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Conference Report

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Outside-in/Inside-out: A Festival of Outside and Subterranean Poetry – Glasgow 4th October – 8th October 2016

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"If Andrew Motion is a poet, I don't want to be a poet. If Philip Larkin was a poet, I don't want to be a poet. If David Antin is a poet, I'll consider it." Charles Bernstein, Glasgow, October 8th 2016

These words from Charles Bernstein's closing response to Outside-in/Inside-out have taken on a second life since they were uttered on the 8th of October in MANY Studios, Glasgow, coming to stand as an epitaph for Antin, who passed away a couple of days after they were spoken. They could equally serve as epigraph for the week's proceedings, humorously reframing questions of position, belonging and the persistent tensions between centre and margins that underpinned the papers, displays, readings and presentations of the Outside Poetry Festival.

This report will present a necessarily partial overview of the five days of panels, exhibitions and performances that took place in a range of venues across Glasgow: the sheer scale of the enterprise dwarfs all efforts at a fully comprehensive review. The organising committee of Jeffrey Robinson, Colin Herd, Nuala Watt, Calum Rodger and nick-e melville (University of Glasgow) and Lila Matsumoto (University of Nottingham) deserve immense credit, both for the ambition and imagination of their programming and for their unfailing grace and good humour throughout the proceedings.

Tuesday 4th: MANY Studios, Ross Street

The first event was the opening of the Palimpsest Exhibition at MANY Studios. This exhibition, curated by Lila Matsumoto and nick-e melville, emphasised processes of scraping away from, or layering onto, source texts in a range of media in order to

create new and hybrid objects and meanings. The works on display included prints by Tom Schofield, film by Margaret Tait, nick-e melville's tippex erasure poems and a series of banners suspended from the ceiling displaying work from Dorothy Alexander's found eco-poetic project, 'Final Warning.'

The opening reading featured John Bloomberg-Rissman (Independent Scholar), Nuala Watt and Nat Raha (University of Sussex). Nuala Watt read some powerful work on blindness in poetry and poetry in blindness that was personal and political, witty and very moving, delivered with fierce intensity.

Fierceness of delivery was also a feature of Nat Raha's kinetic, breath-powered performance. A mike and loop-pedal were used to build up layers of sounds, a self-made chorus to back the pacing, plusive recitation, with Theresa May looming large in the distressingly prescient £/€ poems.

John Bloomberg-Rissman's polyglot incantation was a cento comprised of lines from *Poems for the Millennium, Volume 5: Barbaric, Vast and Wild*, the anthology of outsider and subterranean poetry he edited with Jerome Rothenberg, and which served as inspiration for this symposium. Following the readings, Professor Jeffrey Robinson's welcome promised a week without rain in Glasgow, and a consideration of what words can do that would serve as an alternative to the concurrently-running Tory conference. The fact that both promises were kept emphasised the festival's divergence from what words do and don't do in the political realm.

Wednesday 5th: University of Glasgow (Alwyn Williams building and 5 University Gardens)

The introductory panel featured papers from Andrea Brady, Sarah Hepworth and Sandeep Parmar, and an overview of 'Outside- in/Inside-out' by Jeffrey Robinson.

Andrea Brady's (Queen Mary) paper ('Inside lyric: poetry in prison') began by reversing the inside/outside binary from the perspective of the prisoner, contrasting the inside as a space of repression with the outside as a place of emancipation. In this model, the price paid for access to the freedoms of the outside is conformity. Brady went on to examine prisons as sites of profuse textual production, with the legibility of this writing hampered by issues of access. She considered how imprisonment of

the body complicates the poetic foot, the interplay of conditions of physical restraint with poetic constraint, and the elaborate hallucinations and affective intensities unleashed by conditions of solitude and sensory deprivation. This was a bracing reminder of how the outside/inside binary is complicated by the need to consider the position from which it is viewed. This insight, and her identification of a need to 'rip off some room for people to breathe', set out themes that would permeate many of the performances and papers of the next few days.

Sarah Hepworth's paper outlined her work in Glasgow University's Special Collections from the perspective of the 'Literary Outside'. While the scope and nature of this paper were very different to Brady's, its focus on the mutability of the terms 'outsider' and 'insider' in the context of the life and work of Edwin Morgan served to underline their contingent reciprocity. She discussed the idea of a poet whose long struggle to come inside, after a lengthy period of indifference and rejection, left a lasting sense of outsiderhood that could not be shrugged off, even after it had become anachronistic or anomalous. This notion, too, would find echoes throughout the week's proceedings.

Sandeep Parmar's (University of Liverpool) paper ('Coterie, Community and Censure: UK Poetry and Race'), revisited her much-discussed LARB article 'Not a British Subject', querying some of her own conclusions. Several themes emerged from this lucid exploration of the polarities of coterie and community in the context of race in the UK: that the terms themselves are not neutral and the purported inclusivity of the term 'community' can turn out to be as exclusionary as coterie; that mainstream British poetry culture is a patronising one, which holds 'colonial curiosities' at arm's length and rewards writers of colour who self-foreignize; that the British poetic avant-garde is, if anything, more 'stunningly and unapologetically white' than the American version taken to task by Cathy Park Hong in her article 'Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-garde.' Parmar went on to explore some of the systemic factors inhibiting discussion of and action on this issue, particularly the idea that writers of colour who are perceived as having achieved such markers of acceptance in the literary community as publication and academic position are

considered not to be authorized to discuss exclusionary practices. The acronym BAME itself is dismissed as 'not a site from which to build a nuanced poetics', as attested by the over-reliance on mentorship schemes as a means of addressing structural inequalities. Parmar's wry claim that 'the revolution will not be mentorship schemes', her reference to Evie Shockley's suggestion that it is necessary to think of 'black aesthetics, plural', and her insistence that the binaries inherent in inclusion/exclusion have calcified, laid down challenges that would be returned to in her workshop on Thursday afternoon.

