

Curious & Curiouser

by
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BFA, Simon Fraser University, 1995

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Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in the
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Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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Abstract

Curious & Curiouser is a dual-part project where listening happens in two different “spaces”: the choral composition and in an artist book. Each uses as source material *haiku* that the artist discovered on her walks through the industrial waterfront area of East Vancouver; the *haiku* are engraved on red dog tags and nailed to the wooden power poles she encountered along her path. The *haiku* texts are translated into two spatial forms that make visible the patterns of order in music, braiding visibility with aurality. The choral suite is a kaleidoscopic word painting—a sound sculpture in five movements—staging the sight of sound through choreographic gesture, movement and theatre; a poetry of motion. Composed as a postlude to the suite, the artist book is a part-score for performing listening, the graphic scores and listening events map sound out of sight—a question of how we hear what we see.

Keywords: text-setting; word painting; choral theatre; poetic space; haiku; translation

*dedicated to R. Murray Schafer (1933–2021),
and the curious ear*

hear
here

Acknowledgements

With heartfelt thanks

To Owen, who allowed Curiosity to get the better of me.

To Allyson, for sharing her poetic space and light.

To Peter, for the love of words and gerunds; for seeing hearing.

To the SYC Ensemble Singers—my canvas—the most Curious of choirs.

To my MFA classmates, best cohort ever.

To Bert, best friend forever, who walked this way, and that way.

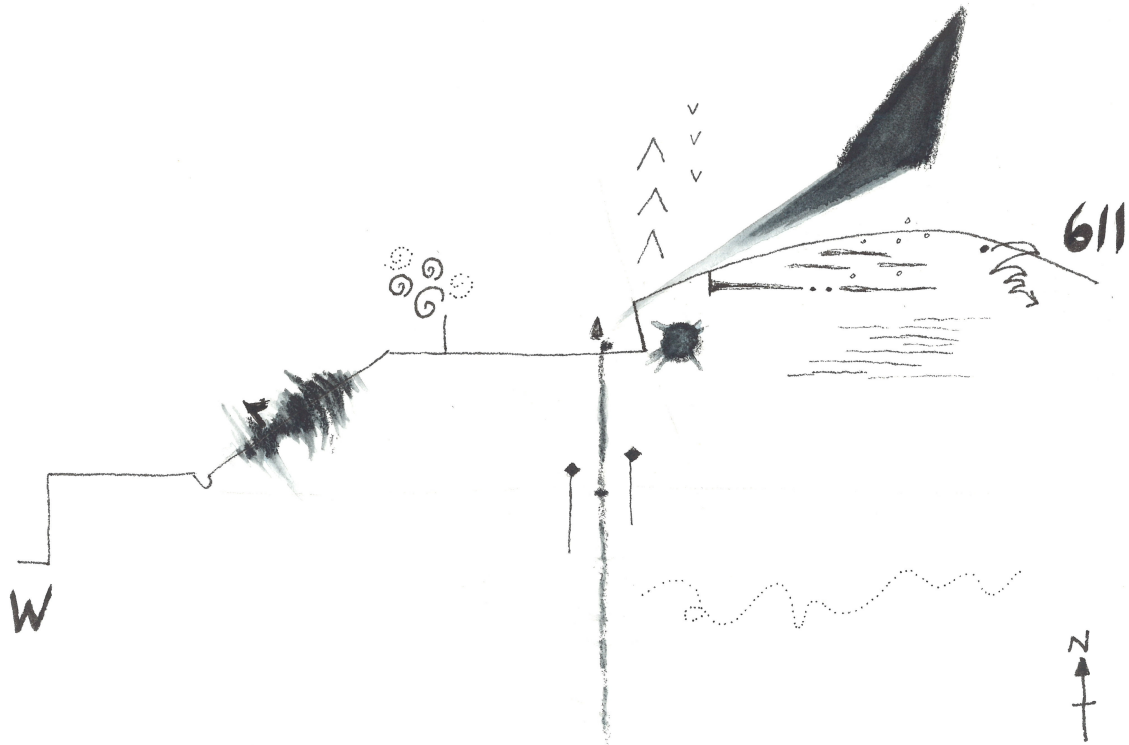
And—*look!* over *there*—ANOTHER *haiku* tag.

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SFU Woodward's-611 Alexander | sound map
(illustration: Jennifer Tham)

Defence Statement

eye hear : a way of seeing

Curious & Curiouser is a work that composes listening in two different spaces: the choral performance and an artist book, both scoring the *haiku* tagged on power poles along the industrial waterfront area of East Vancouver.¹ The project is a study of eye music, word painting² and pictorialisms in visual listening places—what I imagine I see, when words sing.

*Rocks rounded by waves—
the poetry of nature.
Relentless ocean.*³

This *haiku* sang to me, from a tag on the corner of Alexander and Gore. I imagined a re-sounding battle between two baritenors: repeated notes repeating clashes performing a natural erosion of the voice. Nature can be cruel.

Wave after pandemic wave saw these words become a metaphor for the sea—change of the live performance of the choral suite into something to be read, like a map—a score that has to be seen to be heard. For a long while, there was to be a filmed version, drawing attention to the visuality of the performance. Quiet sounds were translated into tiny movements that may/not catch the eye—the embodied sound signed a visual language for a hearing impaired by the digital platform, inflecting the flat-screen space.

¹ The *haiku* tags are part of the public art project *100 Red Haiku Tags* by John Steil, who has a studio along Alexander Street. The *haiku* are used with his permission.

² Word painting: The use of musical gesture(s) in a work with an actual or implied text to reflect, often pictorially, the literal or figurative meaning of a word or phrase. *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Word Painting” by Tim Carter, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.30568>.

³ All *haiku* in this paper are found in the public art project *100 Red Haiku Tags* by John Steil.

The poetic wearing of the work from performance to film and now, to score, organically sites⁴ sounding in that curious space between our ears.

Seeing and hearing as one.

seeing sounding

I first saw sound in Fall 1992.

How fast is the ceiling? asked Daniel Laskarin, on my first day at SFU.

The class was FPA111 and the ceiling was *fast*—long, uninterrupted lines sped from the back of the lecture theatre only to slam into the front wall. I started to check the *tempi* of ceilings everywhere; tracking time on walls, floors, the pavement beneath my feet.

We were talking about John Berger and *Ways of Seeing*.⁵

I see far and near as soft and loud, light as fast or slow or interrupted, and shadows as shifts in timbre. I hear motifs as *leit*-,⁶ drawing attention to space and frame, their polyphonic rhythms footing the flow of time. Every site could be seen as a score, waiting to be heard.

Hearing is a way of seeing.

⁴ I use the word “sites” as a verb, meaning “builds in a place”; also as a homophone for “sights”.

⁵ John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1990) was the FPA111 textbook in Fall 1992.

⁶ *Leit*- (pronounced “light”): “leading”, from the German musical term *leitmotiv* (leading motive), a recurring theme in a composition.

sounding seeing

The BFA at SFU (1991-1995) sparked the beginning of my fascination with the sight of sound: how we see what we hear, hear what we see.

The Singapore Youth Choir⁷ (SYC for short) became my canvas, our studio—a lab in which to put together words-image-music in ways to provoke listening, guided by the words and works of R Murray Schafer⁸. Imagine sounding *this* for the first time (in 1997):

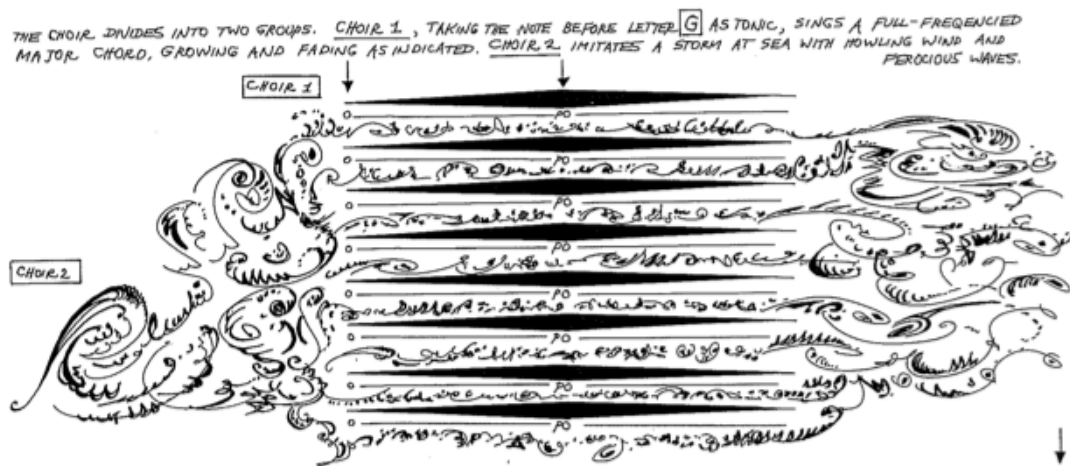


Figure 1. R. Murray Schafer, *Miniwanka*⁹ (1995) (p.8)

This is the storm moment from Schafer's *Miniwanka* (*The Moments of Water*). *This* is choral sounding as theatre, complex and strange; and—our audience couldn't make sense of its magic, its music, its (non) choir-ness.

We began using visuality in our concerts—performative formations, choreographed movement, video, lighting design—to help our audience with pattern

⁷ The Singapore Youth Choir was renamed the SYC Ensemble Singers (SYC for short, still) in 2004; I've conducted the choir since 1986. The choir started as a combined schools' choir in 1964 but was already an adult chamber choir by the time I joined, in 1981.

⁸ R Murray Schafer (1933–2021) was a Canadian composer-sound ecologist-pedagogue who wrote books on dying sounds and how music should be taught (heard). He taught at the Centre for the Study of Communications and the Arts at Simon Fraser University from 1965 to 1974.

⁹ R. Murray Schafer, *Miniwanka* (Toronto: Arcana Editions, 1995), 8.

recognition: visual aids for musical form and function. We staged questions, hoping our audience would grow a curious ear.



Figure 2. SYC performing Hoh’s *Birth and Death: Movement III* (2004)
(Photo: SYC Ensemble Singers. Used with permission.)

Twenty years after we performed *Miniwanka*, our audience saw the SYC as a theatre of voices, a new music ensemble; and—a “choir”. By then, I had my own writing dreams: an *a cappella* opera, a site-specific choral installation, a Void Deck¹⁰ series of poetic interventions, a localised version of *Alice in Wonderland* using the public transport system. (Some of these ideas party together in *Curious & Curiouser*.) It was time to go, back to school to see, sound anew.

Enter, the MFA Program.

¹⁰ A void deck is the ground floor of Singapore’s public housing blocks, a sheltered open space for community gatherings, weddings, and funerals. The term “void deck” is uniquely Singaporean.

seeing drawing

I first drew sound in Fall 2018.

Bring both drawings ... and your repertoire of sounds and gestures with you to the orientation seminar discussion, wrote Peter Dickinson,¹¹ in our first week at SFU.

The class was CA811 and I learn that drawing is a way of seeing. We were asked to draw something we had recently seen (preferably by hand) and, dig up a doodle from an old notebook. Comparing the two, we were to give each an accompanying sound and gesture. I read this diligently, as—*can you draw sound from what you see?*

We were talking about Michael Taussig's *I Swear I Saw This*, and the significance of drawing in (his) anthropological field notebooks.

Drawings are Dionysiac, Taussig proposes,¹² and brings up Berger—for whom “a line drawn is important not for what it records so much as what it leads you to see.”¹³ Hand leads eye here, there, in this sensual dance.

I drew a wall of shapes and patterns at 611 Alexander,¹⁴ for the collaborative studio class: graphic scores, word paintings, (Emily) Dickinson snippets that aerate the ear. The listening wall—titled *Eye hear | I, ear*—was a gift for Joey Zaurrini,¹⁵ who shares my curiosity of everyday sounding objects and everything Schafer. We listened to the images, in silence. Some call this experience *audiation*, but there's no poetry in that.

¹¹ This is number 7 on the list of Peter's *Instructions for CA 811 August 27 Orientation Seminar Discussion*, sent to the class a few days earlier.

¹² Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 24.

¹³ Taussig, *I Swear*, 22.

¹⁴ 611 Alexander Visual Arts Studio (611 for short), Vancouver campus of the School for the Contemporary Arts, Simon Fraser University; located at 611 Alexander Street.

¹⁵ We were assigned a classmate to “gift” by Allyson Clay, who taught the collaborative studio class in Fall 2018. The wall was subtitled *Studies in Augenmusik* (German: “eye music”).

In my first semester in the MFA Program, I walked from SFU Woodward's¹⁶ to 611 Alexander (and back) several times a week. On those walks, I found *haiku* tags on wooden power poles. First one—on the corner of Abbott and Cordova—and then a second, on a neighbouring pole.

*Cloudless blue sky,
ravens circle, dip, and roll.
Cruck, cruck, calling me.*

*Early evening.
Orange light
comforts the earth.*

Two different poetic spaces, a few paces apart.

