings of the piece exist, and the dates when it was performed remain uncertain. The leaflets from readings and correspondence with event organizers that were archived after Mottram's death[50] do not contain any explicit references to the project. Similarly, the available correspondence between Mottram and his two collaborators, Allen Fisher[51] and Bill Griffiths,[52] contains no references to possible events where the poem was performed. Of the three poets involved with the performance, Fisher is the only one still living, and even he cannot—understandably—recall the specific locations or details of the time(s) the event(s) took place.[53] Of course, speculations could be made of possible performances in dingy function rooms "found up twisty stair-cases above pubs in Camden Town, Chalk Farm, or Tottenham Court Road,"[54] but confirmations of a more specific location seem unattainable. This makes the study of *Pollock Record* unlike the previous case studies, as the performance cannot be situated in a particular time and space. Consequently, as an object of study, it poses certain methodological questions, which require further attention.

We can ascertain that the performance took place at least once, as Mottram alludes to *Pollock Record* in several interviews. The most extensive example of these was conducted with Peterjon Skelt,[55] while others with Steve Pereira[56] or Allen Fisher provide some additional commentary. From these interviews, we can infer that *Pollock Record* was comprised of "three big sheets with all kinds of materials on them, with black lines around them."[57] During the performance, Fisher, Griffiths and Mottram would "read one selection one after another,"[58] and the event concluded when one of them "reread one of the sections."[59] While this reveals some of the

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[50] See MOTTRAM 11/1

[51] See MOTTRAM 5/86/1-56 and MOTTRAM 5/86/57-90

[52] MOTTRAM 5/100/1-36

[53] See *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009*. Fisher suggested the event could have been staged in the premises of the Poetry Society. However, considering the year of completion for Mottram's poem, this seems unlikely, as Mottram had walked out of the Society by late 1977.

[54] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 177. Barry borrows this description from Roy Fisher's account of jazz concerts.

[55] See Skelt, pp. 15-41

[56] Originally published as 'The authority of Eric Mottram: Interview' in *Angel Exhaust* 6 (Winter 1986) pp. 51-62. Subsequently published in Allen, T. & Duncan A. (eds). *Don't Start Me Talking: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*. Salt Publishing. Cambridge. 2006 pp. 301-314. My citations will be from the Allen & Duncan edition (hereafter cited as *Don't Start Me Talking*).

[57] Mottram, in Skelt, 25

[58] *Ibid*

[59] *Ibid*

methods for performing *Pollock Record*, it is difficult to generate a broader analysis of the piece through such brief references. Consequently, the present investigation must commence from the grounding material for the performance itself—that is, the sheets that Mottram designed in preparation for it.[60]

In this respect, to study *Pollock Record* is to pursue a complex relationship between performance and documentation. As Philip Auslander has proposed, a large majority of performance art from the 1960s and the 1970s considers the "connection between performance and document" to be "ontological."[61] Here, the event is identified as the preceding act, which both authors and 'authorises' the document. To elaborate, "the documentation of the performance event provides [...] a record of it"[62] that can subsequently be used as a tool that facilitates a partial reconstruction of the occasion. In addition, the document serves as "evidence that" the event "actually occurred."[63] As a consequence, Auslander focuses especially on artefacts such as photographs or video recordings of the performances themselves. Contrarily, the sheets for *Pollock Record* shift the attention from media to script. The ontological framework in Auslander's essay perceives media—or post-event documents—as a record of the performance. My investigation of Mottram's sheets approaches this documentation from a speculative, preceding space that considers these items as evidence of what *might* have occurred. In this sense, the usability of these documents can be considered alongside Austinian performativity.[64] For Austin, "the performance of an 'illocutionary' act"[65] is the "performance of an act *in* saying something."[66] In the case of *Pollock Record*, due to the absence of detailed and documented records, any contemporary understanding of the piece must first be formulated through reading it.

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[60] See MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[61] Auslander, P. 'On the Performativity of Performance Documentation'. *After the Act: (Re)Presentation of Performance Art* (ed. B. Clausen). Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. 2005, 21

[62] *Ibid*

[63] *Ibid*

[64] Auslander also draws upon Austin's theories. However, his use of this theory departs from mine. To Auslander, the performativity of documentation is to do with performance events that exist as "studio fabrications of one sort or another" without the "presence of an initial audience", for example, Auslander notes, The Beatles never performed *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* as it sounds on the record, and consequently, the only 'performance' of this classic album is achieved through its document, i.e. the record. In effect, Auslander considers documentation to be performative in the sense that "documenting the event as a performance is what constitutes it as such". See Auslander, pp. 26-30

[65] Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William Harvey James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Clarendon Press. London. 1975, 99

[66] *Ibid*

To read it is to perform it, which effectively enacts the ambivalences of authorship and slippage that Mottram deemed appropriate for an analysis of performance. In other words, it is possible that the force of the utterances on the sheets themselves may begin to call *Pollock Record* back into being.

But what exactly is uttered on these sheets? The holdings of Mottram's papers contain two of the three sheets mentioned above.[67] Both are dated 1978 and contain the same selections of materials; as such, although the third sheet is not available for closer analysis, it seems likely that it contains an identical selection of texts. However, while one can engage with *Pollock Record*'s materials, it is physically challenging to ascertain exactly what they communicate. Mottram's description of the sheets as 'big' is in fact a drastic understatement; both documents actually consist of two sheets taped together, and measure 35 inches in height and 25 inches in width. The text is not written on the 'canvas' itself. Instead, the materials are glued on to the sheets.[68] These sections also vary considerably in length and size. Some fragments are comprised of several stanzas, whereas others feature a single line. In places where a section has been situated close to the taped borders that join the sheets, the tape has obscured the printed text and the words have been re-written by hand to ensure visibility. As the earlier quote from Mottram indicates, lines that are drawn with a black marker delineate the borders for all the various sections. The sheets contain a large quantity of these poetic fragments, with little space left to spare. Consequently, when one of these sheets is unfolded on a table, it spreads such a wide expanse of written material that reading it becomes a disorienting and vertiginous experience. Even in visual terms, it feels almost impossible to focus on the entire stretch of text. This disorientation is amplified by the material itself, which seemingly does not adhere to a specific sequence. As a result, each of these fragments must be observed in brief intervals, which slowly begins to reveal certain patterns within the imagery and the themes of the work. Much of the material alludes to paintings and visuality. Equally, references to bodies or bodily functions—as well as objects of nature— feature prominently. To a certain extent, as the title of the project implies, these materials seemingly relate to the painter Jackson Pollock.

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[67] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77 The location of the third sheet is presently unknown.

[68] The arrangement of the materials also differs from the later version in *P.S.* magazine.

Ultimately, perhaps *Pollock Record* can be called into being by examining its relationship to Pollock; through these investigations, we can develop a broader understanding of the poem, and also speculate why Mottram would choose to incorporate these materials within a work designed for performance. As I noted earlier, Bush accurately identifies Mottram's use of collage and assemblage as a key component of his poetic practice.[69] The frequency and complexity of this praxis is ably illustrated by Pierre Joris' account of reading Mottram's work. In 1997, during the First Eric Mottram Conference in London,[70] he stated:

> I remember myself—though I had read the *Cantos* & much else by then—surprised at discovering circa 1975, while writing what was one of the first reviews of Mottram's work, how Eric's poetry relied upon a near seamless lifting & incorporating of other writer's phrases and lines. Analysing several of the poems in *Against Tyranny* […] I discovered that some 95% of their language matter was taken over from Paul Nizan's *Aden Arabie* & Sartre's preface to that book. A few days ago, my companion […] was working on a song based on a poem of a late Mottram book, *Estuaries*, & she was able to trace most of the texts to phrases from Van Gogh's letter of 1888, phrases & words lifted, rearranged into a new design that make them an unmistakable Mottram poem[71]

Of course, these methodologies are not uniquely attributable to Mottram, but Joris' recollections resonate with the experience of reading *Pollock Record*. When the sheets are examined in parallel with Mottram's notes and drafts for the project,[72] the primacy of Pollock's presence becomes increasingly clear. Indeed, at first Mottram's collagist methods appear to assimilate the painter's work in an almost rudimentary manner. The poet's preparatory notes feature quotations from B.H Friedman's biography of Pollock[73] as well as Frank O'Hara's monograph[74] about his paintings, and some of the fragments openly declare the painter as their subject matter or source material. For instance, when one section reads "I can control the flow of paint:/there is no accident just as there is / no beginning and no end- 1950 film"[75] the material

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[69] See Bush, 447

[70] Held on the 19th of September 1997, only a few years after Mottram's death (16.01.1995), with papers presented by Jerome Rothenberg, Keith Tuma, Allen Fisher, Pierre Joris, Jeff Nuttal, Bill Griffiths, Lisa Raphals, and Dale Carter. No records of subsequent conferences were found.

[71] Joris, P. 'Collage & Post-Collage: In Honor [sic] of Eric Mottram'. [Online] Available from: http://pierrejoris.com/emmag1pj.html (last accessed 09.03.2011)

[72] See MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[73] See Friedman, B.H. *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*. MacGraw-Hill. New York. 1972

[74] See O'Hara, F. *Jackson Pollock*. George Braziller. New York. 1959

[75] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

quotes Pollock in verbatim and also provides a brief citation of its source: the '1950 film' alludes to Hans Namuth's famous footage of the painter at work, which was a significant contributing factor to Pollock's arrival as a public celebrity.[76] Other fragments are less overtly collagist, but still source their material from the painter. The section "I have no fears about / making changes / destroying the image / life comes through"[77] is in fact extracted from an article Pollock wrote for the first and only issue of *Possibilities*.[78] In addition, while one of the more sustained components is devoid of any direct citations, it nevertheless contains biographical allusions to Cody, Wyoming—where Pollock was born—and 1912, the year of his birth. Likewise, *Pollock Record*'s lunar imagery also features a direct connection to the painter, who was tremendously moved by the moon[79] and referred to it in certain aspects of his work.[80] Indeed, even the sections that veer towards classical mythology—such as the references to Romulus and Remus or conception of the Minotaur within the lines "suckled by a she-wolf / fucked by a bull"[81]—tacitly advert to Pollock. In O'Hara's monograph, the paintings *She-Wolf*[82] and *Pasiphaë*[83] are respectively associated with these myths.

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[76] See, for example, Friedman, pp. 162-198. This view is corroborated in many of the subsequent biographies of Pollock. See, for example: Frank, E. *Jackson Pollock*. Abbeyville Press. New York. 1982; Emmerling, L. *Jackson Pollock: 1912-1956*. Taschen. Koln. 2003; Landau, E.G. *Jackson Pollock*. Thames and Hudson. London. 1989. Today, Namuth's film is commonly considered as the beginning of Pollock's downfall, both in terms of the critical reception of his new works and in his health and personal life. It was in the aftermath of Namuth's film that Pollock began drinking again, and the re-surfacing alcoholism eventually contributed to his fatal car crash.

[77] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77.

[78] The issue was published in the winter of 1947 and 1948, but Mottram's preparatory notes indicate he sourced the material from O'Hara's monograph. The full quotation reads: "I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc. because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through". See O'Hara, 32

[79] Pollock's widow Lee Kasner frequently spoke about the painter's obsession with the moon. Landau's biography corroborates this, as it mentions "reminiscences by a number of friends" who "portray Pollock both cursing at the moon and reciting poetry to it". See Landau, 113

[80] For example *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*, a painting by Pollock circa 1943. Although the image's exact relationship to the moon is understated, its presence is asserted by the title. As I argue during this chapter, Mottram's references often elaborate upon the titles of Pollock's paintings instead of their visuality.

[81] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[82] See O'Hara, 18

[83] See O'Hara, 19
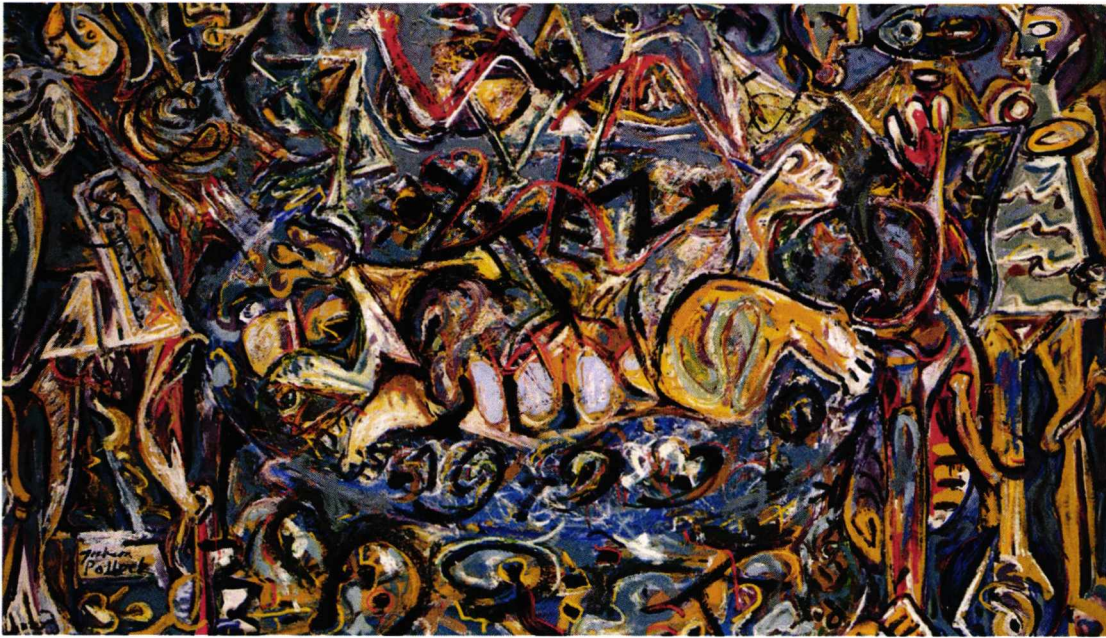
Fig 5.1: Pollock's *Pasiphaë*
Reproduced from Emmerling, pp. 44-45

However, it would be erroneous to regard *Pollock Record* as a rudimentary echo chamber for the painter and his works. Mottram's textual collage encompasses a much broader and more intricate field of materials than this reductive account would indicate. The fragments on the sheets seamlessly enfold material sourced from Pound's *Guide to Kulchur*, Williams' *In the American Grain,* poems by Jack Spicer and Paul Valery, as well as the writings of Artaud—none of which bear any direct relationship to Pollock. Although the painter is an undeniably ubiquitous presence within the myriad fragments, Mottram's resources remain principally literary. In fact, sections of *Pollock Record* reveal a palpable absence between the textual content and the painter who ostensibly is the poem's primary topic. This complex relationship is evidenced by the aforementioned references to Romulus and Remus or the Minotaur. While the titles of the paintings feature a referent to these myths, the narratives are arguably removed from the images themselves. As I indicated earlier, Mottram's decision to incorporate the classical allusions was informed by O'Hara's monograph, where the paintings are analysed from a mythical perspective,[84] but subsequent studies disagree with this approach. On closer examination, Romulus and Remus are

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[84] See O'Hara, pp. 18-19

Fig 5.2: Pollock's *She-Wolf*
Reproduced from Emmerling, 42

both absent from *She-Wolf*,[85] and the backside of the painting's wolf-like figure resembles a mastodon's head, which problematizes the parallels between the image and the myth.[86] Similarly, the relationship between Pollock's *Pasiphaë* and the conception of the Minotaur is somewhat nominal and superficial, as the title did not actually originate from the painter. According to Lee Kasner, James Johnson Sweeney suggested it to Pollock, whose immediate response was simply: "who the hell is Pasiphaë?"[87] In other words, the discrepancies between what *Pollock Record* includes and what Pollock's paintings omit suggest that Mottram's poem may not be about the painter per se. Instead, Mottram seemingly attempts to incorporate Pollock within a wider network of materials.

Perhaps *Pollock Record* is ultimately interested in the continuous metamorphoses that emanate from its symbiotic collages. For instance, the lines "memories arrested in space / 'a gesture I shall never forget'"[88] combine a direct quote

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[85] O'Hara tries—quite unconvincingly—to argue that Romulus is depicted in the painting. Fixing upon a shape in the lower left corner, which resembles a child's face, O' Hara claims that this is "undoubtedly Romulus, for though the wolf nursed both brothers, Romulus later killed Remus. She is not yet giving suck, and Romulus the stronger would be the first to feed". O'Hara makes no reference to the mastodon's head. See O'Hara, 18.

[86] See for example, Emmerling, pp. 43-44

[87] See, for example, Emmerling, 42

[88] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

from Pollock—where the painter describes his technique[89]—with a detail from an early work by Henry James, 'The Madonna of the Future'. The short story depicts the career of an American expatriate artist, Theobald, who tells James' narrator he has worked on his masterpiece—a modern version of Raphael's Madonna of the Chair— for several years. Yet, when the narrator finally sees Theobald's work, he discovers it is only a "canvas that was a mere dead blank, cracked and discoloured by time."[90] The second line in the aforementioned fragment is extracted from the scene that follows immediately after this revelation, where Theobald—who concludes that his failure as an artist is caused by his inability to transfer his vision to his easel—raises a hand towards his absent masterpiece. However, Mottram's lines do not simply juxtapose the act of creation and with an inability to create. It forges a symbiotic relationship between a canonical American author who was praised for his stylistic precision, and Pollock, whom art critics such as Clement Greenberg hailed as one of the greatest American painters of the 20th century.[91] Additionally, the fragment restructures, reshapes and re-deploys the words in James as a reflective commentary on Pollock's paintings. In part, O'Hara's monograph presents the painter's work as a portrait of movement, and praises Pollock's "amazing ability to quicken a line by thinning it" or "to slow it by flooding."[92] In turn, Mottram's collage creatively adapts its resources to extend upon O'Hara's analysis, in that it depicts Pollock's paintings as a record of the physical movements that created them; they enable posterity to behold a series of gestures over an empty canvas. In effect, *Pollock Record*'s multiple resources interact with each other in order to generate a striation of meanings and relationships.

At times, Mottram adapts these striated relationships in order to develop intricate parallels between materials that are linked with Pollock and matters that were more proximate and personal to the poet himself. For instance, the line "I want you to

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[89] Pollock's full version reads: "Technic is the result of needs—new needs demand new technics—total control—denial of the accident—States of order—organic intensity—energy and motion made visible—memories arrested in space, human needs and motive—acceptance". In all likelihood, Mottram sourced the material from Friedman's biography. See Friedman, 178. Also see, Varnadoe, K. 'Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work'. *Jackson Pollock* (ed. K.Varnadoe). The Museum of Modern Art. New York. 1998, 56.

[90] James, H. 'The Madonna of the Future'. *The Madonna of the Future and Other Early Stories*. The New American Library of World Literature. USA. 1962, 217

[91] Greenberg's declaration was also used as a headline for an article about Pollock, which appeared in *Life* magazine (August 8, 1949). The article introduced the painter to a wider American audience. See, for example, Landau, 11.

[92] O'Hara, 26.

fall in love with the picture, not the painter fall in love with the truth with yourself"[93] could initially be interpreted as a candid estimation of the appropriate aesthetic response to an artist's work, which also functions as an appeal to eschew the lure of social stature and celebrity. In this respect, the fragment could be construed as another reference to Pollock's biography: the "film work with Namuth triggered" a "profound crisis"[94] for the painter, as he felt he had sacrificed his creative principles by "pretending to paint" [95] for an audience. However, Mottram was also deeply concerned about the integrity of art—and of the artist. Many of his essays deride the "poet demagogues" he identifies amongst the "establishment poets" and the "poet-laureates," [96] all of who are guilty of subjecting poetry to a process of "quick productivity" for a "quick consumption."[97] To borrow from Adorno, Mottram firmly believed that culture and entertainment could only be brought together through the "debasement of culture."[98] Such concerns would have been especially pertinent for Mottram during the composition of *Pollock Record*.[99] Although the sheets are dated as 1978, there is evidence that Mottram was already compiling the material a year earlier, as a letter from Fisher—dated November 14th, 1977—contains a brief question about a new poem involving Pollock.[100] This dates the project within a tumultuous period in Mottram's career as a poet and an editor, as it follows closely after the Arts Council's Witt Investigation to the organisation of the Poetry Society. In July 1976, the investigators interviewed Mottram in his capacity as the editor of *Poetry Review*, which left poet feeling "insulted and belittled by people he regarded as nonentities;"[101] furthermore, when the Investigation's final report was published in October that year, it criticised the format and layout of the issues Mottram had edited, and deemed them unfit to be "the sole poetry publication of the National Poetry Centre."[102] Indeed, the

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[93] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[94] Emmerling, 76

[95] *Ibid*, 77

[96] Mottram, 'Notes on Poetics' 37

[97] Mottram, in Green, P.A. 'A Discussion with Professor Eric Mottram'. *Negative Entropy 2* (1981). 3

[98] Adorno, T.W. *Dialectic of Englightenment*. Stanford University Press. Stanford. 2002, 114

[99] Some of Mottram's handwritten drafts of sections for the poem are written on the back of flyers for an open lecture on America in the 1930s, which was held in Durham University in 1971. It is unclear, however, whether these sections were written during that visit, or if these flyers were fortuitously near-by when Mottram wrote the fragments on a later date. See MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/7

[100] See MOTTRAM 5/86/1-56

[101] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 78

[102] *Ibid*, 87

recommendations of the Witt Report proved so divisive that in March 1977, many of Mottram's close associates walked out of the Society *en masse*.[103] The poet himself responded to this sequence of events with a bitter "boycott of the Poetry Society,"[104] which he upheld for the remainder of his life. In this context, certain fragments in *Pollock Record* appear to signify an extensive asseveration of Mottram's concern for culture. They elicit the conflicts between commodity and autonomy that characterised much of the poet's professional life towards the end of the 1970s. In this respect, perhaps *Pollock Record* is—to a degree—Mottram's response to the events later surveyed in Barry's *Poetry Wars*.[105]

I will return to discuss *Pollock Record*'s relationship to the fallout at the Poetry Society during the course of this chapter. At this stage, however, I want to focus on a further aspect of the line I quoted earlier. A closer examination of Mottram's preparatory notes indicates that "I want you to fall in love with the picture, not the painter fall in love with the truth with yourself"[106] is actually extracted from Jiddu Krishnamurti's *Life in Freedom*.[107] The source is attributable to Pollock's biography; the painter had been "mesmerised"[108] by Krishnamurti's theosophy as a young man, and these writings continued to influence him throughout his life. Again, Mottram deploys collage in order to generate further complexities within his striation of meanings and relationships. The line both articulates Mottram's own convictions of what it means to be "concerned about art in" a "twentieth-century consumerist society"[109] and simultaneously crafts a relationship between these aesthetic principles and Pollock's personal beliefs—even though the two are grounded upon entirely different perspectives.[110] Consequently, Mottram operates akin to a paradigmatic

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[103] See Barry, *Poetry Wars*, pp. 96-101

[104] Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 114. These sentiments are also reiterated in many of Mottram's publications. See, for example, Mottram, E. 'A Treacherous Assault on British Poetry'. *The New British Poetry*. (G. Allnut, F. D'Aguiar, K. Edwards eds). Paladin. London 1988. pp. 131-134

[105] In particular, see Barry, *Poetry Wars*, pp. 73-104; pp. 113-120; pp.160-172

[106] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[107] Krishnamurti, J. *Life in Freedom*. Starlight Publishing Trust. London. 1928

[108] Landau, 24. Some material in *Pollock Record* also makes explicit references to Pollock being exposed to Krishnamurti's teachings.

[109] Bush, 519. Here, Bush is referring to a general pattern in Mottram's work, and not *Pollock Record* in particular.

[110] Pollock, it has been noted, was particularly taken by Krishnamurti's ideas concerning the individual's strength and power to speak with their own authority. This is not directly relevant to the quotation Mottram has chosen to include in *Pollock Record*. Thus, there is some scope for speculating whether the decision to include this particular quote was in fact chosen for its personal appeal to Mottram. See Landau, 24.

bricoleur, in that he assembles his work from materials "which had not been conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are used," without "hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous."[111] Consequently, rather than being about Pollock, *Pollock Record* is a collage where multiple quotations mutually permeate each other's pores and interstices, creating layer upon layer of new relations in the process. What *Pollock Record* in fact *does* is operate as an arena where Mottram's attempts to work with Pollock.

Why would Mottram wish to work with Pollock through these particular means? One possible answer lies in the procedures of the project itself. How is *Pollock Record* meant to operate? As I read through the sheets in the archives at King's College, London, I am continually reminded of Mottram's utterance: "What does it mean to 'to be able to read'? It means to be able to perform the poem."[112] The claim feels particularly pertinent to *Pollock Record*, as the sheets themselves contain the instructions "unfolds for performance by one or two readers, possibly more."[113] However, the preparatory notes also suggest that the project might have had an alternative origin. Mottram's handwritten drafts for the material in *Pollock Record* contain individual sheets that are labeled 'J.P. Elegy' at the left-hand margin. This suggests that Mottram's original intention was to use *Pollock Record* as a component to his sequence of 'Elegy' poems,[114] which included dedications to influential authors such as Pound or Kerouac,[115] as well as other artists such as the folk musician Woody Guthrie.[116] However, on the opposite margins, Mottram has already written 'A J.P. Record', which again illustrates so much of the ambivalence that surrounds this project, its origins and its performances. Is it possible that Mottram began the poem as one of his 'Elegies', but then decided to develop it into a more ephemeral work? And if so, what influenced him to design the poem as a performance event?

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[111] Derrida, 360

[112] Mottram, E. 'Interviewed by Mark Wallace' *Poetic Briefs: Interview Issue* (1993), 25

[113] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[114] Mottram's published such poems in various pamphlets during the course of the 1970's, and the project culminated with the publication of *Elegies* in 1981. *Pollock Record* is not featured in this collection. *Book of Herne* includes 'Elegy 18: Jackson Pollock as Herne', which addresses the painter. However, there is no direct overlap between this poem and the fragments used in *Pollock Record*. See Mottram, E. *Elegies*. Galloping Dog Press. Newcastle. 1981. Also see Mottram, E. *Book of Herne*. Arrowspire Press. Middlesex. 1981

[115] See Mottram E. *Two Elegies*. Poet & Peasant Books. Middlesex. 1974

[116] See Mottram, E. *A Faithful Private*. Genre Editions. London. 1976

Such questions would be difficult to answer exclusively through a prima facie observation of Mottram's comments concerning Pollock. Available documentation indicates that Mottram did not write extensively about the painter. Although a paper delivered at the Tate Gallery in 1986[117] alludes to Pollock, this is done only in passing[118]. A more viable approach is presented by Mottram's work in poetics. Contemporaneously to the composition of *Pollock Record*, Mottram published two significant essays that addressed his ideas on poetry, design and performance. In 'Open Field Poetry', the poet draws upon a range of sources and examples to argue that an "open field work is a collage of moments of high energy,"[119] which calls for a "properly indicative notation for articulation and performance." [120] While these proposals are unquestionably indebted to some the concepts that Olson outlines in 'Projective Verse,'[121] Mottram's essay is far more explicit about the implications that arise from the temporal, event-like qualities of these works. For him, the 'collage of moments' and 'performance' in open field poetry identifies the poem as a form that "exists and does not exist, exactly as contemporary descriptions in the philosophy of physics allow."[122] Therefore, by rejecting the illusion of "permanence within the high acceleration rate of change in" [123] the twentieth century, Mottram intimates that his 'field' is at least partially transient in nature. Furthermore, while *Towards Design in Poetry*[124] is primarily a collage of documents concerned with concrete poetry and the Fluxus movement, it also considers *poesy* in general as "a complex of possibilities in a piece of material,"[125] which feature a "number of invitations to actions."[126] These concepts are comparable to the aforementioned instructions for *Pollock Record*, which state that the performers should read one section after another "each one

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[117] See Mottram, E. 'Transformations: American arts in the 1950s'. MOTTRAM 9/1/4-6

[118] The same is true for Mottram's *Kent Journal*, which was written during his stay in America between January 3rd and April 9th, 1974. In an entry dated January 27th, Mottram quotes from Fielding Dawson's review of Friedman's Pollock biography, but does not elaborate on this quotation. See MOTTRAM 3/3/5; also see, Dawson, F. *On Duberman's Black Mountain & B.H. Friedman's Biography of Jackson Pollock*. Coach House Press. Toronto. 1973.

[119] Mottram, E. 'Open Field Poetry'. *Poetry Information 17* (Summer 1977). 15

[120] *Ibid*, 30

[121] See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[122] Mottram, 'Open Field Poetry' 15

[123] *Ibid*

[124] Originally published as Mottram, E. *Towards Design in Poetry*. Writers Forum. London. 1977. Later reprinted as Mottram, E. *Towards Design in Poetry*. Veer Books/Writers Forum. London. 2004. All subsequent references are from the Veer Books/Writers Forum edition.

[125] Mottram, *Towards Design in Poetry*, 46

[126] *Ibid*

reading a group which has not been read before."[127] Ultimately, perhaps the materials on the sheets are meant enact the concepts of ephemera, transformation and indeterminacy that Mottram outlines in his two essays.

How do these concepts relate to *Pollock Record's* relationship with Pollock? Tellingly, *Towards Design in Poetry* also quotes from Harold Rosenberg's 1972 interview with Willem de Kooning, where de Kooning's paintings are described as events.[128] This interview was not the only publication where Rosenberg used the term; it also appears in 'The American Action Painters'[129]—an essay Mottram had read by 1963[130]—where it is directly associated with Pollock. In the article, Rosenberg writes:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyse or express an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on a canvas was not a picture but an event.
> The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in mind; he went up to it with material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.[131]

To a degree, Rosenberg's estimation of Pollock's paintings is comparable to Lyotard's characterisation of the postmodern artwork,[132] in that both are identifiable as an event.[133] Similar concepts are also discussed during Pereira's interview with Mottram, where the poet defines his primary focus in writing as "making the poem,"[134] or "making the social event" of the text, "and of course, in rare occasions performing it."[135] In this respect, Rosenberg's view of action painting and Mottram's poetics both situate the work of art within a temporal encounter. Specifically, Rosenberg's descriptions of the painter and his easel correspond with Mottram's plans for *Pollock Record*, where he intended to "bring the relatively unexpected into the

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[127] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[128] See Mottram, *Towards Design in Poetry*, 42.