Jeffrey Robinson closed this session, and in a sense opened the symposium, with an overview of the anthology *Barbaric, Vast and Wild*. Robinson gave a nuanced consideration of the Diderot quote ('la poésie veut quelque chose d'énorme, de barbare et de sauvage' – 'poetry wants something that is vast, barbaric and wild') from which the anthology takes its title, and explored the extra layer of prescriptiveness that is created by changing the French 'veut' into 'must have' in the English translation 'Poetry must have something in it that is barbaric, vast and wild.' He mentioned Pierre Joris's suggestion of 'wills' as a better translation than 'must have', one which would give poetry itself agency, unmediated by the will of the poet. Robinson would return later in his talk to this idea of agency originating from the poem itself rather than from the person of the poet. This relinquishing of agency to the poem was embodied in Ann Waldman's outrider, a figure who lives 'negative capability,' urging us to consider the 'outrider/outsider' status of the poets reading and being read here. Robinson concluded his overview by exhorting the assembled group to 'close your Eliot and open your Diderot.'

While a detailed consideration of the discussions following every panel would extend this report beyond reasonable limits, the Q&A following this panel deserves some attention as it expressed ideas that would inform and shape much of the conversation over the subsequent days. There was some discussion of how encouraging Vahni Capildeo's recent Forward Prize win was, and how her work is willing to take on colonial and racial issues in a manner described by Parmar as 'working oppositionally against itself.' The economic stability that comes with insiderness was also

considered, and the difficulties of accessing this stability via the increasingly precarious contemporary academy. This led to a discussion of the need to create spaces on the margins of the terms inside/outside and eschew the limitations of those terms, which would prove a recurring motif for the symposium as a whole.

Following this introductory panel, the remainder of the symposium took the form of parallel panels, therefore I will only be in a position to offer an overview of the sessions I attended. The difficulty of choosing between panels is testament to the richness and variety of the programme.

The panel on *Identity and the Body* took place in the Edwin Morgan Room following lunch, and consisted of papers from Eric Eisner (George Mason University), Lawrence Uziell (Independent Scholar), Nisha Ramayya (Royal Holloway) and Wanda O'Connor (Cardiff University). Eisner's paper ('Keats in Drag: Mark Doty, Cockney Poetics and Queer Excess') drew on his work on Keats and contemporary American poetry, considering issues of style as strategy, 'the pizazz of language' as a possible countermeasure to the plainness of the clothes and toys handed out to boys. It contrasted the 'overwrought' (framed as a Keatsian term) with the engineered banality of the voice, and considered Doty's attention to the fetish-value of literariness itself, what is 'obviously fake but obviously makes you feel.'

Lawrence Uziell's paper ('Outside from the Start': Selfhood in the work of Denise Riley) took the brave position of using Riley's poetry to put pressure on the version of the linguistic turn in her philosophy. This paper considered the idea of inverting the modernist idea of impenetrable inside so that surface becomes a readable mark of the contingent social, with the 'I' being inextricable from its social contexts. Uziell used the line 'will you come in out of that air now' from Riley's 'Outside from the Start' to explore questions of materiality. In these lines, to come in is to come out of air, which has been imbued with materiality. The extent to which thinking is tied to material circumstances is posited as a corollary of the subject/object split, a feature of life under capitalism.

Nisha Ramayya's paper ('Moving Devotion, Moving Displacement: Decolonising responses to Mirabai and Bhanu Kapil') began by comparing modern translations

into English of the work of sixteenth century North Indian mystic and poet Mirabai. She spoke of devotional Hindu poetry as oppositional, and expressed anxiety about the reception of some literal translations, referring to their attempts at 'fencing in some terribly wild thing.' This was an illuminating discussion, and I would have liked to have heard more on the relationship between the various translations shown and their source text; it was not initially clear whether these versions were attempts to render the same text. The second half of the paper turned to the work of Bhanu Kapil, beginning from the opening to *Schizophrene*, 'on the night I knew my book had failed,' which details the act of throwing the failed book into the garden from which the book itself is generated. This section of the paper considered the psychosis inherent in the act of drawing a line between two places and in the act of reverse migration, and called for 'a practice that matters.' This idea of 'mattering' emphasised the possibilities of practice as the creation of both material and meaning. Ramayaa's rousing conclusion ('This is my dead start') echoed Kapil's gesture of throwing, as well as the repeated 'to begin. To never begin' on which her book *Ban en Banlieue* closes, and stressed the generative possibilities of failure and impasse.

The final contribution to this panel was Wanda O'Connor's 'Entwurf', a report and short performance drawn from her current practice-based research project. The presentation began with a brief description of the Heideggerian theoretical framework of the project and a consideration of contemporary poetry as heterotopia, and complex systems for constructing and dwelling in this poetic other-space. In its emphasis on drafting as a practice of throwing and falling, there were echoes of the preceding paper. O'Connor went on to give a short performance, which involved scattering cut-up text on the floor and reading the recollected text over a background film of the poet on an Irish beach. I found the video's imagery, particularly the shots of the poet's face effaced by waves, an engaging counterpoint to the performance's rehearsing of aleatory tropes.

The discussion that followed seemed a slightly missed opportunity to pull together threads that ran through all four presentations concerning desire, loss and poetic materiality. While it is understandably difficult, maybe impossible, to ensure

that all panel participants get an opportunity to engage equally in the subsequent conversation, it would be nice to see moderators take an active role in teasing out the underlying links between presentations.

The final panel of the afternoon, *Questions of Page and Space*, consisted of presentations on visual poetics by Sarah Hayden (University of Southampton), Mark Tardi (University of Łódź), Rachel Robinson (University of Oxford) and Rey Conquer (University of Oxford). Sarah Hayden's paper wrestled with the challenges of reading the typomontages of German conceptual artist Peter Roehr as poetry. She spoke of staring at almost blank sheets of paper looking for the 'crypto-mathematical goldilocks point,' and of the tedium inherent in this process, leading to 'a threatening force-field of futility.' The paper went on to consider how Roehr applied his mania for repetition, a constant feature of his work, to the language of advertising in a way that subverts the genre's contractual obligation to repeat content, by condensing all repetitions into a single page. Hayden raised questions that touched on some of the conference's guiding themes: edges as markers of finitude and the role of designation in locating artworks in relation to disciplinary boundaries; the need to develop speculative strategies for reading and to constantly stretch and seek to extend these strategies. Her concluding tentative definition ('Poetry is what changes existing poetic and social conditions by poetic means. Thus, poetry is what puts in question the previous definition of poetry') reworked Duchamp's definition of art in the light of Roehr's work, in terms that would resonate with many subsequent performances and presentations, not least Bernstein's closing response.