I found forty-seven *haiku* engraved on aluminium dog tags—in various fades of red—*en route* to 611, on the poles along Abbott, Water and Alexander Streets. One pole had as many as six:



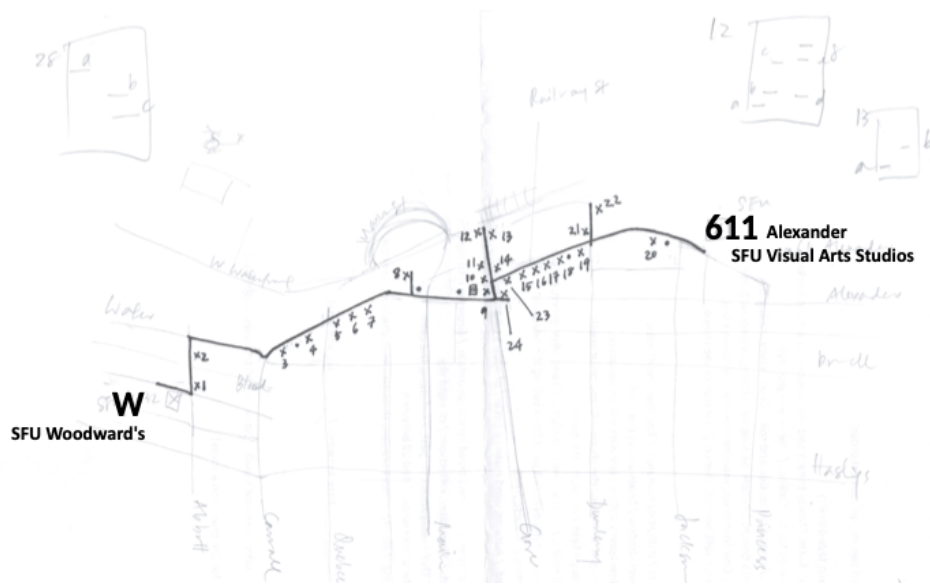
Figure 3. Haiku tags on Pole 24, Alexander and Gore
(Photo: Jennifer Tham)

Who put them there? It took a few months of Google-sleuthing¹⁷ to find their maker, John Steil, who thinks of the tags as guerilla art. (He put the tags up under the

¹⁶ SFU Woodward's is the main campus of the School for the Contemporary Arts, located along West Hastings Street.

¹⁷ The keywords used to find John were "crow haiku East Vancouver", and not, "wooden pole", "power pole" or "haiku". Crows feature prominently in his art, and poetry.

cover of darkness.) Most of the *haiku* present the small dramas of everyday life in East Vancouver, “sudden intimate seeings”¹⁸ that perform as poetic interventions healing the old industrial core—they performed a Greek chorus¹⁹ of sorts as I walked in reverie, between Woodward’s and 611.



The *haiku* drew me in, their “visible language”²⁰ combining sight with sound. The entire text becomes the image; in Ezra Pound’s words, “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”²¹ These poetic instants placed me in time, over time, re-tuning me to their absolute rhythm²²—I painted their words into a series of soundings.

¹⁸ John quotes from William J. Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985), 6: “... most haiku present dramatic moments ... in common, everyday occurrences – small dramas that play in our minds ... the sudden intimate seeings.” John Steil, *A Bowl of Birds*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: A Stylish Johnnie Production, 2014), 3.

¹⁹ A Greek chorus—the chorus in the context of classical Greek tragedy—was the group of actors who commented on the main action of the play, mediating the physical space separating audience and actor.

²⁰ Mitchell on the “visible language” of poet-rhetorician-philosophers being a form that combines picture and speech to “[make] us see” with ... striking figures, the devices associated with classical rhetoric.” W.J.T. Mitchell, “Visible Language: Blake’s Art of Writing,” in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 114.

²¹ Mitchell, “What Is an Image?,” 516 (Pound quoted). Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was an American modernist poet and music critic; the research subject of R. Murray Schafer.

²² Absolute rhythm, in Pound’s words, is the “breath-pattern of the master artificer, above analysis;” a rhythm that was “part of the poetic idea itself” (quoted on page 15), where words make

Before there was *Curious & Curiouser*, there was *Dark brown dog* (for vocal sextet), and *in-between* (graphic score).



Figure 4. *in-between, work-in-progress*
(Photo: Jennifer Tham)

in-between is a visual text of sounding images; an exhalation of train sounds, crow spectra and *haiku* folded within the body of a concertina watercolour sketchbook. Made for the sensory ethnography and multi-modal placemaking class led by Dara Culhane and Peter Dickinson, the graphic score draws (on) the polyphonic aural space around the Columbia Street Pump Station,²³ mapping the sounds of movement, displacement and replacement.

in-between taught me something about sound—how it mis/behaves like water, going where it will, delineating space, drawing places of sounding. I wrote some *umbrella songs* for octet and watercolour choir²⁴ to study this further.

Curious, and curiouser.

space according to their own time-laws sounding their own music in a rhythm that articulates form. Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and music: The Complete Criticism*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 473.

²³ We had been asked to choose a site for a weekly walk/amble, as a placemaking exercise. I chose the path from Woodward's to 611 and back, with its red *haiku* tags, the sounds of the trains and wind which had begun to in-habit me. The Columbia Street Pump Station is about halfway between the two SFU buildings.

²⁴ Movement V, *Curious & Curiouser* (choral suite).

drawing sounding

choral composition |
Curious & Curiouser
5 movements for mixed chamber choir

*Circumscribed by the circle
of my umbrella.
My private world.*

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard studied the phenomenology of the spaces we inhabit, both physical and imaginary. In *The Poetics of Space*, he writes on the power of the poetic image to open up worlds: to read poetry is to daydream. He invites us to listen to the unspoken insides of words—nooks and crannies, their secrets, their “clamour”—reconnecting the image with the literary in a state of reverie.²⁵ In this waking dream state, we become listening subjects, co-composer of our sounding selves. I was composing my eight-year-old self when caught by a teacher with my head in the attic, responding with “mouses” as the plural of mouse.

Isn't it odd²⁶ how “attic” sounds high, higher than “basement” yet not much higher than “cellar”?

Sound re/invents space.²⁷

Seventeen *haiku* are staged in *Curious & Curiouser*—ordered into five movements and a processional. Each movement invents a different space, odes to the different voices I hear. The singers in-habit their own sound spaces in all movements; co-

²⁵ By etymologically linking poetic stanza to “room”, Bachelard unlocks the temporal spaces of words—words are attics and cellars full of secrets and memories, dreams and desires, traces and threads of existence. His words reverberate through the sounding of *Curious & Curiouser*. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

²⁶ It was hard to find synonyms for “curious”, no other word comes close to containing both its modern-day senses—inquisitive and peculiar—as well as Latin roots, careful and diligent. “Odd” is next best, and good enough for here.

²⁷ Voegelin writes beautifully on how sound “re-invests and invents space”, to “extol their histories and expand their present circumstance”, evoking Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*. Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 130.

composing the choral textures, borrowing from and re-turning to each other, walking in and out of place, making subjective word paintings within a painting.



Figure 5. Staging Curious & Curiouser, Esplanade Recital Studio, 19 Aug 2020
(Still: Gavin Lim/Emily Moh. Used with permission.)

This kaleidoscopic word painting—a sounding *sculpture*—reflects, reports, and re-sites sound by choreographing the choral body, composing a performative space for listening in/to the intimate immensities²⁸ of the *haiku* texts. The patterned movement and pictorialisms help reify the musical experience²⁹—scoring, sounding the suite out of sight.

The SYC and I lab-tested the score³⁰—over seventeen rehearsals, in various formats and formations—from March 2020 to July 2021; the photographs included here are stills from rehearsal footage. We Zoomed, we staged, we walked the score, auto-formatting patterns and shapes for spaces big and small. We translated sound into movement for film; we sang in groups of five, two, five, two, and then it was none. Yet, in the repercussions of silence, we hear ourselves anew. Imagine that.

Curious & Curiouser, through the looking glass.

²⁸ I borrow this term from Bachelard, who writes extensively on the phenomenology of the word in “Intimate Immensity”, from *The Poetics of Space*. In this chapter, he writes of how “vast” is a vocal value—when we think or read “ah”, our vocal cords adduct and our voice is ready to sing (page 214).

²⁹ Mitchell argues that the *ut pictura poesis* tradition allows for storage and retrieval in the mind, making “history and temporality intelligible”, reifying the literary experience. Transposing this for the choral stage, the pictorial aspects of the performance—visible patterns of order—reify the musical experience. W.J.T. Mitchell, “Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory,” in *The Language of Images*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 289, 295.

³⁰ The full score for *Curious & Curiouser* is found under Scores Cited.

I water mist fog | Adventures in White for triple mixed octet

In the first movement, moments of water voice a homage to Schafer, based on what I drew:

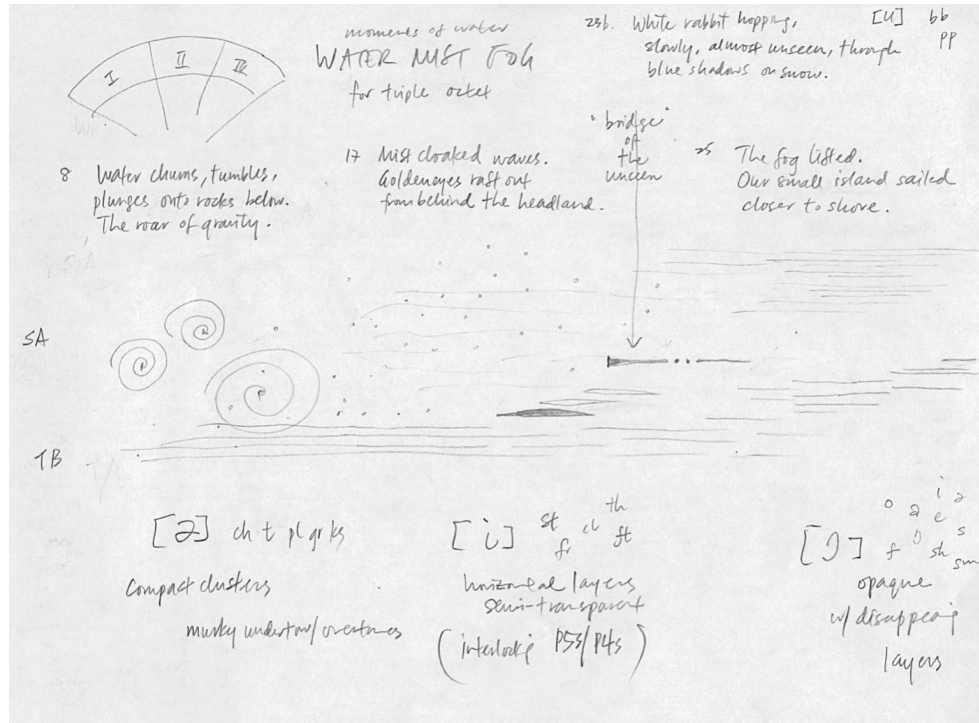


Figure 6. water mist fog, sketch

Adventures in sounding the white of not-seeing, we study opaqueness and tricks of the eye within a soundscape of sameness: close canons, layered textures, overtones to create a shimmery blur, and mime for the white on white. *I swear I heard that!*³¹

³¹ The idea of using mime came from the Glennie-Ceraso interview on the sight of sound. Dame Evelyn Glennie, hearing-impaired percussionist, in a personal interview with Ceraso on a multi-modal listening practice, talks about how sight (of movement) is intertwined with sound:

“if I want to play something quietly, sometimes I move my mallets but I’m not actually touching the instrument. So, the audience ... really do believe they’re hearing something even though nothing is coming out. It’s because they’re seeing the movement ... that automatically gives them the feeling that sound is there.”

Steph Ceraso, *Sounding Composition: Multimodal Pedagogies for Embodied Listening* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 34.



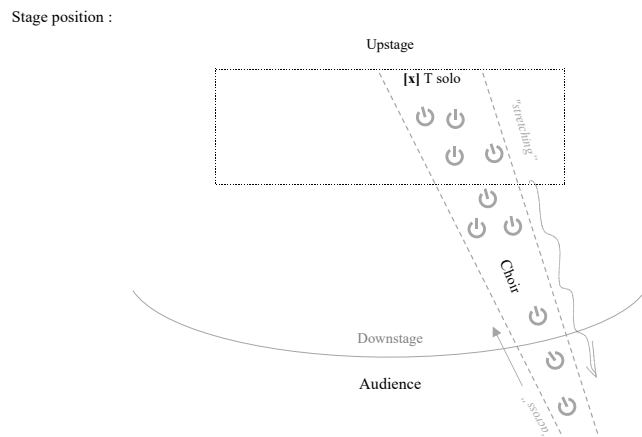
Figure 7. Staging Curious & Curiouser, Esplanade Recital Studio, 19 Aug 2020
 (Still: Gavin Lim/Emily Moh. Used with permission.)

II stretching pine across | for tenor solo and mixed chamber choir, with folder choreography

We move on to a study of shadows, how they lengthen and hollow with time.

*Stretching from the trees,
 Shadows crawl up the mountain.
 Growing into night.*

The choir stretches into the audience aisle, facing upstage:



A choral *recitative* begins upstage, sounding away from yet growing towards the audience until the space is darkened by vowels, with a sky of ethereal harmonics. The text is gradually shed of its skin of consonants, becoming a shadow of itself. One by one, choir folders are folded and lowered; singers go into the night.

A lone grosbeak sings, away.

Across the day. / Sails wing on wing, / we play the wind.



Figure 8. Staging Curious & Curiouser, Esplanade Recital Studio, 19 Aug 2020
(Still: Gavin Lim/Emily Moh. Used with permission.)

Sound is a “kind of wind”³² we breathe in.

We play the wind—sounds vibrating up and left, down and right, winging across the expanse of the stage—as we lift our folders, turn around and sing into the light. Choreo/graphic turns set words in motion, composing sounding moving; the movement of sound patterns space, draughting³³ the score on stage.

mf face front turn slowly in circles

wing on wing we play the wind

Box 1: Turn to face front, slowly.

Box 2: Turn in circles, slowly.

³² This incredible analogy for sound comes to us from Evelyn Glennie, in an interview with Ceraso, quoted in Steph Ceraso, *Sounding Composition: Multimodal Pedagogies for Embodied Listening* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 33.

³³ I use the word “(to) draught” in its many senses: a current of air, (to) sketch or plan, (to) pull or haul.

III Score! | for page-turning choir

*Puck across the line;
Split second, silence.
The roar of crowd.*³⁴

A choir usually comes equipped with scores, a folder, a tuning fork; and instructions for when, where and how to use this equipment (usually to do with watching, anticipating, timing, passing and receiving). Everyone needs to be a team player. The goal: to listen—

Turn the page 10 beats after 4 sounds are heard.

To capture a still (a screen grab if you will): a frozen moment, a split second. In our training matches this June, the play was fast and furious—page-turns sounding skirmishes on ice—and Team SYC scored a few goals.

To end, drop or place your folder on the floor.