[129] Some scholarship on Pollock rejects the connotations of the "inarticulate spontaneity" in action painting as a valid description of the painter's work. I draw upon these concepts strictly in order to illustrate the correlation between the concepts of action painting and Mottram's designs for performing *Pollock Record*. See, for example Frank, 83

[130] See MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[131] Rosenberg, H. *The Tradition of the New*. Da Capo Press. New York. 1994, 25

[132] See section 1.3 of the Introduction to this thesis

[133] See Lyotard, 81

[134] Mottram, in *Don't Start Me Talking*, 307

[135] *Ibid*

performance."[136] In other words, if *Pollock Record* operates as an arena where Mottram attempts to work with Pollock, this interaction is manifested as a fusion of the painter's technique and the performances of the poem. Like the scene described in Rosenberg, Mottram's collage of fragments operates as materials that his performers can appropriate during a reading. However, as *Pollock Record* resisted premeditated ideas of order, the performed poem would ultimately be a result of this encounter.[137] In the archives, as I glance over the sheets, I notice a fragment that reads "unframed space / in which to dance."[138] It almost seems as if the lines were an affirmation of the interconnections between action painting and *Pollock Record*. While the section clearly describes Pollock's work and technique,[139] it also depicts the mode of performance that Mottram's project intends to enact.[140]

5.3. A gesture I shall (never) forget

What did Pollock Record *enact?*

Performance, document and memory

Hitherto, I have tried to call *Pollock Record* into being through examining the sheets themselves. While these analyses have clarified the technique and design for the poem in performance, they have not addressed the actual proceedings of such events. With this in mind, I would now like to focus on the available accounts of these occasions. How closely does *Pollock Record* conform to its intended mode of performance? Although Mottram designed the project as an adapted version of action painting, the

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[136] *Ibid*, 306

[137] Fisher discusses similar ideas in a later essay, which analyses Pollock and other painters through Olson's 'Projective Verse', especially with reference to the 'open field'. See Fisher, A. 'Plurality and the Reproduced: A Selective Approach to American Visual Arts in the 1950's'. *Cracking the Ike Age: Aspects of fifties America.* (ed, D. Canter) AARHUS University Press. Oxford. 1992. pp. 150-178

[138] MOTTRAM 2/2/74-2/2/77

[139] The first line is, again, a direct quote associated with Pollock. 'Unframed space' was a phrase used in reference to not only Pollock's work, but also to a model of an 'ideal' museum for Pollock's works, designed by Peter Blake and displayed at Pollock's 1949 show at the Betty Parson's Gallery. See Friedman, pp. 142-144. With Pollock's suggestions, Blake created a design that used mirrors in the model to create a continuous reflection of each of the long paintings. Similarly, Pollock's movements while he was painting, particularly those seen in Namuth's film, were often likened to dancing. See, for example, Landau, 182.

[140] While it is quite clear how *Pollock Record* aspires to be 'unframed space', it is also worth noting that the second line also relates to Mottram's views regarding poetry and performance. Towards the end of 'Declaring a Behaviour' Mottram praises Bob Cobbing and Olson for their understanding of "poetry as a form of dance—an action of the body in space-time". See Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p

poem's relationship to this methodology is not without difficulties. In some respects, this may be surprising, as Pollock's action paintings are by no means alien to intermedial performance events. For instance, Allan Kaprow's[141] Happenings openly acknowledged the influence of such techniques; in fact, these events occasionally developed concepts that were comparable to the procedures of *Pollock Record*. For Kaprow, the expansive scale of Pollock's works prompted the "marvellous thought that they could go on forever, in any direction including out,"[142] which effectively made galleries useless by unfolding a "wider and wider" field "of environmental"[143] and spatial referents. These thoughts were eventually translated into some of the 'rules' that Kaprow outlined for his Happenings, where "the line between art and life should be kept fluid"[144] and "the performance [...] should take place over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing locales."[145] If we approach *Pollock Record* as a complex of possibilities that might adopt unexpected dimensions during a performance, these intentions bear some similarities to Kaprow's rules. However, it would be misleading to suggest that the similitude between Mottram's design and those of others[146] would cause complications in combining Pollock with poetry and performance. Because Mottram's scholarly work places a great deal of emphasis on performance as a medium for poetry, the designs for *Pollock Record* are deeply committed to this mode of dissemination. Indeed, the parallels between Mottram's project and action painting are clearly the result of erudite considerations.

More specifically, *Pollock Record*'s position as an action poem is problematized during the proceedings of its performance. While Mottram's intentions to construct the poem through spontaneous decisions coheres with Rosenberg's analysis of the event-like qualities in Pollock's paintings, the project appears

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[141] Kaprow, in his own words, began as 'an action painter', but moved away from working with the canvas as it still felt like a theatrical space. In an interview with Richard Schechner, Kaprow explains his predicament: "It doesn't make any difference that it's very large, it's still a stage. It's pretty comfortable working in the middle, but as soon as you get to the edge you have to stop; and I didn't feel like stopping". See Schechner, R. 'Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow'. *Happenings and Other Acts* (ed. M.R.Sandford). Routledge. London. 1995, 224.

[142] Kaprow, A, 'Jackson Pollock: An Artist's Symposium, Part One'. *Artnews 66* (April 1967), 61

[143] *Ibid*

[144] Kaprow, A. *Assemblages, Environments & Happenings*. Abrams. New York. 1965, 188

[145] *Ibid*, 190

[146] It should also be noted that similar practices were, also present in projects by Mottram's friend and associates. For instance, Fisher's *Convergences In Place of the Play* is printed on one large sheet that is roughly the size of a newspaper spread. Comparably to *Pollock Record*, the materials on Fisher's sheet can be read in any order. See Fisher, A. *Convergences In Place of the Play*. Spanner. London. 1973

somewhat confused about the relationship between the act of reading and the act of painting. For Rosenberg, Abstract Expressionism was a document of an encounter between the blank canvas and the artist and his materials. By contrast, although Mottram's sheets resemble the comparative dimensions of Pollock's work, they are not a document of a previous performance. As I noted earlier, they exist as prerequisite materials for a performance. Equally, even though the indeterminate order in which the fragments were read might simulate Pollock's conception of being *in* his paintings as he works, Mottram's sheets facilitate a more limited frame of action. Instead of capturing "the actual movement of the artist's body"[147] on a blank canvas, the performers of *Pollock Record* enact a comparatively linear task of reading pre-prepared sections in an indeterminate order. To extend this logic further, a recording of a reading from *Pollock Record* would represent a more appropriate adaptation of Pollock's paintings as performance documentation. Yet, such objects are excluded from Mottram's design.[148] Indeed, if the procedures for *Pollock Record* included—as Mottram claimed—an attempt to "stress the spatiality and the atemporal nature"[149] of the poem, a recording would confine the text to a singular version within a specific time and place, which would violate the project's ephemerality. In the end, instead of documenting the event for posterity, a performance of *Pollock Record* is fundamentally characterised by absence: "to gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is a lie."[150] Consequently, if *Pollock Record* is difficult to identify as unframed space in which Mottram and his collaborators may perform, it is because the event ultimately veers away from Pollock's techniques. In his paintings, Pollock operates akin to an *engineer* who can act as "the supposed origin"[151] of his own work "and supposedly construct it 'out of nothing.'"[152] However, in borrowing their asseverations from the fragments on the sheets—which are already sourced from borrowed materials—Mottram and his collaborators act as *bricoleurs* who are, in a sense, twice removed.

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[147] Rosenberg, 27

[148] The collections of recorded performances that are housed in Mottram's archives do not contain a recording of *Pollock Record*.

[149] Mottram, in *Necessary Business*, 207

[150] Derrida, 84. Also see section 1.2 in Chapter 1.

[151] *Ibid*, 360

[152] *Ibid*

Mottram's comments in various interviews reveal a degree of discomfort regarding the discrepancies between *Pollock Record's* designs and the praxis of performing it. For example, while speaking to Pereira, Mottram remarks upon the procedures for the project, before conceding that "if I was better at it, and perhaps more courageous and less nervous, I would like to invent things on the spot."[153] However, while it appears that even Mottram felt anxious about the limitations of his sheets, it would be erroneous to discard the poem too quickly. Although *Pollock Record* might not perform Pollock's techniques, perhaps it enacts Mottram's concepts regarding performance as a network of recognized and unrecognized information. In an interview with Peterjon Skelt, the poet recounts one particular event:

> When we did the performance [...] Bill Griffiths, Allen Fisher and myself, the idea was this: I asked each to read one section and the three of us read one selection one after another. The poem would stop when you reread one of the sections. It was implied that you could be thoroughly perverse and curtail it very quickly because you were fed up to the teeth with the whole darn thing, or you could try and go on and on and on...[154]

Thus far, Mottram's descriptions primarily reiterate the procedures I outlined earlier in this chapter. However, even here, the implication that the length of the performance was determined either by decision or accident introduces a certain suspense and uncertainty between the event and its duration. Mottram continues:

> Someone in the audience—I think it may have been Paige Mitchell— said to me afterwards—what I didn't bargain for [...] the tension was getting chronic: everyone wondering who was going to be the first to do the damage. I never even thought of that. Which was also interesting: that it had that effect on the audience.[155]

To elaborate, the indeterminate qualities of *Pollock Record's* duration produced an unexpected audience response. It shifted their focus away from the act of reading and towards the anticipation of its conclusion, which heightened the tensions of the crowd. In effect, the audience's attentions are thrust towards the immediate future, before they slide back to the present moment of performance. Like the proceedings of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', a performance of *Pollock Record* identifies the spectator as a participant, and includes the experience of the audience as a contributing factor of the

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[153] Mottram, in *Don't Start Me Talking*, 306

[154] Mottram, in Skelt, 25

[155] *Ibid*

event. However, the relationship between the audience and the performers in *Pollock Record* is continually redefined as the performance unfolds. For example, the readers were able to assert their authorial control by intentionally concluding the event; in this respect, the project included a certain degree of performing authorship. Conversely, if the performance came to a halt due to an accidental repetition, none of those present could influence the end of the reading. During the occasion Mottram recounts to Skelt, the three performers attempted to carry on as long as possible. According to Fisher, this led all three to feel "nervous about" the performance, "in a positive sense", as the uncertainty "created an energy and anticipation of how things might go wrong."[156] Consequently, the circumstances of the performance relinquished the notions of authorial control. Once again, it transpires that Mottram's *Pollock Record* forces us to confront the ambivalence between spectator and participant, authorial readings and slippage, as well as events and conclusions. Crucially, it is only through the performance that these various striae may cohere as an experience.

The ambivalence of *Pollock Record* in performance shifts the attention to the role of memory. Mottram concludes his account with a description of how this particular performance finished:

> Bill Griffiths was the first to repeat one the passages. It went on for about twenty minutes. He was not too pleased, because it WAS a mistake! He wanted to keep going much longer.[157]

We can extrapolate that this unexpected and unintended conclusion was perpetrated by memory—Griffiths simply forgot that the fragment had already been read. The incident illustrates how *Pollock Record* enacts the densities of 'recognized' and 'unrecognized' information that Mottram identifies within a performance: the entire occasion is transformed by what is noticed and what is not. That is to say, the tension that the audience experienced as a result of these uncertainties indicates that when *Pollock Record* is performed, it is contoured by both memory and forgetting. Of course, memory is a contributory factor for any event or encounter. Even in the plainest sense, the act of remembering allows us to call back moments from the past, as demonstrated by the etymologies of synonyms such as 'recall'. It is also not radical to note that our recollection of events will necessarily be incomplete.[158] For instance,

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[156] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[157] Mottram, in Skelt, 25

[158] See section 1.2 of Chapter 1.

my memories of Drew Milne's reading at the University of Kent in 2010 are severely deficient. I remember that before reading from 'city of dogs', Milne displayed the text to the audience and mentioned that its stanzas could be read in any order. I cannot, however, remember the exact contents of the poem. Even as I subsequently read the poem in print, I failed to recall the order in which Milne performed it that evening. It is therefore unsurprising that memory features prominently in the existing discussions of performance, performativity and performance documentation. In Joseph Roach's work, performance is identified as a site for "the persistence of cultural memory", where "bodily knowledge"[159]—such as habits or customs—supersede the discourses of historical knowledge. In addition, scholars who are concerned with the documentation of performance art, such as Clausen, regard these documents as a mnemonic tool "that subjects the apparently non-graspable to a new way of reading."[160] *Pollock Record* differs from these notions, as it offers a more complex treatment of performance and memory. In fact, Mottram's performance enacts memory—and it does so through a very specific methodology.

Pollock Record enacts memory in a striated manner. As I observed earlier, its performance was entirely contoured by recollections, as Fisher, Griffiths and Mottram were continually forced to reassess whether the fragments they were about to utter had already been read. In this sense, the poem—or rather, its metamorphoses within a given event—is a product of memory. The ramifications of this process are vast. As an enactment of memory, the performance places the poem on a complex temporal plane, where each decision to read a particular section arises from a conscious reflection on the past. Such proceedings are analogous to Whitehead's[161] conception of the present as a "wavering breadth"[162] of a boundary, which is simultaneously "blurred by a fading into memory"[163] and by the "emergence from anticipation."[164] To specify, rather than arising from the present moment, *Pollock Record* actually emanates from the flux between past and present utterances. These circumstances recall aspects of the striated meanings and relationships that take place within the

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[159] Roach, 47

[160] Clausen, 15. Also see section 1.2 in Chapter 1

[161] The bibliographies for both 'Open Field Poetry' and *Towards Design in Poetry* include texts by Whitehead, which indicates that Mottram was working with Whitehead's philosophies contemporaneously to the composition of *Pollock Record*.

[162] Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 68.

[163] *Ibid*

[164] *Ibid*

sheets themselves, but they also mirror the role of memory, as they illustrate how the modulation between memory and forgetting can shape authorship and slippage. As a consequence, the poem in performance does not manifest itself as the materials on the sheets but as the order in which they are read; in effect, *Pollock Record* encourages its audience to approach poetry as a temporal and spatial phenomenon,[165] where the poem can only exist during an event. Its transience arises from a continuum of moments that are sliding into history. Its permanence is entirely conditioned by memory.

This issue of permanence deserves some further attention. At first, it may seem as if *Pollock Record* enacts memory according to a Bergsonian model, where the mind is only able to retrieve "the odd recollection or two"[166] while the entirety of the past preserves "itself, automatically"[167] and trails behind the present. However, this may not adequately represent the proceedings of these performances. *Pollock Record* involved three different performers, which made the moment of repetition all the more likely. Similarly, as Mottram's comments to Skelt indicate, the attentions of the audience were somewhat distracted by the uncertainty of the conclusion. Therefore, while the aforementioned event was brought to a halt by Griffiths' failure[168] to remember the material that was read before, *Pollock Record* as a whole is intrinsically dependent on these ephemeral, self-annihilating qualities of memory. Specifically, the performance of *Pollock Record* is comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of 'short-term memory', insofar as it includes "forgetting as a" part of its "process,"[169] which effectively ruptures the continuity of its recollections. The progression of each performance simultaneously demanded collective remembering and collective forgetting, where all those present experienced a similar

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[165] In part, I am drawing upon Stephen Bann's keynote address at the Cosmopoetics conference in Durham. Bann's presentation began by discussing Mallarme's work, and observed that the poet is not concerned with what a poem is, but when and where it might occur. See Bann, S. 'The Poetics of Transumption', delivered at *Cosmopoetics: Mediating a New World Poetics*. St. John's College, Durham University, Durham. 08.09.10

[166] Bergson, H. *Creative Evolution* (trans. A. Mitchell). Greenwood Press. Connecticut. 1975, 184

[167] *Ibid*, 7

[168] In clinical psychology and neurology, 'failing to remember' is identified through two basic types of 'failure'. 'Storage Failure', as the name suggests, is considered to be a result of the memory system's inability to produce a memory, while 'retrieval failure' is used to describe a process of forgetting where the memory system is unable to locate an existing memory trace. In this respect, the latter model is comparable to the Bergsonian notion that one carries with them all of their past, and is only unable to get to it. See, for example, Parkin, Alan J. *Memory: Phenomena, Experiment and Theory*. Blackwell. Oxford. 1993 pp. 66-100

[169] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17

sense of anticipation for the first repeated fragment. Thus, both memory and forgetting were identified as forms "social action, rather than properties of individual mentality."[170] Such developments can also be considered alongside Deleuze and Guattari's 'short-term memory', which is described as a "rhizome or diagram"[171] type of formation. Because the event involved a multiplicity of memories, which included those of the audience as well as those of the three poets—all of whom were "quite different" in their "approaches to"[172] writing and performance—Fisher felt that the occasion generated a 'nexus' where the participants would, in a sense, "lose each other"[173] and forget which section had already been read. In this respect, while the action of the performance emanates from Whitehead's blurred wavering boundary, this blurring does not occur in a linear sequence of events. Rather, by enacting a manifold network of recollection and forgetting, *Pollock Record* regards memory as a "nervous, temporal and collective rhizome."[174]

For Deleuze and Guattari, 'short-term memory' acts in contrast to 'long-term memory', which is described as "arborescent and centralised"[175] in its structure, and represented by an "imprint, engram, tracing or photograph."[176] In other words, while 'short-term memory' unavoidably ends in effacement, 'long-term memory' primarily operates through forms of documentation. The contrast between the two recalls the binaries of absence and presence, but these mnemonic concepts operate in a more distinctive manner. In particular, Deleuze and Guattari argue that rhizomes consist "only" of "lines,"[177] while the concept of 'long-term memory' appears more akin to the 'punctual systems' of memorisation that are described elsewhere in *A Thousand Plateaus*. These linear techniques subordinate the line "to the point,"[178] where—as a consequence—the line can only serve the punctual system as "co-ordinates for a point, or as localizable connections for two points."[179] In the context of *Pollock Record*, although the performance situates the poem in the rhizomic structures of

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[170] Middleton, D. & Edwards, D. 'Introduction'. Collective Remembering (eds. D. Middleton & D. Edwards). Sage. London. 1990, 19

[171] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17

[172] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[173] *Ibid*

[174] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17

[175] *Ibid*

[176] *Ibid*

[177] *Ibid*, 9. Also see section 1.3 in Chapter 1

[178] *Ibid*, 326

[179] *Ibid*

short-term memory, the sheets themselves—as documents—are similar to the characteristics of 'long-term memory'. Their various fragments indicate the presence of the points and co-ordinates that are found in punctual systems. Therefore, a performance of *Pollock Record* effectively converts the mnemonic documents of the sheets to the transient and temporal phenomena of short-term memory, which produces a new poem in the process.[180] As an event, this is comparable with Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions of the transformations that take place when "Glenn Gould speeds up the performance of a"[181] musical piece. By enacting memory as a temporal rhizome, *Pollock Record* effectively exemplifies an emergent state of becoming where "the line frees itself from the point and renders the" coordinates on the sheets "indiscernible."[182] Fisher's experience of the occasion is comparable to these representations. Where the sheets could be read in any order, Fisher remembers feeling a "sense of uncertainty,"[183] which stemmed from not knowing "whether Bill or Eric would go to the right hand side of the sheets,"[184] while Fisher had just read downwards. That is to say, the dimensions of the performance rejected linear coordinates that might establish a sense of direction or permanence. Ultimately, the collective remembering and forgetting enacted through *Pollock Record*'s 'short-term memory' demonstrates a specific aesthetic stance: by staging the event as an emergent becoming, Mottram's performance refuses the stability of a document.

This refusal underscores the difference between the performance of *Pollock Record* and Rosenberg's characterisation of 'action painting'. While the latter identifies Pollock's paintings as a document of his movements on canvas, Mottram's work emphatically rejects documentation, and exists only through memory. In doing so, the event depends upon its own transience. When asked about the performance, Fisher could only recall general impressions and the appearance of the sheets,[185] whereas specific details felt entirely alien to him. In this respect, *Pollock Record's* refusal of documentation—in addition to its aesthetic stance—also demonstrates significant features of its sociability. Clausen's work compares the documentation of

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[180] "Furthermore, the difference between the two kinds of memory is not that of two temporal modes of grasping the same thing; they do not grasp the same thing, memory or idea". See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17.

[181] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17. Also see section 1.3 in Chapter 1

[182] *Ibid*, 324

[183] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[184] *Ibid*

[185] *Ibid*

performance art to the "reception and the historical transformation of the significance of performance from the image to a news value to a cultural commodity."[186] Correspondingly, *Pollock Record*'s resistance to documentation represents the avant-garde's rejection of the commodification of art. To borrow from Berghaus, it is perhaps "for this reason" that Mottram employs "the most ephemeral of all media, performance, to express"[187] his concerns. These developments parallel the immediate historical context of *Pollock Record*'s composition. As I described earlier in this chapter, the walkout from the Poetry Society was followed by a period that Barry likens to "the 'elected silence' of the Cistercian", as Mottram and his associates were determined "to remain above the snares of"[188] commodity and the culture industry. In effect, the decision sadly resulted in "total cultural exclusion,"[189] where the "radical impulse"[190] was ultimately displaced. More recently, critics have approached certain poems from this period as reactions "to the damage to self-confidence and the loss of *collective* energy"[191] that followed the events at Earls Court, and I would suggest that *Pollock Record's* enactment of memory relates to these contexts. The performance situates its fragments in a multiplicity of possibilities, all of which quickly dissipate and become 're-forgotten.'[192] The poem exists only through a series of absences and perpetually remains suspended in a state of unfinish. Perhaps the performance of *Pollock Record* rejects documentation in order to refuse the "commercial 'Spectacle'"[193] that would transform it from 'an event' to 'a product'. In the end, if the project remains something of a lost world amongst Mottram's already fugitive publications, it assumes this status—to appropriate Sinclair's estimations from *Liquid City*[194] — as a willful exile.

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[186] Clausen, 7

[187] Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance*, 19

[188] Barry, 116

[189] *Ibid*

[190] *Ibid*, 118

[191] Sheppard, *When Bad Time Made for Good Poetry*, 31. Sheppard, for instance, relates aspects of Allen Fisher's 'retrenchement' between 1980 and 1984 to the aftermath of the walkout. In addition, Steven Willey's research into Bob Cobbing's *Jade Sound Poems* also addresses the relationship between the poetry wars and the creative works from this period. See Willey, S. '*Jade Sound Poems*: Bob Cobbing and the poetic institution'. Delivered at *Conversify: Poetry, Politics and Form*. Edinburgh University, Edinburgh. 11.09.2011.

[192] I borrow this term from Barry's *Poetry Wars*, where it is credited to Iain Sinclair. See Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 116

[193] Barry, 116

[194] "poetry is back where it belongs, in exile […] epic recitals that didn't aspire to the vulgarity of publication". See Atkins, M. & Sinclair, I. *Liquid City*. Reaktion Books. London 1999. pp. 38-39

5.4. 'A frontier is where-ever a man / fronts something'

Summaries and further movements

To summarize the proposals of this chapter: I began by addressing the difficulties in approaching Mottram as an object of study, and first examined the suggestions made in previous publications such as those by Barry and Bush. Subsequently, in an effort to outline Mottram's perspectives on poetry and performance, I approached several of his fugitive articles on the subject. These illustrated how willingly and frequently Mottram would discuss the topic, even when the publication or event in question did not explicitly call for it. Although some of the asseverations Mottram declares in these documents may now seem dated, his writings about the production of the poem and its continuation through the reception of a reader or an audience member remains relevant to the investigations of this thesis, as does his manifold ambivalence. These notions—particularly in their associations with Mottram's concerns for recognized and unrecognized nodes of information—were further elaborated through a detailed consideration of *Pollock Record*. This case study, I argued, highlighted a slight shift from the previous chapters, which considered the various methods in which poets interact with performance, to how a performance interacts with the poem. My examination of *Pollock Record* began with an attempt to call the performance back into being through a close analysis of the sheets themselves. Through doing so, it became apparent that rather than simply being a celebratory piece about Jackson Pollock, Mottram's assemblage of materials actually indicate a desire to work with the painter. I illustrated that the sheets were designed to resemble an action poem that was modeled on Rosenberg's analysis of action painting. However, these concepts were found to be somewhat problematic: whereas Pollock's paintings might be considered a record of his movements, these representations were absent within *Pollock Record*. Far from being blank, the sheets were populated with material, and no known recordings of the performance were available. As a consequence, I proposed that while it was not Mottram's exact intention, the performance *Pollock Record* develops a very specific enactment of memory. Ultimately, the work as a whole was analyzed as a perpetual state of becoming, which resists the continuation

of memory, refuses the stability of documentation, and modulates forgetting as a part of its process.

With this in mind, I would like to cast one final glance at the sheets for *Pollock Record*. Neatly filed in their catalogue folder, they are the most complete documents of the performance. Yet, they provide only effaced tracings of their past. The performance itself will forever elude us. In this respect, if these sheets are considered as monuments, they do not commemorate a past event, but rather exist as "a bloc of present that owes their preservation only to themselves."[195] However, if we remember Mottram's suggestion that to read is to perform a poem, the 'readings' on the sheets themselves might also indicate some forms of performance. As I argued during the course of this chapter, Mottram's collagist practices perform with their source materials by placing them in a striation of meanings and relationships. In some respects, this seamless inclusion seems analogous to the enactments of memory that occur during the performance. Just as Mottram, Fisher and Griffiths lose each other during the reading, the materials on the sheets abandon their original contexts and forge new intersections through striated ambivalence.

As I unfold the sheets on the desk and begin to read them again, I start to consider whether this chapter has made *Pollock Record* perform. As I argued before, while the enactments of memory were apparent during a performance of *Pollock Record*, it is unlikely that these features belonged to Mottram's preliminary design. Instead, they arose in the middle of the act. In this respect, by developing the analyses within this chapter, perhaps I also made *Pollock Record* perform in new and unexpected ways. If Mottram designed the poem as "a container" that would not "contain too rigidly,"[196] we may wonder if he fully realised the extent of this elasticity. While many of Mottram's associates frequently developed works that were radically open, his poems were generally structured as a man issuing a "stern directive."[197] When I asked Fisher about whether Mottram was as driven towards concepts such as process or indeterminacy, he responded:

> He was much more reserved about that, but he did try. He always maintained a modesty that was difficult to understand. He would say

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[195] Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy,* 167

[196] Mottram, in *Don't Start Me Talking*, 306

[197] Bush, 438

that he was still learning. His experimentation was kind of reserved, I would say.[198]

Ultimately, perhaps one of the reasons why *Pollock Record* remains so elusive is that its performances were unwittingly unimpeded. As a consequence, this chapter has demonstrated how the intersections between poetry and performance can challenge where the beginning and end, departure and arrival, as well as the origin and destination of the event might occur. While these various networks are difficult to address solely through *Pollock Record*, they will also feature in my investigations of the intermedial convergences between Allen Fisher's various projects from the 1970s.

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[198] *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009.*

CHAPTER 6

'You are invited to perform'

Allen Fisher's creaking beams, Edible *magazines*, Place *and* Blood Bone Brain

6.1 'I try again/to trace the boundary'

Allen Fisher, Poetry and Performance

Towards the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that the elusiveness of *Pollock Record* might partially be caused by its pliant structures, which can be made to perform even more loosely than Mottram intended. At the very least, its semi-improvised, aleatory practices are an anomalous presence in Mottram's oeuvre[1]. When I asked Fisher about the source for these techniques, he proposed his companion was influenced by the "Bob Cobbing nexus,"[2] which is most likely a reference to the longstanding activities of Cobbing's Writers Forum[3], as well as the Poets Forum he briefly ran at the premises of the Poetry Society[4]. Although Cobbing's own performances primarily involved improvised sound poetry, it is possible to distinguish some similarities between his work and *Pollock Record*. For instance, in the early 1980s, Cobbing produced a "series of 17 pamphlets and sheets entitled 'Processual,'"[5] which involved a "photocopied processing of materials" from "fragments of adverts, Muybridge images [...] scientific language, [and] rubbish."[6] Here, the elaborate variations of materials resemble some aspects of performing *Pollock Record*, in that both works develop unique, indeterminate mutations from previously selected resources. In this respect, the two projects are linked in their

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[1] With the exception of Mottram's other performance work from the late 1970s, *The Precipice of Fishes*, which bears some similarities to *Pollock Record*. According to Mottram, *The Precipice of Fishes* involved a "plastic bag" filled with cards "and the idea was of cards, which were turned up in any order"; in other words, the "book [...] was spatial" rather than linear, and the poem would be whatever emerged as the cards were turned up. See Mottram's interview in Fisher, *Necessary Business*, 207.

[2] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[3] See section 1.1 in Chapter 1 and section 3.3 in Chapter 3 for previous references to these workshops. Also see, for example, Mayer, P. *Bob Cobbing and writers forum*. Ceolfrith Press. Sunderland. 1974.

[4] See Barry, *Poetry Wars*, 74. Also see, O'Huigin, S. 'Earl's Court Squared' *Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths* (ed. W. Rowe). Salt. Cambridge. 2007 pp. 51-54

[5] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 222

[6] *Ibid*, 223

demonstration of "process over product."[7] However, I would argue that many of *Pollock Record's* ideas actually bear a closer resemblance to one of its co-performers, Fisher himself.[8] After all, several of Mottram's comments from in the previous chapter—including his statements about the reading of the poem as a part of its production—are made in the context of Fisher's long essay *Necessary Business*. Therein, while conducting his own argument, Fisher proposes that "unless the work is made active by the reader, it might as well be the rotten meat"[9] that the performance artist Stuart Brisley left to decompose for his piece, 'And for today...nothing.'[10] Fisher then goes on state that "significant poetry can only take place through participatory engagement"[11]. In other words, whereas Mottram considers that 'to read' is to 'perform' the poem, Fisher both acknowledges this relationship and elaborates upon it. In Fisher's aesthetics, the most valuable works of art require the viewers'—or the readers'— "engagement to create it, to produce it,"[12] which tacitly associates all artworks with the qualities of an event.

Indeed, Fisher's essays on the subject present a detailed and highly attuned understanding of the relationship between the acts of reading and 'performance', of which *Necessary Business* is only one—albeit significant—example.[13] In recent years, Fisher has developed his theorisations through works such as 'The Poetics of Complexity Manifold,'[14] but publications that precede *Necessary Business* also evidence the formulation of these notions. For instance, 'The Mathematics of

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[7] *Ibid*

[8] Sheppard also makes a connection between Cobbing's 'Processual' work and Fisher, and suggest that Cobbing draws the vocabulary for his title from Fisher's work. See Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 223

[9] Fisher, *Necessary Business*, 235

[10] The performance took place in 1972 at the Gallery House Goethe Institute, London. Brisley explains: "I lay in the bath of black water in the bathroom of Gallery for approximately 2 hours each day for two weeks. In the washbasin and on the ledge next to the bath I laid out some offal. During the two weeks the offal decayed, flies laying eggs and maggots hatching out to feed. There was a low light in the bathroom so it was difficult to see exactly what was there. The door was left ajar. The only sign of movement was that of a body rising and falling in the water when breathing in and out. The stench of offal was overpowering". See Brisley, S. 'And for today...nothing, 1972'. [Online] Available from http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/27/70s/works/And_for_today_nothing/page:6 (last accessed 01.05. 2012).

[11] Fisher, *Necessary Business*, 235

[12] *Ibid*, 165

[13] For more detailed comments on the long essay, see Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 194-199

[14] See Fisher, A. 'Complexity Manifold Talk 1'. Delivered at the Poetry Library. London. 06.10.2010; Fisher, A. 'Complexity Manifold Talk 2'. Delivered at Birkbeck College, University of London. London. 13.10.2010; Fisher, A. 'Complexity Manifold Talk 3'. Delivered at Royal Holloway, University of London. London. 21.10.2010. Fisher has also discussed similar ideas in published anthologies. See, for example, Fisher, A. 'Poetics of Complexity Manifold'. *Hidden Agendas: Unreported Poetics* (ed. L.Armand). Litteraria Pragensia. Prague. 2010, pp. 249-274.

Rimbaud' asserts that as a consequence of the "art resolutions made earlier this century, the idea of art as objects and poetry as poems" has "gradually lost credibility."[15] This allows Fisher to outline an approach that regards contemporary artworks as "objects and processes, process-showing and methodologies in a world of multiple possibilities."[16] As a specific example, when one reads a poem, these constellated possibilities take place

> as soon as a formal model is intelligible, [and it] admits semantic realisation where meaning is apparent, [but] that meaning changes in relation to the meaning another may give it, or in relation to living after the first realisation of the meaning. And the meaning may take on a multiplicity that is summated or left impossible and so forth.[17]

In sum, 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud' outlines a processual understanding of poetry that eschews all senses of pristine closure; instead, the work of reading is never truly finished. While this essay was not published until 1982, similar concepts are already investigated through Fisher's earlier works, which he frequently designed as elaborate projects.[18] As Fisher recalls, this conceptual approach is an influence that dates back to his early involvement in the milieu later associated with the British Poetry Revival:

> Conceptual art was very strong in London around 1966-7 and into the 1970s. It was a big influence on what I was doing, because I was also looking at some of the writers who were using arithmetic, maths and devices to make works, almost like renaissance machines but revived. This was not necessarily new in poetry, but it was newly conceptualized. There was a lot talk at the time of process, as a counterforce. You had procedural ideas with fixed procedures, deterministic models, indeterminate models, which in themselves were deterministic [...] and process became very important at the same time. So, there were systems and process [...] interfering with each other, and I used both [...] Concept art was doing away with ideas of products and encouraging the ideas of the ephemeral and processual activities; poems that would change each time you read them.[19]

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[15] Fisher, 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud', 1

[16] *Ibid*

[17] *Ibid*, 2

[18] In response to a question from Drew Milne, Fisher mentions that all his poetry since 1965 has been written as a component for several larger projects. See Fisher, A & Milne, D. 'Exchange in Process'. *Parataxis 6* (1994), 30

[19] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009*

Drawing upon these concepts, Fisher frequently published his projects as serially released—and often ephemeral—pamphlets,[20] which would frequently show the process of the work alongside the poems themselves. These publications therefore both documented and extended previously conducted research and activities.