Mark Tardi's paper, 'Stratal Geometries', also explored questions of readability. Tardi provided some context for a group of his own poems constructed of verbal and geometric elements: readings of the Canadian mathematician Coxeter and a consideration of the meaning of poetry in a place (the deserts of the southern US) that is actively hostile to human life. Repetition was again explored, this time with reference to Beckett and Sean Scully's working through several iterations of a similar idea. This paper, like Hayden's and Nisha Ramayya's, essayed a constructive role, almost in an architectural sense, for repetition. Speculative reading strategies were

also foregrounded here, as Tardi invited several members of the audience to read aloud copies of the poems that had been distributed in advance. He claimed to be intrigued by their legibility, as he hadn't imagined them as work that could be read aloud. Given the role of shape and direction in these poems, there is no reason to take those we heard on the day as definitive readings either, rather individual iterations of a multiplicity of possible tentative readings. The line 'the kindness of improvised spaces' has remained with me, not just as an appropriate testament to the work's architectonic poesis, but as shorthand for the welcoming, contingent caravan of the symposium itself.

Rachel Robinson's paper on 'betweenness' in the work of Cecilia Vicuña began by considering an idea that cropped up in varied forms throughout the week: the importance of the space in-between inside and outside and the challenges and possibilities of dwelling in this space. She elaborated on the poems' spatial dimensions as constellations where the reader is involved in translating solitude and isolation into community, thereby transforming displacement into strength. This was explored via the image of the quipu string, the Incan 'talking knot,' and linked with Mallarmé's constellation in 'Un coup de dés,' where visual aspects of the poem take precedence over semantic meaning. In keeping with the previous papers, this presentation emphasised the impossibility of understanding the poems' verbal elements in isolation from their spatial manifestations, and noted the tactile, kinetic movement their act of reading requires. The question of inbetweenness was framed via the reader's act of moving around in the spaces between the words. In a sense this paper repositioned the liminality of the margins within the poems' intraverbal and intralingual spaces, folding the edges right into the heart of the work itself. The use of multiple languages further underlined the threshold nature of Vicuña's *Instan*, with the readers' work of visually, sonically and semantically translating serving to energize the non-place created through these processes. In this speculative, intensely proprioceptive process of reading, each poem becomes an offshoot of a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome, with threads being woven in the between space, between languages. Robinson's work, while echoing and amplifying ideas developed

throughout this panel, was particularly compelling in its location of the strong, ephemeral connections between reader and poem in the spaces between the poems' own words, lines and languages.

Rey Conquer's paper on line and layout in experimental visual works by the German poet Arno Holz also approached poetry from within, exploring how we approach poetry as a thing in and of space. In this sense, it fully embraced the panel's overarching theme of the architectural qualities of poetic space and spatial poetry. Conquer began by apologising for the tortured pun ('at stake') in the paper's title, a play on the poems' arrangements around central stakes. This led to an invitation to the audience to read the poems' visual arrangements in pairs, an opportunity which yielded some very creative speculative readings. This reader saw a great deal of flattened roadkill, but fortunately was not called upon to comment.

These four papers together built a comprehensive constellation of ideas on the constructive role of space in poetry, and the need for similarly generative modes of reading for the navigation of these spaces. One of the questions to the panel referred to concrete poetry as a 'liberation from syntax', but if anything, these papers shared a remarkably coherent vision of the page, its margins and blank spaces, as syntactical elements in their own right, profoundly implicated in the making of meaning.

On Wednesday night, the CCA hosted the official launch of *Barbaric Vast and Wild* with an evening of critical papers, readings and performances featuring contributions from Jerome Rothenberg, John Bloomberg-Rissman, Andrea Brady, Diane Rothenberg, Gerrie Fellowes, Aonghas MacNeacail, Nicole Peyrafitte and Pierre Joris. Jerome Rothenberg's introduction expressed a desire, echoed by Bloomberg-Rissman, for an 'anthology of everything.' In a conference so concerned with issues of inclusion and exclusion, it was illuminating to attend to the working out of these dynamics in the context of the anthology itself. Attention in the form of listening was central to Diane Rothenberg's paper, which drew on her many years' experience as an anthropologist. She spoke movingly about performing the gestures of listening without truly attending to what is being said and suggested that a wealth of stories

unfold within earshot while our attention is elsewhere, and that there is more to listening than 'marking time while waiting to speak.'

Andrea Brady gave a powerful reading of poems on US military use of drones and kill boxes, spaces that can be popped into existence where and whenever international law and human rights need to be ignored. Her work torqued inside and outside to constantly wrong-foot the listener, leaving them disturbed and moved by the dazzle of her closing challenge – 'throw down your sparkle.'

This feeling of moving precariously through a space under construction was amplified during Pierre Joris and Nicole Peyrafitte's rigorous multi-modal performance. Attempts to render its nuances come up agonizingly short: incantation, video, movement, vulvic geology, dynamic painting all combined to fill the room with a tense energy that implicated the viewer/listeners in its folds and strands. Destabilizing and invigorating, visual images and single lines from this work have become a central refrain of the feedback loop that stutters into echo when thinking back on the week's words: 'Antschel in Bukovina, America in the cloud' invoke Celan and his black milk, incarnated in the black liquid shot from Peyrafitte's mouth in her full-body action painting. Perhaps wilfully, the line I've had spiralling in my head ever since is 'He had the sense to listen to a hedgehog.' No-one I spoke to since seems to have heard it. I really hope it was there.

Thursday 6th: University of Glasgow (Alwyn Williams building and 5 University Gardens)

The first panel of the day was *Language(s) of the Outside*, featuring two of the symposium's organisers, to which I contributed a paper.

Jeffrey Robinson's paper on 'Romanticism and Outsider Poetics' discussed his work on volume 3 of *Poems for the Millennium*, and identified gender, social class, mental illness, disability and addiction as the most common markers of outsiderhood in the era's poetry. He discussed aspects of appropriation in Romantic poems, particularly those taking the form of dialogue between the dispossessed and a compassionate witness. He went on to consider self-exile as a means of sacrificing life to art for Keats and Shelley, a form of self-imposed constraint that seemed almost to

replicate the tropes, if not the physical limitations, identified in Andrea Brady's paper on prison poetry. The concluding section on John Clare's 'The Wryneck's Nest' traced a contrasting trajectory, with the poem's act of absorption in naturalistic detail leading to a loosening of the bonds of poetic form.