Figure 9. Staging *Curious & Curiouser*, Esplanade Recital Studio, 26 Sep 2020
(Still: Gavin Lim/Emily Moh. Used with permission.)

³⁴ The “puck across the line” refers to the puck used in ice hockey, the most popular professional sport in Vancouver and Canada. As part of my research in setting this *haiku* text, I attended a couple of matches in Fall 2019, in support of the home team (Vancouver Canucks).

IV *three reverberations on a line* | for 5 walking solos and organum

To embody the line, I asked Tomoyo Yamada³⁵ to design movement based on what she saw:

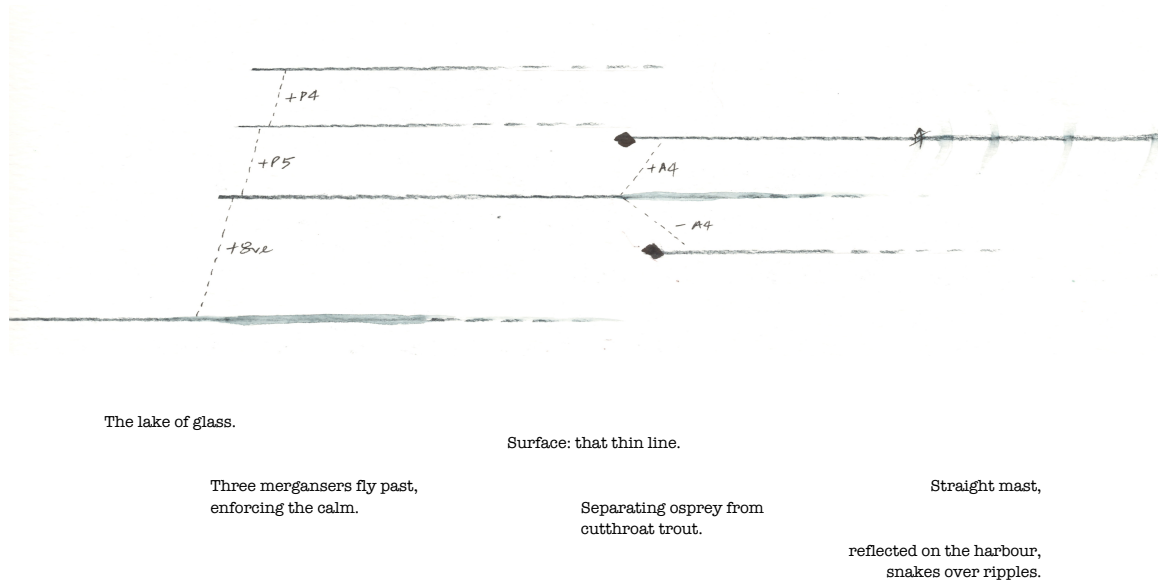


Figure 10. Jennifer Tham, *three reverberations on a line* (2019)
(graphic score)

If I see movement as sound, Tomoyo sees sound as movement. (This looks alike, to me.) On the first day of seminar class her hands spoke, introducing herself with “flower”. From reading the score, she saw the lines as walking: to—from, back—forth, fast—medium—slow, five—together—apart, three—flying—hopping.

³⁵ Tomoyo Yamada, MFA classmate and collaborator. Our first *haiku* project together was *evening rain*: a knot of visuality, movement and sound in an immersive act of rain, made for the collaborative studio class in Fall 2018. Hannah Campbell created a stop-motion video of hand-drawn raindrops; Tomoyo devised gestures, movements and a puddle dance; I composed the soundscape, song and chant.

The solo quintet walk in sound,³⁶ a trio draws melisma with their feet: a turn of the phrase, hear there, a figure of speech. Underlining their poetic polyphony is a *cantus firmus*,³⁷ a choral organum (facing upstage) chants in fourths and fifths, then tritones. The devil you say;³⁸ timely word-signals sweep out from the choir mapping distance and place, sounding *Osprey! Trout! Straight! Straight!*

Sound envisions space.



Figure 11. Staging Curious & Curiouser, Esplanade Recital Studio, 26 Sep 2020
(Still: Gavin Lim/Emily Moh. Used with permission.)

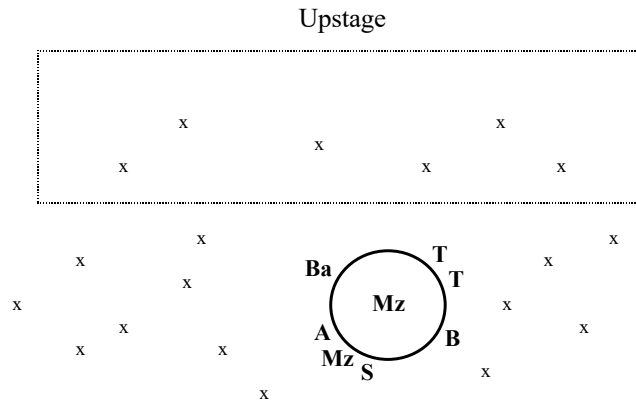
³⁶ Sound, in Tim Ingold's view, is "neither mental nor material, but a phenomenon of *experience*—that is, of our immersion in, and commingling with, the world in which we find ourselves." Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 137.

³⁷ A *cantus firmus* (Latin: "fixed song") is the plain/chant foundation upon which a musical polyphony is drawn.

³⁸ During the Middle Ages, the tritone was called the *diabolus in musica* (Latin: "devil in music"). Composed of three adjacent whole tones, the tritone was considered extremely unstable and dissonant.

V umbrella songs | for umbrella octet and watercolour choir

These watercolour moments are a reverie on the poetics of space, in homage to Bachelard. Adventures in re-sounding pigments—*listening*—we study translucence and the transmission of vocal colour in space.



A watercolour choir stands scattered on stage, around an umbrella octet. Everyone faces out and away—like *haiku* tags on a pole—except for the umbrella girl: she faces the audience, enclosed in a private space. The octet sings in turn—a trio of siskins, a lonely baritone, a couple of rock dudes, an undecided bass, the umbrella girl—repeating, spinning a cocoon of song.

The watercolour singers listen.

Once in a while, a singer re-turns a word, re-siting³⁹ the heard, re-sounding a colour, re-colouring a sound, painting coloured space. (New made-up words are allowed when old words become covered in paint thick as gouache.) By staging listening, we

³⁹ For the filmed version of *umbrella songs*, Tomoyo designed gestures for the *re-sighting* of sound: a twitch, a sway, and an oscillation.

place ourselves inside the repercussions of words inside us. The entire performance space becomes a Bachelard-ian word painting, a living installation, becoming poetry.⁴⁰

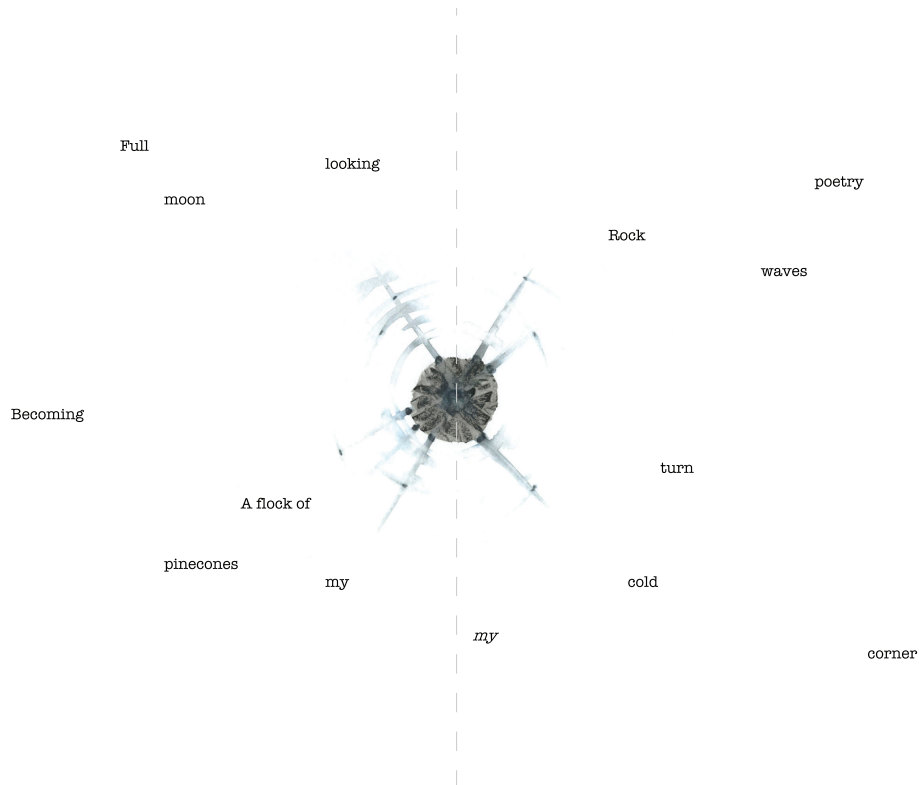


Figure 12. Jennifer Tham, *Becoming poetry* (2020)
(graphic score)

The visual equivalence of silence is space.

Composing space builds a frame around the experience of sound in places of sight.

⁴⁰ In Bachelard's phenomenology of roundness, multiplying the instant—through variation and repetition—causes imagination and memory to gather into (the centre of) a living presence, the dialectics of future/past time creating a poetic instant. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 249.

sounding seeing

artist book |
Curious & Curiose^ar
about how we hear what we see

A sounding of *Curious & Curiose^ar* (the artist book) was staged: *In Place of Sight* (Audain Gallery, November 26 to December 12, 2020). Part of the MFA Graduating Exhibition, four classmates⁴¹ and I offered multi-modal meditations on in/visibility, portals to a poetic space.



Figure 13. Listening station: *Curious & Curiose^ar*
(Photo: Rachel Topham Photography. Used with permission.)

The artist book is a part-score (solo, any voice), for performing listening.

⁴¹ Caitlyn Almond, Hannah Campbell, Liu Xinyue, Ghinwa Yassine.

Composed as the postlude to *Curious & Curiouser* (the suite), the artist book was a way of returning the found images to their places of sight. With the postponement of the live choral performance (from August 2020 to 202?), the book performed as a prelude instead. This paper re-positions the book to its original writing place.

Curious & Curiouser^a is a collection of graphic scores, word paintings and scripts for performing listening, mapping sound out of sight. Three listening events are paired with the drawings made for the listening wall, *Eye hear | I, ear* (611 Alexander, Fall 2018). I was looking into the relationship between image and word, sight and sound.

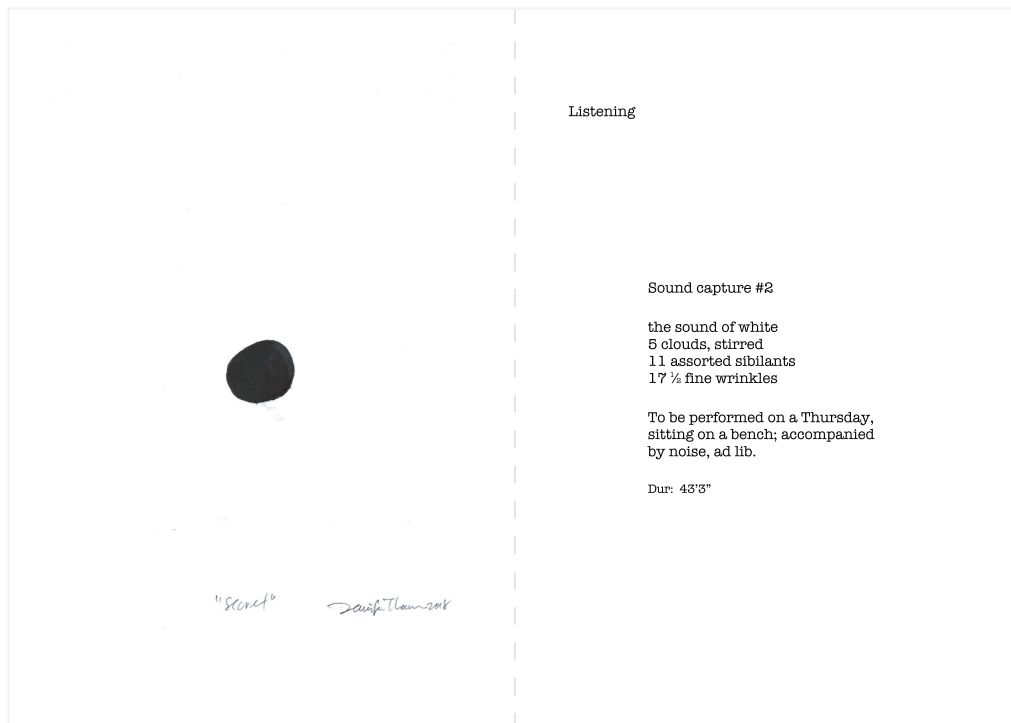


Figure 14. Jennifer Tham, Listening | Sound capture #2 (2020)

Space is the visual equivalence of silence.

Composing silence “stages listening as the invention of sound.”⁴²

⁴² Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 89.

On the phenomenon of listening, Jean-Luc Nancy distinguishes listening (*écouter*), from both hearing and understanding (*entendre*). He argues that because music has been “indexed to a mode of signification rather than a mode of sensibilities,”⁴³ we never truly listen when we can read the signs. When we are *unable* to decode the dis/assemblage of word-sounds, we “strain towards a sense beyond sound,”⁴⁴ and truly listen.



Figure 15. Artist book installation, Audain Gallery
(Photo: Rachel Topham Photography. Used with permission.)

⁴³ Jean-Luc Nancy. *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 57.

⁴⁴ Nancy, *Listening*, 6.

eye hear : I, ear

The lines and words draw musical thought, directing the eye and painting sounds there, hear. The spatial form re-folds space with time “as built in our ears and unfold in our auditory imagination.”⁴⁵ Post-exhibition of *Curious & Curiouser*^a, Meagan Woods⁴⁶ said I have a way of “making the visible invisible.” I see.

I listened.