During the course of this chapter, I will provide a more detailed analysis of the implications within Fisher's concepts. At this stage, however, I would like to broaden the present discussion. How do Fisher's concepts translate in practice? What demands do they place on the act of reading? For instance, Drew Milne has questioned whether Fisher's 'process showing' leads to "too many" poems that "have an unfinished quality."[21] In all probability, Milne is troubled by many of the poems from the first book of *Place*, which frequently feature little more than short historical notes:

> This is the manor of Lambeth
> Terra Ecclesial de Lanchei. In Brixistan Hundred.
> once held by Goda   sister to the Confessor
> taxed for ten hides[22]

Similarly, while Sheppard praises Fisher's ability to apprehend a "multiplicity in a single text", he has also argued that Fisher's poems occasionally lack the appropriate degree of "disruption and transformation", and consequently resemble "a cut up lecture on art history"[23] or other topics. However, Barry suggests that projects such as *Place* ably integrate the "scientific, historical, and social data" that is "fully built into" them, and consequently challenge our "preconceptions of what constitutes the poetic."[24] In effect, this leads Barry to describe a readerly experience that is closely aligned with the poetics of *Necessary Business* and 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud':

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[20] This, combined with Fisher's work in the field of visual arts, have led some critics to characterize his oeuvre to be "in a radical English tradition of poet-publisher which extends back to Blake". See Bush, 104. Sheppard has recently expanded on the significance of this bibliographical model, while also noting that in recent decades, major projects like *Place* and *Gravity as a consequence of shape* have been more securely collected in widely available editions. See Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, pp. 181-198

[21] Fisher & Milne, 'Exchange in Process', 29

[22] Fisher, *Place*, 16

[23] Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, 193. Sheppard makes these comments in reference to Fisher's *Gravity as a consequence of shape*, which the poet began in the 1980s. Barry expresses similar concerns about this particular project in *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, where he writes "the nature of the desired contract between the writer and his readers becomes increasingly problematical. It just isn't clear what he expects his readers to do, or what kind of a person [...] he expects them to be. Does Fisher envisage groups of devotees setting up reading groups and meeting weekly to work out ways into, and out of, his cryptic labyrinthine texts?". See Barry, P. *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*. Manchester University Press. Manchester. 2000, 179

[24] Barry, P. 'Allen Fisher and 'content specific' poetry'. *New British Poetries: The scope of the possible* (eds. R. Hampson & P. Barry). Manchester University Press. Manchester. 1993, 200

firstly, it is *about* reading, as a way of engaging with the sense of the world, and secondly, it demands the reader's sustained participatory engagement with its materials, as well as with 'the words on the page'. The kind of reading required is thus an active process [...] like study[25]

Therefore, works such as *Place* invite the reader to activate the striated significations of the text on each occasion of reading. Although Barry[26] likens this 'active process' to 'study', perhaps it is also possible to regard it as an encounter or a performance.

Considering the scope and complexity of projects such as *Place* or *Gravity as consequence of a shape*, it is understandable that while Fisher's biographical notes frequently refer to him as both a performer and a poet,[27] the majority of academic attention to his work has hitherto centred on his poetry. Most references to his performances are anecdotal. For instance, Bush's extensive chapter on Fisher in *Out of Dissent* contains narrative descriptions of a reading by the poet.[28] Similarly, David Bromige's report on Fisher's residency at the 80 Langton Street gallery in San Francisco recounts one performance in an idiom that recalls "the language of the journalist feature writer,"[29] which goes as far as to mention the poet's "attractively limber wrists."[30] However, apart from a small selection of individual essays,[31] sustained studies of Fisher's performances continue to be a rarity.[32] At times, when publications acknowledge the relationships between Fisher's artistic practices, they are characterised in restrictively categorical terms. For instance, Mottram's retrospective overview of 'The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75' proposed that Fisher worked in "two different poetic areas, not radically different, but enough to make

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[25] *Ibid*, 199

[26] Sheppard also makes similar representations while reading *Necessary Business*. See Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 199

[27] See, for example, the brief biographical statements accompanying the Reality Street edition of *Place*.

[28] See Bush, 210

[29] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 40. Middleton goes on to describe the event in terms of a 'performance of authorship'. My intention, however, is to approach Fisher's performances from a different perspective.

[30] Bromige, D. 'Allen Fisher by David Bromige'. *80 Langton Street Residency Program 1982* (eds R. Pitkin & B. Watten). USA. 1982, 22

[31] See, Middleton, P. 'Performing an Experiment, Performing a Poem: Allen Fisher and Bruce Andrews'. *Additional Apparitions: Poetry, Performance and Site-Specificity* (ed. D. Kennedy & K. Tuma). The Cherry on Top Press. Sheffield. 2002. pp. 29-55. For brief and anecdotal references, see Edwards, K. 'Bloom in the plain acoustic: Allen Fisher, Stepping Out'. *Fragmente 5* (1993), pp. 72-75; Woods, T. 'Allen Fisher's *Place* and the 'Spatial Turn'. *Parataxis 8/9* (1996), pp. 39-47

[32] I anticipate this situation will begin to be redressed with the forthcoming *Salt Companion to Allen Fisher*, edited by Robert Hampson and Cris Cheek. Unfortunately, current information about the volume does not include a table of contents. See http://www.saltpublishing.com/books/scp/1876857676 .htm [Last accessed: 20.06.2012]

singularisation inappropriate" and went on to distinguish between Fisher's work as a poet and his involvement with "the Fluxshoe group of performers of poetry."[33] These distinctions are particularly troubling in the context of Mottram's subject matter. During the early 1970's, when Fisher began to develop his early tour de force *Place*, this work was carried out in parallel "to at least two other projects: *Blood Bone Brain*, which was started in 1971, and the *Art of Flight*, started in 1972."[34] Both *Blood Bone Brain* and *Art of Flight* provided a "milieu of conceptual, processual and process-showing art that informed and interfered"[35] with the composition of *Place*. Significantly, as both *Art of Flight* and *Blood Bone Brain* were engaged with various performance practices, their interaction with *Place* signifies an overlap between Fisher's printed publications and his many performances.

Indeed, contrary to Mottram's essay, *Blood Bone Brain* enacts these intersections on a considerable scale, and incorporates several other publications to its overall structure. When the project eventually culminated in 1981, Fisher summarised it as a "performance involving three ranges of words, musics [sic], visuals as well as smells and movements" that were "designed through earlier works elaborating, changing and extending them."[36] Consequently, approaching any one of the documents involved with *Blood Bone Brain* will provoke questions of where the beginning and end, departure and arrival, origin and destination might occur. In this chapter, I intend to investigate these intersections and transformations in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the interaction between poetry and performance in Fisher's work. In an attempt to illustrate the scale, methodology and proceedings of *Blood Bone Brain*, I will begin by tracing the project's multiple genealogies. I will then move on to a more detailed analysis of the performance, where I will investigate the synchronicities between the event and the materials it deploys. Through these analyses, I will be able to illustrate the intricate relationships between Fisher's poetics and performance.

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[33] Mottram, ''The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75', 41

[34] Fisher, A. 'Introduction'. *Place*. Reality Street. Hastings. 2005, 5

[35] *Ibid*

[36] Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1: Plans*. Spanner. London. 1981, a1

6.2 'What we do here should remain viable and undefined'

Tracing the genealogies of Blood Bone Brain

Blood Bone Brain exists across myriad forms and media. In November 2009, Fisher sent me a bibliographical list[37] that featured 144 items published between 1968 and 2008. The document included five separate entries identified as a part *of Blood Bone Brain*, where the format ranged from printed pamphlets[38] to microfiche documents[39] and a cassette tape.[40] However, as the catalogue intentionally omits certain "graphic"[41] and related work, it fails to disclose all of the items involved with this project.[42] For instance, the bibliography does not include the programme notes[43] Fisher prepared for an early performance of *Blood Bone Brain* at Nottingham's Midland Group Gallery in 1973. Similarly, a visual chapbook titled *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72*[44] is not identified as a part of the project, although its introductory note declares the work—or its process—"will also be included in the book *Blood Bone Brain*."[45] Alongside these objects,[46] versions of the project were performed in Nottingham, Blackburn and London during the early 1970s,[47] and a

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[37] Fisher, A. *'RE: af.biblio'* [E-Mail]. Message to Author. 30.11.2009

[38] See Fisher, A. *FFACECE*. Aloes Books. London. 1973; Fisher A. *Creek in the Ceiling Beam*. Aloes Books. London. 1973; Fisher, A. *Sicily*. Aloes Books. London. 1973

[39] See Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1: Plans*, op cit.; Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*. Spanner. London 1981; Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 3: Musics and Recyclings*. Spanner. London 1981; Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*. Spanner. London 1981; Fisher, A. & Walker, J. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 5: Visuals*. Spanner. London. 1981; Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 6: Books A&B*. Spanner. London 1981; Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain Documents 7&8: Book C*. Spanner. London 1981

[40] Fisher, A. *The Art of Flight/Blood Bone Brain* [Cassette]. Balsam Flex. London. 1982. The tape contains live and studio recordings of the two projects.

[41] Fisher, A. *'RE: af.biblio'* [E-Mail]. Message to Author. 30.11.2009

[42] Additionally, although *Prosyncel* features material from various components to *Blood Bone Brain*, it is not specified as a part of the project. See Fisher, A. *Prosyncel: A sketch map of Heat*. Strange Faeces Press. New York. 1975

[43] Fisher, A. *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*. Aloes Books. London. 1973

[44] Fisher, A. *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72*. Beau Geste Press. Devon. 1974

[45] *Ibid*, 4

[46] Fisher also lists the following books, booklets and pamphlets as documents that 'relate' to the project: *oom toom tatterack*, Pearl White's Edible book for book fair 1971, *Spaces for Winter Solstice*, Milk in Bottles, performance programme for *Blood Bone Brain* in Blackburn, *Circles Lines & Wheel Barrows*, *Five for Graham's*. The specific relationship between these works and *Blood Bone Brain* is not always apparent. See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, e.13

[47] Fisher's notes also identify a set of 'related' performances, which include Oom Toom Tatterack at Zeez Art Gallery, London in 1971, Creek in the ceiling beam at Exe Gallery, Exeter in 1971, Milk in

reduced version was also staged during Fisher's aforementioned residency in San Francisco. Consequently, even a synoptic overview of *Blood Bone Brain* must pursue a complex nexus of relationships. As the project's genealogy is comprised of multifarious striated lines, it may be difficult to distinguish its points of origin. In his 'Thumbnail Lecture', Fisher claims that the project originated from his "interpretation of an ancient Egyptian hieroglyph of wholeness (a jug containing the heart; a bone; a bird of prey),"[48] but this oblique statement requires some further analysis. The reference to hieroglyphs does not denote archaeological investigations per se, as Fisher's concerns arise from the *interpretations* of the symbol. In this respect, the statement in 'Thumbnail Lecture' may be associated with techniques of assemblage (where the 'whole' is comprised of a three-part pictograph) and transformation (where the 'jug containing a heart' becomes 'blood' and—as if by a pun—'the bird of prey' becomes 'brain'). Ergo, the genealogy of *Blood Bone Brain* is not simply a linear chronology; one must also consider the manner in which each of its components is put to use.

The aforementioned *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72* provides a curiously apt point of entry for these considerations. Although the pamphlet was not published until 1974, its composition was commenced much earlier during summer of 1972. The work is comprised of photographs depicting sinks, each with an adjusted coloration, and while the introduction states that it will contribute to *Blood Bone Brain*, there are no signs of these photographs in Fisher's microfiche booklets. When asked about the relationship between the two projects, the poet could no longer remember his erstwhile intentions.[49] However, this pamphlet is still indicative of the milieu that contributed to the initial gestation of *Blood Bone Brain*. Published by Beau Geste Press, *Taken the days...* emerged out of a "map of interactions" Fisher encountered "in a small community working in and out of a farmhouse in Devon"[50] during the early 1970s. As he recalls:

> David Mayor [...] Felipe Ehrenberg, Marta Ehrenberg and a few other
> people rented a [...] 15-bedroom house that was falling apart [...] He
> would invite people down for performances, and there were three or

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Bottles at the Croydon College of Art in 1973 and 'sometimes i smoke 5,000 cigarettes a day' at the Curving Space Gallery, London in 1974. See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, e.13

[48] Fisher, A. 'Thumbnail Lecture'. *Reality Studios 3.1* (1982), 8

[49] Fisher, A. *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*. London. [Digital recording in possession of author] Hereafter cited as *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*.

[50] Fisher, A. 'Beau Geste Press'. *Poetry Information 17* (Summer 1977), 74

four printing presses there; everything from a very cheap duplicator or mimeograph, through to a small letterpress, with some litho work and thermography as well. That opened it up to poetry and art, and music. There were dozens and dozens and dozens of people you would get to know from Japan, America and elsewhere. It was a very vibrant scene.[51]

This setting also became the "operational base" for the "international festival of live, graphic and published art works"[52] known as the Fluxshoe tour. Fluxshoe, as the name acknowledges, was not a seamless continuation of the Fluxus art from the 1960s, but based on negotiations of the "socially shared"[53] ideas from the preceding movement. As such, with its propensity toward multivalent performances, which were specific, yet flexible for "each time they were performed,"[54] Fluxshoe and Fluxus shared similar conceptions of events and experience. For example, the procedures of Tomas Schmit's Fluxus piece *Zyklus*—where water was poured from one glass to another until it spilled or evaporated[55]—and Knud Petersen's two-balled football match for Fluxshoe in 1972[56] both treat a "nonart activity"[57] as a performance. They intervene with the normal expectations of an "everyday experience"[58] and treat the mundane occasion as an art event. The composition of *Taken the days...* experiments with similar procedures. The sink in the photographs is presented as an *objet trouvé*, and the pamphlet's process[59] seems to regard the activities involved in its production—from eating the curry to operating the printing press—as something akin

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[51] *Interview with A. Fisher 27.02.2009.* The international contacts Fisher mentions are most likely various affiliates of the 1960's Fluxus movement. As Simon Anderson points out: "Mayor's base outside Exeter was visited by the Taj Mahal Travellers—or at least a contingent from that group—consisting of Takehisa Kosugi, Yukio Tsuchiya, Ryo and Hiroko Koike. Kosugi himself had been a cofounder [...] of the experimental music group Group Ongaku, in 1961, and had worked [...] with a whole range of internationally renowned artists and musicians from Tom Takemitsy to Robert Rauschenberg, including Ichiyanagi, Cage, Paik and Vostell. His involvement with Fluxus began early, and he had a collection of events published, which were included in the first Fluxus Yearbox". See Anderson, S. 'Fluxus, Fluxion, Fluxshoe: the 1970s'. *The Fluxus Reader* (ed. K. Friedman). Academy Editions. West Sussex. 1998, 26

[52] Anderson, 26

[53] *Ibid*, 25

[54] *Ibid*, 28

[55] As Schmit explains: "Water pails or bottles are placed around the perimeter of a circle. Only one is filled with water. Performer inside the circle picks the vessel and pours it into the one on the right, etc., till all the water is spilled or evaporated". See Schmit, T. 'Zyklus'. *Fluxus Performance Workbook* (ed. K. Friedman). Emily Harvey Gallery. New York. 1990, 45

[56] See Anderson, 26

[57] Higgins, H. *Fluxus Experience*. University of California Press. Berkley. 2002, 111

[58] *Ibid*

[59] Fisher calls the pamphlet a "showing of process". See Fisher, *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72*, 4

to a performance. In this respect, *Taken the days…* recalls Auslander's identification of performance documentation as ontological proof of an event that has taken place.[60]

Similar traits are exhibited by a range of pamphlets that Fisher developed during the summer he began documenting material for *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72*. *Ffacece*, which was started in June that year, identifies itself as "book A in a series of three lettered A, B, C, D."[61] Chronologically, this makes the pamphlet the first component of *Blood Bone Brain* that unequivocally identifies itself as part of the project.[62] As with *Taken the days…* the material is visual as opposed to textual; the pamphlet primarily features a series of distorted images featuring the "guerilla Genaro Vasquez Rojas"[63] who fought for the Guerreran National Civic Association in Mexico during the late 1960s, and was killed by the Mexican national forces in February 1972.[64] The connotations of the image, along with introductory statements such as "the guerilla forces are weak everywhere and the enemy, however scattered he may be, is strong everywhere,"[65] could suggest that *Ffacece* is responding to a specific political situation, but this position is never explicitly stated. Although Felipe Ehrenberg at Beau Geste Press is identified as the person who supplied the photograph,[66] *Ffacece* shows surprisingly little interest in expanding on the historical relevance of its sources. It is far more concerned with the process of its making, as evidenced by the inclusion of detailed notes for the colours used during the printing:

1) Run stencil A in Red 200 times
2) Run A in Green 175 times over red A
3) Run A in Blue 150 over green+red A
4) Run B in blk 125 over Blue/Green+red A
5) Run B in Red 100 times over Blue/Green+ Red A+ Blk B
6) Run B in yellow or similar 75 times over Blue/Green+ Red A+ Blk+ Red B
7) Run copy of page 5 through stenciled run off in Red maybe 25 times over page 6. (All the time keeping 25 sheets back)

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[60] See Auslander, 21. Also see section 5.2 in Chapter 5.

[61] Fisher, *Ffacece*, n.p.

[62] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1:Plans*, a.1

[63] Fisher, *Ffacece*, n.p.

[64] See, for example, Weinberg, B. *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico*. Verso. London. 2000, pp. 242–243

[65] Fisher, *Ffacece*, n.p.

[66] The preface to *Ffacece* states that Ehrenberg donated the photograph. The pamphlet is also dedicated to him. According to Fisher, although Strange Faeces published *the* book, it was printed using the equipment in Devon. See *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*

8) Run B in Red 150 times
9) Run B in Blue 125 times over Red B
10) Run B in Green 100 times over Red+Blue B
11) Run A in Blk 75 times over Gree/Red+Blue
12) Run A in Red 50 times over Green/Red+Blue B+Blk A
13) Run copy of page 9 through stenciled Run off in blue maybe 25 times over page 6
14) Feed pages one to thirteen into thermograph + Run off in inks left over[67]
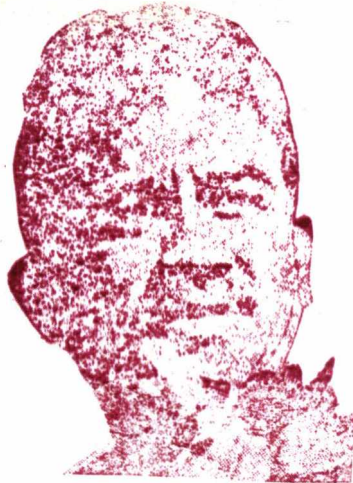
Fig 6.1: First image in the sequence for *Ffacece* (Stencil A in Red)
Courtesy of Allen Fisher

These details precede the actual presentation of the images. Thus, when the pictures first distort the physiognomic features and gradually drain the colour so that the final page features only faint outlines of the face, one is continually aware of the techniques used to achieve these effects. It follows that if *Ffacece* "is a document recording the nature of things"[68]—as its introductory notes assert—its does not observe 'things' as unmovable, consistent entities. Instead, to adapt concepts from Deleuze, the monadic presence of these images is in fact akin to a "schema of permanence" that is "realized in flux"[69] through several interacting forces. *Things*, in other words, are conditional and open to change.

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[67] Fisher, *Ffacece*, n.p.

[68] *Ibid*

[69] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 91.

Thus, *Ffacece* operates on the premise that "things can always be altered"[70]. Perhaps this explains why in 1973, Fisher referred to books A, B and C of *Blood Bone Brain* as "book events."[71] For him, the term emerges out of a need "to be in the process of, rather than in the completions of" the work. As a consequence, "books are events" akin to "performances."[72] Such views are affirmed by book B of *Blood Bone Brain*. The work on *Creek in the ceiling beam* commenced around July 1972; like *Ffacece*, it also featured a considerable degree of 'process showing'—although the process involved was far more intricate. The book was comprised of a poem 'creek in the ceiling beam', which was composed through a selection of material sourced from John Ashbery, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, Robert Duncan, Larry Eigner, Roy Fisher, Jackson Mac Low, Paul Metcalf, Charles Olson, Armand Schwerner, Jack Spicer, Philip Whalen, Jonathan Williams, W.C. Williams and Louis Zukofsky.[73]
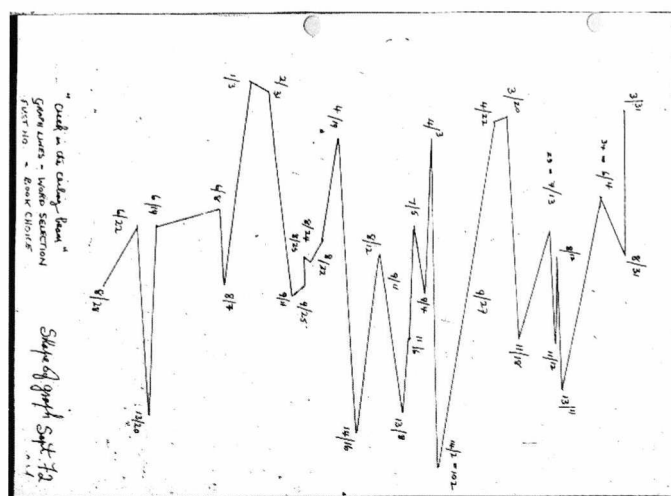
Fig 6.2: The graph from *Creek in the ceiling beam*
Courtesy of Allen Fisher

The lines were selected through an elaborate procedure where Fisher listed the times and dates he heard a ceiling beam creaking in his studio, plotted these times on a graph and used the graph to select the material. In addition, the publication narrated Fisher's quasi-jocular efforts to identify the causes behind the creak. As he explains:

> I was aligning the sounds I was hearing in the beam that's above me when I'm sleeping [...] I was linking it to the idea of ley lines and electric forces, and pigeons landing on the roof, and water systems not operating properly, whole ranges of things like that. Effectively, these

[70] *Ibid*, 90

[71] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*, n.p.

[72] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010.*

[73] See 'CREEK IN THE CEILING BEAM BEDTIME BOOKLIST' in Fisher, *Creek in the ceiling beam*, n.p.

were devices to connect different parts of location; where I had been, where I was going, where I had come from, where I knew people and where I knew particular aspects of the geography or geology [...] Some of these materials [included] cemeteries, which I was jokingly linking as if there were some secret significance in the link—but there isn't of course. With those linkages and the timing of the creaks, I would develop poems.[74]

Therefore, while the composition of the poem may draw upon the procedural poetics of writers such as Mac Low,[75] *Creek in the ceiling beam* as a whole is reminiscent of Ponge's *Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi*[76] (*How a fig tree utters and why*), in that both feature an "entire portfolio of every single traceable sheet relating to"[77] the work. Like Ponge's text, Fisher's 'book events' situate the acts of writing "not at any finite point of completion but rather at its many instances of production."[78] However, while Ponge primarily presents notes and facsimiles associated with his drafting process, *Creek in the ceiling beam* also incorporates materials from Fisher's extensive meta-textual research; diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs, along with images of cisterns and hot water tanks are all included. As the pamphlet appears so aware of its own production, its processual framework rejects the connotations of consumption that are associated with finished 'books.' [79] Additionally, it acknowledges the vast scale of activities that may contribute to the process of its making.

Therefore, in contrast to the reader-response theories of Iser,[80] Fish[81] and others, where the literary work exists as a performative "convergence of the text and the reader,"[82] the conceptual programme for *Blood Bone Brain*'s early 'book events' also identifies multiple acts of composing and constructing the work as comparable

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[74] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010.*

[75] For example, Mac Low's *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* composed by selecting and arranging textual material by chance, but then modifying the visual outlook when the poems were to be printed. See Mac Low, J. *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters*. Station Hill Pres. New York. 1992

[76] See Ponge, F. *Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi*. Flammarion. Paris. 1999

[77] Bergvall, C. 'In the Place of Writing'. *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally* (ed. R.Huk). Wesleyan University Press. Middletown. 2003, 327

[78] *Ibid*, 238

[79] In part, I am drawing upon Bergvall's arguments regarding Ponge. See Bergvall, 238

[80] See Iser, W. *The Implied Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington. 1974

[81] See Fish, S. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge MA. 1980

[82] Iser, 275

sites of convergence. In addition to 'author', the introductory notes to both *Ffacece* and *Creek in the ceiling beam* refer to Fisher as the "director of co-ordination,"[83] which tacitly indicates a degree of creativity and collaboration within the printing process. This position—undoubtedly facilitated by Fisher's work as a small press publisher[84]—is also evident in *Sicily,* which was Book C of the project. For this 'book event', the schema involved a series of cut-ups, but as before, Fisher was interested in showing the process of the work:

> [*Sicily*] is almost over-elaborate in the ways it shows the printing process. There's a moment when the book is unreadable—you wouldn't try to read yellow print on yellow paper. The intention is not that you should be sitting down as with a novel. […] The description of the process is itself the process. I suppose I was influenced by collecting some of William Burroughs' work from late sixties. In fact, I was one of the publishers of *White Subway*. […] What particularly attracted me about Burroughs' work wasn't so much what he was telling me, in terms of his own fiction. It was to do with the way in which he displayed the cut-ups. It was the way in which the visual gave you messages and information that might have related to the text or might not have done. It was to do with damage, destruction, almost to do with multiple consciousness. Those ideas interested me more than reading it as a fiction. […] When he makes the cut-ups, the pages look damaged; they have thick black felt-tip pen or crossings out, re-typings […] they then provide the manuscript for the novels that Olympia and Grove Press and so on publish. They tidy all that up; they don't include the crossings out, they put in punctuation and it's all cleaned up. It seems to me you then have a different text.[85]

Unsurprisingly, *Sicily* retains its visuality. The text features notations, crossings out, faint facsimiles of damaged clippings as well as the waste left over from this process. But how are these visual elements meant to incorporate messages of 'multiple consciousness', as Fisher suggests? Perhaps the implications of the statement could be read in parallel to Deleuze and Guattari's 'assemblages', specifically as they related to books. Fisher's cut-ups are apprehensively conscious of a "signifying totality"[86] that is manifested in the fiction, which threatens to present itself as the fixed face of the text.

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[83] Fisher, *Creek in the ceiling beam,* n.p.

[84] In the early 1970s, Fisher was working together with Dick Miller at Aloes Books. He had also started the *Edible* magazine in the late 1960s. He later published material under the title Spanner. Consequently, critics have identified Fisher to be "that rare poet/painter whose political radicalism depends on the imagination of formal invention". See Bush, 104

[85] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010.*

[86] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 4

Yet, this fixity is "continually dismantled"[87] by the visual design, which repeatedly defaces it.[88] In other words, the 'process showing' in *Sicily* unveils the damage involved with producing the book. This violence is simultaneously extended to the readerly experience: as Fisher mentions, the book contains yellow print on yellow pages that becomes almost impossible to read, which suggests that "there is no [material] difference between" what Sicily communicates and "how it is made."[89]

In addition, the book as 'assemblage' provides a useful concept for considering the relations between books A, B and C in *Blood Bone Brain*. Thus far, I have itemised each of these publications individually, whereas they were actually conceived as components of a larger project. Consequently, as J.H. Prynne would late note of other works by Fisher,[90] these 'book events' invite us to view each of them "in the light of the other."[91] Taking into account the gravitas *Ffacece, Creek in the ceiling beam* and *Sicily* all place on procedure and process, it would appear as if they are less interested in simple signification than they are in function. As with the cut-ups in *Sicily,* our attentions move away from what is *being said* and towards what is *being done*. We must ask: how are these 'book events' connected? How does reading one inform our encounters with another? What metamorphoses result from these convergences? One possible response to these questions lies in the final component of the series, 'Book D'. What contributions and connections does this 'book event' entail?

Even in comparison to the preceding parts of the project, 'Book D' of *Blood Bone Brain* is a fugitive and ephemeral item. Although it was ultimately presented as a set of "eight microfiches comprising film of 784 pages with seven synoptic/sample booklets,"[92] these documents actually serve as a textual archive for a series of performances from the mid-1970s.[93] No full recordings of these events have survived,

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[87] *Ibid*

[88] Here, I am also drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations of both 'the Body without Organs' and 'faciality'. See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 165-212.

[89] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4

[90] Prynne's comments refer to *Necessary Business* and *Boogie Break*. Fisher had sent Prynne copies of both, as *Necessary Business* discusses his work. See Prynne, J.H. 'A Letter to Allen Fisher', *Parataxis 8/9* (1996), pp. 153-158

[91] Prynne, 153

[92] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1:Plans*, a.1

[93] *Sicily* provides certain suggestions of the shift from print to performance, as its introductory notes state: "Before Book D will appear a supplement and music edition complimenting A-B-C and leading me into D". See Fisher, *Sicily*, n.p.

but the notational booklets Fisher prepared shed some light on their proceedings. For instance, when *Blood Bone Brain* was performed as a part of a Fluxshoe event in Nottingham on June 9th 1973, the evening featured "music composed in loop from piano notes" played by Mottram, which Fisher had "recorded to cassette,"[94] while the performers—Felipe Ehrenberg, Paul Woodrow and his wife, all of whom had volunteered earlier that day[95]—read "from [the] blue 'poem' sheets titled 'creek in the ceiling beam'"[96] to a tape recorder. The volume of each utterance was determined by Mac Low's 'playing card pip method', which Fisher details as follows:

> at each notated volume change [the] reader will be handed a playing card at which time he changes to fit the new volume as follows: —
>
> Loudness indicated by suit
>
> RED=LOUD   BLACK= SOFT
>
> pointed-up suits FULLY loud or soft
> rounded-top suits moderately loud or soft
>
> therefore:
>
> SPADES   = p   (quite soft)
> CLUBS   = mp   (moderately soft)
> HEARTS   = mf   (moderately loud)
> DIAMONDS = f   (quite loud)[97]

Afterwards, the taped readings would be played back in various sequences. Thus, this performance already drew upon the earlier publications as working material; although the poem 'creek in the ceiling beam' was the most overt component, other elements of the project were incorporated in a slightly subtler manner. The looped music, for example, was based on the following notational pattern:

F
FA
CC
EE [98]

This figure already features in the first few pages of *Ffacece*, along with note that states it ought to be read "as in music."[99] Similarly, an "interpretation"[100] of the graph

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[94] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*, n.p.

[95] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, b.1-b.2

[96] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*, n.p.