My own paper, 'A poetry at the gates of existence,' attempted to read Peter Manson's 2014 collection *Poems of Frank Rupture* in the light of Robin Blaser's 1975 essay on the work of Jack Spicer, 'The Practice of Outside.' It began by establishing the dynamic of the process of poetic creation, as outlined in Blaser's essay, involving a complex movement between polarities operating across the porous membrane between inside and outside, with the encroachment of the outside into the space of the poems' fragile 'I', but also to a reciprocal dilation of this 'I' to absorb and enclose much that has its origins outside. It then considered Peter Manson's long poem 'Sourdough Mutation' as an embodiment of Blaser's notion of 'words that float in and out of a meaning.' It focused on the acts of sonic suturing and splicing that make up the poem, and explored the means by which it forces its reader to navigate a wavering Möbius strip between seeing and hearing, thinking and feeling, thereby reproducing the dynamic interplay of inside and outside in the act of reading itself.

This was followed by Colin Herd's paper, 'Show-Orations: The Sophists and Contemporary Poetry,' which concerned itself with the work of Charles Bernstein and the 'talk poems' of David Antin. He began by depicting the sophists as archetypal outsiders, muddying the clear waters of thought with an excess of style. This was followed by discussion of the parallel influences of Stanley Cavell and Rogers Albritton on Bernstein during his time at Harvard, with the latter, in particular, being recuperated as something of a forgotten figure, given that his work on orality versus textuality was parlayed in marathon feats of oration and Socratic dialogue at the expense of publication. He discussed Bernstein's own engagement with scepticism and his commitment to the value of struggling with difficulty rather than reaching a conclusion. An example of this was the 'radical coherency' of his 'Conversation with David Antin,' yielding Antin's line 'If Socrates is a poet, I'll consider it.' This

continuing commitment to a radical coherence born of the struggle with difficulty would be enacted in Bernstein's closing speech on Saturday.

The final paper was a co-presentation by Nicole Peyrafitte and Pierre Joris on contemporary Occitan poetry. They began with a brief overview of the regional distinctions between Occitan dialects, the development of Occitan poetry since troubadour times, and the current status of this poetry, before turning to the work of two modern poets, Bernat Manciet (1923–2005) and Marcela Delpestre (1925–1998), whose works they have recently been translating. Manciet was presented as a major poet of his time, something of an Olson figure. They gave some examples of poems in Occitan, which he had self-translated into French. The linguistic status of this work is particularly complex, with the poet choosing to write in a scarcely-spoken dialect of Gascon, and using the French self-translations as a screen, holding the mainstream reader at a distance from the original poems. They emphasised the need for the translator to ignore these screens completely and return to the source poems. Their presentation on Delpestre focused on the poet's double life as a farmer and a poet, showing a short video clip of her on her Limousin farm, reading and talking about her work. Her agricultural background marginalised her during her lifetime, leading her to be dismissed as a 'peasant poet,' and yet the excerpts from her 'Stone Poems' provided suggested a prescient, tough-minded eco-poetics. Some of these poems that I've sought out since the conference seem to speak remarkably clearly to its concerns, and to our current moment: 'Listen to it sleep, the stone. For so much time inside the blackness of time and of the stone./Listen to it breathe.'

The discussion following this diverse but interlinked set of papers was somewhat unusual in having two of the poets discussed, Bernstein and Manson, in attendance. Charles Bernstein spoke about Antin's method of 'talking to discover,' suggesting that he was doing philosophy in the mode of Wittgenstein, who in turn did philosophy like a poet. There were questions about language as a means of accessing the real, and considering the poem as a site where one encounters the limits of knowledge and the slipperiness of meaning. Pierre Joris succinctly responded to the latter concern with the point that 'the poem is not a crossword puzzle,'

encapsulating the shared concerns of all four preceding papers. Peter Manson spoke about his intentions for 'Sourdough Mutation': inspired by psychedelic music it was designed to create a distracting surface, a legible equivalent of the use of anamorphic perspective in renaissance painting, with a completely different syntax operating underneath through sound, and concluded: 'I think I succeeded in that.'

Following the break, questions of sound and syntax were explored further on a panel (*Sound/Music/Voice*) made up of papers by Mike Saunders (Independent Scholar), Hanna Tuulikki (Independent Scholar), Robin Purves (University of Central Lancashire) and Katie Ailes (University of Strathclyde).

Saunders' paper ('Noise & Purchase') considered questions of creativity, concentration, abstraction and poetry linked with the use of apps that reproduce ambient coffee-shop noise. This performance came with its own distracting sound surface, as it was delivered over samples from a selection of the apps in question played at an increasingly loud decibel level. The early section of the paper put pressure on the arbitrariness of the boundary between 'creative' and 'uncreative' work engaged in by poets and writers, and suggested that the self-consciousness involved in writing in public spaces such as coffee shops can serve as a useful proxy for discipline. From this point on, the decibel-level began to render the paper difficult to follow, with a teasing quote from Anne Carson marking the point of transition to incomprehensibility: 'These words do not signify anything except their own sound.' The title's punning implications only unfolded as the increasing decibel level of the 'background' noise loosened the listener's purchase on what she was listening to, fragmenting the remainder of the paper to a poetry of sound shards, from which I particularly admired the line '- I propose/crush/hidden/whirlwind/extraordinary/changes/coffee shop.' While I appreciate this paper's commitment to enacting its premise in its process, I must admit to having found the ambient noise overwhelming, almost painfully so after a certain point and, although it would have defeated the purpose, I would have enjoyed a more audible performance of a fascinating paper.

Hanna Tuulikki's paper concerning her own musical practice, 'Air falbh leis na h-eoin/away with the birds,' focused on mimesis of birds in Scottish Gaelic song,

particularly the choral representation of songbirds in songs from a matrilineal tradition. Tuulikki spoke of the communal nature of the work, with ensembles singing the sea, wind and birds out in the open, to create interacting soundscapes that incorporate ambient noise. Her emphasis on the need to create spaces for listening recalled Diane Rothenberg's talk of the previous evening, as well as implicating song in the symposium's all-encompassing project of building shared spaces.