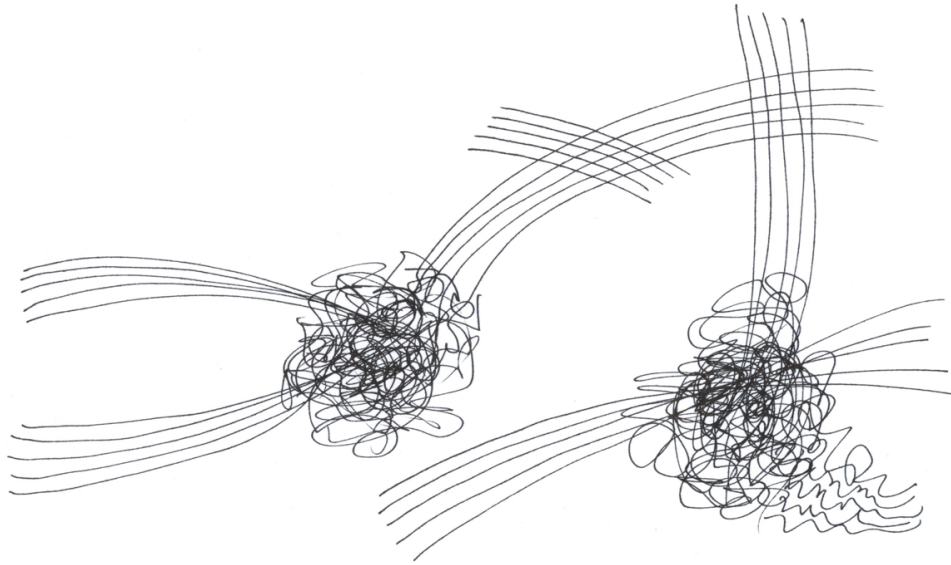


Figure 16. Jennifer Tham, Eye hear “Knots and Crosses” (2018)

I heard.

In writing this paper, I performed word painting.

Within the endless frame of a pandemic space, I re-sight the sounding of *Curious & Curiouser* into words that sing. Curating word(image)sound—their reverberations, resonances, repercussions—to make enough of my world perform in this space, I again see this world for the first time. Eye music.

How curious.

⁴⁵ Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 123.

⁴⁶ MFA classmate, who works with words, choreography and costume design.

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for the SYC Ensemble Singers, Singapore

Jennifer Tham

Curious & Curiouser

a suite of choral movements for mixed chamber choir

SCORE

Vancouver/Singapore
2020/2021

Programme note

I wrote *Curious & Curiouser* as choral theatre, to look into the pictorialisms of a choral space and how we hear what we see. The suite draws its text from *haiku* tagged on to wooden power poles along the industrial waterfront area of East Vancouver.

I found these tags on my walks between SFU Woodward's and 611 Alexander St, the two campuses of the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University (Vancouver), during my first semester in the MFA Program, Fall 2018. The tags are part of the public art project *100 Red Haiku Tags* by John Steil, who thinks of them as guerilla art. The tags act as portals into an altered time and space—the place of the everyday dramas around them—and pulled me into the heart of the old downtown core; their words and images of the *haiku* become rabbit-holes into the different place-scapes of the suite, invented spaces in which we play with the visuality of the performance.

In composing *Curiouser & Curiouser*, I started from the image, exploring “eye music” through choreographic gesture, movement and theatre. The choral art is re-imagined as a word/sound sculpture of patterned movement by composing the movement of sound and the sight of movement by choreographing the choral body—walking to and from, facing away, turning toward. The work is curious about the theatre of being a “choir”—moving into and out of position, turning pages, lifting/lowering folders.

Each movement is a different étude, a different sounding space. In every movement, the singers inhabit their on sound-spaces, co-composing the textures by repeating gestures in their own way.

I *water mist fog* is about concealment, hearing what catches our eye.

II *stretching pine across* is about shadows and circulating sound, with the aid of folder choreography.

III *Score!* is about the score, literally, and involves page-turns but no singing. Instructions given.

IV *three reverberations on a line** is about the line, embodied by walking and choral organum.

V *umbrella songs* is about singing, colouring what catches our ear.

The Processional—***line up***—refers to how choirs line up to enter the stage, and the way they move offstage. I imagined the performance space as both mode and site of transport—a *ferry*—bringing us to different places. Lining up is part of the unseen (backstage) theatre of being a “choir”.

Curious & Curiouser is dedicated to the SYC Ensemble Singers, who lab-tested the work in various formats and formations during rehearsals from May 2020 to July 2021.

Jennifer Tham
6 August 2021, Singapore

Jennifer Tham is curious about the sight of sound and has a multi-modal listening practice as a composer and conductor. Her work is shaped by a love of words, phenomenology, mapping, spatial practices, conceptual art, contemporary music and choral theatre.

* **Tomoyo Yamada**, MFA classmate and collaborator, designed the movement for *three reverberations*. Tomoyo is an interdisciplinary artist whose primary medium is dance and choreography. Her work explores different modes of human movement and embodied cultural difference.

Jennifer Tham

Curious & Curiouser

a suite of choral movements for mixed chamber choir

- I ***water mist fog*** | Adventures in White for triple mixed octet [5:00]
Pole 8 | *Water churns, tumbles, / plunges onto rocks below. / The roar of gravity.*
Pole 17 | *Mist cloaked waves. / Goldeneyes raft out / from behind the headland.*
Pole 23b | *White rabbit hopping, / slowly, almost unseen, through, / blue shadows on snow.*
Pole 25 | *The fog lifted. / Our small island sailed / closer to shore.*
- II ***stretching pine across*** | for tenor solo and mixed chamber choir, with folder choreography [7:00]
Pole 9 | *Stretching from the trees, / shadows crawl up the mountain. / Growing into night.*
Pine grosbeak singing / just for us. / We wish.
Across the day. / Sails wing on wing, / we play the wind.
- III ***Score!*** | for page-turning choir [6:00]
Pole 20 | *Puck across the line; / split second, silence. / The roar of the crowd.*
- IV ***three reverberations on a line*** | for mixed choir and 5 walking solos [6:00]
Pole 9 | *The lake of glass. / Three mergansers fly past, / enforcing the calm.*
Powell | *Surface: that thin line. / Separating osprey from / cutthroat trout.*
Pole 9 | *Straight mast, / reflected on the harbour, / snakes over ripples.*
- V ***umbrella songs*** | for umbrella octet and watercolour choir [8:00]
Pole 24 | *A flock of siskins / settle along the branches. / Becoming pinecones.*
Full moon over the ridge. / I know you're at home / looking at it, too.
Rocks rounded by waves— / the poetry of nature. / Relentless ocean.
The corner, deciding which way to turn. / The cold north wind.
Circumscribed by the circle / of my umbrella. / My private world.

Processional

To be performed when entering and exiting the stage.

line up | for singers moving in an orderly manner

Powell | *Ferry line-ups. / Ordering the randomness of / different desires.*

A note on Duration:

The overall duration of individual movements will vary ($\pm 2:00$), responding to the overall sense of time and space as mapped by the acoustics of the performance venue. To provide a sense of musical proportion, some durations have been indicated in the score by [t:00] (where t marks time; for instance, [1:00] is the one-minute mark).

A note on Pole Numbers:

The poles were numbered according to the order in which the *haiku* tags were found, in Fall 2018. More tags were found on the poles along Powell and Dunlevy Streets in early 2019; these poles have not been numbered.

I

A homage to R Murray Schafer,
a nod to *Miniwanka* (*The moments of water*).

water mist fog

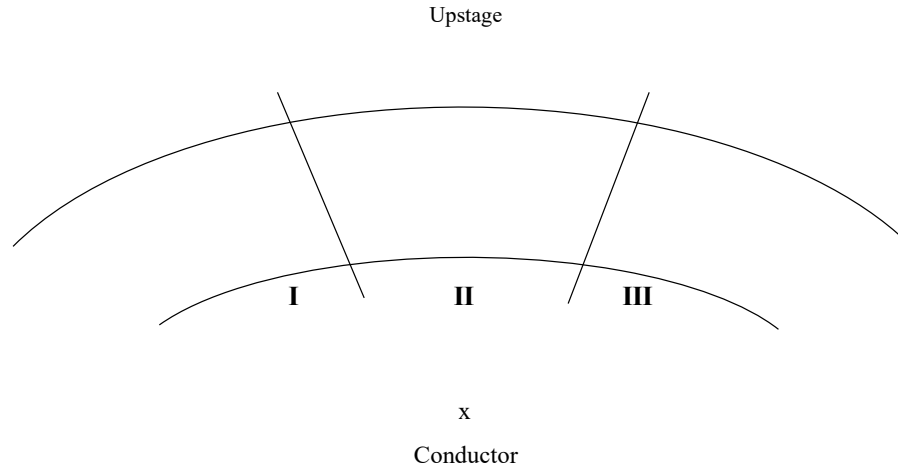
Adventures in White for triple mixed octet

... <i>water</i> ...	Water churns, tumbles, plunges onto rocks below. The roar of gravity.	... <i>mist</i> ...	Mist cloaked waves. Goldeneyes raft out from behind the headland.
	(<i>snow</i>) White rabbit hopping, slowly, almost unseen, through blue shadows on snow.	... <i>fog</i> ...	The fog lifted. Our small island sailed closer to shore.

—John Steil, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

I *water mist fog* | Adventures in White for triple mixed octet

Stage position :



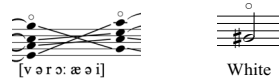
Performance notes :

1. The choir is divided into 3 mixed octets, positioned in blocks (see diagram).
2. Sound and sounding gestures move from Stage Right to Stage Left : Octet I → Octet II → Octet III.
3. Each octet reads from the same score (notated for single octet), singing in canon with each other. The canons are allowed to be “loose”, with the delay between each entry modified according to desired density of texture and/or space.

Suggested canon:

Octet I begins, followed by octets II and III, singing 2 and 3 beats after Octet I, respectively.

4. The ° markings denote “overtone-singing”—producing overtones while singing the given pitch and text. For example, in *mist* and *snow*:



5. ***fog*** All voices leave the sustained notes one at a time, moving sequentially upwards to their highest possible note. Let the crescendo and subsequent decrescendo (as the voices pass their comfortable range) take place naturally.

fog may be used to move into position for Movement II.

I

water mist fog

Adventures in White for triple mixed octet

... water ...

No slower than ♩ = 88

S
M
A

Wa - ter churns, _____

tum - bles, tum - bles, churns _____, plun - ges, plun - ges,

on - to the rocks be - low...

[v ər ɔ : æ ə i] allow natural overtones to emerge.

attacca

... mist ...

[S/A] Repeat "mist" *ad lib*; marking time with your breath; each breath a complete "mist". Interrupt this with 2 or 3 discrete iterations of "cloaked", "waves". *Soli*, refer to box.

S/A

pp possibile, almost humming [1:00] *p*

Mist _____ cloaked _____ waves _____ Mist _____

Tenor solo *mp - mf*

Gol-den-eyes

T/B

[v ər ɔ : æ ə i]

[T/B] Move slowly through the overtones, sliding towards the next note. Align with other notes in the chord, if possible. Tenor *Soli*: each soloist to sing in turn, in loose canon with the preceding voice.

(snow)

Each soloist to sing in turn, after the preceding voice, almost inaudible, *recitativo*.

Soli *pp possibile*

I White rab-bit hop-ping, slow-ly,

II al-most un-seen, through

III blue (mime) sha-dows on snow.

Mezzo solo *pp possibile*

White rabbit hopping

[2:00] [3:00]

Mist cloaked waves

[o: i a]

... fog ...

[Tutti] Leave the sustained note, one at a time, *ad lib*, singing the sequences given. Take your time, breathe as often as necessary, a full breath per 3-note figure.

mp *ff possibile **

[i] [a] [o:] [a]

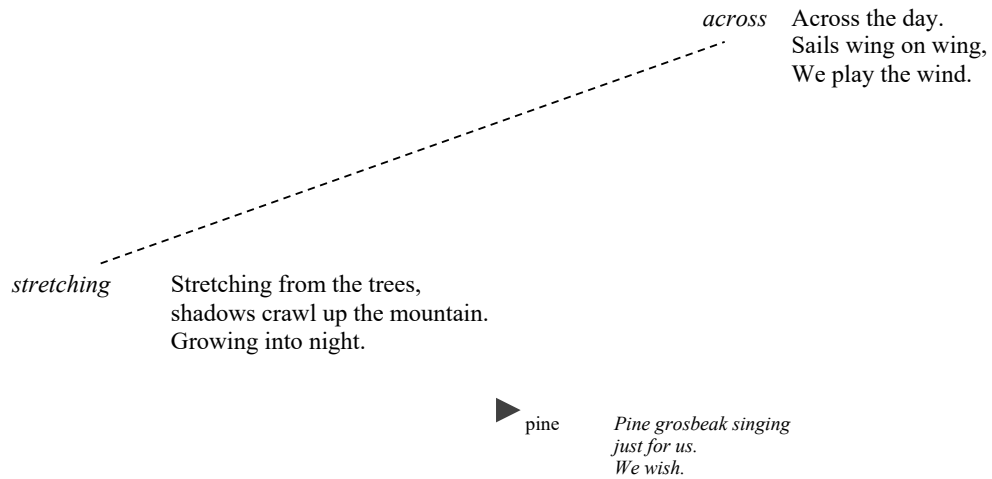
[o: i a] [a]

Jennifer Tham
Vancouver, 12iii2020

II

stretching pine across

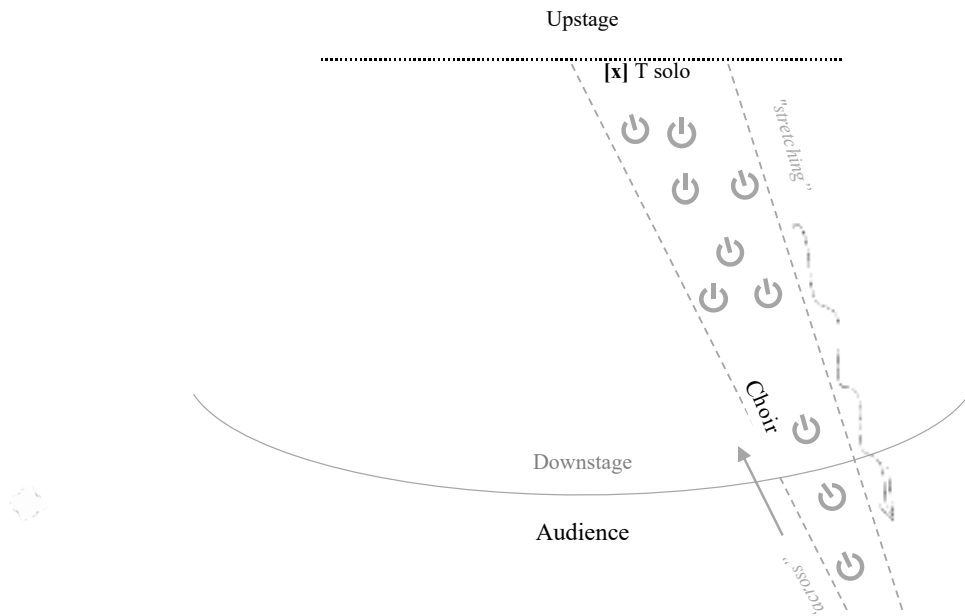
for tenor solo and mixed chamber choir, with folder choreography



—John Steil, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

II *stretching pine across* | for tenor solo and mixed chamber choir, with folder choreography

Stage position :



Performance notes :

1. Singers take a mixed position, facing upstage, spilling into the audience aisle. Choir folders open.
2. ***stretching*** Sound begins upstage and moves towards/into the audience.
Closing/lowering of folders, likewise, begins upstage and moves towards the audience.