[97] *Ibid*, n.p

[98] *Ibid*, n.p

that charted the creaks in Fisher's beam was converted to a score for controlling the volume of the FFACCEE tape. Therefore, the 1973 performance of *Blood Bone Brain* does not involve simple presentations of work from previous 'book events'. Instead, this early version of *Blood Bone Brain* incorporated these publications almost as if they were *transmedial* phenomena: certain motifs, along with the general aesthetic schema of procedure and process, are repeatedly filtered through a range of methods and technologies.[101]

A performance that followed in Blackburn on July 14th was closely modelled on the procedures developed for Nottingham. The evening began with a "collage of the 3 recordings made"[102] during the previous event. After this, a selection of performers read from *Sicily,* and changed their volumes according to the playing cards handed to them. The music "was composed from [a] tape of FFACECE" that was "cut into pieces" and then "rejoined"[103] by Fisher.[104] However, while the events in Nottingham and Blackburn were based upon relatively linear instructions, *Blood Bone Brain*'s various metamorphoses were enacted to a more elaborate degree on October 28th 1974 at the premises of the Poetry Society in London. This time, the occasion involved a series of performers including music by Bill Griffiths and Eric Mottram, images projected by Jude Walker and Pearl White, as well as various materials read and recorded by Lee Harwood, Paul Brown and Fisher himself. As in Nottingham during the previous year, the poem 'creek in the ceiling beam' was read, only this time, the reading happened at the very beginning of the evening. Afterwards, a tape of a recorded interview with Fisher was played before the proceedings properly began.

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[99] Fisher, *Ffacece*, n.p.

[100] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*, n.p.

[101] See Rajewsky, 46

[102] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, b.1

[103] *Ibid*, b.2

[104] Although Fisher's methodologies are different, his music at the Blackburn performance of *Blood Bone Brain* extends upon Burroughs' influence on the printed version of *Sicily*. From the late sixties until 1976, Burroughs and Brion Gysin (who had first introduced cut-ups to him) experimented with cut-ups on the tape recorder. As Burroughs explained: "We went on to exploit the potentials of the tape recorder: cut up, slow down, speed up, run backwards, inch the tape, play several tracks at one, cut back and forth between two recorders. As soon as you start experimenting with slow-downs, speedups, overlays, etc., you will get new words that were not on the original recording". See Burroughs, W. S. 'It Belongs to the Cucumbers: On the Subject of Raudive's Taped Voices'. *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics Volume 1* (eds. A. Waldman & Marilyn Webb). Shambala. Boulder & London. 1978, 65
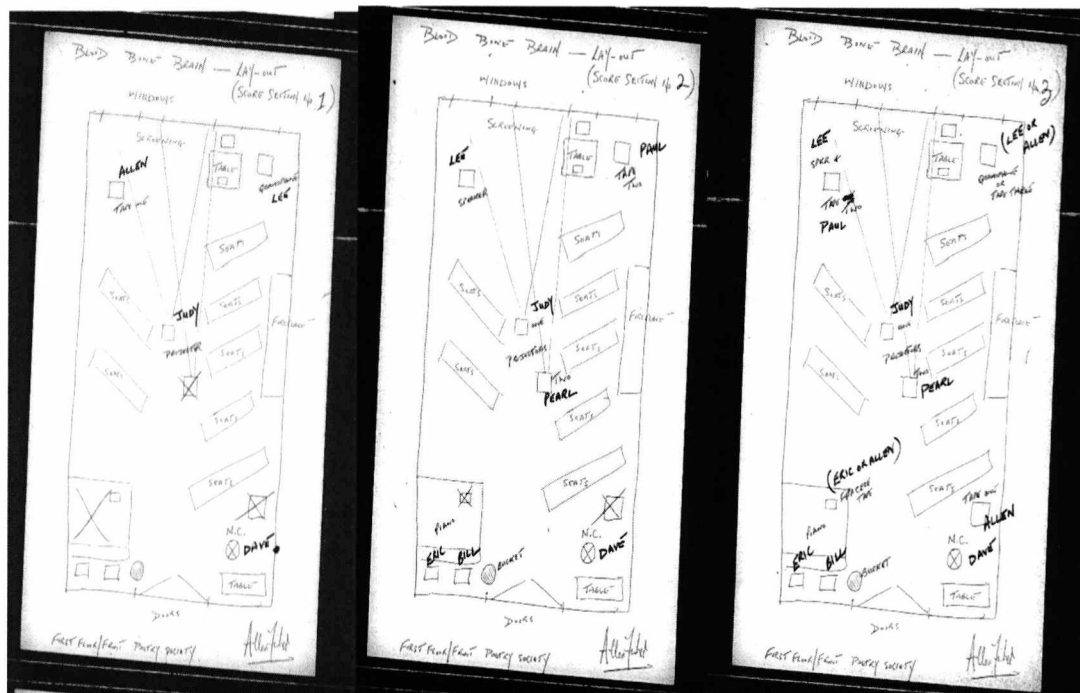
Fig 6.3: Seating plan for *Blood Bone Brain* in London, 1974
Courtesy of Allen Fisher

During the first set of the performance, two screens in the front of the room were projected with BONE VISUALS, or various pictures of previously prepared 'memory' objects, while various old records were played through a gramophone as BONE MUSICS. Lee Harwood, who was in charge of the gramophone, was provided a selection of 39 records[105] and an invitation

> To play a record every minute for 39 minutes.
> To play the records in number order.
> To observe the centre comments such as follows:-
> "Middle" meaning start near the middle; or
> "Cracked" meaning this record might break on you.
> (A small set of spares will be provided)[106]

The records would be changed in sync with the projected slides. The 'memory objects' that were used for BONE VISUALS were based on the 'memory jars' and other items Fisher had previously prepared for a Fluxshoe exhibition.[107] Observed in isolation, these artefacts resembled quasi-parodic time capsules: while the jars drew upon a broad range of quotidian realia—such as a potato—they were difficult to characterise as a symbolic "sanctification, commemoration, protection and

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[105] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, d.3

[106] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, a.7.

[107] See *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010.*

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Fig 6.4: BONE VISUAL 1-Tulse Hill Potatoe 1965 & BONE VISUAL 9-Norfolk Grass (missing)
Courtesy of Allen Fisher/Jude Walker

elaboration"[108] of an era or culture. Instead, their foci involve ephemera and absence, as with Norfolk Grass (missing); or damaged distortions such as boiled clocks; or decayed remains such as a sheep's skull without its "lower jaw."[109] During the performance, these sounds and images would be accompanied by Fisher's vocalisations of pre-prepared BONE WORDS, which he was free to "read as given, elaborate as [he] wished, or ignore"[110] if he so decided. The words that were read would also be recorded on tape.

The second set of the evening also combined a variety of music, visual projections and performed words. However, these spanned across two themes entitled BLOOD and BRAIN. For instance, BLOOD & BRAIN MUSICS were based on a written score (Blood on Rain) for two performers[111]—in this case Mottram and Griffiths, who were seated on a piano at the back of the room. One would "follow the right hand score from page one to page five" and repeatedly play "bars one to forty"[112] for 13 minutes. Afterwards, repetitions and variations of this pattern were carried out until 39 minutes had lapsed. Meanwhile, the second performer was invited to follow a

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[108] Jarvis, W.E. 'Modern Time Capsules: Symbolic Repositories of a Civilization' *Libraries & Culture* Vol 27, No. 3 (Summer 1992), 228

[109] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, c.7

[110] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words.*, a.2

[111] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, a.4 identifies the sections played were 'Vauxhall Way Swank', 'Strawberry March' and 'London Sun Song'. Also See, Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 3: Musics & Recyclings*, a.2-a.14

[112] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, a.4

similar pattern on "the left hand score page"[113] or to improvise according to their preferences. The BRAIN VISUALS were "subject to flux/variation,"[114] but most likely included pictures taken in London and farther a field. However, the materials for BLOOD VISUALS were far more localised and specific: all of the 39 images were based around south London, with 22 depicting churches, cemeteries or both. In contrast to BONE WORDS, which frequently involved poems by Fisher and his companions, BLOOD and BRAIN WORDS utilized a range of found texts and prose. Paul Brown, who read BRAIN WORDS, was given an "arbitrary selection"[115] from John Buchan's *39 Steps*[116] and instructed to record his reading. Lee Harwood's BLOOD WORDS, on the other hand, consisted of information pertaining to the accompanying visuals, such as:

> Camberwell cemetery church
>
> the cemetery once owned the 2 churches. the remains of one were all we found
> the cemetery is in wood lane Peckham /Ref OS 34/74
> at the apex of the triangle in the c in the c b
> we drove from albany road, noting that R.W. Whites old factory had disappeared, to camberwell road and down into camberwell green where we turned into Peckham road and rye lane via the one way system contrived to stop our entry and then to into peckham rye and the cemetery.[117]

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[113] *Ibid*

[114] *Ibid*, c.8

[115] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, a.2

[116] The frequent use of the number 39 is based on the "39 weeks" of the Fluxshoe tour. See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, c.1.

[117] *Ibid*, e.13

Fig 6.5: BLOOD VISUAL 1- Church. Camberwell cemetery. SE22
Courtesy of Jude Walker and Allen Fisher

Therefore, by surveying the "unities of ambiance" within the "spatial localization[s]" of a modern city, as well as its "principal axes of passage [...] exits and [...] defences"[118], BLOOD WORDS portrayed a journey comparable to a Situationist Dérive. However, like with BONE WORDS, this prepared information was not a mandatory component, as Harwood could extemporise his "own words using the visuals as image vibration."[119]

The final set of the evening made use of the taped recordings from the first two. For instance, the primary task for Fisher and Brown was to replay their recordings back to the performance space. Intermittently, David Miller—who acted as the master of ceremonies—would present the readers with numbered cards that indicated the desired volume of the sounds, from "nothing [...] up to an audible level."[120] Similarly, Harwood was provided with a smaller selection of numbered cards for BLOOD WORDS, which he read according to the numbers Miller indicated. Mottram and Griffiths were also asked to observe Miller's notations, and played "each bar as indicated by the master of ceremonies repeating the bar until his number"[121] changed. White and Walker were given a limited number of slides to project, again according to Miller's notations. In addition, there "were occasions where only one slide" would be shown, or where "half of the slide" was masked; they were also permitted to "manipulate the projection"[122] as they wished. As a result of

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[118] Debord, G. 'Theory of the Dérive', *Situationist International Anthology* (ed. & trans K. Knabb). Bureau of Public Secrets. Berkley. 1981, 52

[119] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, a.2

[120] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, b.14

[121] *Ibid*,

[122] *Ibid*,

these cues, the third set was occasionally reduced to silences, even blank screens. In other words, the evening ended by enacting a series of variations of the performance that had just taken place. However, these variations could be tantamount to violence. If the first two sets provided a loosely configured structure to the proceedings, the conclusion to the performance undermined it through effacement and defacement.

Despite the details above, my summaries of *Blood Bone Brain* in performance are necessarily incomplete. Like *Pollock Record*,[123] the microfiche archive Fisher published in 1981 only provides evidence of what may have occurred from a preceding, speculative space; what is left behind are plans of actions, not the actions themselves. In this respect, these notes are documents that resemble publications such as *creek in the ceiling beam*, where process occupies more space in the work than the completed product—i.e. the performance or the poem. However, the existing schemata are detailed enough to reveal *Blood Bone Brain's* genealogical links to Fluxus and Fluxshoe. The overarching ethos of Fisher's project corresponds with Fluxus' eschewal of "the art object as a non-functional commodity"[124] as well as the "inclusionary"[125] and intermedial methods of the group.[126] While *Blood Bone Brain* as a whole traverses across a range of media, the 1974 performance in London demonstrates how, in Rajewsky's words, these "medial forms of articulation" are "present in their own materiality" primarily in order to "contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire"[127] event. Structurally, the "flexible", "open-ended" and "non-site specific"[128] designs of the project share common features with the Fluxus 'Events' staged by Schmit, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, and others. Indeed, some of the programme notes for *Blood Bone Brain* list Mac Low, Higgins, and Walter de Maria as references for Fisher's pre-performance interview.[129] Yet, although Mac Low's procedural methods were a significant influence on the performances in Nottingham and Blackburn, the performance in London featured more intricate

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[123] See section 5.2 in Chapter 5.

[124] George Macuinas, in a letter to Tomas Schmit. Reproduced in Wijers, L. 'Fluxus Yesterday and Tomorrow: An Artist's Impression' *Fluxus: Today and Yesterday* (ed J. Pijnappel). Academy Group. Great Britain. 1993, 9

[125] Mac Low, in Wijers, 9

[126] See Higgins, D. 'Intermedia'. *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of Intermedia*. Southern Illinois University Press. Carbondale. 1984, pp. 18-21. Higgins was associated with Fluxus, and originally published the essay in a newsletter from Something Else Press in 1966.

[127] Rajewsky, 52

[128] Higgins, H. 91

[129] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, c.10

techniques than chance. In fact, Fisher's elaborate notes are the antithesis of the "simply scored"[130] Fluxus activities like Brecht's *Two Elimination Events,* where the instructions simply read:

TWO ELIMINATION EVENTS

- empty vessel

- empty vessel.[131]

In this respect, while the origins of *Blood Bone Brain* may be linked to the constellations surrounding Fluxshoe and Beau Geste Press, by the time the performance arrived to London in 1974, its scope had extended far beyond the dimensions of this nexus.

6.3. 'to grasp the world / without gripping it'

Performing with Blood Bone Brain

While the genealogies of *Blood Bone Brain* may be examined in order to itemise and investigate the complex facets of the project, they can generate as many questions as they answer. Apart from the occasional readings of 'creek in the ceiling beam' and the other aforementioned examples, how do these performances work with the early 'book events' of the project? Or, to pose the question more specifically, what approach does *Blood Bone Brain* assume towards poetry and performance? To a degree, the event seems to resists questions such as these; the taped interview at the beginning of the performance claims its proceedings "are not yet within grasp"[132] and that "it is a note of decadence to call" them "poetry."[133] Yet, in a letter to Fisher from November 1974, Mottram describes the occasion as an "intersection performance" that speaks "something in a way of synchronicity,"[134] where 'synchronicity' appears to signify to the event's intermedial correlations. Perhaps these intersections are relatable to Fisher's later dictum, "poetry is always 'yet to be found' in the process of its making, and that making continues to take place through the physiology of the

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[130] Higgins, H, 112

[131] *Ibid*, 113

[132] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions,* e.5

[133] *Ibid*

[134] MOTTRAM 5/86/1-56

reader,"[135] whereby a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* becomes a conceptual 'physiology' in which this making—and re-making—might occur.

This proposal is necessarily tentative, as it can only be investigated via the microfiche slides. However, in contrast to Mottram's *Pollock Record*, where the instructions are only loosely defined, Fisher's notes allow us to partially reconstruct

Fig 6.6: BONE VISUALS 2- Remains of an Edible Book for Book Fair 1971
Courtesy of Jude Walker and Allen Fisher

the intermedial exchanges of *Blood Bone Brain*. For instance, consider 'BONE WORDS: 2', which was accompanied by a projection depicting the remains of an *Edible* magazine. Fisher began producing such artefacts in the late 1960s, "using rice paper, writing on it with cochineal", printing them "via a gelatine press [with] shortcake pastry for covers" and finally storing them "in individual sandwich bags."[136] Primarily, *Edible* printed poems by Fisher, Pearl White, Dick Miller and others, and while some "poisonous"[137] editions were printed on paper, others were genuinely edible.[138] Therefore, each issue of the magazine was genuinely conditioned by

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[135] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 1. The passage as a whole is responding to Olson's 'A Later Note on Letter # 15', which refers to "Whitehead's important corollary: that no/event is not penetrated, or collision with, an eternal event/The poetics of such a situation are yet to be found". See Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 249. Specific comparisons between Fisher and Olson will be discussed at the beginning of the following chapter.

[136] Fisher, A. *RE: Edible* [E-mail]. Message to author. 01.06.2009

[137] *Ibid*

[138] As Fisher describes: "I remember an Association of Little Presses exhibition in 1969 and 1970 where [copies of *Edible*] were on sale and the national press came. The Daily Telegraph reporter bit through and the poisonous supplement [...] got caught in his teeth and his brief newspaper review complained about it. Another paper, I think it was the Daily Mirror, photographed me on a park bench with other office workers eating their lunch and me eating my book". See Fisher, *RE: Edible* [E-mail]. Message to author. 01.06.2009

ephemerality, as it would either be eaten, or grow mouldy and rot. These circumstances also inform the content of 'BONE WORDS: 2'. The poem begins:

> trying cochineal paste
> print rice
> 1967 to eat trying
>
> open mouth hung
> press stretch clipped to deckle
> eaten[139]

and further along, continues:

> not Happy Birth shortened
> cake   pastry
> kneaded to conceal content
>
> annealed wit
> fat whipped past sonnet
> rice patter
>
> *Pearl White Mouth Poem*
> in sandwich   bag
> ten pence.[140]

To elaborate, the poem depicts the production and the uses[141] of the magazine featured on the slide. In this respect, the event of performing 'BONE WORDS: 2' alongside the projection could be regarded as an intermedial enactment of Fisher's poetics. The occasion presents the audience with 'an object' and simultaneously narrates the process of its making.

However, this analysis of the event presupposes that the performance unfolded exactly as the declared intentions stipulate. In fact, *Blood Bone Brain* permitted a wide range of improvisation, where the poem could be elaborated upon or even ignored in its entirety. Indeed, it is more than likely that the performed words differed significantly from the pre-prepared text. As Fisher explains:

> If you are in a performance situation [...] you could choose to have a score, or a set of notes, or a book of poems; or you could choose to memorise it [...] what I tried in *Blood Bone Brain* performances was to do neither of those things, but to give myself different indicators to

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[139] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, a.7

[140] *Ibid*

[141] Stanzas such as "phoned public/The Daily/reporting lunch park/office eating/took photographs/and telegraph" are a clear reference to the exhibition Fisher describes above in n138. See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, a.7

talk. It [was] like a theatre of memory [...] you arrange the slides in such a way that it gives your memory indicators. When the slide [...] would come up [...] I would use it to extrapolate and talk and improvise.[142]

In other words, 'BONE WORDS: 2', as it appears in the notes, is a prospective utterance. It is only there to provide the performer with a point of departure in case they feel unable to improvise. Therefore, while aspects of the poem may enact an instance of 'process-showing' by describing the production of an *Edible* magazine, its position within the performance is more akin to the impermanence of such ephemera. The permanent documents, like the image of the *Edible* magazine and the poem that accompanies it, do not constitute stable bodies of work, but are instead *reproductions* (in the case of the projection) or *potentialities* (in the case of the text). As a consequence, this section of *Blood Bone Brain* bears a slight resemblance to the relations between fixity and damage seen in *Sicily*. In multiple ways, the process of performing these works can destabilize their apparent materiality.

In this respect, the self-archived notes for *Blood Bone Brain* act as a "plane of consistency" for the project as a whole. They do not masquerade as totalizations, but instead present "consistencies and consolidations" that lead to "continuous variations, which go beyond constants and variables"[143]. *Creek in the ceiling beam* provides an apt example of this. Whether read aloud, played as a collaged recording, or used as a
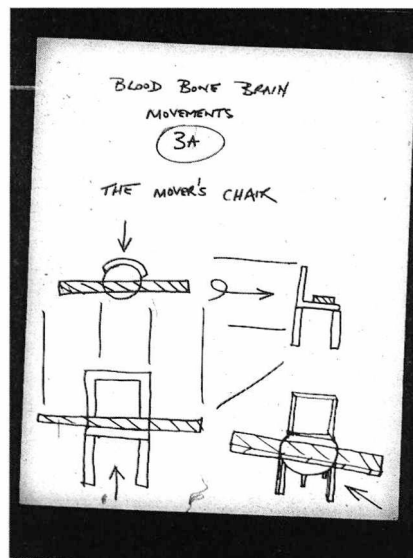
Fig 6.7: 'The Mover's Chair' with the blank that symbolised the beam
Courtesy of Allen Fisher

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[142] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010.*

[143] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 558. This notion will be discussed more in depth at the end of this chapter.

'VOLUME SCORE', this 'book event' is included in each of the first three versions of *Blood Bone Brain*. In 1974, however, its intermedial presentations were intensified. For instance, many of the cemeteries featured in BLOOD VISUALS also appear in Fisher's studies of the "place where the ceiling beam creaks."[144] At certain points in the evening, two volunteers would additionally carry "a large plank [of wood], obscuring views [...] of the slides,"[145] where the plank was meant to symbolise the beam[146] that originated the poem. Thus, reading 'creek in the ceiling beam' at the start of the occasion acted as a prelude that foreshadowed certain themes and events from the performance. Yet, the event itself did not draw upon the poem, but used the materials and situations that lead to the work. Again, the structure of the occasion is comparable to the publication as a whole: *Blood Bone Brain* presents the poem and then shows some of the work involved in its concepts and composition. But are these 'showings' capable of generating new ideas about the work?

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the BLOOD WORDS and VISUALS pertaining to Camberwell cemetery and church provided a verbal and visual account of an excursion resembling Situationist Dérives. In addition, although the ramshackle church is the most prominent feature on the slide, the words identify it only as 'remains' that are twinned with a completely demolished building; the surrounding cemetery is in fact the prevailing fixture. Therefore, the synchronicities between word and image resemble ideas from Vaneigem's 'Comments Against Urbanism', where cemeteries are identified as "the most natural areas for greenery that exists" as they are "the only ones to be harmoniously integrated within the framework of future cities."[147] At the same time, these interactions could also denote a further reference to the materials in *Creek in the ceiling beam*. In the pamphlet, a section titled 'LOCATION OF SITE FOR EVENT' opens with a study of an Ordnance Survey Map for South London:

> Found a straight line joining Camberwell Cemetery church and the cemetery church at Morden passing through, as it does, the cemetery and church at Mitcham and also Tooting Bec tube station.[148]

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[144] Fisher, *Creek in the ceiling beam*, n.p.
[145] Bromige, 5
[146] *Ibid*
[147] Vaneigem, R. 'Comments Against Urbanism'. *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (ed. T. McDonough). MIT Press. Cambridge Massachusetts. 2004, 123
[148] Fisher, *Creek in the ceiling beam*, n.p.

The section continues to describe a further set of similar measurements. Fisher draws another straight line from Camberwell to churches and cemeteries in Herne Hill, Clapham Common, Barnes, Osterley, Heston and Harlington; he then forms a triangle by drawing a straight line from "the cemetery church in Chelsea"[149] to the one near Wimbledon Park; finally, after drawing a central line from North Cheam to a church in New Park Road, Fisher returns to Camberwell. This time, he joins a straight line from the borough "to the cemetery church at Twickenham passing through the cemetery at Roehampton Vale, the tube station at Earlsfield"[150] as well as the room with the creaking ceiling beam. In other words, Camberwell cemetery is a pivotal location for the 'research' carried out in *Creek in the ceiling beam*, and the inclusion of the slide in the performance continues the intermedial variations of Fisher's 'process showing.'

Is it possible to negotiate between these contrasting interpretations of the first BLOOD WORDS and VISUAL? As I suggested earlier, Fisher's investigations to the cause of the creaks were partially humorous. In particular, the churches and cemeteries were included in order to satirise the ideas of ley lines in the works of Alfred Watkins[151] and others:

> These straight lines were routes [...] for the people delivering salt for the different prehistoric groups [...] They would line up to a particular node or a hill, or a valley or a gap. Quite often, something like a church or a tower would be built to give them this focus. Another thought about that in Britain is that people communicated through bon fires [...] It's an odd history, because it is very fraught with invention, and romanticism, and nonsense [...] It's the same time as John Michell is writing his books, in which the alignments of churches are actually flying saucer landing sites; that kind of non-sense.[152]

In this respect, it would be tempting to relate this aspect of *Creek in the ceiling beam* to George Maciunas' characterisation of Fluxus as "good, inventive gags."[153] However, if *Blood Bone Brain* operates by elaborating and changing features from previous works, the images relating to *Creek in the ceiling beam* are also amenable to reconfigurations. Their signification can change "in relation to the meaning another

[149] *Ibid*
[150] *Ibid*
[151] See Watkins, A. *The Old Straight Track*. Abascus. London. 1988
[152] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*. For the book mentioned by Fisher, see Michell, J. *The View over Atlantis*. Thames & Hudson. London, 1986
[153] Maciunas, in Hendricks, J. (ed). *Fluxus etc /addenda I the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection*. Ink &. New York, 1983, 26

may give it, or in relation to living after the first realisation"[154] of one particular understanding. For instance, in the spring of 1974— after the publication of *Creek in the ceiling beam* but before the Poetry Society performance of *Blood Bone Brain*— Fisher published the first book of *Place*,[155] which included the following short passage:

> our brain volumes
> polluted by our senses that
> now can tell us nothing
> except that we are told we are flying or that
> yes the ceiling beam creaks
> & our children smell of the dead.[156]

Here, the explicit reference to the creaking beam effectively undermines the light-hearted tones of Fisher's declared intentions. Instead, the failures in seeking the cause for the creaks are incorporated to a wider discourse of "unhealth" and the systemic "violence"[157] of state apparatuses: instead of learnt, this information is passed on indifferently and unautonomously. The failures of knowledge exhibited in this passage leave the bodies within it "mutilated" by an attempted "mastery'" over them, thus contributing to Fisher's calls for "intelligence" to be "humanised."[158] Therefore, the extract situates the investigations of *Creek in the ceiling beam* alongside the abstract "factual non-sense / that some call intelligence,"[159] which is critiqued throughout *Place: Book I*. In doing so, it reveals the violence behind these earlier 'gags'. Similarly, while a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* sources the image of Camberwell church and cemetery from the earlier pamphlet, it also diverts its significance. In the context of BLOOD WORDS 1, which focuses on the dereliction of the building, the attention shifts away from the process in *Creek in the ceiling beam* and back towards Vaneigem's urbanism. Just as some of the London churches

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[154] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 2. Also see section 6.1 of this chapter.

[155] See Fisher, A. *Place: Book I*. Aloes Books. London. 1974. The publication was a limited edition, and the first book of *Place* was subsequently printed by Truck Press in 1976. See Fisher, A. *Place: Book I*. Truck Press. Carrboro. 1976. All subsequent references to *Place: Book I* will use the 1974 Aloes Books edition.

[156] Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 44

[157] Hampson, R. 'Producing the unknown: language and ideology in contemporary poetry'. *New British Poetries: The scope of the possible* (eds. R. Hampson & P. Barry). Manchester University Press. Manchester. 1993, 136

[158] Bush, 103

[159] Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 44

were first built on pre-Christian sites,[160] here the "ubiquity"[161] of urbanism takes over from God.[162] Consequently, the image can be paired with the dystopian tower blocks—such as the Aylesbury Estate—which were built in London during the 1960s and 1970s.[163] Further still, the ubiquitous presence of urbanism can also be related to Constantinos Doxiades' sprawling and chaotic 'Dynamegalopolis' that has grown out of scale to the point of irrationality and dysfunction.[164] The same cityscape is also addressed in the subsequent books of *Place*:

> the street IS a field of metal
>   pressed and crushed
> the shops are TO LET
> to let the cars move
> cars move out to now centres
>   already outside of
>   visual clench [...]
> [...]
>   so this is transforming to dream
> where ideal solutions are propelled
>   into static cells pumping dynamic growth
>   Dynamegalopolis
> in which Scamozzi's bones shift in dust[165]

Thus, the meanings behind the first BLOOD WORDS and VISUAL proliferate beyond 'process showing' and satire to also comment upon the spread of urbanism. However, like Vaneigem's essay, Fisher does not observe the decay of Camberwell church with ecclesiastic nostalgia. Rather, the situation is depicted as one conjuncture in a long procession of uncaring homogenous powers all "on the verge of asserting total mind control."[166]

In other words, a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* facilitates both a state of proposal and a breakage from that proposal; its schema may seek to incorporate elements of the project's previous components, but the event also allows these works

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[160] See, for example, Pennick, N. *Sacred Architecture of London*. Aeon Books. London. 2012, 38. Fisher was aware of this history, and admitted this may have been a partial influence for his original idea to investigate the Ordnance Survey Map while composing *Creek in the ceiling beam*. See *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*.

[161] Vaneigem, 'Comments Against Urbanism'. 122

[162] *Ibid*

[163] See, for example, *Camberwell Grove: The Secret History of Our Streets*. Dir. M. Cranitch [Television] UK. BBC. 13.06.2012

[164] See, for example, Doxiades, C. 'The Coming World City: Ecunomenopolis'. *Cities of Destiny* (ed. A. Toynbee). Thames & Hudson. London. 1967, pp. 345-346

[165] Fisher, *Place*, 320

[166] Vaneigem, 122

to be undermined by additions, extractions or reconfigurations. The performance invites its participants—whether they are performers or members of the audience—to enact the "actualizing activities"[167] of reception and engagement described in 'Mathematics of Rimbaud' and *Necessary Business*. However, the productions and reconfigurations that occur during these events are not solely dependent on "circumstantial differences"[168] that pertain to the mood or the ambiance of the performance space. As with *Creek in the ceiling beam* and the image of Camberwell church, these transformations might be influenced by factors that at first seem remote. In fact, the first book of *Place* appears in dialogue with *Blood Bone Brain* so frequently that categorical distinctions between the two begin to feel inappropriate. For example, one of the first published fragments from the book[169] provides new approaches to the 'memory objects' included in BONE VISUALS:

> the tracks that confirmed our sanctuaries
> are torn apart
>
> in 1806 one area of waste near Stockwell and
> another at Norwood allotted for burial
>
> upon unquiet earth our senses are torn
> our memories jarred to forgetfulness[170]

When read in isolation, the 'jarring' becomes a causally linked reverberation of the tearing that takes place in the preceding line. In this context, the fragment connects with the motifs of violence and debasement that are enforced upon the catatonic inhabitants of *Place*. The memories that they possess—as well as the memories *about* them—can be considered alongside the other 'haemorrhaging' senses that are polluted, stifled and ignored throughout the early parts of the book.

On the other hand, when viewed in conjunction with the 'memory objects' in *Blood Bone Brain*, the line could also address the process of performing certain BONE WORDS. As I argued earlier with reference to 'BONE WORDS 2', Fisher's use of the slides as a theatre of memory destabilised the apparent fixity of his pre-

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[167] Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 199. Sheppard's comments are made in reference to *Necessary Business*.

[168] Fisher, A. 'Allen Fisher Interview. The Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK: Edited Transcript' [Online]. Openned. 2008. Available from: http://www.openned.com/storage/pdfs/allenfisherinterview.pdf [Last accessed: 20/06/2011)

[169] The poem was the first of the extracts published in *Poetry Review* in the winter edition of 1972 and 1973. See Fisher, A. 'from place/two'. *Poetry Review* Vol. 63 no. 4 (1972/1973) pp. 299-300.

[170] Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 21

prepared texts. Thus, the relationship between the various 'memory jars' and the spoken words could be compared with the "consistent" and "inventive"[171] memories described in 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud.'[172] The memory objects, like Waddington's chreods, represent "canalized"[173] and consistent pathways; their directions are "determined and structurally stable"[174] and "difficult to divert."[175] For instance, the remains of an *Edible* magazine would gradually decay to an inedible and unreadable state of forgetfulness. By contrast, the "poetries of inventive memory"[176] in BONE WORDS represent tropologies that disrupt the canals of chreodic memory and create new pathways in the process. Consequently, "memory becomes a reinvigorated invention of perception,"[177] as the correlations between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain* enact a mutual interrogation of the authoritarian structures that the works oppose. However, the synchronicities between the parallel projects flow in both directions. Just as *Blood Bone Brain* can inform our reading of fragments in *Place*, the poem also permeates the performance in multiple ways. At times, this may result in paradoxical circumstances. Although the 'memories jarred to forgetfulness' will be reinvigorated by the 'poetries of inventive memory', this situation is simultaneously marked by impermanence. The improvised moments will also be torn and dismantled because—like the short-term memory practiced in *Pollock Record*[178]—they include "forgetting as a" part of the "process."[179] In fact, *Blood Bone Brain* anticipates this deterioration, and incorporates the failures of memory within its proceedings. For instance, the silences and blank screens during the final section of the event could be construed as representations of the damage inflicted upon our recollections. Thus, the performance asserts that the artistic production of 'inventive memory' can only take place momentarily in each moment of reception.