Robin Purves' paper ('Keiji Haino and Mora-timing') discussed the ramifications of the sound-structures of Japanese for cover-versions of rock songs in English. He explained the term *mora* as the small, timed units of sound that make up spoken Japanese. These units are defined in terms of perceived length, with the second part of a long vowel sound being a *mora* in its own right. Purves suggested that this sound structure applies a counter-force to English loan-words, yielding a source of new rhythms for rock music. He referred to Haino's cover-version of the Rolling Stones' 'Satisfaction' as an act of 'dissimilation', a process of making unlike.

Katie Ailes paper gave an overview of the Scottish spoken-word scene, concentrating on difficulties imposed by the genre's negative definition, as a scene or style that defines itself in terms of what it is not. She problematized the scene's fetishizing of authenticity and the DIY aesthetic, and identified the need for reviewers who can contextualise. I would have been interested in hearing more on the latter point, in particular how this type of reviewership could be cultivated and where it might be situated in relation to the academy.

Two of this symposium's most crucial interventions took place in the Alwyn Williams building on Thursday afternoon.

Firstly, there was a presentation and exhibition on the work of the Homeless Library.

The Homeless Library is the name given to a project convened by Philip Davenport and Lois Blackburn through their activities as arthur+martha, a Community Interest Company founded in 2007 to offer creative workshops in healthcare settings for older people in greater Manchester. In 2009 they began working with the highly-regarded Booth Centre in Manchester – a homeless charity set up twenty years ago

to bring about positive change in the lives of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Homeless Library (launched at the House of Commons this summer) documents the heritage of homelessness using interviews, artworks and poetry and, before the session began, delegates were invited to examine and handle the many extraordinary handmade books created by people who are either homeless or have had experience of homelessness. The exhibit also contained the texts of interviews conducted with homeless people in Manchester which are remarkable documents in their own right – surprising, harrowing and moving by turns. A related project ‘Tweets from Engels’ is represented in the *Barbaric Vast and Wild* anthology, and was one of the connections that led to a+m’s participation in the symposium.

a+m were accompanied by three participants in the Homeless Library project – Lawrence, Christine and Danny – all of whom have had the experience of homelessness. Their presence at the symposium was a most impressive example of bringing people into a university environment who would normally be considered as outsiders to it, and it brought a real excitement to the proceedings. Davenport and Blackburn undertook to introduce the panel with a light touch, Davenport describing the tension between the creatively enabling chaos of the chance procedures beloved by experimental writers and the exhausting chaos that comprises most homeless people’s day-to-day lives. Blackburn then described how important it was to create a ‘safe space’ for creative encounters, and how vital this had been for project participants. Reading out Helen Perkins’ footnotes to one of the transcribed interviews (‘M’s Story’), Blackburn was overcome by emotion and handed the text to Christine to finish reading it.

Lawrence then read poems that he’d composed for the Homeless Library: sharp, witty but also poignant lyrics which moved him to tears at one point. Christine read with great poise, clarity and dignity from one of the transcriptions of the interviews (‘Doreen’s story’) which was a devastating account of the workhouse, prostitution and poverty, ending on a resonant accusation of those wealthy enough in society to avoid debilitating labels: ‘they can pay for silence.’ Danny then read a thoughtful sequence of his poems – which he had handwritten onto the pages of a book by

Robert Frost – concluding on the powerful reflection: ‘I have been acquainted with the night.’

Following these presentations, a thoughtful and wide-ranging discussion ensued in which the audience learnt more about these writers’ approach to their work and its effect on their lives. Danny spoke about the importance of confidence and how two years ago he would have simply walked out of a room like the one we were in. Christine spoke about how working on the project had inspired her to help others who can’t read and write. Lawrence spoke of his amazement when reading a transcription of his own personal story for the first time, exclaiming ‘is that me?’ But the context of these experiences was never far away, with some discussion of SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) measures in Manchester to get people off the streets in winter and the designing of a map for rough sleepers. One of the audience shared their own experience of homelessness and asked for advice on how to write about that material – Danny acknowledged how important solitude had been for him to start working on his writing. This was an enormously important and emotionally-charged session which I found a profound contribution to the symposium. I was left reflecting on Danny’s remarks about how his poetry reminds him of people who’ve moved on – ‘but their words are still here’.

This was followed by Sandeep Parmar’s guided discussion on race in UK poetics, for many another highlight of the conference. If anything, its concerns have become even more pressing in light of subsequent global and domestic events, and dismaying conversations around issues of race in the mainstream and literary presses. In opening the discussion, Parmar drew on her earlier paper, and extended that work’s willingness to revisit and question her own positions. She opened the conversation by asking us to think about if and how issues of colour are read and perceived across the boundaries of the avant-garde, and returned to the problematic idea of ‘community’ explored in her earlier paper, questioning whether all communities are constructed on the exclusion of a designated ‘them.’ Where the previous day’s paper had outlined the complexity of the terms ‘coterie’ and ‘community’ as experienced by BAME writers, this discussion aimed at putting pressure on some of the weak spots

identified and pushing for change in how the avant-garde acts on issues of race and inclusion. It was a wide-ranging discussion featuring contributions from many of the hugely engaged participants. While it would be difficult to do justice to everyone's interventions in the limited space available here, the most compelling aspect of the discussion was its focus on practical action, on challenging everyone present to ask themselves 'what's your role?' in making the systems and structures of avant-garde poetry nourishing to poets of colour.

Notions of inside and outside and the spaces between crept into discussion of the positioning of work by poets of colour within literary syllabi, with 'post-colonial' and 'vernacular' coming to serve as colour-coded terms, facilitating a form of literary segregation. This dovetailed with some interesting conversation about the importance of folding writers back into the tradition who have been languishing in these ex-centric outposts. Holly Pester referred to the need to 'unwhiteman' reading lists, and asked what the British equivalent of 'Zong' would be, and why Black and Asian poets had not yet made themselves heard sufficiently in the British innovative conversation. There was a suggestion that performance and mainstream poetry had siphoned off BAME poetry by presenting work by poets of colour in forms that were more digestible to white people. The problematically linear conception of time suggested by the term 'innovative' itself was also mentioned in this context.