Upstage, an SMzATB quintet begin, one or two at a time.
Singers downstage of the quintet, facing them, catch and carry their chant, reiterating note and text, rhythm ad lib, also one or two at a time.
This continues until everyone is singing.

Folders As the quintet ends their second line of text, they close and lower their folders, slowly and quietly, taking 4s to 8s.
Singers downstage of the quintet do the same, following after the singer in front of them, until all folders are lowered.
3. ***pine*** Solo tenor-bird sings, facing upstage.
4. ***across*** A solo soprano sings in the aisle, answered by another singer upstage, facing upstage.

Boxes Synchronise singing with playful movement: turning to face front, turning in circles, while singing, opening/closing and lifting/lowering folders *ad lib*, *maestoso gracioso sempre*.

Box 2 may be used to move into the next position, turning slowly in circles with folder dance.

II

stretching pine across

for tenor solo and mixed chamber choir, with folder choreography

— *stretching* —

Chant the given text on a single note, *ad lib*.

After a certain number of repetitions,

sing the next pitch on the given scale in the direction of your note at [1:30], and [2:30] :



Align with other notes in the chord if possible.

Continue singing (overtones) until you sing [Box 1], unless you have a solo.

Instructions regarding tempo and texture below.

mf quasi-chant

[1:30] [2:30] * T solo

S
Mz
A
T
B

||: Stretching from the trees. :||: Shadows crawl up the mountain. :||: əʋɪŋɪnu:ɑɪ :||

Tempo | Quick recitations ——— slowing — half-phrases/words — slow ———
Text(ure) | Consonant-rich, rustling ——— shedding ———> vowels ——— overtones ———

[2:00] **Folders** | Close and lower slowly,
 starting from singers upstage

► — *pine* —

Sing in a clear voice, improvising on the given gestures, ~ 1:00 dur.

mf sempre, allegro

* Tenor solo, ad lib

wish _____ for for me wish wish wish _____

After the tenor-bird sings, wait 10s.

— across —

Solo 1 : soprano, from the aisle

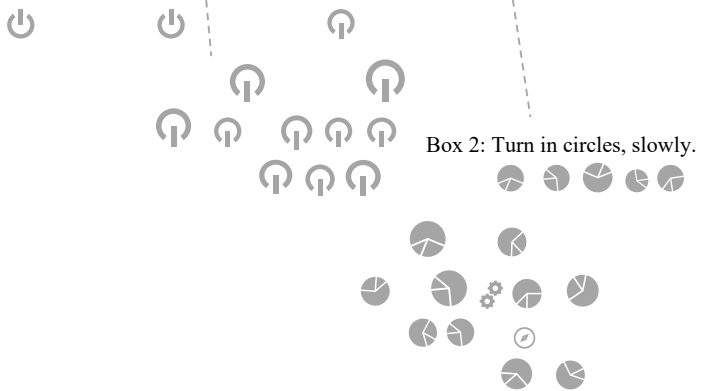
Solo 2 : soprano, upstage

Musical score for the phrase "A - cross the day". The score is written for Soprano 1 (Solo 1) and Soprano 2 (Solo 2). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8. The music starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics "A - cross the day" are written below the notes.

Individually, perform Box 1 then Box 2, *ad lib*.
 Start sparse—one singer at a time—then slowly increase density until the air is filled with sound and movement.
 Repeat Box 1 as wished, then move to Box 2.
 Repeat Box 2 as needed, to move into a new position.

Two musical boxes, Box 1 and Box 2, are shown. Box 1 contains the notes for "wing_ on wing" and Box 2 contains the notes for "we play_____ the wind". Both boxes are written on a single treble clef staff.

Box 1: Turn to face front, slowly, folders open/lifted.
 If repeating, turn to face upstage, folders closed/lowered.
 Repeat, alternating.



While turning, open/close and lift/lower folders *ad lib*, *maestoso gracioso sempre*.
 Synchronise movement with singing.

Jennifer Tham
 Vancouver, 20x2019

III

Score!
for page-turning choir

Puck across the line;
split second, silence.

The roar of the crowd.

—John Steil, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

III *Score!* | for page-turning choir

The choir stands in a scattered position across the stage.
Each chorister will need a choir folder, *Score/s* (in folder) and a tuning fork.
Score refers to any bound score, with a minimum of 40 page-turns.
More than one score may be used, if necessary.
Pages may be turned in either direction.

Instructions

The work begins after the last folder is lifted and opened.

Follow your own beat.

Turn the pages of the score(s) in your folder, as quietly as possible.

Two or three times, as slowly as possible.

Two to five times, as loudly as possible.

Play as closely as you can to every 5th / 7th page-turn of one other player.

At some point, seek out another player and play a duet with them. A chain response may form—stop when you overlap.

Turn the page every 24 or 15 beats, then every 25 or 16 beats, then every 26 or 17 beats.

Turn the page 10 beats after 4 sounds are heard.

Turn the page every 38 beats; turn the page twice, every 37 beats. Alternate.

To end, drop or place your folder on the floor.

The work ends when all folders have been placed or dropped on the floor.

At some point, use your tuning fork.

Instructions left intentionally open.

Jennifer Tham
Singapore, 11vi2021

IV

three reverberations on a line for mixed choir and 5 walking solos

3 The lake of glass.
Three mergansers fly past,
enforcing the calm.

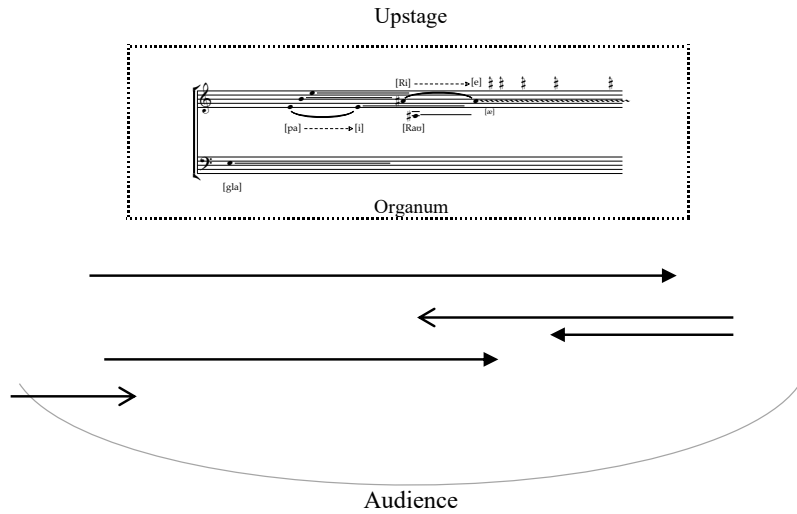
2 Surface: that thin line.
Separating osprey from
cutthroat trout.

1 Straight mast.
reflected on the harbour,
snakes over ripples.

—John Steil, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

IV three reverberations on a line | for mixed choir and 5 walking solos

Stage position :



Performance notes :

5 walking solos are selected from the choir.

The rest of the choir form the *organum*, standing in three rows (of mixed voice-parts), facing upstage.

1. Solos See movement score.
2. *Organum* Begin about a minute after the solos begin walking.

[1:00] [2:30] [3:15] [4:00] [5:00]

Occasionally, individual singers may sing the following words on the corresponding [syllable] or [vowel], turning in circles as they do :

[gla] <i>glass</i>	[pa] <i>past</i>	[I] <i>thin</i>	[Ri] <i>osprey</i>	[e] <i>straight</i>
			[Raʊ] <i>trout</i>	[æ] <i>reflected</i>

The *organum* may end before the solos.

Jennifer Tham
Vancouver, 17xi2019

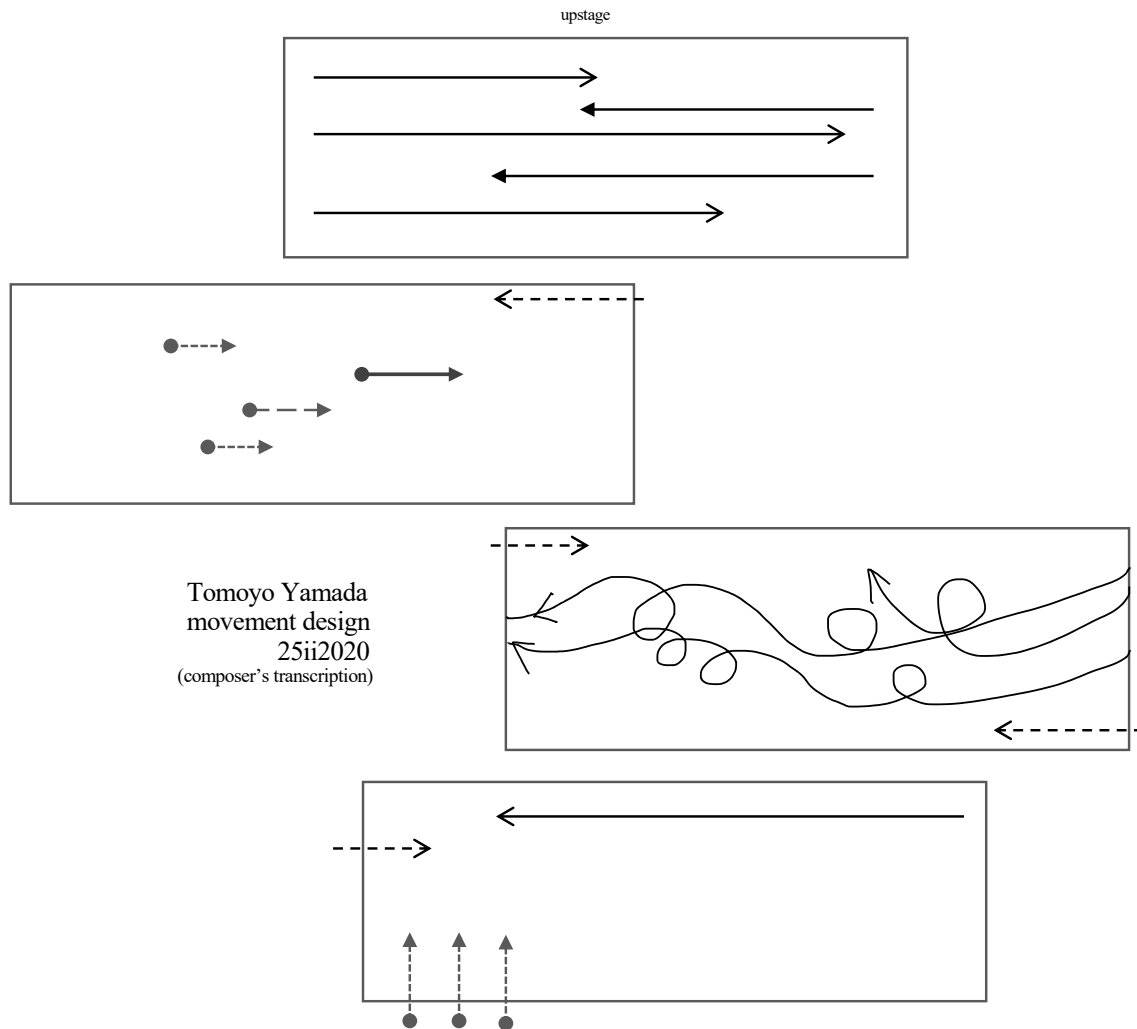
IV
three reverberations on a line
for mixed choir and 5 walking solos

Movement score

The following boards are suggestions for tracing lines on stage: straight, and wavy with or without turns.

The various ways of walking are : moderate to slow (crotchet 72 – 30)
forward or backward
with tiny runs and skips

The various ways of seeing are : not seeing
seeing past



A link to video of the movement designed by Tomoyo
can be obtained by contacting the composer.