Fisher characterises these serial modes of production and reception with the term 'facture', which he derives from art history. Traditionally, the term is used to

[171] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 4

[172] Also see Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, pp.199-203 which discusses similar notions with reference to *Necessary Business* and poems from Fisher's *Gravity as a consequence of shape*.

[173] Waddington, C.H. *Tools for Thought*. Paladin. St Albans. 1977, 106

[174] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 4

[175] Waddington, 106

[176] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 4

[177] Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 200

[178] See section 5.3. in the previous chapter.

[179] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 17

"indicate an artist's handling of" tools such as "the brushstroke" and "how [these] materials are worked descriptively and expressively."[180] However, as evidenced by the 'faktura' of Russian constructivism, it can also denote systematic investigations of "pictorial and sculptural constructs *as well as* the perceptual interaction with the viewer,"[181] which also incorporates "the technical means of construction into the work itself." [182] Although Fisher's use of 'facture' is comparable to that of the constructivists, the ethics of his proposals remain quite distinctive. He contrasts the term with concepts such as 'create' or 'make' and argues that while these ideas imply hierarchical "completions and finished products", 'facture' remains open and includes "the viewer in the production process of the art." [183] These concepts are also present in 'BONE WORDS 10', a text that further entangles the connections between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain*. The first book of *Place* concludes with an excursion to the Lake District, where the penultimate section includes the following event:

Fig 6.8: BONE VISUALS 10- Sheep's skull less lower jaw. Westmorland. 1972
Courtesy of Jude Walker and Allen Fisher

       in a steep climb
              old settlements Threkeld[sic] stood out
     as I stood there
           lifting stones I
     picked up the skull of a sheep
            all around the sheep bleat

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[180] Zurier, R. 'Facture'. *American Art* Vol 23. No 1 (Spring 2009), 29

[181] Buchloch, B.H.D. 'From Faktura to Factography' *October* Vol 30 (Autumn 1984), 87

[182] *Ibid*, 89

[183] Fisher, A. *RE: Facture* [E-mail]. Message to author. 31.05.2012. The quoted material draws upon a short extract from Fisher's introduction to a collection of essays about the topic. At the time of writing, this work is unpublished.

the quarry exagerating[sic]   carrying their
                                                    bodies' volume and vibrating it

                                                    as I dropped the skull

           I recrossed that field   retook the skull &
                      left   "bad luck" they sd.
           "all its flesh eaten   lower jaw missing"[184]

'BONE WORDS: 10' in *Blood Bone Brain* suggests that the poem is at least partially based on factual reportage. The prepared words are nearly identical to the poem, and the accompanying slide actually features the skull in question. Indeed, the notes for 'BONE WORDS: 10' openly describe the text as an "extract from *Lakes*, a set cut into"[185] *Place: Book I*. The diction is quite revealing: *Lakes* is not identified as an inborn component of *Place*, but as something 'cut into' it. However, the 'cutting' in this instance does not suggest the 'damage' and 'destruction' that Fisher enacts in works such as *Sicily*. The relationship between *Lakes* and the rest of *Place: Book I* seems far more symbiotic. For instance, the section that precedes Fisher's encounter with the sheep's skull intersects observations from Dove Cottage with speculations concerning tremors in the earth,[186] before concluding with lines that resemble stage directions for a performance: "(at this point a reshowing of the plates / involved with place XIX on page 59)."[187] The page in question features only a short archaeological note. In addition to another reference regarding the 'plates involved', the poem simply reads:

                    a Neanderthal skull with a hole in its base
                    artificially enlarged
                    was found within a circle of stones on the "floor"
                    in Monte Circeo, Italy[188]

The relationship between 'XIX' and the notes regarding Wordsworth's cottage seems oblique. However, the re-presentation of the Neanderthal skull conceivably works as a prefiguration of the sheep's remains in the subsequent poem. By comingling Fisher's

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[184] Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 99

[185] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, b.1

[186] The analysis of the tremors recalls some of the research Fisher carried out for the creak in his ceiling beam. This section of *Lakes* speculates that the tremor may have taken place "around 29th November 1971 when I recorded that men in Denver, Colorado were drilling the earth's mantle with holes to fill with water". See Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 98.

[187] Fisher, *Place: Book I*, 98.

[188] *Ibid*, 59

discovery on the field with this earlier, more scholarly encounter, *Place* 'factures' a covalent bond between the two fragments. The 'steep climb' of Threlkeld Knotts merges with Monte Circeo, the two skulls blend together and two violent realities are simultaneously made present. After the Neanderthal skull in Monte Circeo was first discovered in 1939, anthropologists proposed that its mutilated condition was a result of a ritualistic murder involving decapitation and cannibalism.[189] The "experiential multidimensionality"[190] between these pages seemingly connects this act with the consumed flesh on the sheep's skull, which conveys impressions of the continued brutality of 'masters' against their 'inferiors'. More specifically, the parallels between the sections can be read alongside Fisher's anger at London's unchanging political superstructures,[191] where opportunity and justice have been unevenly distributed since the times of antiquity:

> In republican Rome
> centre of political gravity in an executive
> limited only by law the nomosic addition
>
> citizen auctoritas elected by the rich
> a class with inherited training arenas
> with disproportionate voting power[192]

The covalent bonding between these fragments is also comparable to *Blood Bone Brain's* intermedial synchronicities. In fact, the directions concerning the 'plates involved' almost mimic the interactions between the projected slides and the various performers. Is this relationship extended any further by incorporating the extract from *Lakes* into 'BONE WORDS: 10'? How is the poem put to use during the performance? Of course, like all 'BONE WORDS', the extract was open to elaboration or improvisation. However, the text included in Fisher's notes already

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[189] See, for example, Blanc, A.C. 'Some Evidence for the Ideologies Early Man'. *Social Life of Early Man* (ed. S.L.Washburn). Taylor & Francis. Great Britain. 1962, pp. 119-136. During the 1980s, this claim was contested, and it was argued that hyenas caused the damage to the skull. However, at the time when Fisher was writing *Place*, the cannibalistic ritual was the leading theory about the skull from Mt. Circeo.

[190] Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 200. Sheppard uses this phrase in the reference to *Gravity as a consequence of shape*.

[191] Here, I am drawing upon the Marxist use of the term, which refers to dominant ideologies in law, politics, religion and elsewhere. See, for example, Marx, K. & Engels, F. *The German Ideology Part One, with Selections from Parts Two and Three, together with Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy"* (ed. C.J. Arthur). Lawrence & Wishart. London. 1970, 47

[192] Fisher, *Place*, 348

departs from the version printed in *Place: Book I.*[193] Where the poem reads 'lifting stones I / picked up the skull', *Blood Bone Brain* removes the pronoun entirely. Likewise, the 'sheep' are removed from 'all around the sheep bleat'. The bodies' 'volumes vibrating it' becomes the "volumes vibrating them."[194] Finally, while the poem recounts how the speaker let the skull fall, the pronoun is once again removed from 'BONE WORDS: 10'. In effect, "dropped the skull"[195] is left floating in isolation between the two stanzas. Although many of these edits are minor, the persistent removal of the 'I' is striking. One possible explanation for this can be articulated via the role of 'facture' within the performance. David Summer's recent work has theorised facture as a semiotically indexical concept, in that it implies an "immediate relation to a prior cause" in the way that a footprint denotes "the former immediate presence of a foot."[196] A similar situation occurs with the performance of 'BONE WORDS: 10', where the spoken words—regardless of their exact format—would respond to the previous encounter with the skull. However, Summer also describes the "language of facture" as "notional metaphors"[197] that stress the reflective capacities of the mind in formulating concepts and relations. He illustrates this proposal by discussing the development of tools during hominid evolution, and proposes that the facture of these implements "not only allowed adaptation" but also "created the expectation of further"[198] adaptations, which multiplied agency by enabling the activities that make these alterations possible. The process of facture presented by 'BONE WORDS: 10' is analogous to this condition of 'notionality'. This section of *Lakes*, which is first modified by its intersections with *Place*, is further adapted by its inclusion within *Blood Bone Brain*, where it is potentially reconfigured during each event. Therefore, the diminishing presence of the first person in 'BONE WORDS: 10' acts as an indicator of Fisher's intentions for the audience to take part in the process of 'facturing' the performance, either by physically joining in it, or by

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[193] Although minor edits (which mainly correct misspelled words) have been carried out in subsequent editions of *Place*, the poem closely resembles the version first printed by Aloes Books in 1974. Therefore, the variations featured in the notes to *Blood Bone Brain* are somewhat anomalous.

[194] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, b.1. This is the only change that is also featured in the subsequent editions of *Place* from Truck and Reality Street. For example, see Fisher, *Place*, 108

[195] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 4: Words*, b.1.

[196] Summer, D. *Real Spaces: World History Art and the Rise of Western Modernism.* Phaidon. London. 2003, 74

[197] *Ibid*, 107

[198] Summer, 109

participating in the formulation of ideas inspired by its intermedial synchronicities. In an event where "*you* are invited to perform,"[199] any 'performance of authorship' gradually loses its credibility.

I have outlined these intersections between *Edible* magazine, *Creek in the ceiling beam* and sections of *Place* in order to emphasize the strangely chimeric practices of *Blood Bone Brain*. Initially, it might appear as if the project constantly twists back on itself to consume its previous components, as *Ffacece*, *Creek in the ceiling beam* and *Sicily* are all assimilated amongst the various performances. Moreover, these constituents appear insufficient in satiating *Blood Bone Brain*, which additionally ingests other works that were developed in parallel or beforehand. In some respects, these manoeuvres bear a resemblance to Deleuze and Guattari's 'body without organs.'[200] Like this concept, *Blood Bone Brain* operates as a "conjunction of flows" or "a continuum of intensities" that is ready to be plugged into "other collective machines"[201] or assemblages. During these convergences, it transmits its own 'intensities' while other energies are transmitted through it, and both sites are transformed as a consequence.[202] This process occurs throughout the examples discussed in this chapter. For publications such as *Ffacece*, which *Blood Bone Brain* alters from visuals to music, these mutations occur on a material level. More frequently, however, the manifold convergences affect our perceptions of *Blood Bone Brain* and the materials that pass through it. For instance, the research featured in *Creek in the ceiling beam* helps to explain the inclusion of Camberwell church in BLOOD VISUALS; however, the intersections between the slide and the corresponding BLOOD WORDS simultaneously evoke new realisations about the social realities behind *Creek in the ceiling beam*. Similar conjunctions may also flow

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[199] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1: Plans*, a.1 (my italics)

[200] Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that the phrase 'body without organs' is borrowed from Artaud's 'To Have Done With the Judgement of God', which reads: "When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom". See Artaud, A. 'To Have Done With the Judgement of God'. *Selected Writings* (ed. S. Sontag). Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. New York. 1976, 571. Also see, Scheer E. 'I Artaud BwO: The Uses of Artaud's *To have done with the judgement of god'*. *Deleuze and Performance* (ed L. Cull). Edinburgh University Press. Edinburgh. 2009, pp. 37-53.

[201] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 179

[202] See Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4

from multiple directions, as demonstrated by the synchronicities between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain*.[203]

Yet, the parallels between a 'body without organs' and the performances of *Blood Bone Brain* also suggest that the project involves more than consumption and ingestion. In a *Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the 'body without organs' is an egg, which they identify as a "perfectly contemporary [...] milieu of experimentation."[204] The 'body without organs' is not an embryonic state that anticipates a maturational development to a complete, 'actual' body, as it is "continually in the process of constructing itself"[205] adjacent to such bodies. To phrase this more broadly, the 'body without organs' is closely related[206] to the 'plane of consistency' that Deleuze and Guattari inscribe with continuous variations.[207] Like these planes, the 'body without organs'—or at least an operative model of it[208]— provides a reservoir of potentialities that are activated and actualised during the aforementioned convergences. Thus, if a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* only practiced self-consumption, it would ultimately resemble the 'schizophrenic body' that Deleuze and Guattari describe as "waging its own active internal struggle against" itself, "at the price of catatonia."[209] However, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate, these performances adopt a more complex approach. While its concluding sections relied on repeated recordings, *Blood Bone Brain* as whole resists catatonic immobility. It refuses to settle, and continually reinvents itself. Each performance elaborated on the previous occasions, and while Fisher's individual instructions were detailed, their content remained open to adaptation and improvisation. Thus, every aspect of the performance contained a potential for

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[203] This relationship is slightly similar to the motility and fluidity Redell Olsen discovers within *Place* itself. Drawing upon Barthes' distinction between 'work' and 'text', she argues: "Fisher's *Place* would seem to be studded with fragments of works (local history, science, nature, literature, philosophy and music) that have been activated in a methodological field of encounter [...] *Place* can be approached as a 'text-between' of many others which must be *set going* by the reader rather than consumed". See Olsen, 52

[204] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 181

[205] *Ibid*, 182

[206] "Does the plane of consistency constitute the body without organs, or does the bode without organs compose the plane? Are the Body without Organs and the Plane the same thing? In any event, composer and the composed have the same power." See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 559

[207] See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 558

[208] Deleuze and Guattari argue that the 'fabrication' of a body without organs is dangerous, as it can also become "the cancerous BwO of the fascist inside us, or the empty BwO of a drug addict, paranoiac, or hypochondriac". See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 181

[209] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 166

substantial and material alterations. In this sense, by situating "the actual production"[210] of the project in each event, *Blood Bone Brain* is capable of performing Fisher's concepts of readerly engagement and 'facture'. Thus, if the project resembles a 'body without organs', this is because its multiplicities escape the unhealth of a 'schizophrenic body' through their ability to connect, conjugate and continue.[211] Through such perpetual transformations, the performance is ultimately —if only on a representational level—able to offer a counterforce to the linear, 'unchanging' changes discovered at Camberwell church, Threlkeld Knotts and elsewhere.

6.4. Coda: 'You are invited to perform'

Receptions are further movements

The comparisons between *Blood Bone Brain* and an operative 'body without organs' raise one further question: if this project comes into play "in the medium of becoming or transformation,"[212] will it ever reach a terminus? As I enter Templeman Library in order to consult Fisher's microfiche booklets, I begin to reflect upon the manner in which *Blood Bone Brain* resiled the ideas of performing authorship. In February 2009, when I asked Fisher for details about the performance at Earl's Court, he could scarcely recall more than a few of them.[213] Likewise, when Mottram discussed *Blood Bone Brain* during the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975,[214] he confessed that as a performer, it was difficult to focus on the event as a whole.[215] In this respect, the performance bears some resemblance to the nexus of relations that unfolded during 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1'; here too, the audience 'authors' the event. As a consequence, *Blood Bone Brain's* capacity to connect, conjugate and continue extends beyond its archived materials. The publication of 'Book D' did not actually bring the project to a halt, as *Blood Bone Brain* continues to wander. For instance, when Fisher performed a reduced version of the work during his residency in San Francisco, David Bromige, who sat in the audience, wrote the following impressions in his notebook:

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[210] Fisher, 'Allen Fisher Interview. The Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK: Edited Transcript', [Online].

[211] See Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178

[212] Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*,559

[213] See *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009*.

[214] See section 5.1. in the previous chapter.

[215] C40/32

> graveyards—patterns of starch on protein—remains of an edible
> book—warring bike computer—baking book crust—avenue to
> tower—a path of patterns—estaded [sic] in London—smaller things in
> jar—pretended graveyard—a Mexican dish simmering all day—dipped
> battered chrysanthemum leaves—London County Council pencil—sky
> aviaries through bhang— Eros sundial—church roof—[...] piece of
> shit—Bics—sports and church and lorry—beam creaking behind damp
> ceiling [...]—As I stand alone in a dark room old house—sheep
> skull—grave yard—there is a yellow haze which prevails— dice—gas
> fire with imitation wood—[...] stick of rock as mimic ciggie—block of
> apartments in imitative city—intersection accident[216]

Many of these notations—such as graveyards, the edible book and a sheep skull—are clear references to the projected slides, but others seem more obscure. For example, what are the sources for 'As I stand alone in a dark room' or 'there is a yellow haze which prevails'? Are they based on some of the improvised content, or are they Bromige's private perceptions? Could 'intersection accident' perhaps describe his estimation of the performance itself? When introducing his notes, Bromige admits that they "permit variant readings"[217] and thus, perhaps speculating upon their origins is counter-productive. More importantly, these annotations document one instance of reception, which illustrates the types of transformations that might occur during an encounter with *Blood Bone Brain*.

But *Blood Bone Brain* wanders even further, and cuts across different medias in the process. Earlier in this chapter, I noted that extracts from the project were included on a tape from Balsam Flex in 1982. More recently, recordings of Fisher reading 'creek in the ceiling beam' and selections from BONE WORDS have been made available on PennSound's archives.[218] Some of the materials for the project have also seeped into collections such as *Prosyncel* or *SCRAM*[219]. Furthermore, when I interviewed Fisher in August 2010, I casually mentioned that I had slowly accumulated extracts from the microfiche booklets as printed documents. Fisher replied by suggesting that these copies represented another new transformation of the project. Based on this reasoning, the poet's current intentions to convert his notes into

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[216] Bromige, pp. 25-26

[217] *Ibid*

[218] See, Fisher, A. 'Fisher Reads *Scram* on January 13th, 1989 in London as a part of Gilbert Adair's Sub-Voicive Poetry Series'. [Online]. http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/fisher.php [Last Accessed: 31.05.2012]

[219] Fisher, A. *SCRAM, or the transformation of the concept of the cities: selected poems 1971-1982.* Spectacular Diseases. Peterborough. 1994

electronic files would result in a further set of metamorphoses.[220] Nearly 39 years after the project was performed at Earl's Court, the facture of *Blood Bone Brain* continues. In this seemingly infinite, branching network of potentialities, the wanderings of the project seem almost rhizomic. Thus, as I begin to re-examine the notes, I am reminded of my earlier ruminations regarding Mottram's *Pollock Record*. Has *Blood Bone Brain* been 'made to perform' during the course of this chapter? On some reflection, perhaps the structure of my analyses emulates Fisher's 'facturing process'. By tracing the multiple convergences that take place in *Blood Bone Brain*, I have often returned to the same sections, slides and words, only to discover that their apparent meaning has changed in relation to the meanings another work has given them, or as a consequence of reconsidering my "first realisation of the meaning,"[221] Furthermore, it is possible that the synchronicities outlined in this chapter extend, elaborate or depart from the prefigured intentions of Fisher's schemata. In this sense, although my proposals were composed long after the event and over a considerable period of time, they are similar to Bromige's notations. Both encounters are capable of continuing *Blood Bone Brain*'s production and transformation.

Here, a further thought enters my mind: if *Blood Bone Brain* extends beyond its archived materials, what is the function of these documents? At the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that while the sheets for *Pollock Record* provide a script for a performance, they also act as the most complete documents of the event. I also argued that this speculative, preceding space complicates the common ontologies of performance documentation.[222] As the present chapter has demonstrated, a similar relationship occurs with the microfiche archive for Fisher's project; these documents can also call *Blood Bone Brain* back into being. Yet, while Mottram's sheets are all but lost at the archives of King's College, London, Fisher published his notes as serialised pamphlets. Although the items were impossible to consult without specialist equipment, they still demonstrate an intention for wider dissemination. Consequently, if *Pollock Record* avoids documentation in order to resist the commodification of art,[223] one could argue that the microfiches of *Blood Bone Brain* run the risk of transforming the performance into a product. However, as we have seen, *Blood Bone Brain* refuses the fixity of one idea or appearance. Perhaps Fisher's reasons for

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[220] See Fisher, A. *Re: Blood Bone Brain Images*. [Email]. Message to author. 01/06/2011
[221] Fisher,'The Mathematics of Rimbaud', 2.
[222] See section 5.2. in the previous chapter.
[223] See section 5.3.in the previous chapter

publishing the notes are better characterised by the penultimate sentence of his introduction: *"you are invited to perform."*[224] Earlier, I associated this statement with the notional qualities of 'facture', whereby the audience is able to participate in the event both as performers and as engaged spectators. However, the notes for the Nottingham performance of *Blood Bone Brain* also indicate that Fisher's invitation was more multifaceted. The booklet requests that the "Author/Composer" is informed of any adaptations or further performances so that "he may try and attend."[225] In other words, the invitation to perform could ultimately transform the author to an attendee, thus waiving any trace of the 'performance of authorship'. At the time, it would appear as if this invitation went largely unanswered, but perhaps the continued facture of *Blood Bone Brain* through scholarly pursuits enacts one possible response. Therefore, it becomes difficult to historicise Fisher's microfiches as a commodity or a monument of lost moments "that can only be desired in" their "non-existence."[226] Rather than a closed artefact, their function is more akin to Whitehead's descriptions of the eternal event he finds in Cleopatra's Needle:[227] a "certain stream of events which maintain" some "permanence of character"[228] and enable the continued becomings and transformations of *Blood Bone Brain*.

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[224] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1: Plans*, a.1 (my italics). Also see section 6.3 of this chapter.
[225] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain: A Performance 9/6/73*, n.p
[226] Clausen, 7
[227] Also see chapters 1 and 2 in this thesis.
[228] Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, 167

CHAPTER 7

Dénouement

Conclusions and Further Movements

7.1 'We have come / all this way/to return'?

Steps towards a synthesis

As the present discussion approaches its conclusion, I would like to perform a liberal pastiche of Fisher's process showing, and briefly comment upon the deliberations of the previous chapter. Specifically, I want to focus on the concluding remarks to my case study of *Blood Bone Brain,* where the allusions to 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' and Whitehead's theorisations of Cleopatra's Needle tacitly acknowledge several absent presences within that section. I chose to leave these perspectives undeclared primarily because addressing them in more detail now will permit me to start synthesising certain correspondences between the striated investigations of this thesis. In its utilisation of multiple performers, multimedia and certain procedural systems, the structure of *Blood Bone Brain* clearly shares broad similarities with the techniques of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1'. Likewise, although Fisher's concepts of 'process', particularly as they are articulated in 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud', draw upon the scientific theories of Bohm, Thom, Waddington and others, it is also correct to note the influence that Fisher derives from Whitehead. For instance, his philosophies are perceptible in the poet's discussions about reception and 'facture' during an interview with Steven Willey and Alex Davies:

> If you imagine that I've just read something and you've responded to it, in another hour it might be quite different for you due to all sorts of circumstantial differences, not just to do with the weather or whether your warm or hot or who you're with or the ambiance of the place. As you extend that, there's a whole range of potentials and that's why I eventually [...] realised along with others that there's a factoring process in which you make a piece of work which others have received, but the actual production takes place in the receiving, whether that happens to be you re-reading it or you reading it or

hearing it. So the actual production of the art process [...] happens continually at different times.[1]

Of course, the ideas of the statement are familiar from the previous chapter. However, it is also worth noting the similarities between Fisher's comments and Whitehead's descriptions of Cleopatra's Needle, which I first discussed in Chapter 1:

> If an angel had made the remark [about the Needle] some hundreds of millions of years ago, the earth was not in existence; twenty million years ago there was no Thames; eighty years ago, there was no Thames Embankment, and when I was a small boy Cleopatra's Needle was not there. And now that it is there, we none of us expect it to be eternal.[2]

To a degree, Whitehead's analyses of these factors—along with the Needle's loss of molecules, its state of cleanliness or its appearance in different climates—are comparable to the 'circumstantial' transformations Fisher identifies in his 'factoring process'. In this respect, my final case study effectively casts a mirror on some of the discussions conducted at the very beginning of this thesis.

Inevitably, this means that the figure of Olson will also appear somewhere in the reflection. Of course, Olson's influence on Fisher has been widely noted, even by Fisher himself. The opening to *Place* famously both acknowledges a debt to the poet and simultaneously declares its independence from him[3]. Furthermore, Fisher's dictum, "poetry is always 'yet to be found' in the process of its making,"[4] is a conscious response to the *Maximus Poems'* 'A Later Note on Letter ♯ 15', where Olson refers to "Whitehead's important corollary: that no/event is not penetrated, or in collision with, an eternal event", and declares: "the poetics of such a situation are yet to be found."[5] However, Fisher's embryonic readings of Olson are seldom addressed specifically. Although he was certainly familiar with the *Maximus Poems* by the time he came to write *Before Ideas, Ideas*[6] in 1971, Fisher's first encounters were with an entirely different set of texts:

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[1] Fisher, 'Allen Fisher Interview. The Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK: Edited Transcript', [Online].

[2] Whitehead. *The Concept of Nature*, 166. Also see the discussions in Section 1.3. of the Introduction.

[3] 'I & VIII' reads "I, not Maximus, but a citizen of Lambeth". See Fisher, *Place*, 11. In addition, a poem from 'Unpolished Mirrors' is written in homage to Olson. See Fisher, *Place*, pp. 397-398

[4] Fisher, 'Mathematics of Rimbaud', 1. Also see section 6.3. in the previous chapter, which includes the full quotation.

[5] Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 249

[6] The poem includes a brief reference to reading Olson's poems. See Fisher, A. *Before Ideas, Ideas*. Edible Magazine. London. 1971

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When Charles Olson came to London in 1967, I hadn't read *Maximus*. In fact, because of the age I was, you couldn't buy it then; previous generations could, because they had sources I did not know about, but it was a bit later when I got a hold of it [...] what I bought at the time was 'Proprioception' and [...] 'A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn.'[7]

To extrapolate, the expansive open field on the pages of *Place* is equally influenced by "Pound's *Cantos*, Williams' *Paterson*, Zukofsky's *A* [...] [Gary] Snyder, James Koller and Lew Welch"[8] as well as the *Maximus Poems*. In fact, the first significant influence Fisher derives from the poet of Gloucester is his work in 'Proprioception'. Specifically, Olson's "eccentric"[9] understanding of the term led Fisher to contemplate on ideas of perception:

'Proprioception' gives you a much deeper understanding of the body in its relationship to gravity, its relationship to light, its relationship to blood pressure, heart, all sorts of organs that you don't normally take on board as being about perception as such. But they are a part of your physicality, a part of who you are.[10]

Therefore, one of the concepts Fisher develops from 'Proprioception' involves an awareness of relational networks. On the one hand, this corresponds with conceptions of the body that, "by the movement of its own tissues"[11], provides data of its spatial positions and movements. However, Fisher's extrapolations from Olson's text also bear a slight resemblance to ideas in Birdwhistell's kinesics. As a part of his theory, Birdwhistell argues that the communicative aspects of "body motion behaviour"[12] are best examined through systems of body motion—which contain "diverse elements like muscle tension, tics, toe taps and kinemorphic constructions"[13]—as they are manifested in "a particular social situation."[14] Likewise, Fisher's allusion to 'gravity' and 'light' alongside the sensibilities within the body suggest that his attraction to 'proprioceptive' perceptions is inspired by these multiplicities. Specifically, Fisher's reading enables him to arrive at a concept of perception that is influenced by a range

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[7] *Interview with A. Fisher on 27.02.2009.*

[8] *Ibid*

[9] *Ibid*

[10] *Ibid*

[11] Olson, 'Proprioception' 162

[12] Birdwhistell, R.L. *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body-Motion Communication.* Allen Lane the Penguin Press. London. 1970, 173

[13] *Ibid*, 156

[14] *Ibid*, 173

of contributory factors, which are perceived within the body *and* in its surroundings—perhaps even in its relation to other bodies. As we have seen, such ideas emerge throughout the process of *Blood Bone Brain*, where the project's capacity to connect, conjugate and continue allows it to be transformed by the context in which it occurs.

A similar situation emerges during Mottram's *Pollock Record*. Of course, Mottram was also influenced by Olson's writings—although in this case, critics have noted, Mottram's reading inspired him to develop his allusive writing "towards open field presentation and collage."[15] However, Mottram's views also demonstrate a great degree of ambivalence. While his essay on Olson's reading at Beloit College in 1968 praises the manner in which the poet performs his material "away from linear discourse, and towards an effect of simultaneity,"[16] other articles—such as the aforementioned 'Open Field Poetry'[17]— seem to distance themselves from Olson. Although 'Projective Verse' is one of Mottram's examples, Olson's essay is not as crucial to the argument as one might expect. Instead, Mottram takes Williams' 1948 lecture, 'The Poem as a Field of Action,'[18] as his point of departure. Later, he pairs 'Projective Verse' with the writings of Fenollosa, Pater and McClure[19], and even describes Pound's *Cantos* as "a compendium of composition by field."[20] Furthermore, the original manuscript for the essay includes a brief note to Peter Hodgkiss—the editor of *Poetry Information*—where Mottram expresses his intention to broaden the concepts of 'field composition' beyond the writings of Olson.[21]

Thus, like Fisher's readings of 'Proprioception', Mottram's approach to Olson seems somewhat atypical. Specifically in terms of performance, he pairs Olson with Cobbing in their shared understanding of "poetry as a form of dance—an action of the body in space-time."[22] Elsewhere, he also argues that the 'field' ought to be "taken up in the hearer's sensibility as a whole."[23] Although both statements could possibly address certain ideas of embodiment within 'Projective Verse', the references to the

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[15] Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 196

[16] Mottram, E. 'Performance: Charles Olson's Rebirth Between Power and Love'. *Sixpack 6* (Winter 73/74), 95

[17] Also see section 5.2. in Chapter 5.

[18] See Williams, W.C. 'The Poem as a Field of Action'. [Online]. Available from: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essasy/237854?page=1 (last accessed: 04.07.2012)

[19] See Mottram, 'Open Field Poetry', 17

[20] Mottram, 'Open Field Poetry', 4

[21] See MOTTRAM 9/18/10-1

[22] Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p

[23] Mottram, E. 'Perfomance: Charles Olson's Rebirth Between Power and Love', 95

'action of the body' and the 'sensibilities as a whole' suggest that more is at stake than breath[24] or the performance of authorship. In this respect, perhaps Mottram's approach to composition by field can be examined alongside the concepts of readerly engagement that renders any reading of the poem, both public and private, to a performance.[25] At times, Mottram seems to identify the 'field' as a 'score'[26] for these events:

> [...] the poem is a set of dynamics in an open field [...] The voice composes the dynamics from the scores. The space of the page is given again as time and sound. The dynamics of control in measure, rhythmic space, and the interplay of molecular event and sentence event, create an individual rhetoric.[27]

While this might cohere with Olson's typewritten 'instructions' for the reader,[28] Mottram's interest in performance is not exactly committed to the "blinding fixity of a printed text."[29] Somewhat paradoxically, he also argues that the unexpected factors — such as the commentaries and discussions between readings — can become "a part of the poem."[30] In this respect, as "performances increase in number"[31], they can proliferate several variations of the text. That is to say, the dynamics of the performance can undermine the fixities of a 'score'. A performance of *Pollock Record*, as we have seen, not only permits these multiple variations, but actually depends upon them. The 'poem' on the sheets does not represent an "emplacement in a given dimension", as it can "become a multiplicity that varies according to the dimensions"[32] of each event. In this context, perhaps *Pollock Record*'s capacity to act as a 'container that does not contain too rigidly' negotiates between the striated ambivalences we encounter in Mottram's various statements.

By outlining these perspectives of Olson's influence on Fisher and Mottram, it is not my intention to affirm Wheeler's earlier estimations of the poet as the 'godfather' of innovative poetry performance. Rather, the performance methodologies that I examined via *Pollock Record* and *Blood Bone Brain* reflect upon a different

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[24] See section 2.1. in Chapter 2.