In keeping with the conference's originating text, the role of anthologies in making space for avant-garde poets of colour was also explored. There was concern expressed at a current anthology featuring four BAME poets out of twenty, but it was agreed that this was a particularly tricky situation for individual poets to negotiate: asking to know who else had been invited to contribute before agreeing to participate was mooted as a possible strategy, but the limitations of this approach were acknowledged. The anthologist's overarching concern will always be to make a coherent book, and this section of the discussion emphasised the importance of *making* the type of anthology that is needed, maintaining focus on responding to exclusionary practices with practical action.

There were references to the controversies surrounding Rita Dove's anthology and Cathy Park Hong's article 'Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-garde,' which linked the discussion into the ongoing global, or at least trans-Atlantic, conversation around race and avant-garde poetics, but the shortcomings of the current British context remained the central concern. Claudia Rankine's interview by a BBC journalist who contended that class, and not race, was the defining problem of modern Britain, was an illustrative example of a phenomenon that was described as 'skewing intersectionality away from race and towards class.' This suggests a lingering unwillingness on the part of many of the gatekeepers of British culture to acknowledge the persistent realities of race as a limiting category.

Nat Raha spoke of the implications of these realities for poets who find themselves negotiating diversity while being edged into the position of token black or trans person in a particular panel or anthology, in a corruption of intersectionality. Once again, the symposium's motif revealed itself in the grain of these questions of place and position, of openness and closure. Throughout this discussion, it was made clear that the avant-garde has not traditionally been open to poets of colour, but that the responsibility for making this space an inclusive one lies with those who are already on the inside. The work of inclusion was reframed as everyone's task, not simply the concern of those who have been excluded. In acknowledging the difficulty of avant-garde work, Pester had asked how it is that we make the effort to read Susan Howe's difficulty but not Linton Kwesi Johnson's. The conclusion of the discussion called on all of those present to be active, as readers, publishers, academics, in making the avant-garde an open, welcoming space for poets of colour. There has been much media discussion recently of the limitations of so-called 'identity politics'; this discussion clarified the fact that identity is a universal category, and that those whose identities allow them to move relatively seamlessly in their world, to the point of assuming the role of gatekeeper, are in a privileged position that brings with it the responsibility for ensuring this facility of passage to others. The valuable work done by many, particularly RAPAPUK, was commended and the challenge of taking up this work was extended to everyone present. This talk pulled

together strands of conversation central to the entire symposium and turned guided discussion into guidance towards action, representing one of the most bracing and practical interventions of the week. Parmar will be guest-editing a forthcoming special edition of the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* on Race in UK poetry, which will provide an opportunity for readers to engage in more depth with these emergent themes and calls for action.

Following a visit to the 'Design and the Concrete Poem' exhibition at the Lighthouse, the aptly-named and satisfyingly chthonic Poetry Club hosted the 'Outside and Subterranean Poetry' night, whose dazzling line-up represents a challenge to any reviewer's powers of synthesis. Illustrated presentations of their art from Susan Bee and Liliane Lijn provided visual stimulation in the midst of a varied and compelling sequence of readings from Gerry Loose, Julie Carr, Maggie O'Sullivan, Will Rowe, nick-e melville, Charles Bernstein, Holly Pester and Peter Manson, threaded through with a riotous feat of emceeing by Colin Herd and nick-e melville, whose polished double-act recalled Reeves and Mortimer in their 90s prime. It would be invidious to select highlights, but for this viewer Maggie O'Sullivan's spell-binding shamanism, Holly Pester's utterly disarming stage presence and Peter Manson's bravura physical reanimation in English of the uncompleted constellations of Mallarmé's 'Les noces d'Hérodiade' have been the presences lingering in the mind ever since.

Friday October 7th Glasgow Women's Library

Friday saw the transfer of the conference to Glasgow Women's Library, and the important practical and archival work undertaken by this institution was the focus of Adele Patrick's opening paper. This was followed by discussions of the work of two visionary female artists, with Michael Parsons presenting on the work of composer, visual artist and pioneering sound-artist Lily Greenham, and Liliane Lijn discussing some of her own work in a variety of media: kinetic sculpture, film, and visual art; exploring themes of language, mythology and light.

Following the coffee break, I moderated the panel *Translation and Border States*, comprising papers by Piotr Gwiazda (University of Maryland) and Jacob McGuinn

(Queen Mary), and a presentation of cinemoems by Calum Rodger, Rachel McCrum and Jonathan Lamy.

Gwiazda's paper ('Alone with Language: On Exophonic Poetry') took as its starting point the idea of exophonic poetry as a form of outsidership, with work written in a language other than the poet's mother tongue challenging the boundaries of what is considered poetry. He linked Santayana's idea of a second language as one whose roots don't necessarily reach the centre with a claim made by Celan to Bonnefoy that 'You are at home within your language . . . as for me, I'm on the outside.' The generative potential of this sense of outsidership was explored with reference to the work of Celan and Beckett, whose choice to write in French stemmed from a desire to be ill-equipped that he wittily described as 'le besoin d'être mal armé' ('the need to be badly armed'). The poetic capacities of this seemingly insufficient linguistic equipment were explored in relation to Myung Mi Kim's assertion that poets need to carve out their own place in language. While this act may be foregrounded in the work of exophonic poets, Gwiazda made the point that all poets are essentially alone in, and with their language, and therefore unable to take their medium for granted. This paper's focus on the constructive properties of language linked it with the idea of poesis as architecture which arose in several earlier panels and would be a recurring theme throughout today's presentations.

Jacob McGuinn's paper 'Fragmenting Figuration: Celan inside Paris outside Blanchot' focused on fragmentation and repetition in Celan's poetry, considering its characterisation as 'outsider' in relation to Blanchot's fragmented late work. This paper explored some very complex interactions between inside and outside, enacting the necessity of considering these terms in relation to each other while remaining conscious of the shifts in position and circumstances that cause them to overlap and reverse. This was a densely-argued paper whose thinking, particularly around the idea of repetition, it is difficult to do justice to with brevity, and one I would appreciate the opportunity to read.

Following these papers, Calum Rodger gave a brief overview of the background to the 'Cinemoems: Scotland/Quebec' project, an initiative providing Scottish poets

with training in the use of film-making equipment and the opportunity to spend time in Quebec shooting cinemoems. This was followed by screenings of short poem-films by Rodger himself, and by Scottish poet Rachel McCrum and Canadian multimedia poet Jonathan Lamy, both of whom briefly introduced their work. This seems a valuable project, and it will be worth noting whether the poets' increasing confidence in their film-making skills translates into more visually ambitious cinemoems: the initial films represent visual translations of poems, and it would be interesting to see the creative potential of the visual medium unleashed to full effect, resulting in complementary but not necessarily corresponding artworks.