V

A homage to Bachelard,
in reverie on the poetics of space.

umbrella songs

for umbrella octet and watercolour choir

2 Full moon over the ridge.
I know you're at home
looking at it, too.

3 Rocks rounded by waves—
the poetry of nature.
Relentless ocean.

5 Circumscribed by the circle
of my umbrella.
My private world.

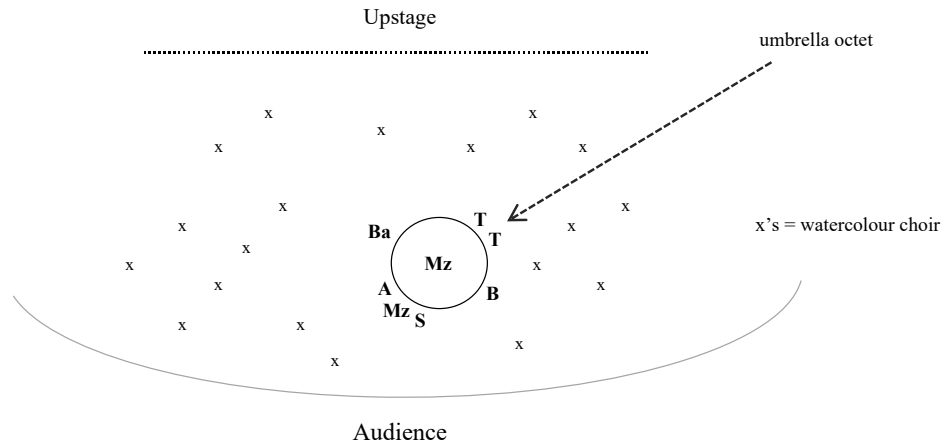
1 A flock of siskins
settle along the branches.
Becoming pinecones.

4 The corner,
deciding which way to turn.
The cold north wind.

—John Steil, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

V umbrella songs | for umbrella octet and watercolour choir

Stage position :



Performance notes :

The choir is divided into an umbrella octet and a watercolour choir.

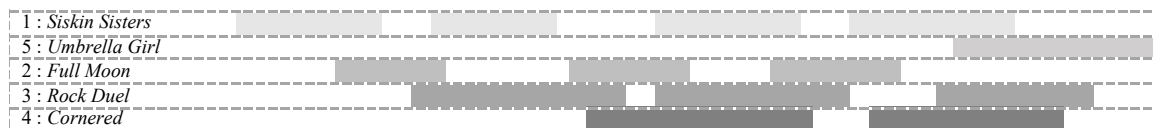
The octet is made up of a trio of female voices
 a baritone solo
 a tenor (and/or baritone) duo
 a bass solo
 a mezzo-soprano solo

SMzA *siskin sisters*
 Ba
 T/Ba *rock buddies*
 B
 Mz *umbrella girl*

The other singers form the watercolour choir.

Instructions :

Umbrella Octet The octet stands in an outward-facing circle, enclosing the mezzo-soprano soloist, who faces the audience. Each of the sub-sections of the octet sing in turn, beginning with the trio, moving clockwise around the circle, ending with the mezzo-soprano solo. Their songs repeat, forming a cocoon of sound.



See score for performance directions.

Watercolour choir

Take up a scattered mixed position around the octet, facing away from the octet.
 Let the octet begin. Listen in silence for a minute or two.
 Follow their sounds and re-sound them, one word/note at a time, on a single breath.
 Borrow the octet's colours to start with.
 Allow the colours to gradually transform (in) the space.
 If the octet cannot be heard clearly, despite listening carefully,
 either borrow the word/note of a watercolour singer
 or borrow a note and make a new word

There are two possible endings—either the umbrella girl ends alone or the watercolours fill the space.

V
umbrella songs
 for umbrella octet and watercolour choir

1 Siskin Sisters | SMzA trio

1st time: *mf* – *f*

2nd and subsequent times: *mp* – *p*, using text, vocables or humming.

$\text{♩} = 80$ *leggiero espressivo*

S
 A flock of sis - kins set - tle a - long
 A flock of sis - kins set - tle a - long , a - long the

A
 A flock of sis - kins set - tle a - long , a - long the

7 the bran - ches,
 bran - ches, the bran - ches, bran - ches. Be-com-ing pine - cones.
 bran - ches, the bran - ches, bran - ches. Be-com-ing pine - cones.

* Repeat song 3 to 6 times, waiting between repetitions.
 Sustain the final note(s) in the last iteration.

2 Full Moon | baritone solo

1st time: *mf* – *f*

2nd and subsequent times: *mp* – *p*, using text, vocables or humming.

$\text{♩} = 72$ *in a declamatory manner*

Full moon ov - er the ridge. I know. I

6 know you're at home look - ing at it too.

* Repeat song 3 to 6 times, waiting between repetitions.
 Sustain the final note(s) in the last iteration.

3 Rock Duel | tenor (and/or baritone) duo

$\text{♩} \geq 88$ *With effort. f sempre.*

Rocks round-ed by waves. po - e - try

Decide who sings first, they are Singer 1 and the next, Singer 2.

Singer 1 sings the text, using the given rhythm and any combination of the notes in Box [A].

Singer 2 performs in canon with Singer 1, one ♩ behind, or as closely as possible. Resist the effort to blend or balance; instead, try to overcome Singer 1 without overtaking him.

After 4 iterations, perform Box [B] at a much slower tempo. Decide who sings which note, beforehand.

After 9 iterations *tempo primo*, perform Box [B] at the slower tempo, keeping the same part as above.

After 2 iterations *tempo primo*, perform Box [B] *simile* ...

After 5 iterations *tempo primo, simile* ...

After 4 iterations *tempo primo, sim.*

After 5 iterations *smile*

After 8 it... *sim...*

1 iteration, *pause*. Perform Box [B] *ad lib*, repeating until after the Umbrella Girl sings.

4 Cornered | bass solo

$\text{♩} = 72$ *Decisive, or not. (1st time: f, 2nd time: mp. Wait before repeating.)*

The cor - ner, de - cid - ing, de - cid - ing, de - cid - ing which way,
 9 which way, which way, which way, which way which way which way, which way to
 14 turn, which way, which? The cold North wind. 2x

5 Umbrella Girl | mezzo solo

$\text{♩} = 56$ *accel.* $\text{♩} = 108$ (mm.10)

Cir - cumscribed by the cir - cle of the cir - cle, of the cir - cle, of the cir - cle
 10 of my pri - vate world. Ah ah *

* Repeat 3-6 times, becoming slower each time yet not softer.

Jennifer Tham
 Vancouver, 24xi2019

Artist Book

The artist book—*Curious & Curiouser^ar*—was installed at a “listening station” in the Audain Gallery as part of the MFA Graduating Exhibition, *In Place of Sight* (November 26 to December 12, 2020).

The artist wrote the following statement for the exhibition brochure:

“*Curious & Curiouser^ar* is an invitation to perform listening. The book translates *haiku* found tagged on power poles in the industrial waterfront area of East Vancouver into a collection of graphic scores, poetic instants and listening events. Scripts for mapping sound out of sight, the word paintings are the opening act for *Curious & Curiouser*, a theater piece for mixed chamber choir, which will set the poetry in motion in 2021.”

Jennifer Tham
Curious &
Curious^{er}



Moon dances with clouds :
Moon with clouds
dances with
clouds
Moon

:

for :

Peter Dickinson -----

Allyson Clay -----

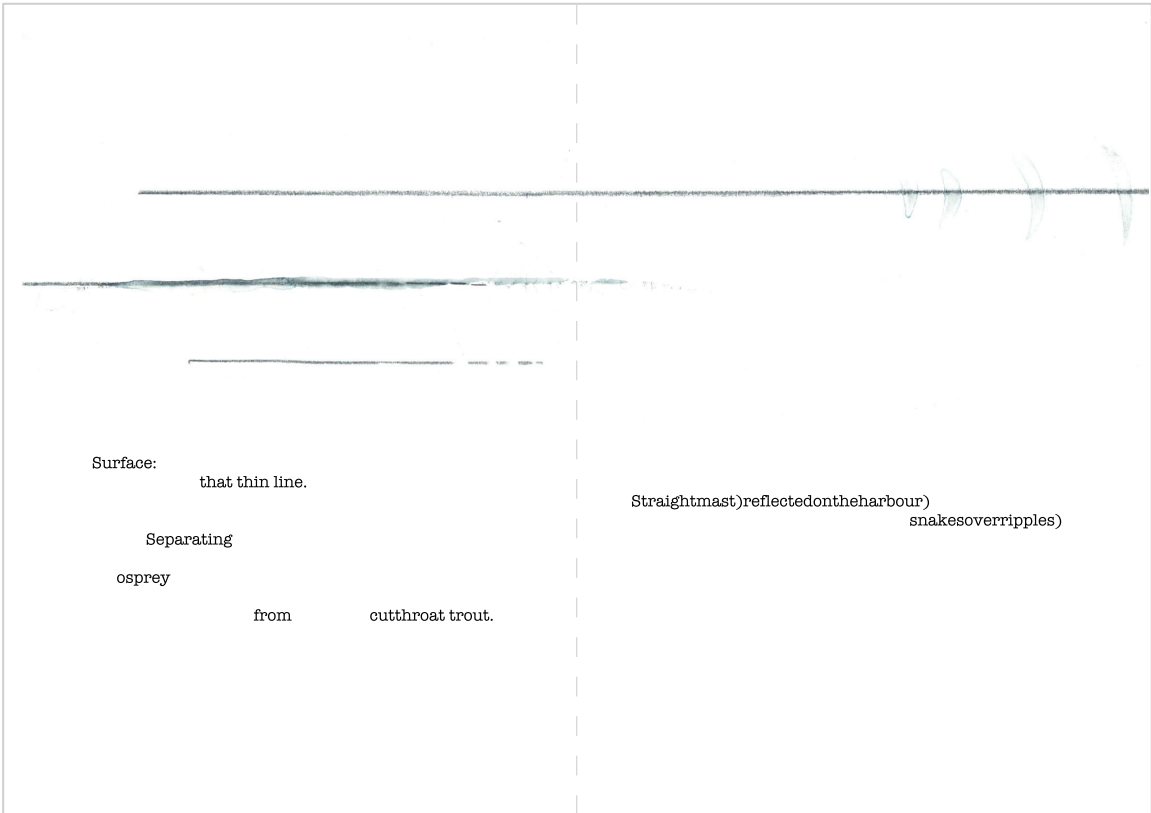
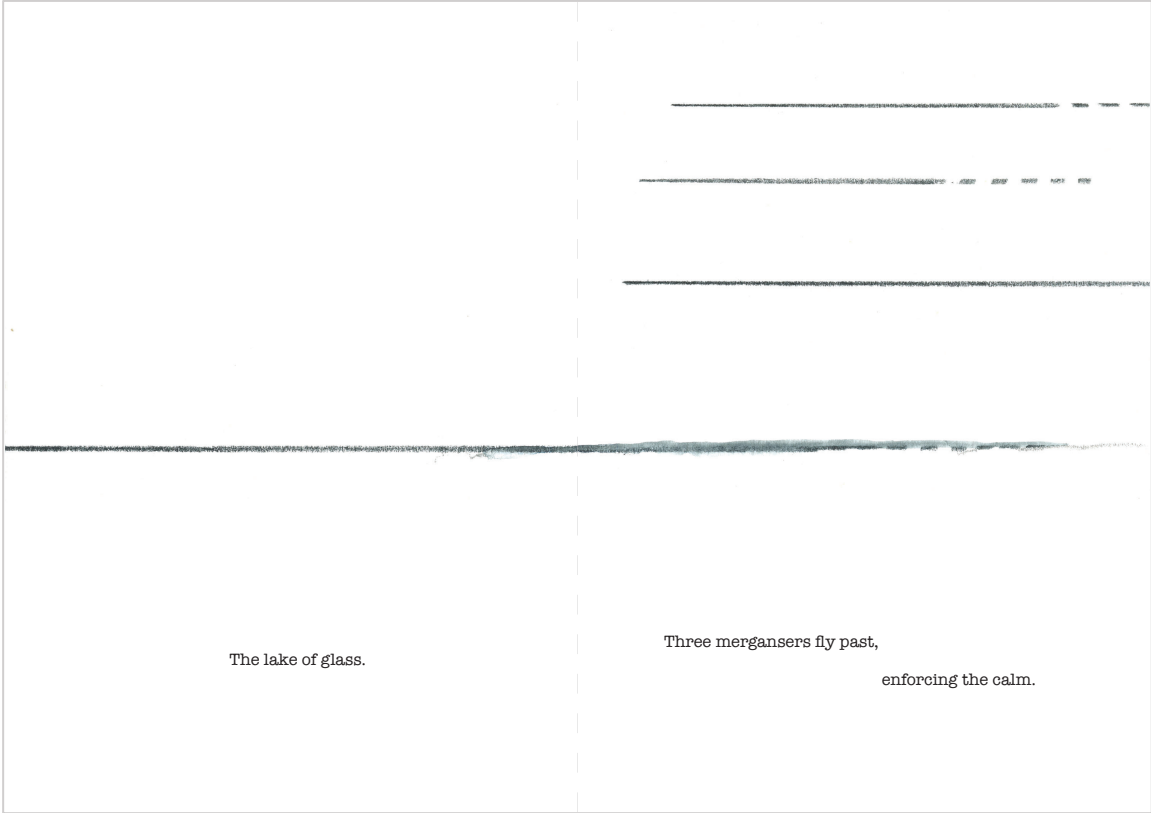
Joey Zaurrini -----

because :

I drew and they saw that it was good

Curious &
Curiouser

about how we hear we see



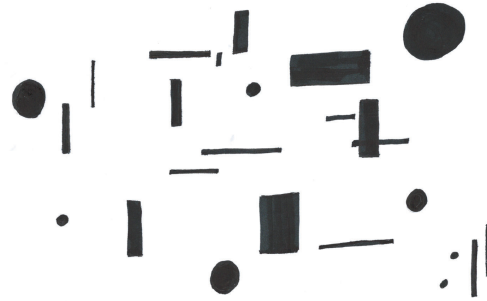
Listening

Sound capture #1

the sound of yellow
3 moonbeams, rinsed
11 assorted i's
5 small freckles

To be performed on a Monday,
during a ferry crossing.