[25] See section 5.1. in Chapter 5.

[26] See section 2.1. in Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

[27] Mottram, 'Open Field Poetry', 15

[28] See Olson, *Collected Prose*, 245

[29] McCaffery, 170. Also see section 2.1. in Chapter 2.

[30] Mottram, 'Notes on Poetics', 38

[31] *Ibid*

[32] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9

aspect of my first case study. For instance, while writing 'Open Field Poetry', Mottram makes a peculiar assertion:

> Jackson Mac Low intends to create works in which the reader's mind provides meanings and connections at various levels of consciousness and intention, so that the field of poem and field of reader interact.[33]

Pairing Mac Low's procedural poetry with composition by field suggests a further degree of removal from Olson's poetics. As several critics have noted, a similar situation is present in Fisher's oeuvre. His "commitment to procedure and system"— as exhibited in *Creek in the ceiling beam* and elsewhere—pairs his expansive processual methodologies with the "chance procedures of"[34] Mac Low. In addition, as I argued in Chapter 5, Mottram's 'Declaring a Behaviour' presents the performance of a poem as a theatre of interchange, where "the poem takes place as an interface"[35] between various centres. The essay subsequently illustrates this argument with a reference to Cage's 'Composition as Process':

> [...] in all of space each thing and each human being is at the centre and furthermore each one being at the centre is the most honoured one of all [...] moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time and what the space.[36]

Mottram also discussed Cage during his talk at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975, where he suggested that *Blood Bone Brain* parodies the composer's work[37]. When I mentioned this interpretation to Fisher in 2010, he offered the following response:

> If it was a parody [...] I think [it was] likely to be reverential, to some extent—in awe of him, really. I just thought of him as a major artist, I still do [...] I don't remember or know when I first read *Silence* or his lectures, but [...] almost for certain, I would have learned from Cage's writing and some of the performances I saw him do with his music. In the Seventies, he was [in London] quite a bit. He was still in the situation where people would walk out en masse from being so disgusted and shocked by it all [...] He has always been a major influence on any performance I have helped build, or have instigated,

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[33] Mottram, 'Open Field Poetry', 14

[34] Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, 60. Also see Olsen, 51

[35] Mottram, 'Declaring a Behaviour', n.p

[36] Cage, 'Composition as Process', 46

[37] C40/32

or have built myself. I feel just thankful, really. I don't think I would call [*Blood Bone Brain*] a parody.[38]

In other words, the similarities that Mottram sees between Cage's work and *Blood Bone Brain* would be more appropriately characterised as conscious homages to the artist. The recorded interview that was played at the start of the 1974 performance in London affirms this: during the exchange, Fisher both compares his work to Cage,[39] and the tape concludes with quote from the composer.[40] Likewise, although *Pollock Record* was quite an anomalous project for Mottram, its aleatory techniques also exhibit some broader influences from Cage; these are also deployed in *The Precipice of Fishes*, a subsequent work developed by Mottram.[41] Thus, while Olson was an influence on both Fisher and Mottram, their performances would additionally incorporate concepts and techniques that 'A Toss' seemingly dismisses as tricks.[42]

The situation is quite clear. In their individual ways, *Pollock Record* and *Blood Bone Brain* both correspond with my earlier investigations of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', as the two performances also place components of Olsonian poetics in dialogue with the procedural techniques associated with Cage and others. In a certain sense, this demonstrates a continuation of the parallels I explored in Chapter 2. However, the situation in the latter case studies is not exactly identical to the performance at Black Mountain, where the correspondences between these respective approaches is only made visible through scrutinizing the convergences that neither Cage nor Olson explicitly declare. As we have seen, the performances of *Blood Bone Brain* intentionally intermingled concepts of process and procedure. For instance, this cooperative pairing is visible in the relationship between *Creek and ceiling beam* and the subsequent performances. On the one hand, the composition of the poem itself appeared to follow relatively deterministic procedures. On the other hand, as my earlier discussion of BLOOD VISUALS suggests, a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* is able to generate new ideas about *Creek and ceiling beam*'s materials—such as Camberwell church—by placing them in a different context. Moreover, because *Blood Bone Brain* as a whole anticipates that the plans of its earlier versions will be

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[38] *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010*

[39] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, e.5

[40] See Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, e.6

[41] See note 1052 at the start of Chapter 5.

[42] See section 2.2 in Chapter 2.

elaborated and extended, this method is practiced across the entire project. Fisher deliberately allows process to undermine and reinvent certain aspects of his preliminary procedures.

Thus, we have not come all this way to return. The work in *Blood Bone Brain*—and, to a degree, in *Pollock Record*—develops the convergences from Chapter 2 to a much fuller degree. As I argued earlier, Olson's 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language' sets out some rather paradoxical boundaries[43]. While he praised the 'theatre of theatre' for identifying that "the several elements of theatre are a *field*"[44] through which a performance might be achieved, he also criticised 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' for its seemingly absent "morality of motion"[45]. Furthermore, despite identifying the 'elements' of a performance as 'a field', he simultaneously subordinates many of these constituents by regarding them solely as 'intensifications' of language. Fisher, as *Blood Bone Brain* demonstrates, is not committed to these boundaries. The effects of his performance are achieved through the synchronicities between the media it deploys. The visuals, music and movements do not serve as intensifications of the words, but actually precipitate new perspectives about the verbal content. At the same time, *Blood Bone Brain* also provides a response to certain aspects of Cage's work. Although the composer insisted that an experimental action is "not concerned with its excuse" as it "needs none,"[46] the intersections within *Blood Bone Brain* frequently highlight the same socio-political realities that Fisher criticises in *Place*. Effectively, *Blood Bone Brain's* intermingling of procedure and process in poetry and performance challenges Cage's famous dictum of "I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry,"[47] as it develops a praxis of precise asseverations without explicit utterances.

So far, I have deliberately focused on the comparisons between my first case study and the final two. However, this is not to say that The First International Poetry Incarnation or Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival are excluded from my syntheses. They too share common traits with the rest of the performances studied in this thesis. For instance, in Chapter 3, I described how Ginsberg wished to conduct his

[43] See section 2.2. in Chapter 2

[44] Olson, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language', 53

[45] *Ibid*

[46] Cage, 'Composition as Process', 39

[47] Cage, 'Lecture on Nothing', 109

reading as a "great spiritual event,"[48] but his severe inebriation caused him to read so hysterically that it undermined his shamanic performance of authorship. I also argued that the poet's rendition of 'Who Be Kind To' traverses the Incarnation's incongruous aspirations, where ultimately, his performance enter into a dialogue with the manifold social situations of the event, as well as its multiplex of historical contexts. Towards the end of the Chapter 3, I briefly compared these myriad aspirations, communal convergences, and cultural discourses to the proceedings of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1'. However, the course of Ginsberg's performance can also be associated with the subsequent case studies. The Incarnation situated Ginsberg's poems in a different context, which yielded a new understanding of them. In this respect, we may place the performance in dialogue with *Blood Bone Brain*. Although Fisher incorporates similar transformations as a deliberate component of his schemata, their presence at the Albert Hall suggests that performances in general may provide a space where the text on the page is possible to comprehend differently in its relation to different audiences and events. Deeper still—as the discussions of *détournement* and Vaneigem's notes on urbanism suggest—the Incarnation and *Blood Bone Brain* may both be observed through broadly Situationist perspectives. In fact, the Situationist conception where each observer is an active participant[49] is a strong feature in 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', the Incarnation and *Blood Bone Brain*. Moreover, the same concept is also present in Riley and Mulford's decision to conduct a discussion with their audience.[50]

Indeed, Riley's reading is not exempt from these syntheses. In Chapter 4, I argued that her performance is perpetually characterised by degrees of ambivalence. It eschews the 'performance of authorship' valorised by critics such as Stern, yet its experimentations are enacted with a degree of restraint. There is less attention to the techniques of the spectacle, as Riley and Mulford seem more focused on exploring the social situation of the event.[51] The status of authorship is similarly challenged by the enactment of memory that occurs during *Pollock Record*, where the three participants

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[48] Ginsberg, in Miles, *In the Sixties*, 61

[49] "each individual subjectivity will either take place in a collective form or it will not take place at all […] My subjectivity feeds on events. The most varied events: a riot, a sexual fiasco, a meeting, a memory, a rotten tooth. The shock waves of reality in the making reverberate through the caverns of subjectivity. I am caught up in these oscillations whether I like it or not" See, Vaneigem, R. *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Trans. D. Nicholson-Smith). Left Bank Books and Rebel Press. London. 1983, 190

[50] See section 4.3 in Chapter 4

[51] See section 4.3 in Chapter 4

effectively lose each other in the performance's temporal and collective rhizome.[52] Perhaps surprisingly, Riley's reading also contains certain parallels with Fisher's project. In the previous chapter, I asserted that *Blood Bone Brain*'s multiple transformations are able to perform Fisher's 'factural' poetics. Likewise, Riley's reading is indicative of her poetics: the *dis*continuities within her performance resonate with the pronominal slippage in her poetry and the theoretical positions she outlines in *Am I that Name* and elsewhere. Furthermore, these strategies anticipate her later poems, where she continues to "perform her gender within ideologically produced sexualities."[53] Of course, the similarities between these case studies can be extended even further. Chapter 6 demonstrated that the transformations Fisher's enacts in *Blood Bone Brain* respond to the wider political discourses in his poetry, and a similar performance takes place during Riley's reading as well. The *dis*continuities of the event are deeply informed by Riley's feminist politics, and aspects of her performance—particularly its baffling opening statements—consciously undermine the preconceptions of a 'feminist' poetry reading. In fact, such patterns are not limited to these two chapters, as all the performances in this thesis assume a certain political stance. If 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' gave rise to a space where no body—not even that of the event itself—remains or is one, the performance asserts a certain counterforce against the cultural closures of McCarthyism. Ginsberg's performance of 'Who Be Kind To' not only criticises the war in Vietnam, but also identifies it as a characteristic of a wide-reaching cold war against humanity. In the aftermath of the 'poetry wars', *Pollock Record*'s refusal of documentation rejects the commodities of the culture industry. In this respect, each performance affirms the claim that Fisher articulates during the taped interview from *Blood Bone Brain*: "All art. Every act in life. Is a POLITICAL ACT."[54]

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[52] See section 5.3 in Chapter 5

[53] Davidson, I. *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*. Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstoke. 2007, 91

[54] Fisher, *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2: Actions*, e.6

7.2. 'The feed-back proves'?

Taking the long view 1: conclusions...

The syntheses I outlined above primarily conjoin these events through broad comparisons. Ultimately, it may be that my disparate case studies are impossible to compress into a homogenous whole. Indeed, as I indicated during the Introduction, this totalization was never identified as a desirable goal for this project. Instead, I began by presenting this thesis as a study that intended to make the 'invisible' visible. In particular, I argued that the nascent field of researching poetry and performance has often approached the topic from a restrictive perspective, or focused its attentions on the macroscopic phenomena of 'poetry readings' as a whole.[55] I also pointed out that a prevalent number of these studies base their analyses on contemporary performances that the authors themselves have attended. Therefore, I argued that the minor 'event histories' of individual readings and performances have hitherto been left more or less invisible, and that a fuller understanding of innovative poetry and performance demands that these occasions are appropriately pegged into history. I also set out to investigate each respective case study from an analytic frame of reference; through doing so, I hoped to offer new viewpoints on the different methods in which poets after 1950 have performed their work.

Thus, I began my discussions with alternative interpretations of two prominent performances— 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' at Black Mountain College in 1952 and The First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall in 1965. As I discussed in the previous section, the first case study focused on the tensions between Charles Olson and John Cage in the context of the seminal performance in which they both participated. The chapter began with a critical consideration of Olson's pervasive presence in the existing discourses on poetry and performance. Then, I outlined conflicting perspectives of the poet's views about Cage and 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1', after which I turned to consider the performance in parallel with certain concepts from 'Projective Verse' and other essays. In the end, this parallel analysis facilitated a dialogue between the poetics and the performance. The second chapter began with a brief discussion of the frequently valorised Six Gallery reading, which launched

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[55] See section 1.1. in Chapter 1, where I discuss these ideas with reference to Douglas Oliver's *Narrative and Poetry in Performance* and Peter Middleton's *Distant Reading*.

Ginsberg's career in 1955. Primarily, these observations focused on the venue's space through concepts of *détournement*. These proposals provided a point of departure for examining the Incarnation. I analysed the performance alongside other events that have conflicted with the cultural representations of The Royal Albert Hall during its history. The various aspirations of the evening were also linked to the comparative social implications between countercultural individualism and the political activism of the New Left, which I ultimately discussed through Ginsberg's performance. This chapter concluded with reflections on the Hall's role a social nexus where new friendships and allegiances were formed.

The remaining chapters focused on events from the 1970s. Noting upon the Incarnation's strangely homogenous list of performers, I approached Denise Riley's first public reading at the 1977 Cambridge Poetry Festival with a view towards the social situation of the event. Whereas the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation were only made visible by examining the event in parallel with a multiplex of historical contexts, the sociality of Riley's reading was enacted through the utterances themselves. Her demeanour performs the *dis*continuities of her poems. Through doing so—as my earlier syntheses indicate— the event challenged the apparent stratagems of feminist poetry, the conventions of a 'formal poetry reading' as well as the performance of authorship. The latter concept was also challenged—to a more radical degree—during Mottram's *Pollock Record*. This case study also evinced a further development for this thesis: while the first three chapters analysed the performance of poetry as a site of numerous interfaces, the examination of *Pollock Record* extended these considerations towards the manner in which the event itself might affect the performed poem. Due to the absence of documented performances, I approached *Pollock Record* from a speculative space, and eventually analysed its reliance on the transience of memory. Similar themes were also present in the final case study, where I focused on *Blood Bone Brain* and argued that the multifarious manifestations of the project effectively perform Fisher's poetics of facture.

Of course, as the previous chapters and syntheses demonstrate, these summaries are synoptic at best. Nevertheless, this sequential overview reveals some of the broader outcomes of this thesis. In terms of the individual 'event histories', each case study uncovered previously invisible events or perspectives. The investigations of 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' and the Incarnation both contested the previously

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established histories about these events. Despite its contradictory boundaries, 'Theatre Institute Lecture on Language' problematizes some of the accounts concerning 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' in Clark's biography of Olson or Harris' history of Black Mountain College. Likewise, the quarrels between Ginsberg and his audience at the Albert Hall call attention to the tumultuous aspects of the Incarnation, which are commonly absent from reports about the evening. In this respect, perhaps the analyses of Chapter 3 provide some insights to a more thorough and accurate appreciation of the event. The final three case studies addressed largely 'invisible' occasions. When I told Riley of the recordings I had studied at the British Library, she seemed surprised; she was entirely unaware that her reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival had been taped. Similarly, when I untied the string around *Pollock Record*'s folder at the archives in King's College, London, the stiff knot gave the impression that it was rarely opened. While components that pertain to *Blood Bone Brain* have received some attention in recent years,[56] academic appreciation of the project would benefit from a comprehensive survey of its complex genealogies. I hope that the histories within this thesis will eventually contribute to a more complete understanding of innovative poetry and performance.

In addition, I hope that some of my proposals will yield further perspectives for the existing research on this topic. In Chapter 1, I observed that previous publications on poetry and performance tend to conduct their enquiries with reference to sound, elocution or rhetoric—although their respective methodologies often vary. For instance, Oliver's quasi-scientific *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* compares recordings of poetic stresses in order to arrive at a 'best reading', whereas Middleton draws upon a range of perspectives, including sound symbolism and linguistics via Saussure and Derrida.[57] Yet, while Middleton astutely observes that both the poet "and the listening audience are performances" that generate "an intersubjective network", which eventually becomes "an intrinsic element of the meaning of the poem,"[58] his argument—as we have seen throughout this thesis—still places a considerable emphasis on the performance of authorship:

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[56] For instance, Will Montgomery's paper at the Legacies of Modernism conference at Paris in June 2011, addressed the Balsam Flex cassette with studio recordings from *Blood Bone Brain*. See Montgomery, W. 'Balsam Flex: Poetry and Cassette Culture' delivered at *Legacies of Modernism*. Université Paris-Diderot - Institut Charles V, Paris. 10.06.2011.

[57] See Middleton, *Distant Reading*, pp. 51-54

[58] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 93

> The poet who reads her or his own poetry aloud in public is performing authorship, a practice that fascinates poets and audiences because the author is the subjective crossroads for the enormously complex transactions of institutional legitimation in the contemporary world [...] Poets cannot claim that the authority, truth, and pertinence of their work is directly dependent upon [...] existing institutional networks, and instead they have to generate this platform from within the work and its distribution, adding any authority they can from their standing as a poet[59]

Middleton develops this issue of 'legitimation' even further:

> poetry readings become another means of negotiating authorization of the claim to a public voice and the right to state facts and make judgements. Asseveration is central to this. The poetic utterances carry an assertoric force that depends on the presence of a performative author[60]

Although the word 'performative' suggests that this presence is at least partially staged, Middleton insists that these events serve to dramatize authorship.[61] As my discussions in Chapter 4 indicate, the performance of authorship is also crucial to Stern's conception of the 'formal poetry reading'. In addition, they tacitly emerge in Wheeler's estimations of the voice as an invocation of the body,[62] as well as in shorter studies by critics such as Hall.[63] Likewise, Lopez alludes to events where a poet delivers "a definitive performance" of a "definitive [...] text,"[64] and if we accept Denise Levertov's claim that the personality of the poet is inherently imprinted on the poem,[65] the utterances in Oliver's study would also—to some extent—represent a performance of authorship.

Contrarily, although a selection of Mottram's articles on poetry and performance involve ideas that are comparable to Middleton's,[66] the case studies in this thesis consistently problematize this mode of performance: Olson's poems— which were possibly read by others[67]—were just one participant in the overall field of

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[59] *Ibid*, 36. The reference to 'institutional networks' derives from Middleton's earlier discussion of conference presentations and lectures. Like Stern (see section 4.3. in Chapter 4), he compares poetry readings to these academic modes of public speaking.

[60] *Ibid*, 46.

[61] See Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 46

[62] See Wheeler, 23

[63] See Hall, 77

[64] Lopez, 80

[65] See Levertov, 53

[66] See section 5.1 in Chapter 5

[67] See section 2.2 in Chapter 2

'Theatre Piece ♯ 1'; although Ginsberg's readings emanated from his charismatic presence, his performance at the Incarnation also asserts the presence of a multiplicity; Riley's *dis*continuities challenge the conventions where the poet is the hero of their own work; *Pollock Record* relinquished authoriality through collective remembering and collective forgetting; *Blood Bone Brain* reveals an aspiration to transform the author to an attendee. Each of these techniques would be difficult to portray as an assertoric force that performs authorship. Equally, it would be inaccurate to associate them with Bernstein's arguments, where the "aurality" of the performance "enacts the poem [and] not the poet."[68] Perhaps these occasions bear a closer resemblance to the themes that Middleton outlines in his discussions of 'collective events'. To some degree, the case studies in this thesis have addressed performances where

> [The] audience and poet collaborate in the performance of the poem. The audience is not simply a collection of autonomous individuals whose auditions of the poem are entirely independent. During the performance, the audience [...] creates an intersubjective network, which can then become an element of the poem itself.[69]

Despite these correlations, my analyses have differed from Middleton's propositions. For instance, *Distant Reading* portrays these performances as occasions where "the audience is created by the event,"[70] whereas the proceedings in 'Theatre Piece ♯ 1' or *Blood Bone Brain* were quite the opposite. Both allowed the audience to formulate multiple interpretations based on their individual perceptions,[71] which effectively led to a situation where the audience 'authors' the event.[72] Moreover, when Middleton observes that an intersubjective poetry reading is "only partially under the sway of the author", he argues that this may produce a "turbulent" and "unpredictable" occasion

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[68] Bernstein, 13. Also see section 1.1 in Chapter 1.

[69] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 93. Middleton uses 'intersubjectivity' in same sense as Habermas' theory of communicative action, which argues that "to the extent language becomes established as the principle of sociation, the conditions of socialization converge with the conditions of communicatively produced intersubjectivity". See Habermas, J. *Theory of Communicative Action Vol 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (trans. T. McCarthy). Polity Press. Oxford. 1987, 93. As the previous chapters demonstrate, my approach to the 'intersubjectivities' in performance is not exclusively based on linguistic communication.

[70] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 93

[71] See section 2.3 in Chapter 2, and sections 6.3 and 6.4 in Chapter 6

[72] In Peter Brook's *Empty Space*, it is not the performance per se that creates the theatrical event, but rather, the presence of an audience. As Brook writes: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged". See Brook, P. *The Empty Space*. Penguin. London. 1990, 11

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that is "capable of warping as well as amplifying"[73] the performed work. Here, the comparative pairing between 'warping' and 'amplifying' implies that this unpredictable turbulence is also an undesired phenomenon. On the contrary, certain performances actively aspire towards this uncertainty. As *Pollock Record* indicates, the poem's progression and conclusion is sometimes deliberately placed beyond the performers' control, and the audience may actually participate in the unpredictable formation of the text. In this respect, by eschewing the performance of authorship, many of the case studies in this thesis also blur the boundaries between poet and audience.

It would be shortsighted to present these differences as repudiations of the previous studies about poetry and performance. Rather, they simply demonstrate that disparities *do* exist. Many of the aforementioned critics base their analyses on events that would comfortably cohere with Stern's definition of a 'formal poetry reading', as they primarily discuss single-author readings at university campuses,[74] Elsewhere, when studies move beyond this academic setting, they frequently resort to discussions of poetry slams[75], where the performances can be "rather less interesting than the pop music" they attempt "to impersonate."[76] By contrast, in an effort to demonstrate the range and variety of innovative poetry and performance, this thesis examined more anomalous events. To phrase this more broadly, as poetic experimentation after 1950 increasingly yearned for an expansive open-endedness, performance offered another possible avenue that allowed the poem's multidimensional development to continue.[77] Perhaps this explains why Benamou, Kaye[78] and others observe that "performance" is a medium that has "changed the scene of"[79] all contemporary art. Furthermore, the open-endedness of these poems could also lead to performances that traversed a wide expanse of concepts and media.[80] As a result, the dimensions of these events—both in theory and in practice—are far more complex than the drama of speaking and listening. At times, it might seem as if these performances simply adapt techniques

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[73] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 101

[74] In addition to Stern, see, for example, Middleton, *Distant Reading*, pp. 94-100.

[75] For example, see Wheeler, pp. 127-163.

[76] Lopez, 74

[77] This is also acknowledged in Middleton's study. See Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 102

[78] Kaye argues that performance looks "towards postmodern contingencies and instabilities more than any other mode of work". See Kaye, 23. Also see section 1.3 in Chapter 1.

[79] Benamou, 3. Also see Section 2.1. in Chapter 2.

[80] Also see Middleton, *Distant Reading*, pp. xii-xiii

from performance art, but such integrations only emphasize the depth and breadth of this field. Consequently, efforts to uncover the entire silent "history of poetry readings"[81] will inevitably face an insurmountable task. These histories are so numerous and inconclusive that a comprehensive totality is impossible to attain. Like Pound towards the end of his *Cantos*, we "cannot make it cohere."[82] Therefore, this thesis ultimately celebrates the potential advantages that surface when studies of poetry and performance diversify from the history of the phenomenon itself to also include the minor histories of individual events and effects.

To this end, perhaps the reverberations of this project are also methodological. My approach to each case study was carefully modified according to the availability and accessibility of relevant documentation, as well as the formats in which these documents existed. I provided a brief overview of these variant sources during Chapter 1, where I also acknowledged that the studies of this thesis would necessarily be incomplete; indeed, I argued that a conclusive account of these occasions is unattainable. I also compared the examination of these 'non-graspable events' to contemporary modes of literary exegesis in order to demonstrate that both operate as sites of ongoing and unending enquiry, where the object of analysis is perpetually mediated by a series of absences.[83] Therefore, I proposed that while a performance's "only life is in the present,"[84] documentation can bring certain aspects of these ephemeral occasions to a more tangible field. Although these proposals still seem viable, my investigations have also refined some of their implications. For instance, in the case of *Pollock Record*, as the available documents preceded the actual event, they problematized the 'ontological'[85] views of performance documentation. Similarly, Fisher's concept of 'facture' implies that each new version—or format—of *Blood Bone Brain* continues the project's transformations. In this respect, although these documents do not encapsulate the event itself, they still instigate further stages in its reception.

The methodological themes of this thesis also present some further questions. In the context where scholars have published commendable studies of Charles

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[81] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 72

[82] Pound, E. *The Cantos*. Faber and Faber. London. 1987, 810

[83] See section 1.2 in Chapter 1.

[84] Phelan, 73

[85] See section 5.2 in Chapter 5

Dickens' public readings[86], and where an entire field of research is dedicated to debates about the performances of Shakespeare's plays[87]—not to mention other bygone events— the frequency in which scholarship on poetry and performance alludes to moments that "vanish as they occur"[88] is somewhat peculiar. As evanescent as these events were, they must surely feel more tangible than their Victorian or Elizabethan counterparts. Of course, *Pollock Record* exemplifies how certain performances incorporate this transience as a part of their design; the avant-garde has "always conceived of itself as a highly ephemeral phenomenon."[89] Nevertheless, although the examination of these quondam occasions is inevitably conditioned by uncertainty, is it constructive to expel them to silent anonymity? I began this thesis with allusions to Sinclair's 'invisible' histories and Sheppard's regrets about innovative poetry's failure to embrace its own past. At the time, I proposed that if these 'invisible' histories are currently being made more perceptible, perhaps they are slowly receiving the consideration they deserve. Yet, is the very idea of 'invisibility' a contributory factor to this lack of attention? Although Sinclair is correct to note that much of the poetry discussed in this thesis was first published in pamphlets and chapbooks that still go largely "unnoticed"[90] by the mainstream, could claims about poetry belonging "in exile"[91] possibly perpetuate a fetishisation of its clandestine state? Could more be done to deliver the 'event histories' of innovative poetry and performance to a less tenebrous space?

Since it was first launched in January 2005, University of Pennsylvania's Web-based archive, PennSound, has published thousands of digital recordings, which include entire readings and performances. As I noted in Chapter 2, one of the more recent additions to its database is Olson's notorious reading at Berkeley; likewise, a recorded a reading by Allen Fisher from 1989 includes three poems affiliated with *Blood Bone Brain*. In short, PennSound facilitates effortless access to an abundance of documents from numerous performances. However, despite the commendable

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[86] See, for example, Andrews, M. *Charles Dickens and his performing selves: Dickens and the public readings*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2006

[87] See, for example, Worthen, W.B. *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2003

[88] Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 65

[89] Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance*, 19

[90] Sinclair, 'Introduction', xiv

[91] Atkins & Sinclair, *Liquid City*, 38

efforts by projects such as the British Electronic Poetry Centre[92] or the Archive of the Now,[93] a comparable site is yet to be established on this side of the Atlantic. At the same time, the Eric Mottram Archives contain a considerable volume of tapes and cassettes, which include both public performances and private readings recorded at Mottram's house.[94] These various recordings date from the 1950s to the 1990s, and feature a cornucopian catalogue of poets from America, including Olson, Ginsberg, Williams, Duncan, O'Hara, Ed Dorn and Ted Berrigan. It also contains a wealth of material from British poets, which include readings and performances by Fisher, Griffiths, Cobbing, Paula Claire, John Wilkinson, Roy Fisher and several others. If these recordings were converted into digital files, it would provide a solid foundation for a Web-based archive that rivalled the scale of PennSound. Perhaps this service would eventually provide a substantial and wide-reaching infrastructure for more investigations of these fugitive histories. A tremendous field still awaits our attention.

7.3 A postscript for a 'golden age'

Taking the long view 2: … and ever further movements

To reiterate my comments from Chapter 1, the findings of this thesis address only a minute fraction of the histories I have tried to examine. Earlier, when I first outlined the itinerary of my chapters, I acknowledged the absence of certain poets whose performances were—regrettably—beyond the bounds of this study. In addition, the years after 1980 offer a range of episodes that demand our consideration. Sheppard's recent recollections of The New River Project[95] or talks at SubVoicive in 1984[96] provide some important documentation of these events, but more detailed histories are still needed. As several participants to these gatherings are still active as poets and critics, a retrospective anthology of personal accounts is surely a viable project. Ulli Freer's poetry—along with his ritualised performances—also deserves far greater

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[92] See http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~bepc/index.htm

[93] See http://www.archiveofthenow.com/

[94] See http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/iss/archives/collect/1mo70-14.html

[95] See Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, pp. 108-133

[96] See Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, pp. 101-107

attention than it has hitherto received.[97] But what will be the fate of the most recent histories? What is the current state of innovative poetry and its performances?

I would like to conclude with brief observations about events I have encountered in recent years. In 1979, Ken Edwards described the British Poetry Revival as a period of "growth and flowering" that "some bright critic" would someday declare "a kind of golden age."[98] Of course, while this thesis is not exclusively about poetry from the UK, the majority of its case studies are directly related to this period. Therefore, my primary interest with these concluding remarks is to observe how the histories of the Revival reverberate today. Curiously, poets from Edwards' generation have recently begun to associate equally valorizing descriptions to the present day. Writing in 2011, Andrew Duncan estimated that the work emerging from London was at "a historic peak right now"[99], and—when interviewed by Rupert Loydell in early 2012—Sheppard argued that the UK is currently "living through a golden age of avant-garde poetry."[100] Indeed, the frequency in which events are listed on Peter Philpott's 'Readings in London'[101] indicates that innovative British poetry is experiencing a considerably active period. At times, different readings and performances are scheduled for every night of the week. A few of the regular series were already active during the Revival. For instance, although Cobbing passed away in 2002, Writers Forum[102] still takes place today. In fact, London now hosts two workshops with synonymous monikers. In 2010, disagreements between Lawrence Upton—who chaired the events after Cobbing's death—and a number of the regular attendees culminated in an acrimonious separation, after which the defectors formed Writers Forum Workshop (New Series).[103] The antagonism between the groups is unresolved, but both appear to thrive individually. Upton hosts his meetings at the

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[97] See, for example, Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, 124

[98] Edwards, in Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 35

[99] Duncan, A. 'Irrepressible Creativity of the London Scene'. [Online] available from: http://angelexhaust.blogspot.co.uk/2011_03_01_archive.html (last accessed: 30.06.12)

[100] Loydell, R. & Sheppard, R. 'Even the Bad Times are Good'. [Online] available from: http://www.stridemagazine.co.uk/Stride%20mag%202012/Jan%202012/rupertandrobertint.htm (last accessed : 30.06.12)

[101] See http://www.modernpoetry.org.uk/readings.html

[102] These workshops were briefly mentioned during the course of this thesis. See section 3.3 in Chapter 3 and section 6.1 in Chapter 6.

[103] For a more detailed overview of these events, see Duncan, 'Irrepressible Creativity of the London Scene'

Betsey Trotwood pub in Clerkenwell, whereas the New Series has recently moved to The Fox in Shoreditch after spending a year and half at William IV in Islington.