A discussion followed on the complexities of defining or deciding mother tongue and the political aspect of choosing a language to write in, which cross-pollinated with ideas explored in Joris and Peyrafitte's paper from yesterday: what it means to choose to write in one language rather than another, who one is hiding from or with by means of this choice. This led to some thoughts on the difficulties of self-translation, understood in the sense of turning one's words into images as well as other words, and the potential for over-fidelity to the source-text inherent in this process.

Following lunch, I attended *The Space of Performance*, with papers ranging over a satisfyingly broadly-defined performance space by Nuala Watt, Scott Thurston (University of Salford), Jane Goldman (University of Glasgow) and Theresa Muñoz (University of Glasgow), with Goldman's paper delivered *in absentia* by a group of her postgraduate students.

Nuala Watt's paper, 'Partial Sight and Poetic Form,' drew on her own practice-based research on a poetics of blindness and opened with the challenging assertion: 'all poetry is partial sight,' which it eloquently unfolded. She gave a hilarious critique of an Edwin Morgan poem on blindness that annoyed her so much it propelled her into PhD study, and suggested that darkness and blindness have been burdened with a bad press in poetry and that these terms need to be reclaimed. Her consideration of how space makes meaning in the poem provided a counterpoint to Wednesday's panel on *The Space of the Page*, and comprehensively refuted the assertion made in

that panel's discussion that space has no semantic function. In fact, many of this paper's concerns were closely allied to that panel's theme; by placing it in this panel, however, light was shone on the performative aspect of writing in and with space, and particularly on deformation and transformation as creative processes.

This concern with the space-building capacities of performance also informed Scott Thurston's paper, 'The Movement work of Jennifer Pike Cobbing: Vitality Dynamics and Economies of Effort,' which drew on Daniel Stern's work on vitality dynamics in order to explore the movement work of Pike Cobbing from the mid-eighties on. Stern's concept of 'vitality dynamics,' which is transferable between art-forms, considers the experience of vitality as a gestalt of movement, time, force, space and intention/directionality. Thurston's paper noted the powerful interest in the kinetic in Pike Cobbing's visual art before going on to examine her movement work as a means of making vitality dynamics visible. This section of the paper drew on short video clips of the work in question, and considered visual elements (masks, costumes, stylized movements) as well as focusing on the dynamic qualities of the movement itself. This section almost reversed the terms of Watt's preceding paper: where Watt considered space as generative of poetic performance, Thurston considered performance, in the form of movement, as a means of creating and disrupting a virtual space. In re-presenting Pike Cobbing's work in this way, making visible something that had been hidden from view, this paper allowed for the replication and reconsideration of this virtual space, further emphasising the architectural qualities of performance. This act of recuperation has been lent an urgent poignancy by Pike Cobbing's recent passing.

These papers built on one of the overarching themes of the week: art as a means of creating a place for what has been marginalized. In these works, this could be seen as a self-reflexive act, with the art itself providing the means to generate its own space. This echoed some of the conclusions of Sandeep's discussion, and would be picked up on later in Holly's workshop, where the hand-crafting of dissent through a box of randomly assembled texts would see poetry harnessed as a modular resistance-building technology.

The inhabiting of poetic voice and space was explored in Goldman's 'Ballad of A Room of One's Own: Thoughts on *Herland's* Woolf Supper.' In this polyvocal presentation, students took the roles of the Marys from 'The Ballad of the Four Marys,' who in turn voiced Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where Burns was woven into the narrative of what is here styled as Woolf's 'Reply to the Toast to the Lassies.' This performance's ventriloquism raised questions about the role of voice, often the voices of anonymous women, in creating the threads of the ballad tradition that Burns would draw on, and that Woolf would acknowledge in her consideration of class, gender, genius and opportunity.

Teresa Muñoz's paper, renamed 'Visualizing Reading,' explored the act of silent reading itself as a performance, and presented the results of eye-tracking technologies and the Perigram reader in plotting the trajectories of various movements through texts, translating the performance of reading into a constellation of shapes. Once again, text was presented as a space to be navigated, and the close attention to movements of the eye within this space called to mind the concerns of the panel on *The Space of the Page*, with which this paper had clear affinities, not least in its focus on the tracking and recording of reading as well as the performative qualities of the act of reading itself. In a sense this paper provided a technologically-focused counterpoint to the performances of reading explored in Hayden, Tardi and Conquer's papers.

The final event of the day at Glasgow Women's Library was an archival workshop facilitated by Holly Pester (University of Essex).

Using a 'magic box' of materials from the archive of the GWL, this event played with found language as a source of material and energy for the creation of space and voice in and with which to enact and speak dissent. This proliferation of prepositions was necessitated by the reflexivity of the process itself, with word, voice and space building and building on one another through their reciprocal interactions.

In deference to the oracular powers of the archive, Pester had not peeked into the box of resources made available by the archive beforehand. The theme for the workshop was women's reproductive rights, and the materials in the box were to be

our oracles, providing words and energies for the topic. Holly referenced the recent march of women in black in Poland against the threatened rolling-back of abortion rights. Coming as I do from a jurisdiction (Ireland) where the right to life of a pregnant woman is constitutionally equated with that of the foetus, this was a powerfully resonant theme for me. The participants were divided into groups with each group provided with a source text to mine for language that spoke to this theme. As the source texts ranged from manuals and handbooks to a copy of *Jackie* magazine, the resulting scraps of language generated a multi-textured corpus. Our group, working from a copy of the 'Suffragette' newspaper, was spoiled for relevant words, yet we found ourselves entranced by interpellations from the margins, by the ads and calls to prayer: 'trial earnestly solicited' and 'communion for initiates.' The contingency of this process, its results depending on the source text, on the movement of readers through the text, on their act of listening to the whisperings of their oracle, has been much on my mind in the weeks since. The provisional nature of progress, the vulnerability of the words in which our rights are encoded, has never been clearer. While women in Ireland march for the repeal of the 8th amendment, whose wording reduces the value of the life of a grown woman to that of a fertilized egg, in the USA talk of overturning progress and punishing the exercise of choice reminds us of how fragile these rights are, how vulnerable to erosion and erasure.