Dur: ca. 10'



"slides & stones"

David Thomson 2018

Listening

Sound capture #2

the sound of white
5 clouds, stirred
11 assorted sibilants
17 1/2 fine wrinkles

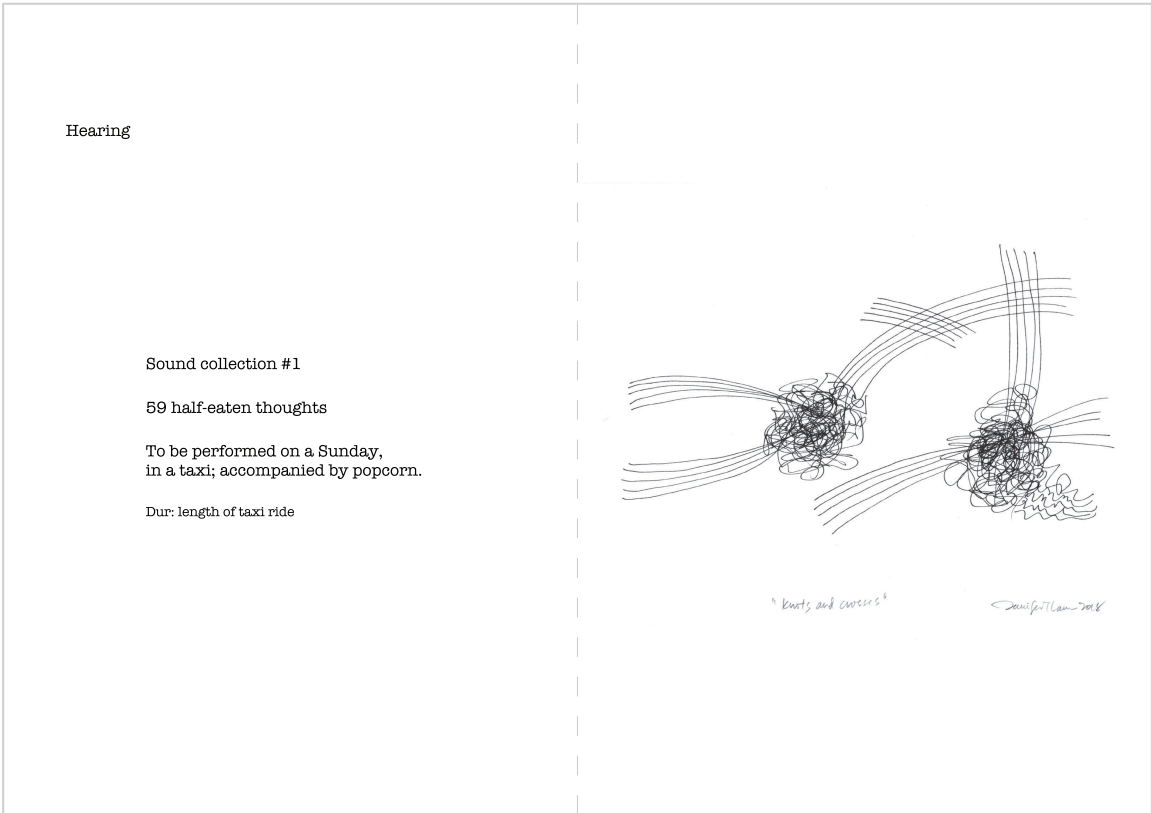
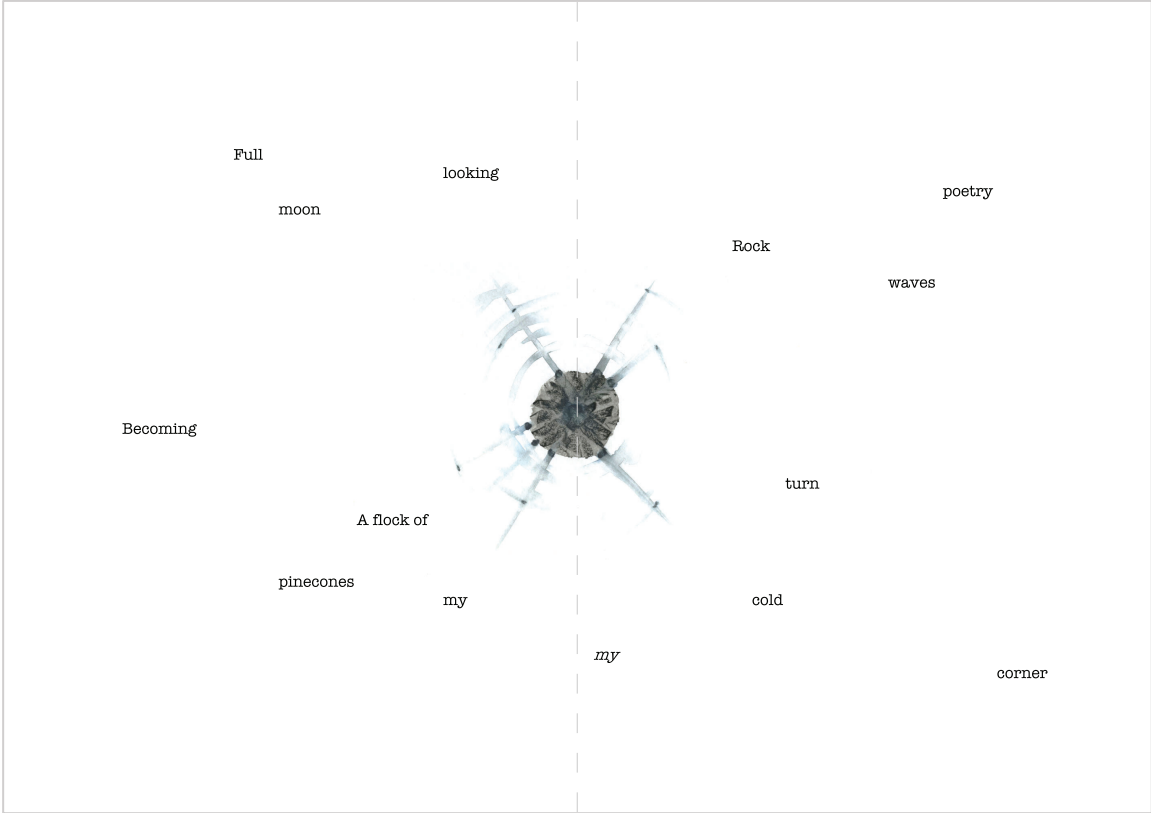
To be performed on a Thursday,
sitting on a bench; accompanied
by noise, ad lib.

Dur: 43'3"



"secret"

David Thomson 2018

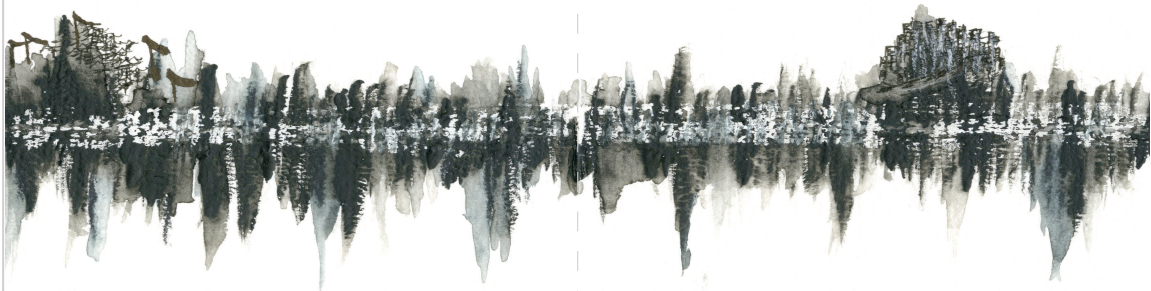




Turkey vulture,
the winter wren.



And all between.

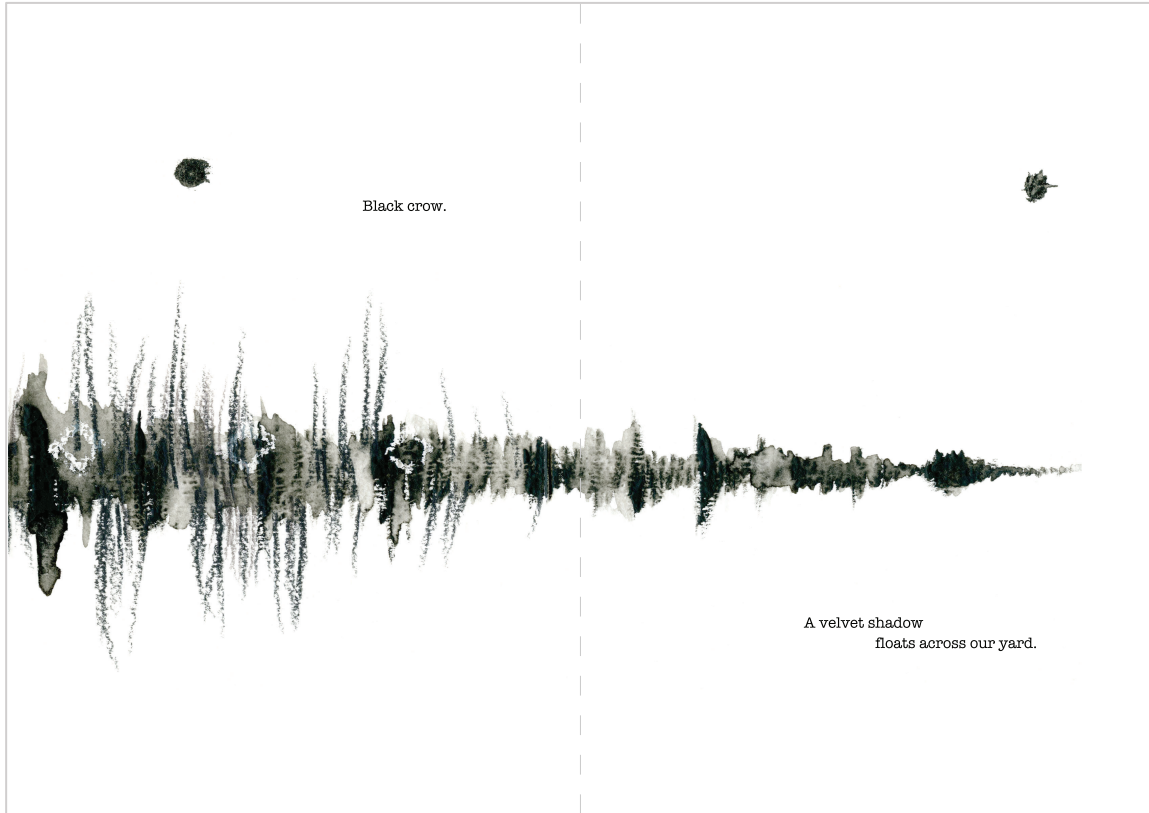


Lusaka, La Paz;
what about Ulan Bator?



The atlas of dreams.





Curious & Curieuse^r is a study of eye music, a sighting of sound.

The book translates *haiku* found tagged¹ on power poles in the industrial waterfront area of East Vancouver into a collection of graphic scores, word paintings and scripts for performing listening, mapping sound à la R Murray Schafer, Yoko Ono and Raven Chacon.

Listening aid/s :

QR-1 **Moon dances**
Big band music spills across the square, then above. Moon dances with clouds. — John Stell, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

4-7 **three reverberations on a line** (2019) paper, watercolour

8-11 Listening | Sound capture #1, #2
"Sticks & stones", "Secret" *Gift for Joey* (2018) paper, ink

12-13 **Becoming poetry** paper, watercolour

14-15 Hearing | Sound collection #1
"Knots and crosses" *Gift for Joey* (2018) paper, ink


¹The *haiku* are part of a public art project *100 Red Haiku Tags* by John Stell (www.johnsteli.com). John thinks of the tags as guerilla art, and is happy the *haiku* are being given a new dimension. The *haiku* flowing—fully or fragmented—through the spaces of this book are from the tags along Alexander and Powell streets. The poetry is used with permission of the author.

16-25 **in-between** (2019) paper, ink, watercolour
Graphic score

A visual text of sounding images – *haiku*, train and crow spectra – draws the invisible antiphon around the Columbia Street Pump Station, in between SFU Woodwards and the SFU visual arts studios at 611 Alexander.

The rhythms of the CPR train passing the Pump Station activate the heart of this score; its sound spectrum – passing from left to right – reminds me of *ikat* patterns.

Ikat, from the Javanese language, means "thread" and also "to bind". The yarn is bound first before dyeing, in patterned knots that resist dyeing.



Train spectra *Ikat*

Train sounds – the sound of journey, migration, displacement – and their spectra form the base layer on which an atlas of dreams is mapped.

The 3 *haiku* are tagged onto poles nearest the Pump Station.

28-QR **Yellow leaves**
Yellow leaves fall, shape to lines. The nest! — John Stell, *100 Red Haiku Tags*

Jennifer Tham
September 2020, Singapore

Yellow leaves fall, shape to lines .
 Yellow leaves all shape s .
 Yell leave fall s et li e
 lo ves all sh ine
 ello leave all, shape to li es
 lo e ve fall, sh o ne .
 low eaves fall, ape
 Yel l a all to
 el l ll, sh e
 l l ll l
 l l ll
 l ll
 ll
 ll, sh .



dedicated to Bert, who walked
 with me, all ways .

www.jennifertham.com

Appendix.

Research Essay

Painting Words With Sound

A Phenomenology of Word Painting in Music

Jennifer Tham Sow Ying
CA 812 Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar II
Fall 2019

Painting Words With Sound

A Phenomenology of Word Painting in Music



Figure A1. Jennifer Tham, Word Painting "Soundescape" (2018)

**BABABADALGHARAGHTAKAMMINARRONNKONNBRONNTONNERRONNT
UONNTHUNNTROVARRHOUNAWNSKAWNTOOHOOHOORDENENTHURNUK,**

James Joyce's thunder-word from *Finnegan's Wake* is splintered into the hundred noisy consonants and angry vowels that sound its form, in a word painting à la R Murray Schafer—Canadian composer, pedagogue, iconoclast and once-upon-a-time SFU lecturer responsible for soundscape studies and writings, including *The Tuning of the World*.¹ Schafer has shaped much of my thought around words and music, writing and sounding, seeing and hearing; his choral scores are graphically notated, with words that sing off the page.