Other rancorous sentiments harbour a longer history. In a recent interview, Jeff Hilson revealed that Bill Griffiths had refused to read at Hilson's Xing the Line-series, which was then held at the Poetry Café in Covent Garden. According to Hilson, Griffiths felt suspicious about the venue's connection to the Poetry Society,[104] as the bitter residues of the events in Earl's Court[105] had not subsided. Hilson's comments also suggest that the proprietors of the Poetry Café were not unequivocally accommodating. As he recalls:

> initially we [...] felt we were infiltrating this bastion of conservatism which had tried so hard to ignore the poets we were interested in. It didn't last. After a run-in with the bar staff, a sordid affair involving false accusations of after-hours trespass on adjacent properties and true accusations of excessive drinking, we were thrown out. It transpired that the Café bar staff wanted to use our spot for their own reading event, which about sums up the Poetry Society: mendacious all the way down.[106]

After the eviction, Xing the Line migrated to a variety of pubs around London: first to The Plough near the British Museum in Bloomsbury, then to the Horseshoe Inn and the Leather Exchange near London Bridge, which was followed by a brief residency in William IV before the series relocated to its current site at The Apple Tree in Clerkenwell[107]. In other words, the history Xing the Line almost resembles a minor re-enactment of the 'wars' between the Poetry Society and Mottram's fellow poets. Both situations involve a brief episode where a radical group of poets infiltrated a space that was associated with the literary establishment, before mutual hostilities banished the avant-garde back to a more rhizomic terrain.

However, it would be spurious to suggest that the current events are only centered on disagreements between various literary coteries. After the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party formed a coalition government in 2010, poetry readings and performances have often occurred alongside protests against the administration's austerity measures. These occasions have also prompted certain

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[104] See Hilson, J. 'Maintenant ♯ 92: Jeff Hilson: Interviewed by SJ Fowler'. [Online] Available from: http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/maintenant-92-jeff-hilson/ (last accessed: 30.06.12)

[105] See Chapter 5 for discussions of how the fallout with the Poetry Society motivates aspects of *Pollock Record*

[106] Hilson, 'Maintenant ♯ 92: Jeff Hilson: Interviewed by SJ Fowler''.

[107] Hilson, J. *Xing the Line* [Email]. Message to author. 09.07.12

poets to re-evaluate poetry's role within such contexts. As Jennifer Cooke notes, Sean Bonney's 'Letter on Poetics'[108] recounts a disappointing reading at a student occupation[109] in order to analyze poetry's ability to be "urgent, significant and relevant to groups of protesters and activists", who are more likely to view these performances as "entertaining"[110] sideshows. To a degree, similar concerns are also present in my earlier criticisms regarding the frictional aspirations of the Incarnation. However, recent incidents have also deployed the performance of poetry as their primary mode of protest. When David Willetts, the current Minister of State for Universities and Science, was due to speak at Cambridge University's Lady Mitchell Hall in November 2011, a group of students intervened by reading an epistle[111] from the auditorium until the Minister vacated the building. In the aftermath of this intervention, the Hall was occupied for a period of eight days, during which another notable event took place: J.H. Prynne, who is commonly thought to shun public performances,[112] launched his latest publication, *Kazoo Dreamboats*,[113] with a reading at the Hall.

Of course, my brief examples can only provide selective glimpses of the present milieu. However, accounts of these incidents often emerge without great delay. In his interview with Loydell, Sheppard observes that the difficulties with recording events during the early 1980s were compounded by the costs of the equipment and the lack of technical support. When tape recorders inevitably broke, "nobody could fix them."[114] The proliferation of portable and affordable recording devices has unquestionably remedied this situation. Today, a poet cannot "read in public [...] without being recorded."[115] This habit has been clearly visible at the events that I have attended in person. For instance, the collective behind Veer Books dutifully videotapes performances affiliated with the press, and subsequently releases

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[108] See Bonney, S. *Happiness: Poems after Rimbaud*. Unkant. London. 2011, pp. 63-65

[109] "It felt stupid to stand up, after someone had been doing a talk on what to do if you got nicked, or whatever, to stand up and read poetry. I can't kid myself otherwise". See Bonney, 63

[110] Cooke, J. 'Sean's Four Letter'd Words' in Bonney, S et al. *Four Letters. Four Comments*. Punch Press. Scarborough. 2011, n.p

[111] See Anon. '"Go Home David": an Epistle to David Willetts'. [Online] Available from: http://www.defendeducation.co.uk/go-home-david-an-epistle-to-david-willetts (Last accessed: 04.07.12)

[112] See, for example, Middleton, *Distant Reading*, 68

[113] See Prynne, J.H. *Kazoo Dreamboat: or, On What There Is*. Critical Documents. Cambridge. 2011

[114] Loydell, R. & Sheppard, R. 'Even the Bad Times are Good'

[115] *Ibid*

the material online.[116] Clips from Steven Fowler's Camarade project—which invites poets to perform collaborative readings—appear on YouTube quickly after each event.[117] Likewise, the website for Openned has amassed a considerable archive of audiovisual material.[118] Yet, while most events are recorded, the appropriate use of these files is not always clear. Some years ago, Philip Kuhn donated a digital recorder to Hilson on the understanding that he would use the device to record readings at Xing the Line and periodically send the SD cards to Kuhn in Devon. According to Hilson, although Kuhn intends to forward the recordings to the British Library, his primary objective is to store the documents in "his own personal archive."[119] Since late 2011, Hilson has begun to record readings at Xing the Line on video as well. This footage is intended for publication on YouTube—although at the time of writing, only two readings have been uploaded.[120] While the "cumbersome process"[121] of transferring the recordings is understandable, the predicament also exemplifies the precarious nature of these documents. Despite Hilson's commitment to "record as much as possible,"[122] the posterity of these files would seem more secure if they were catalogued with greater coordination. Earlier, I alluded to the possibility of digitizing the tapes from Mottram's archive in order to establish a Web-based repository that was comparable to PennSound. If such a site were available, it would furnish the current scene of British poetry with a communal database that could also archive the numerous performances that are currently recorded in pubs, lecture halls and galleries across the country. Of course, the Internet can be a precarious domain,[123] and the maintenance of this service might prove to be unfeasible. Nevertheless, perhaps the Web is the only viable medium[124] to accommodate these multiple documents and

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[116] See http://vimeo.com/user5147995/videos/sort:alphabetical/format:thumbnail

[117] See http://www.youtube.com/user/fowlerpoetry?feature=results_main

[118] See http://www.openned.com/video/

[119] Hilson, *Xing the Line* [Email]

[120] See http://www.youtube.com/user/xingtheline1

[121] Hilson, *Xing the Line* [Email]

[122] *Ibid*

[123] For instance, in the summer of 2012, the avant-garde magazine 3A:M briefly lost all their files when the site's server was unexpectedly switched off. See, for example Clark, N. 'Web hits delete on magazine's 12-year archive'. *The Independent* 6th July 2012. [Online] Available from: http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/web-hits-delete-on-magazines-12year-archive-7920565.html [last accessed: 08.07.2012]

[124] Also see Loydell, R. & Sheppard, R. 'Even the Bad Times are Good', where Sheppard intimates that he and Robert Hampson have come to the conclusion that a web based resource is ideal for capturing the multiple histories of the 1980s.

accounts. At the very least, if something akin to this archive existed, the current 'golden age' might seem a little less 'off-piste' in the future.

APPENDIX A

Interview with Allen Fisher 27.02.09, London
Interviewed by Juha Virtanen. Recorded in a café outside St. James's Church.

Because so many of the events and publications from the 1960s and 1970s presently exist in a fugitive state, I would like to begin with a few questions that try to map out this field. Your biographical notes often state you have been involved with poetry and performance since the early sixties. How did you first encounter these practices?

I'll be slow answering, but I'll get there. Initially, it wasn't very public. I would attend readings, but wouldn't let it be known that I was also somebody doing stuff. I attended readings, and music performances in central London. Places around Great Newport Street. There was a small place in Herne Hill that I would go to, for smaller poetry readings. Quite early on, I would attend concerts where jazz and poetry were being mixed. Ronnie Scott's club was cheap to get in on Sundays...

Do you mean events like Michael Horovitz's Live New Departures?

Yes. I went to those. Spike Milligan did stuff. It wasn't always very good, but it was socially quite interesting. I like jazz and some of the poetry was ok, so I enjoyed that mix. At school I'd read Kerouac, and knew that he was interested in poetry jazz. That kind of introduced me to the performance side of things: hearing poetry read, and hearing music with it. It was to do with the live ambiance, not just of the reading itself, but the social ambiance; meeting people, joining a kind of nexus of people. And of course they start publishing magazines and you take part in them.

By 1964, Better Books was getting really interesting in central London, just off Charing Cross Road—very very big Better Books at the time. Big basement with a lot of installation art, eventually, but a lot of performances; managed by Bob Cobbing and people like Jeff Nuttall, eventually managed by people like Lee Hardwood and Paul Selby and Bill Butler. Butler also ran Unicorn Bookshop in Brighton. We were learning a lot from the small presses in America. The dates are going to be haywire, but I'm thinking of magazines like *The World*, *C Press*—a whole range of magazines I'm going to forget. I always remember Ed Sanders' Fuck You Press, simply because it's so outlandish. It overlapped a lot with some of the performances and activities that were going on at the Better Books basement, which included film. Around that time the ICA, set up in Dover Street, which

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was quite low-key, insomuch as was institutionalised as it became, or as it is now. It's relying so much on government grants that it's a different kettle of fish, really. But it was very vibrant. For instance, I remember a notable exhibition called Between Poetry and Painting. It showed a relation between concrete poetry and visual poetry, and spoken poetry as well, and concrete poetry spoken. Of course Cobbing is involved, but then there is a huge nexus of Europeans and South Americans involved.

Eric Mottram also ran a series of poetry readings at the ICA, didn't he?

Yes, but by that time it had moved. I think that was in the early seventies. Towards the end of the sixties, I was involved in the small press scene: Association of Little Presses, exhibitions, performances, events, fairs, that sort of thing. I had started a magazine called *Edible,* and I had started making books that you could eat. I had poisonous editions that had paper inside them, so you couldn't quite eat them— they had supplements you had to take out. All of those are of course gone, except for one box with a rotten object in them; in fact, I photographed it and used it for *Blood Bone Brain.*

Just around 1970, there was a revival of Fluxus in Britain, mainly through David Mayor, who was a Cambridge graduate who went to Exeter to do a MA or a PhD on John Cage and Stockhausen. He pulled out. Together with Felipe Ehrenberg, Marta Ehrenberg and a few other people, he rented a farmhouse in Devon—a huge 15-bedroom house that was falling apart. The farm had moved to a decent bungalow on the corner of the estate. He would invite people down for performances, and there were three or four printing presses there; everything from a very cheap duplicator or mimeograph, through to a small letterpress, with some litho work and thermography as well. That opened it up to poetry and art, and music. There were dozens and dozens and dozens of people you would get to know from Japan, America and elsewhere. It was a very vibrant scene. It eventually became a kind of touring circus for Fluxshoe, which puns almost with Sanders' Fuck You Press. That got some support from the Arts Council in terms of the touring money, so that the institutes who were hosting the events would get enough money to put them on. A lot of performances, a lot exchanges. I started taking part on a conceptual art level: jars of objects, using the objects as memory pieces to make performances, using distorted and unusual reel to reel tapes. You could run them around the room around milk bottles and such. I was working on that right through the 1970s, and compiled it under the banner *Blood Bone Brain.* It had lots of smaller elements: some were performances, while others were publications, books and pamphlets, or ephemeral handouts.

At the same time, Better Books is still going on, until it ran out of money, and moved to the front of Charing Cross Road. The readings

became much tighter; less performances, more just poetry readings. Eventually, the poetry scene moved via something called Duck Soup to Indica, first of all, which was a gallery just down the road here. Barry Miles got money to set that up from different rock bands, and Yoko Ono exhibited there. He set up a bookshop alongside it, which was also financed by them, along with *International Times*. That was another poetry nexus, but it didn't have that many performances there, as far as I remember. I might have done one there, but maybe not. There were events at the Roundhouse, and there was the London Musicians Collective, and the London Film Co-op, which were in the same building, just by Camden. We would use it for poetry performances. All of this is going on at the same time, more or less, and the pubs were also socially linked to it. There'd be certain pubs or cafes where you could always find people. Better Books, for instance, was around a couple of pubs where you could turn up during the week and always find somebody of interest to talk to. That dissipated gradually in the seventies as people got jobs and did different things.

That's really the complexity of it, almost over-synoptic, but it's bound to be.

I can give you another level now, which is conceptual really. Conceptual art was very strong in London around 1966-7 and into the 1970s. It was a big influence on what I was doing, because I was also looking at some of the writers who were using arithmetic, maths and devices to make works, almost like renaissance machines but revived. This was not actually new in poetry, but it was newly conceptualized. There was a lot talk at the time of process, as a counterforce. You had procedural ideas with fixed procedures, deterministic models, indeterminate models, which in themselves were deterministic in a sense—John Cage and such like—and process became very important at the same time. So, there were systems and process counterbalancing each other or interfering with each other, and I used both. So I wrote a series of books called *Place*, which was about showing the process while demonstrating the work. Concept art was doing away with ideas of products and encouraging the ideas of the ephemeral and processual activities; poems that would change each time you read them. Of course, in retrospect, you could say that doesn't work, because people still ran around collecting all these ephemeral bits of paper and turning them to objects. That's not how it was thought of at the time.

Around that time, in the very early seventies, I got together with Dick Miller—and eventually with Jim Pennington, who was a friend of his. They had met at the London College of Printing. We set up something called Aloes Books. What still is important about it to me is that it brought together people you had heard of with people who were unknown. We printed some Jack Spicer, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Patti Smith, Kathy Acker and a whole range of others. The idea was that one would fund the other. It didn't really work like that, really, but that's how it was conceived.

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You mentioned the Fluxshoe tour, where parts of Blood Bone Brain *were performed. How did the tour evolve? Did it naturally emanate from the farmhouse in Devon, or was there a more prolonged period of planning involved?*

I don't know. I don't remember how I first met them. They had a printing press and I had a printing press, so there was a link there, probably. We were interested in similar work, so whenever they had events and I could make it, I would come. If I couldn't, I would send them stuff. David was also editing a magazine called *Shmuck*, and I would contribute to it: small things, big things. I also sent him a huge tea chest with a six-inch foam hose in it. The idea was that when you opened the box, it would burst out. At the time, I was working for a lead and solder manufacturer, and I would send David fluxes. But there were people in London I knew at the time: filmmakers and performers who would also take part, and other people whom I have forgotten now. As I remember, Fluxshoe didn't perform much in London...

I think it only came as near as Croydon or Guildford...

Yes. As far as I remember, much of it wasn't recorded at all. There was a Fluxshoe Catalogue, but it only had a few things in it. Then there was a Fluxshoe Addenda, which was a folder of loose leafs, and we usually very cavalier about products. Felipe was much more focused on them, as he interested in making a living selling objects. He and Marta separated eventually, and went their separate ways. I haven't seen Felipe since. Marta married someone in Holland and now lives partially in Holland and partially in Mexico City, so I sometimes see her en route. David moved into alternative medicine and became an acupuncturist.

You spoke about your work in conceptual art, which sometimes comes together with performance and your poetry in works such as Blood Bone Brain. *I read an essay by Eric Mottram where he argues that these practices are distinct enough to make singularisation inappropriate. Do you feel there is this boundary in your work?*

I wouldn't be rude about what Eric said, but I would say that it's too categorical. I would say they overlap.

That was my sense of it as well, particularly with something like Place *and* Blood Bone Brain.

Yes, very much so. In fact, *creek in the ceiling beam*, which was a part of *Blood Bone Brain* was a complex, cheeky and joking device to

make a poem based on a beam that was recorded in my bedroom. In the process of doing that I photographed a lot of cemeteries around London. I also got Jude Walker to photograph the jars, because they'd become too cumbersome to carry around. So the performance became these photographs and the words around them, which was sometimes poetry, and sometimes it was difficult to say what it was. The same is true for *Place*. If you read through some of the earlier books and look at the pages in isolation, it is difficult to say whether it is poetry or not. I don't care one way or the other—I'm not very worried about that.

Yes, there's an interview with Mottram where he speaks of your work as an invitation for the audience to participate in the recreation of language sound and syntax. That seems like more viable characterisation to me, but I want to touch upon that idea of 'audience'. If you designed performances that included audience participation, did you have any expectations for that audience?

I guess the truth of it is that there is an initial reliance on people you see quite a bit in readings and performances, and you can rely on them to take part. Then there is a second layer of people who you don't know, but who recognize what is going on and take part. Then there is another layer of people who you don't know at all, and who actually don't want to take part, and that is fine also. How you define it is quite hard, because they are not just poets. They are not just readers of poetry either. That I thought was an advantage, because the two could interact in different ways in different genres and modes.

We have spoken a lot about your conceptual background, which I think ties in with your philosophical or theoretical stance. In 'Mathematics of Rimbaud—if I may paraphrase—you seem to describe poetry as a mode that is simultaneously manifested in a stable consistency and in an ever-changing inconsistency, always yet to be found in the process of its making. Could you elaborate on this notion?

Just to make it huge generality, which you can apply to anything: in the first place, the context changes—quite regularly. We're having this conversation at this café at the moment, but if we did it tomorrow it would be a different conversation as it might be colder, it might be hotter, we might be doing it at a different café. So the nuance would be slightly different, but not by much, and that applies to everything. But if, however, in the process of making something—as a part of the idea of making it—you take that into an account, or encourage that interaction with the context, it's almost Situationist. It's as if you have a choice in a situation; you can choose to just observe, in which case your interaction with it is reactionary, or you can say that because you are there, you are also responsible, and you may as well contribute. That's a political and theoretical level. If you bring that down to the

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production of the poetry, you can say that the poem is always being made by your interface and interaction with other people around you. I find that I sometimes read something that on the page might seem to be the same thing, but read in three different audience situations, it would feel and be understood differently. Some might say that its contrary to academic practice, but I don't think it is. It's elaborated differently from conventional practice.

It reminds me about another thing. Where this interface didn't work, and where it came to blows really, was at the Poetry Society. A lot of us working with it there, and the interaction with the poets who were more conventionally minded found it inappropriate or aggressive, or rubbish—that it wasn't proper, and all the rest of it. That interaction made it quite important. It almost brought about a tightening of the need to be deliberately in the process of making, rather than in the process of having been made. The difference there is somebody who made a poem and brought it to show you, like making an object that they had polished and given to you, as opposed to somebody who said, "this is something in the process of making, what do you think". It would feel differently for that reason.

It can get exaggerated. There are elements of writing poetry that remain fixed to a certain extent. The words are the same words this week as they were last week, in a sense. In performance, I use improvisation: I change words, I'll use mistakes and elaborate on mistakes, rather than always correct them. That's just a very small instance of how that interactive action can occur. It's also quite obvious that in some spaces people can hear everything and elsewhere they can't. You get that with everything, really. If you are open to that fact, and encouraging others to be open to it, it can change what happens. I think it improves what happens.

That's really interesting, because I feel anxious about 'process' as a linear concept—a direct development from A to B, which implies a pre-determined or desired conclusion. But, during the interview that you played at the beginning of Blood Bone Brain, *you state that the project should remain viable and undefined, which suggests that its conclusion is indeterminate and unspecified. It's almost more like 'practice' instead of 'process'. How would you negotiate with such terminologies?*

I think the terminology now is fraught. By 'process', as I use it, and process showing, which is another term that crops up there, you show the process while you're doing something. It has a multiplicity that you are indicating is actually missing in some chemical sense of it perhaps. Like a chemical transition during an experiment would be linear, in the sense. It would start somewhere and end somewhere, and you could almost anticipate it. You'd want to anticipate it; otherwise you would worry about it. Of course, philosophically and in terms of physics,

that's not the case anyway. Linearity is actually a convenience and representation—a misrepresentation, in fact. Our existences are much more involved in non-linearity as much as linearity. I would always want to come back and say that 'process'—within one categorical understanding of it—could be fixed, and that is needed in order to make understanding comprehensible. It's needed to create an analysis. I think it is just as philosophically and politically appropriate to say that it's not as reliable and fixed as that. It's not necessarily repeatable.

To me, parts of that sounds almost Deleuzian...

I would say that they came after the event and they were able to collate this huge array of materials. I think they are very good on assemblage. Their last chapter in *A Thousand Plateaus* on concrete rules is really very good. I haven't fully engaged with some of *Anti-Oedipus*. It moved to an area I was less interested in. But I think their work around *A Thousand Plateaus*—the work around rhizomics and nomadics—really interested me. It still does.

But it wasn't a direct influence per se.

No. But I felt very warmly towards it as soon as I understood it. I think some of the work came from, I also came from; their range of reference include Kafka and Beckett and Francis Bacon and so on, all of which were early influences to me. They also looked upon the French philosophers that I had heard about from Mottram, Pierre Joris and other acquaintances: everything from Derrida and Barthes to more esoteric materials. I think I have always had a hankering for that philosophical and conceptual undercurrent. I've always got substance and energy from it. I still do.

Which, in some ways, brings me to the issue of sources. In the notes for creek in the ceiling *you provide a list of your 'bed time reading material', which include poets like Williams, Olson and so forth. What sort of work were you reading during the early seventies? A lot of critics seem keen to point out a certain Olsonian influence.*

When Charles Olson came to London in 1967, I hadn't read *Maximus*. In fact, because of the age I was, I couldn't buy it then; previous generations could, because they had sources I did not know about, but it was a bit later when I got a hold of it; maybe a year or two years later. What I bought at the time was 'Proprioception' and another pamphlet called 'A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn'. The expansiveness, the spread of texts, the use of fragments, the whole range of open field, is not simply Olson. It's Pound's *Cantos*, Williams' *Paterson*, Zukofsky's *A*, it's some of the work around Olson that isn't Olson, but arguably derives from him—Snyder, James Koller and Lew Welch, those people. You can almost find it in O'Hara's

'Second Avenue'. It's a much larger nexus than simply Olson. But, it's true to say that by the time I published *Before Ideas, Ideas*, I had read some of *Maximus*.

I met Eric Mottram after that book, because he wrote to me wanting to meet me because he had read the book. At that time, he was living in Kensington. He would have been my first encounter with somebody who knew anything about this stuff in a scholarly sense. Most of the people I met before that had known the work because they were practitioners. Eric really wasn't at the time. He was a teacher. He must've been at King's by this time. I learnt a lot from him in that regard, but I learnt in a kind of an after the event way. He was someone I could go and ask, "What's this about" and so forth. We would argue about it. There wouldn't necessarily be an agreement. He had a good library and was much more knowledgeable about some of the material—on Pound, for instance, which I had never been taught in any formal way. He was quite useful for it.

By the time the first book of *Place* comes out, I certainly had *Maximus* on board, which crops up in the poem. As do Williams and a few others. That continues, on and off. I still think of Olson as someone who understood 'process' in the way I was thinking of it.

I think that term is partly coming out of Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. At the same time it is coming out ideas that I was looking at in biology; things articulated by Waddington, Rene Thom, catastrophe theory and that side of things. Although it talked about a deterministic process—as you mentioned earlier, from one point to a known other—some of the knowledge of the journey is quite interesting. It's not as rigid or fixed as you first might expect. I got very interested in ideas of punctuated equilibrium, and I got interested in ideas that quantum physics elaborates on. You don't move from one place to another through a slow transition, but you jump and suddenly change. I'm interested in that sudden change idea. I would call all that a part of the process.

You mentioned meeting Mottram, which was something I planned to ask later on. You participated in each other's performance work—Mottram played piano in Blood Bone Brain *and you took part in Mottram's* Pollock Record, *which is another project I am researching. Do you remember much of this particular performance?*

I don't remember it much. I think it was at the Poetry Society [pauses].

Eric was picking up on ideas from the Bob Cobbing nexus, the textual nexus of this kind, but also because he was interested—like I was—in painting. *Pollock* would be, I suppose, a tribute and a kind of celebration of the painter. It's interesting to note that Bill, Eric and I

are all quite different people, very different in our approaches to work. Eric was far more self-conscious about his performances, far more self-critical. Bill was very assured as a performer, very accomplished and erudite. I think it was partially because he was very alliterative and lyrical and had a lot bases in early written forms—oral forms, essentially. Eric was accomplished on a scholarly level. He would know where things were coming from. But I also think that the scholarly level sometimes inhibited him somewhat. It made him self-conscious of what he was doing. For our performance—however one wants to categorize it—we were all quite nervous about it; nervous in the positive sense that creates a sense of energy, or an anticipation, of how things might go wrong, how you might trip up and how you might recover. As far as I remember the sheet, the lines overlap a bit and they are not unidirectional. You had to make decisions about where you're reading. Because of the lack of exact scoring—that you might expect to run in a certain sequence—it added an element of uncertainty and unknowingness. You didn't know what was happening next. You didn't know if Bill or Eric were going to the right-hand side whereas you had just come down. You would lose each other, actually. That loss was a benefit as much as anything else. It would create an energy and a dynamic. The work therefore is being made as it being read, you might say. If you perform it again, it is very unlikely it would happen the same way.

There's an interesting debate that goes on about that. I remember talking to John Seed, who was at one time very reticent about giving public performances, because he thought it over-stabilised the meaning within the poetry's line, because you put an emphasis here or there, rather than make it available as a multiple. He was against performance for that reason. There was a debate about that. Anthony Barnett, a musician as well as a poet, would argue that poetry is composed and music is improvised. I was in a group of poets that did not think that at all. It is as open as music is, or is not...

Surely reading it aloud gives you the same—if not more—variety, because you are free to alter the emphases during each event.

Yes. That was the debate, anyhow. Eric had taken advantage about the fact that we had this nexus of space, where lots of people could be expected to be reliably turning up. There was some empathy and sympathy from the audience, to an extent. They might have put up with all sorts of problems. That doesn't actually explain it, because the actual event, I haven't quite got in my head. I remember the text and reading it.

From Mottram's interview, I understand that the audience found the anticipation for the conclusion of the piece almost unbearably intense. Perhaps the uncertainty you mention was mutually experienced. In some ways, the performance seems to exemplify

poetry in the process of its making—almost in action. Was Mottram also experimenting with these concepts?

He was much more reserved about that, but he did try. He always maintained a modesty that was difficult to understand. He would say that he was still learning. His experimentation was kind of reserved, I would say. Nonetheless, he was trying things. He felt that there was a license to do so by the social nexus at the time. For a long time, we lived very close to each other. He was in Herne Hill, and I was in Brixton Hill. I would see him for music sessions at least once a week, and other sessions at other times. We would have quite a strong exchange.

Just a final thought on this event, although it relates to other topics: there seemed to be a lot collaborations taking place at the time—events that incorporated several different artists—which seems raise questions about, shall we say, conservative views of 'authorship'. Questions about how the performance environment affects the 'authorship', and where the poem is situated during the event. For example, would you say the poem emanated from the source material, from the vocalization, or in the audience hearing it?

Can I just reverse the question? The problem with the question is that it presupposes that there is an end result. I don't think that's true. We then have to question what is the result, and I think the result is different for different people at different times. I think there is a result already on the page. It's the written text you can take off your shelf. That's an end result, but it's not the only result. The performance could be a second result. You might also have a recording of that. The recording might not be very good because it was made some time ago, so that's another result, where you listen to it having been performed. There's a lot of debate in music—for instance—at the time. People like David Toop, for instance, didn't want to be recorded, because he felt like his improvisation was being fixed in an end result. Actually, that's a silly thing to worry about, because you can have ten different recordings and ten different results. I'll come back to authorship in a minute, but what I would say is that the 'product'—the outcome—is not singular. And it doesn't complete.

That leads to a problem about authorship. It relates to a—and I don't want to sound rude—conservative text by Roland Barthes, called 'Death of the Author', in which it's clear that there is no author because nobody's reading anything, and there is no point to talk about the author if it's not being read. Then it starts to shift, and there's a blur that's occurring between where the text is read, who its read by and so forth. Then you might say, conceptually and philosophically, if

that's the case then, why don't we actually plan for that; why don't we write so that there is an openness in the work which doesn't complete? That doesn't always happen. But if it's there as a potential, and in *Pollock Record* it really is because even on the page you do not know the actual order, then authorship is not necessarily singular. The idea of the author as an individual is being lost somewhere. You could say that it has a problem and a solution at the same time. The solution is that its making the text more democratic in a sense—it is open to more than the individual who made it. On another level, that might be thought of as a negative or a positive. If you require fixity in order to make a statement about that fixity, you've got a problem there. The debate is about intention, and how you articulate intention. Do I know my intentions in the sense of knowing anyway?

I think it's an interesting, complex question that reveals a lack of confidence in some peoples' reading processes. They need to somehow have that authority, whereas I really don't. I wouldn't give that license to just push it somewhere else and say it doesn't matter. That's not true either. It's not so amorphous or ephemeral or so inconsequential as to be meaningless and worthless. So what is worth it? It's a philosophical and social debate about how the engagement is taking place. The answer is quite difficult. But it's a good difficulty.

Absolutely. Could we talk a little more about Blood Bone Brain? *It was performed— or one of its performances was—at the National Poetry Centre. Do you have any recollections of the event? How did people react to it?*

I don't know. A part of the answer is that some of the audience are people who are doing things themselves, so they are a part of network of understanding and sympathies. Not expectations in the sense that they know what they will get, but that they know they will get something. Some of those people are performers themselves, and others aren't. Those that are have a different level of sympathy and maybe a set of demands over things that are working and not working.

The performances were ephemeral in the sense that they are difficult to gather, and difficult to record, because they take place at different locations in the room. The duration is quite long, so there are moments where you are attentive and others where you are inattentive. They were environmental, and because you're walking through the space, you would experience emphases differently. If you were close to the piano, for example, you would have a different experience of the event. Because I was involved in the event as a performer as well as instigator, it was difficult to know how the audience was responding at the time. There was positive response after it. I didn't get negative responses. That isn't a very full answer, but I don't have a full recollection of the audience.

You mentioned the performance being environmental, which brings up notions of space and place. Of course, both feature heavily across your work. How are they present in Blood Bone Brain?

> First of all, it's almost as if it were a map. I'm not sure if diagram is the right word, but it's a way of documenting and a documentation of history, both in the small sense of what happened yesterday, and in the large sense of where we are. In that sense it's like a palimpsest. The expectation of one being on top of another isn't necessarily an expectation of being older than the other. It's quite a fluid map, in a sense. *Blood Bone Brain* is more fluid as a map than *Place*, which still ends up a set of books. *Blood Bone Brain* doesn't have that so much.

It also feels as if during the performance of Blood Bone Brain, *with its changing slides and movements within the audience, the space itself was mutating. Your 'Thumbnail Lecture' notes that the project began from an interpretation of the Egyptian hieroglyphs for wholeness. Do you mind elaborating on this source of inspiration?*

> It's a device in some ways. I'm interested in energy and structure and thinking, and it seemed to me to embody those things, and it made it easier for me to remember them. I associated 'blood' with the energy side of it, and 'bone' was to do with structure, and 'brain' which helped me understand frames of structures. It was very metonymic and allegorical. It was never taken in a mystical, serious sense. I didn't study Egyptian religion or anything like that. It was a convenience, really—a device that allowed me to understand different aspects of my work.

But it seems to me there is also a spatial element to them. It's almost as if you are taking the body and making it to a place.

> That's very interesting, because I got very interested in human physiology half way through the 1970s when my wife got kidney problems. They both packed up, and so she was on a machine, which I had to connect her to. Her blood would leave the body and come back in, as if were a fake kidney that cleaned the blood. I almost think that *Blood Bone Brain* got re-articulated in the mid seventies because of that. I did an Open University degree, and used a lot of the human physiology from there.
>
> But it's very interesting. The body is a place. I almost must have said that somewhere. And I don't think I would be the first either. I also think that Williams, as a doctor, may have thought something similar. It's also like Olson's 'Proprioception'. Proprioception, as he

understands it, is so interesting. I've used it a lot. 'Proprioception' gives you a much deeper understanding of the body in its relationship to gravity, its relationship to light, its relationship blood pressure, heart, all sorts of organs that you don't normally take on board as being about perception as such. But they are a part of your physicality, a part of who you are. It is one of my favourite Olson books—probably partly because you can't quite understand it. It's always a challenge to look at it, and I like that.