Saturday October 8th – MANY Studios

The last day of the conference brought us back to our point of departure, MANY Studios on Ross Street, for a final panel and reading and a closing response by Charles Bernstein (University of Pennsylvania).

Digital Transformations featured papers by Andrew Prescott (University of Glasgow), Tom Schofield (Newcastle University) and Bronac Ferran (Birkbeck).

Prescott spoke about medieval manuscripts, focusing on the material qualities of the texts that risk being lost in the process of digitization and expressing the concern that editing could squeeze the life out of the source text, flattening its textures. He suggested that current digital practices are merely reviving or supercharging experiments that have a long history, and that digital pioneers might be disappointed with the use that's been made of the media's possibilities.

Tom Schofield also considered the fragility of digital artefacts, with the medium containing its own inbuilt forms of loss. In discussing his own work, the group of prints, 'Unnamed Terrains,' on display as part of the 'Palimpsest' exhibition, he spoke of classifying *types* of materiality, and drew on Austin and Butler to emphasise the performative quality of materiality.

Bronac Ferran's talk dealt with her curatorship of the 'Design and the Concrete Poem' exhibition that we attended at the Lighthouse Gallery on Thursday afternoon. She spoke about the notion of the post-digital and a possible return to the analogue, and explored the beautiful idea of the material and the immaterial interpenetrating each other, proposing 'a micro-archaeology of material history.' These three papers shared an emphasis on the permeability of binary borders, with the digital and analogue, material and virtual inhabiting the same space and time rather than being confined to categories sealed off from each other, allowing for the extension of the dimensions of the symposium's focus on space-building and sharing.

The final reading brought together exceptional performances from three very different poets: Lila Matsumoto, Alec Finlay and Jerome Rothenberg.

Matsumoto's reading was accompanied by images, the 'soft, mild matter' of the poems inspired by and interacting with photographs of medical artefacts from the Wellcome Collection. Alec Finlay's performance of an inter-lingual poetics of place was also structured around photographic images, with visible and audible signs locating place-names as thresholds. Both of these readings derived energy from the cross-pollination between the visual and verbal elements of the performances.

Jerome Rothenberg's beatific presence seemed to generate its own antic flow, deriving from the act of ventriloquism as commitment: 'voices are dumb until I speak for them.' His vocalisation of Hugo Ball's Dada rhythms was a feat of re-animation that exuded warmth and light, humming with the shared energies at the roots of so many of the practices engaged with this week. It was rapturously received, with a sense of being lucky to have been present in the moment where 'this happening happened,' to link back to his earlier point on the poetics of ephemerality. A line of his that I've revisited several times since, 'I'm privileged to be here among you, from now on we live on borrowed time,' seems to have become more apt with every

passing week, emphasising the potential longevity of a seemingly ephemeral poetic moment.

Charles Bernstein's closing response began with a re-consideration of the terms outside and inside, elaborating on the need to pay minute attention to context in determining the extent and interaction of these reciprocally deictic terms. Initially, I was troubled by aspects of Bernstein's own adoption of position: his seeming insistence on the continued outsider status of his own and related poetics came across as troubling in a culture where so many groups and individuals are genuinely languishing on the margins, or clinging to contingent and precarious adjunctified footholds within the institutions from which the avant (old) guard continue to proclaim their permanent outsiderhood. It is hard to escape the thought that anyone paying close attention to the current context would have difficulty equating thirty years spent at the heart of the academy, as a poet and teacher of poetry, shaping the poetics of the US and beyond in fundamental ways, with a position outside of the mainstream. This was wryly acknowledged later in his talk when he mentioned the inherent charisma associated with exclusion: what's excluded is hip and, by extension, if one wants to remain hip, one must cling at all costs to the status of outsider. If anything, these concerns amplified the need for constant vigilance in determining the borders of inside and outside.

Bernstein went on to question the exclusionary canon-formation of the avant-garde, a topic that echoed some ideas explored in Sandeep Parmar's discussion, and asked whether the avant-garde is held to higher standards than the mainstream, or expected to be morally exemplary. This led to a nuanced consideration of complications around the idea of appropriation, of who can or should tell particular stories. He declared himself a product of miscegenation and appropriation, and claimed that purism leads to silence and that poetry has to be a dialogue. Bernstein astutely identified opposition as the source of the avant-garde's energy, with *pushing against* as the dynamic powering its processes. It would seem logical that *what* you oppose becomes crucial to the integrity of this dynamic once one's position coincides to all intents and purposes with the 'insider' space one started out in opposition to. Putting pressure on the systemically exclusionary structures one now operates inside would seem the most

promising means of maintaining oppositional energy. After all, the function of the avant-garde in military terms was to clear a passage for the rest of the army; a vanguard that breaches the walls and captures the fortress without then throwing open its doors to the army outside has failed in its mission. Bernstein seemed acutely aware of this dilemma, returning to the idea of a 'cycle of dominance,' the dominance of one particular mode over another, and extolling the virtues of the 'dialogic and transformational' and, with reference to Maggie O'Sullivan, of 'colliding as poesis.' His own work in Pennsoud, *Close Listening* and his critical writing is exemplary in this regard, and his talk evinced a deep commitment to creating a space, where others can speak for themselves and be heard, for poetry in danger of remaining marginal. This connected back to Diane Rothenberg's talk on listening and Jerome Rothenberg's act of ventriloquising on behalf of voices that would otherwise remain dumb.

Bernstein's talk was a fitting end to five days' exploration of the borderlands of inside and outside; in keeping with the symposium's themes and methods it eschewed facile answers in favour of probing questions. That these questions have become urgent, almost oppressively so, in the subsequent weeks, leads to a sense of longing for the transformational dialogic space improvised by the symposium's organising committee and its participants across five days and as many locations in a mellow Glasgow autumn.

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(with thanks to Scott Thurston for additional reporting)

The Homeless Library

You can see images from the Homeless Library exhibit at the symposium on a+m's blog (<http://arthur-and-martha.blogspot.co.uk/>). You can also download a free copy of the accompanying book of interviews here: <http://www.blurb.co.uk/b?ebook=586385>.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they were a delegate at the conference, but otherwise have no competing interests.

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