That might be another answer to the earlier discussion about authorship and fixity. How is it that I was that I enjoyed reading people like Olson, or like Pound, and not understanding what I was reading? How is it that I went back to that stuff, and still do? You don't actually conclude. If you did, you wouldn't need to go back.

One final question: during the introductory notes to the microfiches for Blood Bone Brain, *you describe the work as both a document and performance. But, during the taped interview for the performance in 1974, you say it would be a note of decadence to call it poetry. But if the idea of poems has gradually lost credibility, how far does an event like* Blood Bone Brain *actually permeate into poetry? What is the relationship between the two?*

It is quite often useful to say that 'this is a piece of music', or 'this is a piece of visual art', or 'this is poetry'. I also think that it's not necessarily always useful. So what is the benefit to getting the answer to the question then let's work with that. The benefit might be: "I'm just hearing this piece of music, and it reminds me that last time I heard it, it worked better when it was played in a certain way, but now I prefer this way". If we expand that, it doesn't mean we worry about whether or not it's music. When you worry about whether it is music is because you're comparing it to other music. It's an Aristotelian problem, really. So when we come back to *Blood Bone Brain*, in order to call it poetry, we must consider the context. What poetry? Is it the same as *Paradise Lost*? Well, not really. Is a bit more like Cage's lectures? Is it in a nexus of Olson's *Maximus*? Some of it is, I guess. So my answer is loose really. I'm not evading the question. I want to know what the answer is needed for, and then we can work backwards. If we need this to be poetry, we can talk about ways in which aspects of *Blood Bone Brain* are poetry, in the way they deal with space and existence, or how they question and analyse everyday life. In other ways, they're not like poetry at all; they're more like everyday life. That's not derogatory, necessarily, as it's open to that. So, I'm not anxious about it. The anxiety is likely to come from somebody says that they can't give it an appropriate critical value or an I.A Richards analysis.

Categories are like that. If they are to become something to use, in a broader sense, you have to decide first what you need. The answer to the question is: it varies.

APPENDIX B

Interview with Denise Riley 16.08.10, London
Interviewed by Juha Virtanen. Recorded at the poet's home.

I would like to begin with a little bit of context. The year of the Cambridge Poetry Festival (1977) coincides with the publication of your first collection, Marxism for Infants. *But, you had been writing poetry since the 1960s…*

> I had been writing poetry since I was quite young—probably since primary school. But I had been doing it quietly and discreetly and unobtrusively without any expectation that it would see the light. Really, without wanting it to see the light.

But the publication of Marxism for Infants *took place after you returned to Cambridge. You had lived there once before, right?*

> That's right. I did Philosophy and Fine Art there, between '68 and 1970, when I graduated. I had done a year before that in English Literature at Oxford.

Great. I am asking about these biographical details because I am trying to get a sense of how 'new' you were when you performed at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in '77.

> I was completely new. I can't emphasise strongly enough my horror at having to do any reading. That Cambridge Poetry Festival reading that you are talking about was the first poetry reading I had ever done in all my born days. If you really want to know [Laughs]—I don't know if this is the sort of detail that you like—but I was so sick with fear and horror and loathing of having to stand up and make a spectacle of myself. It went totally against all my natural inclinations. For at least three weeks ahead of it, I didn't sleep and I got through the event propped up with Valium and a couple of shots of brandy. People will often say to me about readings that I don't appear to be nervous. Actually, I am sick with fright. One of the few good things about getting older and older is that you can disguise it better and better.

How strange. That doesn't come across on the tape, at all…

> I didn't even know there was a tape.

I think they must have recorded most of the readings, and eventually donated them to the British Library. There are quite a few recordings available at the Sound Archive there.

Oh, I see.

How did you end up taking part in the reading, given that you were so horrified?

The answer to that is very easy to tell you, really. Somewhere—not only through the poetry network, but also the informal Women's Liberation Network in Cambridge—I met Wendy Mulford. At that time, Wendy was living with John James, another poet whose work I like very much. John and Wendy's home sort of functioned as this informal meeting place for a few people. Somebody else had told Wendy that I was somebody who had done some writing. The person who told her might have been one of the Cambridge poets of my own immediate age. Wendy is perhaps seven or eight years older than I am, I'm not sure. All these distances that were significant in your twenties vanish absolutely later on [Laughs]. Wendy—who is very vivacious, very animated and very warm person—more or less prised the manuscript from me. I think this may even be a ghost memory, a fictional memory, so don't rely on it, but I do have a memory of a handover scene in which papers were more or less tugged out of my grip. It may not be true, but the psychic truth, or emotional truth of it is that *that* is how it *felt*. Then—very rabidly—Wendy, who was then running Street Editions, decided she wanted to make a pamphlet out of it, very much to my surprise.

In the small press world, as I am sure you know, because the channels of disseminating the written work were so slight, so fragile, so vulnerable, so restricted to a small group of people—I don't think by anyone's will, but simply because the number of readers was very small and it relied on the accidents of personal acquaintances in a small town in a rather parish pump-like manner, where the risk of parochialism in a pejorative sense were also very strong. Of course that meant that poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package. I quickly found out that, as a newly 'forced into print' writer, you did not have the liberty of appearing to be precious and saying 'no no I can't possibly do it'—although of course I had several goes at saying 'no no I can't possibly do it' [Laughs]. But you realise that by sticking to that line, you would be letting down a row of people who had put time and effort into producing your work and hoped to get a few copies around. So that is really why I had to go against my own grain, sick with nerves [Laughs].

There must have been several poets within the audience, too. I have recognised some speakers on the tapes, but quite a few remain anonymous. Do you recall who was present at the reading?

I can tell you who I think might have been present, although I'm no longer sure if they were there. I'd imagine John James. Andrew Crozier would probably have been there. Possibly Nick Totten, possibly Ian Patterson. I would have been about 27 or 28, and I was of course painfully aware that there were several much older and infinitely more distinguished poets swashing around in the background, but I'm sure they had better things to do than sit in the audience for pale and shaking twentysomethings. I would not have invited friends I knew who were not involved in poetry already. In fact, I wouldn't have invited anyone. So, the audience was there possibly because they had read the programme and decided, for their own reasons, to be there. They would not have heard it from me. I remember those early poetry festivals as being quite animated. I remember Robert Duncan being around at one of them. It was, in those days, quite a good tempered and quite an international event.

I remember reading the programmes for those festivals, and I agree; they feature an intriguing variety of names. One final question about these minute details: at one point during the discussion that followed the reading, you address one audience member as 'Mike'. Do you remember who that was?

It might well have been Mike Haslam, who I knew at the time. By then, he would have left Cambridge and been living in Yorkshire.

I would now like to turn to the reading itself. It was very much structured as a joint performance by Wendy and yourself. One of the things that really struck me while listening to the tapes is the opening: you both utter the phrase "am I going to make feminist scrambled eggs", more or less in unison. What were the origins of this line?

[Laughs] That was a joke between us, and that had arisen from a remark by the writer Fielding Dawson. He was around at the festival, and had been having a drink at a bar somewhere. Wendy I had met him and he had said something about—it was something perfectly amiable and mindly about feminism and somehow that developed into a joke that we took from his remarks. Of course, it was mild irony of the kind I would very much approve of about how far and how thoroughly one could extend the domain of feminism. So the joke came from that little old accident of a conversation with Fielding Dawson maybe the night before we did the reading. It seemed somehow apropos. It is absolutely nothing to do with anything in the poetry that was being read.

Why did you choose to open with the phrase? Was it to play on the joke?

> It was a continuation of the joke, and the joke had something to do
> with the audience's expectations of what a reading by feminist poets
> might be. It was sort of cheerfully ironic address to possible
> expectations, where recognition might lie or a stance of pre-
> recognition might miss.

It's the kind of opening that makes it very surprising to hear you were anxious about
the event. It comes across as a very confident stance, and this impression is affirmed
by the short speech you deliver after this joint utterance. You criticise the 'grandiose',
'sanctimonious', and—I think 'self-indulgent'—qualities of 'self-congratulatory'
feminist poetry...

> Oh God, how awful of me! I hope I didn't. I've always rather defended
> the notion of self-indulgence, it seems to me a good thing. Oh dear!
> That sounds deeply embarrassing. How can I get that tape and burn it.
> Did it sound awful?

No, no. I found it very interesting...

> I'm sure I was being rude and stupid and that would have been the
> expression of my terror coming out. But, the polemic—as I am sure
> you will know—is partly in my prose writing at the time, and it's
> mostly in a book called *Am I that Name*. It's really to do with the
> extent that feminist politics on the ground can be helped or hindered by
> a wholehearted embrace of a certain form of saturation in femininities.
> Of course, there was a version of that embodied in *Marxism for
> Infants*. Not too many, I hope, because self-consciously polemical
> poems can be pretty limp.
>
> In the mid seventies, a lot of the newly appearing feminist poetry was
> very wholehearted celebration of the essence of womanhood, as it
> were. I won't try to characterise it, but it seemed as if there was a new
> orthodoxy of what feminist poetry should be. That is: it had to be
> highly accessible, which is excellent. But this notion of accessibility
> was a limited notion, because it relied on the duplication and imitation
> of certain rather anti-modernist kinds of writing, or writing which
> hadn't taken into account a great of contemporary poetry and European
> poetry. In its way, it might've been a bit parochial at the time. That
> was partly what the polemic was about.

During the reading itself, it almost feels as if your voice changes throughout. You
begin together with Wendy, which is quickly followed by the polemic, and then

interject by saying 'that stirred everyone up a bit. There's playfulness in this introduction. When you start reading, particularly during the first half, you go through the poems very quickly. These changes generate a degree of ambivalence within the event. Was this a conscious approach?

Not knowingly, at the time. There were various reasons for it. One was my feeling—which wasn't unique to me at the time—that chitchat, or anecdotes, or biographical details and stories between poems only serve to make it difficult to whoever's listening to you to listen to the poem. Instead, they'll be thinking about your childhood and ways, and the sad death of your favourite spaniel when you were ten, or the boy who pulled your pigtails when you were at school, or whatever it was. I know that style of performance was and is dear to quite a lot of readers. What it does is, knowingly or unknowingly, it draws—or tries to draw out the sympathy of the audience to the persona of the poet. Of course, as a highly anxious reader, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to notice me. I would even say that in time, as I went on having to do these readings over the years, I worked out a technique for myself—it happened intuitively and on the hoof, as it were—of reading quite loudly and quite calmly, without any intervening talk. The way that I described what I was doing to myself was that I was putting up a barrage of words behind which I, the biographical person, could be quite invisible. It was a sort of an illusion of invisibility. Of course, I didn't believe I was literally invisible, but I hoped that I would make a distancing effect by generating a loud and clear style of speaking.

On tape, you mention something quite similar. During the post-reading discussion, you suggest that the conventions of the performance set up the poet on stage as the 'hero of their own text'. Could you just elaborate on this notion a little? What kind of a performance makes the poet 'a hero' in this sense?

I would my remarks with a pinch of salt. Again, the emotion behind that was the emotion of self-annihilation. The intellectual justification for it, which I suppose holds good, is that if a poetry reading is done with a great deal of biographical filling—you know how some readers can make a great soap opera not only of details of their lives, but simply by rifling through their bits of paper, dropping their book, saying to themselves 'now what should I read next'. The audience will laugh sympathetically and the poet would feel encouraged. I think what I meant by that is that it brings the figure of the performing poet into such a prominence that the words themselves become incidental, and it is the charm of the person which is being relied on to reach and communicate with the audience. I am very aware that there are many modes of performance. Performance poets do that to it to a great effect, but it is a very different genre and different texts need that. The kind of

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writing that I was doing, or that I like myself, was occupied with a different enterprise and a different set of objects.

What I like for myself, what I still like about poetry, is that there is a kind of democracy about it: it is cheap to produce, it is cheap to circulate, you can write it—as I often did in fact—on the back of an envelope on the top of a bus on an old post-it note. You don't need a big apparatus to do it. Part of that ease of cheap, democratic assimilation is that you did not necessarily have to have the temperament that enjoyed swirling like a glorious magnificent cloud out of the text to shed its own bluster around the room.

But how about poets like Allen Ginsberg, whose poems and performances are often strongly imprinted with his physical presence?

I loved a lot of Allen Ginsberg's work. In fact, the first time I ever went to America in 1983 was with a small group of poets, and we were indeed put up at Allen and Peter Orlovsky's flat on our first night over. So I did come across him then. Of course, he was very kind and calm and sober and besuited and bespectacled lawyer by 1983. I would say that the power that is fabulous in recordings, is also fabulous on the page. I'm very glad those recordings are there…

Absolutely, but is he a 'hero' of his own text, in the sense you mentioned earlier?

I don't think I was even thinking of any particular performers at all. Some writing, like Allen's—or even Frank O'Hara's—is such fabulous conversational work. Its conversational nature would demand that it be spoken with a certain warmth of leaning into the audience. Surprisingly, I have one or two lightly conversational poems of my own that are almost written cautiously and experimentally by me to see if I could run with that, almost as an exercise. [Laughs] There are blessedly few of those ones.

No, I'm thinking more of—again, I can't think of names—but there is what I rather reductively call an English style of nostalgic, mildly confessional writing. In performance, you would often find the poet would be reliant on creating a confessional intimacy, which infuses the modest and domestic subject matter of the poems with the pathos of the person telling you his story. I think it's that mode, if it was to be seen as the 'correct' mode of performing.

The general topic of the post-reading discussion seems to be the role or purpose of poetry readings. Unfortunately, the tape at the British Library does not capture the beginning of the discussion, so I'm unsure of how you and Wendy introduced the conversation to the audience. Why did you instigate this particular debate?

Because—again, I can't remember precisely—but clearly it was in the air. It was in the Cambridge air, and no doubt in other airs across the country. But I can't remember the particulars.

On the recording, Wendy mentions that, as women, you have found a big barrier in actually 'doing' the performance. I know that, at the time, the circuit for these events could be quite masculine, or male-oriented. What was your experience of this?

It's certainly true that the overwhelming majority of performers were men, as was the overwhelming majority of the audience. The consequences of that are quite hard to explain. It would be misleading to say that it was a simple experience of exclusion or some form of deliberate sexual apartheid. It was interesting, because it was certainly something that one thought about a lot, at the time. I know that certain performers of feminist work would and did feel that the way forward was to make anthologies of women's poetry and make anthologies of feminist poetry. Have you been able to look at some?

Do you mean anthologies like Lillian Mohin's One Foot on the Mountain?

Yes, exactly. You will have seen that certainly neither Wendy or I—and Wendy was quite rightly more established as a writer I was—were contributors to those, because our work was seen as difficult, or inaccessible, and therefore not really feminist. So, from the point of view of writing collectives of women, who were aiming to produce—quite rightly—a platform in which more women's writing could be performed and disseminated, our work was just off the map. So that was the trouble from that side.

Of course, there was a great deal of casual, cultural misogyny in the poetry circuit in Cambridge, London, and everywhere. It didn't take the form—at least not to my awareness—of discouraging my work, or as far as I knew, Wendy's work. I suppose partly because that loose collective of writers had the same interests in transatlantic literature; a common background of interest in many poets living and dead, acknowledged and less acknowledged. It would have done terrible violence to that commonality of reading interests if there'd be any attempt to specifically say, "well we don't want to hear what this young woman has to say because she is a young woman". It wasn't crude in that way.

But, it was a very pub based culture. There was a strong element of younger and middle aged men's club, although not in a way that understood itself as hostile. It was only when I overheard fellow poets—whom I will not name—talking about women and saying 'is she fuckable or not' or 'look at the big tits on that one' that I thought

'oh come on guys, give us a break'. There was also, I think, on the part of several male writers in that group an interest—even if slightly nervous, or hesitant, or sometimes hostile interest—in feminism.

This happened in print as well. I remember reading that during Mottram's editorship of Poetry Review, *the percentage of women featured in the magazine was relatively miniscule. Most of the female contributors were from America, I believe. Of course, a similar observation has been made about* Children of Albion.

I think one moment during the discussion in Cambridge also touches on this. Someone from the audience expresses confusion over whether you and Wendy are discussing issues in feminism or problems with poetry readings. As a response, you say the discussion is about the way 'the one produces the other'. Was this in reference to the difficulties you described just now?

What would have I meant by 'the one produces the other'? [pauses]

There's an essay I am really fond of by von Kleist, which is called 'On the Production of Thought while Speaking'. I certainly hadn't read that at the time, but what Kleist said in that very good essay, which I try and get all my students to read, is that having to stand up on your feet and be forced into speech by the dynamics of the occasion will generate an effect, which match your own astonishments. Your thought is formed not a priori in your mind, but on ellipsis, as it were. It's a form of Tristan Tzara's 'thought is made in the mouth'. I believe profoundly in both of those notions as phenomena, which can hit you while you are reading poetry and while you are in that exposed state that—in my case—you dread. But then, once you are there and there is no possibility of taking flight, a certain inventiveness—which you cannot take credit for, because it is not the inventiveness of thought, but of the occasion of utterance—takes over and that might suddenly produce a kind of aphoristic a remark, like the one you've just quoted, which wouldn't have been the result of a premeditated thought. But when I hear you say it now, 40 years later, I think 'yes, that's probably right'. The two were bound up with each other, and mutually generative. I'm not sure if I can answer it any other way.

Let's return to the idea of the author as a 'hero' of their own text. I was very interested to hear you and Wendy read other authors as well. For instance, during the second half, you read a poem by H.D. What was the motivation for reading works by other poets?

Those writers would have been interesting modernist or para-modernist women writers. That would have been one motivation. The larger motivation was the idea that instead of simply cornering the aerospace for your own poems, you would just be to take some time to introduce something that the audience might enjoy, something they might recognise, which would give their strained ears a break. Or, if they didn't recognise it and they liked it, they could go away and look up the author. Maybe find something that would bring them some pleasure.

I think you and Wendy both even mention the bibliographical information for the poems you read, as if to disseminate that information further. How well known was H.D at the time? On the recording, you say she isn't anthologised enough.

It's a very good question. H.D. was certainly known and read by anyone who had an interest in the less familiar shores of early 20th century writing. Pound, of course, was infinitely better known. There was a 1917 collection called *The Sea Garden,* where I had found some bits that I loved, but I could only get that out of the library. It was before the revival of interest in H.D, and that did indeed come about through the general surging interest in poetry written by women in the very late seventies and early eighties. So H.D. did press the wave of that.

One thing that struck me as interesting about this decision was that it seemed to pose questions regarding authorial ownership. For instance, Peter Middleton's recent book the subject talks about a 'spectre' haunting poetry, as if Barthes dead author had risen to claim their presence again. Your reading seems to do something different. In fact, you conclude by reading one of Wendy's poems. Yet, before the audience leaves, someone comments that they would have liked to hear the poem in Wendy's voice, because it is written to 'her measure'. How representative was that response?

I don't how representative that voice would have been. But there was, at the time, a strong adherence to the notion of the author's voice as very intimately bound up with the comprehension of the text. That was something that, from many points view, seemed to me at least questionable. One of the other reasons I don't like doing readings is that moment at the end of a reading when somebody appears from the audience and says, 'I'm so pleased to hear you read, because I could never understand any of your work before, and now that I finally heard you read it, I think I can begin to get what it was about'. All I can say is 'thank you very much', but I am probably thinking 'I've completely failed'. I desperately want the work to be intelligible without me.

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Finally, during the discussion, Wendy mentions, and I quote, "what particularly strikes me, as a feminist, who—politically—is accustomed to doing things in collective ways, is that there is no practical, possible network for the making of poetry". Obviously, she must be talking about the actual production of the poem itself. How far do you think a performance serves as a form of this collectivity?

I think there are two answers. One is that I think the performance of a poem is certainly helpful in creating a sense of collectivity for the audience, whether it is a critical or a receptive collectivity. From the point of view of the performing writer—and I can only speak for myself—the one advantage I have found from the otherwise unmitigated horror is that it lets me hear, as if for the first time, my own work. And I can hear what I have done wrong; where a phrase is not working. It comes back to what I was saying about Kleist and the production of thought as an utterance that is materialised as a new idea. You can hear your own reading completely fresh. Your text is there and it is speaking your own slight error. The truth of it at that point will fall on your ear.

APPENDIX C

Interview with Allen Fisher 18.08.10, London
Interviewed by Juha Virtanen. Recorded in a café outside St. James's Church.

I want to begin by returning to the reading you did at Kent last November. During the event, you briefly mentioned that Blood Bone Brain *was about memory. Would you mind elaborating on this statement?*

It could be quite a long question, but the quickest way of answering it is to do with performance—or it can be introduced through this idea of performance. If you are in a performance situation, you could choose to have a score, or a set of notes, or a book of poems; or you could choose to memorise it. Those are the two extremes, I suppose. And what I tried in *Blood Bone Brain* performances was to do neither of those things, but to give myself different indicators to talk. It is like a theatre of memory, in that regard. It's almost like the idea of memory rooms that people like Cicero promoted as an idea; when you're giving a talk you don't have a paper in front of you, and you go to a room in your head called geography and then talk about that. That seems a bit simplistic, though. My experience of it has been through art history, really. I don't use notes or papers when I give lectures on art, but I couldn't do it without slides and images. So what you do is you arrange the slides in such a way that it gives your memory indicators. In *Blood Bone Brain* I set up something called memory jars, which were initially jars with objects in them, and things like that. When the slide would come up, or if I had the jars with me at an exhibition, I would use it to extrapolate and talk and improvise. So that's the first system of memory that is inside of *Blood Bone Brain*.

There's another level of memory that is to do with place, to do where you are. I made fun of that a lot in *creek in the ceiling beam*, where I was aligning the sounds I was hearing in the beam that's above me when I'm sleeping—it went crack every so often. I was linking it to the idea of ley lines and electric forces, and pigeons landing on the roof, and water systems not operating properly, whole ranges of things like that. Effectively, these were devices to connect different parts of location; where I had been, where I was going, where I had come from, where I knew people and where I knew particular aspects of the geography or geology that interested me. It's kind of a different, narrative layer. It gave me something to come back to and use to arrive at something else. Some of these materials, there were lots of cemeteries, which I was jokingly linking as if there were some secret significance in the link—but there isn't of course. With those linkages

and the timing of the creaks, I would develop poems. Almost like a Mac Low mode or something like that, which isn't memory at all.

Was there any other reason to choose the cemeteries apart from these parodic qualities?

There was something else behind it. Many of the Christian sites in parts of London are built on top of Pre-Christian sites. It was said, I don't think it was ever proven, that St. Leonard's Church on top of the hill at Stretham, was a pre-historic site. Whether or not that was the case, I don't know, but some churches have certainly been built on such sites. That's one of the initial pretexts to make them connect, because one of the ley line-ideas in Alfred Watkins was that these straight lines were routes for the people delivering salt for the different prehistoric groups, so that they would be able to line up the next part of their journey. They would line up to a particular node or a hill, or a valley or a gap. Quite often, something like a church or a tower would be built to give them this focus. Another thought about that in Britain is that people communicated through bon fires, on tops of hills and so on. Some would say that's the serious side of it, but it's an odd history, because it is very fraught with invention, and romanticism, and nonsense as well as one or two facts. I'm subverting myself so I don't fall into the nonsense of it. It's the same time as John Michell is writing his books, in which the alignments of churches are actually flying saucer landing sites; that kind of non-sense.

There's a further issue that's to do with parody. I recently listened to a recording of Mottram speaking at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975, where he talks about Blood Bone Brain *for a brief while. In his view, the performance parodies the works of John Cage. What do you think he meant by that?*

If it was a parody, I don't think I'd be taking the piss out of John Cage. I think I'm more likely to be reverential, to some extent—in awe of him, really. I just thought of him as a major artist, I still do, albeit he's passed away now. The first issue of *Spanner* was an interview with Cage. I don't remember or know when I first read *Silence* or his lectures, but I think I might have—almost for certain, I would have learned from Cage's writing and some of the performances I saw him do with his music. In the seventies, he was here quite a bit. He was still in the situation where people would walk out en masse from being so disgusted and shocked by it all. I think it was at the Saville Theatre where he did one of his lectures with microphones strapped to his throat, where all you could hear was this incredibly loud noise. There must have been about 300 people there, and in the end, only six remained. Cage is also quite well known as being one of the instigators of the first Happening in 1952 at Black Mountain. I think he has always been a major influence on any performance I have helped

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build, or have instigated, or have built myself. I feel just thankful, really. I don't think I would call it a parody.

I'd like to talk a bit further about the context for the work, particularly in terms of Books A, B and C. In the introduction to the texts, you refer to them as 'book events'. Was the term related specifically to those projects, or did you use it more widely?

It was specifically for those projects, although it comes out of experience in other ways, with books as events. Part of the event is the production of the book, which is often collective and involves many people. It comes out of a process of learning to do something in a way where you put up with the inadequacies of your skills, and see them as a part of the process of what it is. Not to denigrate it either. There are parts of a performance that just don't work, and some that do. It's just a part of what you're doing, effectively. There is almost a need to be in the process of, rather than the completions of. Books are events in that regard, they are like performances. I think they still are, for me.

That really comes across in books A, B and C...

The books quite often note that they are being made, so to speak. I've always had a liking for that kind of 'process showing'. Even in writing of poetry, I like to show some of the ways in which it's being made, as a part of the work, rather than a separate set of notes. That's not always the case, as some of the notation is a part of the poem—it's going to depend on the work I'm talking about.

In the booklet for the Nottingham show—which I might misquote, as the ink has faded on the copy I have read—you mention that the overall structure for the performance was based on Sicily. *On my understanding,* Sicily *was based on cut-ups and recycling. How did that method relate to* Blood Bone Brain?

I don't know. A part of the relation is to do with printing. *Sicily* is almost over-elaborate in the ways it shows the printing process. There's a moment when the book is unreadable—you wouldn't try to read yellow print on yellow paper. The intention is not that you should be sitting down as with a novel. So in parts of the book, the description of the process is itself the process. I suppose I was influenced by collecting some of William Burroughs' work from late sixties. In fact, I was one of the publishers of *White Subway*, which was one the best collections of his work, probably still is. What particularly attracted me about Burroughs' work wasn't so much what he was telling me, in terms of his own fiction. It was to do with the way in which he displayed the cut-ups. It was the way in which the visual gave you messages and information that might have related to the text or might not have done. It was to do with damage, destruction, almost to do

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with multiple consciousness. Those ideas interested me more than reading it as a fiction. In fact, I preferred that to the fiction itself, which seemed a little tedious or unseemly.

I've recently gone back to that, because I gave a paper in Glasgow on Burroughs' use of the visual. It transpires that he used to make drawings. Those are his drawings on the cover of the original *Naked Lunch*. They're almost hieroglyphs, but not. Or marks made by a Zen master. But coming to the visuality, when he makes the cut-ups, the pages look damaged; they have thick black felt-tip pen or crossings out, re-typings. That's the text that first gets published in various ersatz magazines. They then provide the manuscript for the novels that Olympia and Grove Press and so on publish. They tidy all that up; they don't include the crossings out, they put punctuation and it's all cleaned up. It seems to me you then have a different text. It's hard to articulate how the text has changed. Its visuality is a part of the meaning. I was interested in that as a process. *Sicily* comes out of lack of research information about the mafia: lots of cut ups stories of that sort of thing, using magazines. Although I can't remember what other sources were in there.

I still want to examine how books A, B and C. Your notes to the microfiche files mentions that you used these components as working materials for initiating decisions. Did this work in a similar way to the theatre of memory you described earlier, or does it denote a different methodology?

What was going on in the art world might help to explain some of it, conceptual art really. That was also about showing the process of the making: Robert Smithson or someone like that would show these diagrams that led to something. That was a big influence on the kind of work I was doing then, and it certainly was a part of my proposal. I'm as—if not more—interested in the process as I am on the product. It's as crucial as anything that might be the work. It's not included for a didactic reason…

Yes, it seems as if certain components of Blood Bone Brain *articulate a hope that others would develop the work further. I'm thinking of statements like 'you are invited to perform' and so forth. Do you know if anyone else staged subsequent versions?*

No. Not that I know of.

Conceptually, it's still quite interesting. It seems to work with this idea of process as well, in that your performance—or your notes—are not necessarily the conclusion…

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Yes. Nowadays, it could always be that somebody phoned you on a mobile to ask what they should do next, and you would be on the other side of the country suggesting things. But no, it didn't happen.

I had a question about the extractions from 39 Steps *within 'London performance A' of* Blood Bone Brain. *Was there a particular procedure you had for selecting the pages?*

I don't remember. But I am almost certain that I would have had some arbitrary mechanism, so that it wasn't to do with my own feelings. When I did *Milk in Bottles*, people would come into the room and they would drink from the bottle and they would measure how much milk was left. That would give them a number they could use as a device. They had a pile of newspapers to look at, and use those to find words. So the words were picked entirely based on the individual measurements. A system like that would interest me more than simple selecting the pages at random. I'm surprised I don't remember...

Similarly, there's a methodological curiosity in Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72. *The introduction to the pamphlet says its process will feature in* Blood Bone Brain. *Was this to do with the way the images were processed, or how do these works connect?*

I think the main link was geographical, because a lot of it was produced in the same building with Beau Geste in Devon. David Mayor produced the 'curry' book, and I used their equipment for a lot of work.

There's a related issue in the 'curry' book. In the introduction, you refer to Blood Bone Brain *as a 'book'. Did you originally intend to produce it in this form?*

Something in the back of my head says maybe that is true. But I think the book was meant to be a set of volumes. Maybe there was a moment where I thought it was [pauses] maybe there was an intention to have another book, which would use the material from the performances.

Might it be that this idea of a 'book' eventually developed into the microfiche documents. Maybe the method of production had to change as more and more materials were generated.

To return to the performance in 1974, some of the readings were read to tape recorders, which were subsequently replayed to the audience later in the evening. On

the one hand, this could involve ideas of memory. But it could also illustrate some leanings towards concepts like 'process' or 'event'.

Yes. Subsequently on two or three occasions, the most recent of which is Volespin, there's a whole range of things in the performance, but one of the things that happens is that I'm reading some texts into a tape recorder. During the second half, I've got earphones on, and I'm not using a text, I'm just listening to what I'm saying and trying to replicate it. Only it was impossible to keep up with myself, so I had to invent bits in between and improvise. That's not quite the same, but it's a development from it. It's memory and distortion at the same time.

I had another question about the details in the project, but forgot to ask it before we digressed the other things. Why did you choose to include the image of Genaro Vasquez Rojas in Ffacece?

That is a good question. I don't know. One of the people I was working with was Felipe Ehrenberg, who was Mexican. Maybe the image came from him. But I don't have anything deeply historical in terms of the knowledge I have of this particular Mexican guy. So it's not out of support for his work. There's a romanticism I still have with revolutionary bandits—an affinity for them, to a certain extent. So I think it came of ambiance of agreement. But I don't remember it.

We're nearing towards the end, but I'd like to acknowledge the possible risk of the type of questions I have asked this time around. The foreword to Ffacece reads: "All statements confuse the issue further". Are interviews such as these in danger of doing the same? Is there a danger in this type of reconstruction and analysis?

No, I don't think there's a problem—unless there's a need to expect a finite answer. But I can't see that happening. You could ask the same question in a year's time and you'd get different answers. Not entirely, which would be interesting. When Peter Barry interviewed me in the eighties, he asked me a question about whether I was depressed, and I said I'm angry. Then in the nineties he interviewed me again, and he asked me the same question, but I didn't recognize it, and I gave him the same answer. So things can be consistent [Laughs].

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