¹ R Murray Schafer (1933–2021) taught at the Centre for the Study of Communications and the Arts at Simon Fraser University (Burnaby, BC) from September 1965 to December 1974. L. Brett Scott, *R. Murray Schafer: A Creative Life* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

Words that sing of Things, sounding symbols that *whisper* **SCREAM** *ROAR* in/to our inner ear, performing the new pictorialism in music. The performativity of a graphic score activates the imagination; the visual design of words, wedges and lines produces a see-touch-hear response that amplifies our experience of them. Designed words toe the line of musical thought, drawing the eye and painting sounds big and up, small and down, fast and left, slow and right, across the space of the page.

Eye music 1

Speaking of the page, composers have been experimenting with visual scores—*augenmusik* (Ger.), literally “eye music”—before such music was theorised as a type of word painting. One of the best known examples comes from the *Chantilly Codex*,² a collection of French medieval and early Renaissance polyphonic music. The chanson *Belle, Bonne, Sage, Plaisant* is scored as a heart (Figure A2), painting the word *cor* (“heart”) hidden in the composer’s name, Cordier.³ The song was written for a special someone, subtle changes in rhythm notated in red; the heart skips a beat.



Figure A2. Baude Cordier, *Belle, Bonne, Sage*⁴ (early 15th Century)

² Wikipedia, s.v. "Chantilly Codex", accessed December 5, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chantilly_Codex.

³ Baude Cordier (ca.1380-ca.1440), French composer, exemplar of *ars subtilior*, fond of red note notation. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Baude Cordier," accessed December 10, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baude_Cordier.

⁴ Score, Baude Cordier, "Belle, bonne, sage," from The Chantilly Manuscript, Musée Condé 564, distributed under a CC BY-SA 3.0 license.

Eye music flourished especially among the Italian madrigalists, the musical pictorialisms of troubadour song reaching their apogee in the late Renaissance madrigal, propelled by the rediscovery of Ciceran rhetoric⁵ in particular. The madrigal originated in 14th century Italy as a polyphonic part-song for two or more voices, sung in the vernacular. A study of Luca Marenzio⁶ and his polyphonic love-spells reveals a catalogue of musical gestures used to represent an affect, a coupling, a motion; each madrigal, a model answer to the depiction of words in music. Musical devices—sometimes called *madrigalisms*, after the song form—were often applied locally: height-related words ('heaven', 'sky', 'paradise') were heard in ascending lines and higher notes, for example, in the excerpt of his Petrarch setting below (Figure A3).

Figure A3. Marenzio, *Due rose fresche*⁷ (1585) (mm1-5)

Due rose fresche e colte in paradiso
Two roses, fresh and gathered in paradise

This imitation of nature, a *rhetorical* figure, was called “painting”.⁸

⁵ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Rhetoric and music” by Blake Wilson, George J. Buelow, and Peter A. Hoyt, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43166>.

⁶ Luca Marenzio (1553/4-1599), Italian composer of prolific output, whose madrigals are considered to be the epitome of the late 16th century form.

⁷ Luca Marenzio. *Due rose fresche*, ed. James Gibb (Choral Public Domain Library). http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/images/e/ea/Due_rose_fresche_complete_Marenzio.pdf

⁸ In a section headed *Hypotyposis or Painting*, Haynes and Burgess write on the art of rhetoric in the creation and performance of Baroque music: “... the imitation of nature was usually just called “painting,” regardless the artistic medium. Each art, by virtue of the concept of *ut pictura poesis* painted the same inventio using different imitative techniques. Bruce Haynes and Geoffrey Burgess, *The Pathetick Musician: Moving an Audience in the Age of Eloquence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 49.

Word painting

- : The use of musical gesture(s) in a work with an actual or implied text to reflect, often pictorially, the literal or figurative meaning of a word or phrase.⁹

In the rhetoric of the Renaissance, the composer was as much poet and painter, representing “the Circumstances of [Things], in such a lively manner, that the Hearer shall fancy he almost sees them with his Eyes.”¹⁰ By 1624, German theorist Joachim Thuringer had sorted words into three categories for “painting”: “‘words of affection’ (‘weep’, ‘laugh’, ‘pity’), ‘words of motion and places’ (‘leap’, ‘cast down’), and ‘words of time and number’ (quickly, twice).”¹¹ Words became the mother of (musical) invention, the paint flew through every level, down to and including the Big Picture.

One by one, two by two, or in threes, and more, voices meandered up and down along the polyphonic highways and low roads into the 18th century, mapping heaven and hell, and in-between Things. Under Baroque power conditions, music gives in/to words, making verbose their imagery in the name of Rhetoric. Visual puns continued alongside musical play, seen but not heard, secret signs for sight-readers only. The most famous technical pun is the cross motif in Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*—notes are arranged in the shape of the cross¹² in No. 51 (‘Give me back my Lord, I pray ye’), augmenting the multiple signs of the cross (*kreuzes*, symbolised ‘#’). Bach carried a personal cross in the letter-notes of his name, B – A – C – H:

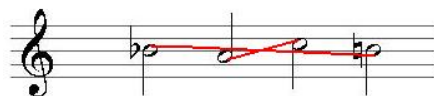


Figure A4. B-A-C-H cross motif¹³

⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Word Painting” by Tim Carter, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.30568>.

¹⁰ Haynes and Burgess, *The Pathetick Musician*, 49.

¹¹ Carter, “Word Painting,” *Grove Music Online*.

¹² Vladimir J. Konečni, “Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion”: A Rudimentary Psychological Analysis, Part II,” *Bach* 17, no. 4 (October 1986):12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41640275>.

¹³ Albrecht Hügli, answering the question on which of Bach’s works has a score with a cross on the page, on *StackExchange – Music: Theory & Practice*. <https://music.stackexchange.com/a/84606>.

There is a plenitude of pictorialisms in Bach's music; Schafer graphed¹⁴ the tenor aria from Bach's *Magnificat* (Figure A5), in a session on setting words to music—

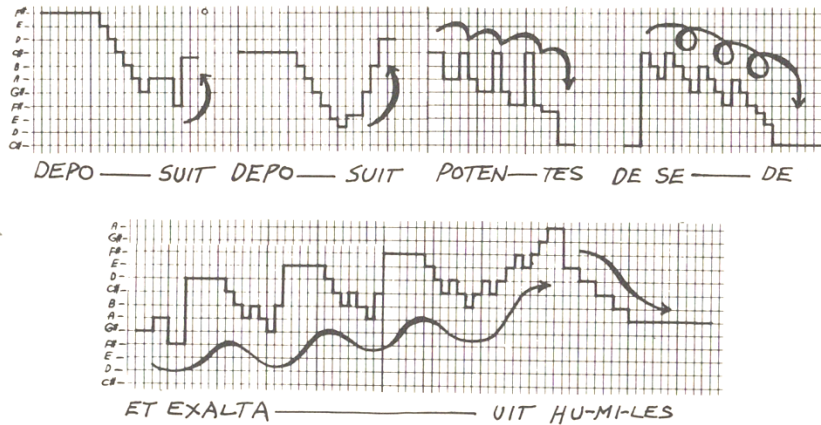


Figure A5. Graph of *Deposuit potentes* (Bach) by Schafer

Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the meek.

Look at the hand of God!

Before the throwback to Bach, Schafer had asked his students to set the same text (Figure A6).¹⁵ See this “psychographic curve of the word’s soul”¹⁶ hug the inner curvature of the Bach, missing only his dramatic Baroque flourish:

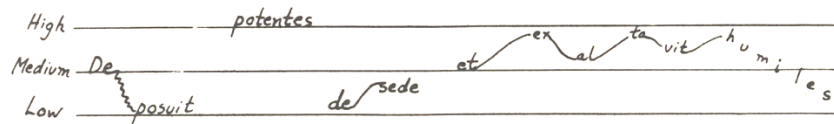


Figure A6. Contours of an action script for *Deposuit potentes*

¹⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Thinking Ear* (Toronto: Arcana Editions, 1986), 193.

¹⁵ Schafer documents the text setting of the class in the chapter “The Psychographic Curve of the Word’s Soul”; this “action script” is one of the settings drawn, the other two use conventional notation. Schafer, *Thinking Ear*, 192.

¹⁶ Schafer, *Thinking ear*, 191.

Bach to the now, painting falling-rising, witness karma play out in Justin Timberlake's *What Goes Around . . . Comes Around*¹⁷ (2006):

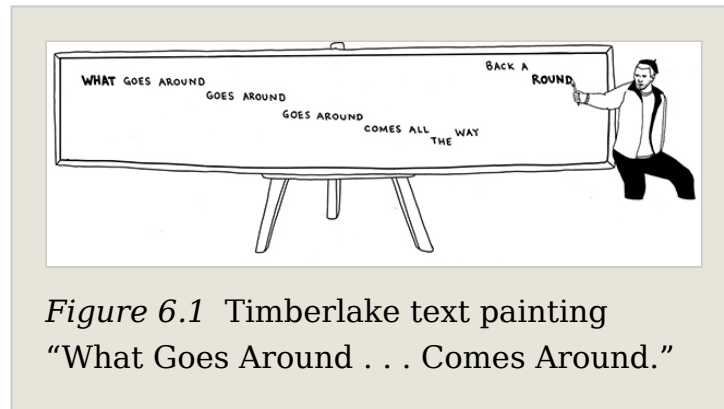


Figure A7. "Figure 6.1."¹⁸

In "Painting a Musical Masterpiece", Sloan, Harding and Gottlieb analyse Timberlake's *What Goes Around*, framing his text painting¹⁹ in the tradition of 12th century troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn:

As Timberlake sings "what goes around, goes around, goes around, comes all the way back around," *the melody follows the arc of his lyric*. It's as if he starts his paintbrush in the center of the canvas on the home pitch of A, descends down as he repeats "goes around," makes a sudden upwards brushstroke, then falls back to the starting note at the canvas's center on the final "comes back around" (Figure 6.1) The musical melody "paints" the textual meaning of Timberlake's chorus, making the song's sentiment more palpable and powerful for listeners. Text painting creates a *literal* connection between words and music.²⁰

Word painting is everywhere in popular music, from Harburg-Arlen's *Over The Rainbow* and Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* to the literal stops in sound, the high notes, the low

¹⁷ Nate Sloan, Charlie Harding and Iris Gottlieb, "Painting a Musical Masterpiece," in *Switched On Pop: How Popular Music Works, and Why it Matters*, eds. Nate Sloan and Charlie Harding (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2019). DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190056650.001.0001

¹⁸ Sloan et al, "Painting", 2. Figure used in illustrating Timberlake's text painting in "What Goes Around ... Comes Around."

¹⁹ The term "text painting" is used interchangeably with "word painting" for the purposes of this paper, as "word painting" can be applied locally to individual words or to phrases or to the whole text.

²⁰ Sloan et al, "Painting", 2 (emphasis added).

notes, and Cohen’s interval-naming *Hallelujah*. The major lift, that minor fall; word painting—it could just be all hear say.

Irving Godt calls this the “high-low prejudice”.²¹ We are prone to hear pictorial intent no matter which words are set high or low. Take, for example, the phrase *he ran about looking high, and ran about looking low*, here are four ways to set the text—

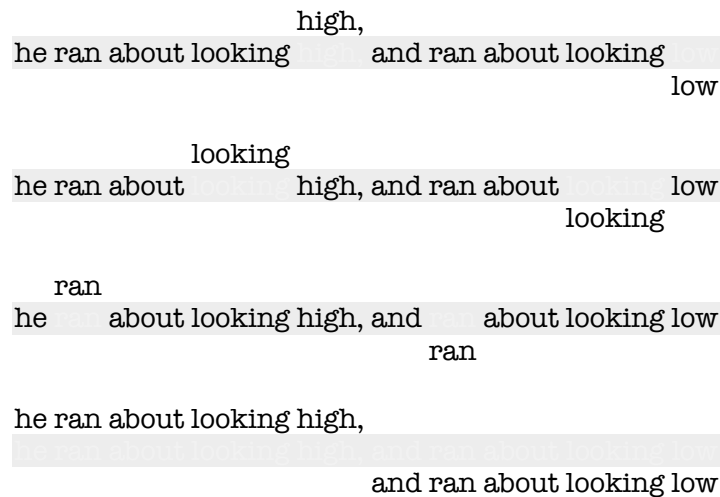


Figure A8. Jennifer Tham, *Four Godt-inspired paintings: “high” and “low”* (2019)

Choose your favourite painting. See which one sounds good.

Height, however, is a matter of perspective. In the 15th century, “high music” was understood as loud music, belonging outdoors; “low music” was quieter, chamber music.²² Our study of word painting needs to come with a caveat: listening “discovers and generates the heard.”²³ We could be *imagining* Things; eyes wide shut to how literature has been formally mis/treated by musical measure, words repeated, repeatedly, extending beyond recognition, beyond meaning, motion detectors working overtime.

²¹ Irving Godt, “An Essay on Word Painting,” *College Music Symposium* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1984), (College Music Society): 125. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40373748>

²² Godt, “Essay on Word Painting”, 122.

²³ Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 4 (emphasis added).

Imagine that. Imagine this—

Here are lynxes Here are lynxes,
Is there a sound in the forest
 of pard or of bassarid
of crotale or of leaves moving?²⁴ (Ezra Pound)

Poetry in motion.

Words painting/sounding image, positioned on a breath-map according to the tempo of the forest.²⁵ A voice notation.²⁶

Ezra Pound—American modernist poet, research artist-composer and music critic, research subject of Schafer—constructs a “visible language”,²⁷ a form that combines sight with sound, that makes us imagine Things in their place. An image, a figure of speech?

Images must be “understood as a kind of language ... something like an actor on the historical stage.”²⁸ According to Mitchell’s theory of iconology, our imagination splits them into two types: “lower” (pictorial/graphic) images and “higher” (abstract/sublimated) images. In Romantic and modernist poetics, the image is sublimated,²⁹ privileged, mystical; it hides among words, before our eyes. In *haiku* and other imagist poetry, the

²⁴ In “Introduction to the music in Pound’s poetry,” Schafer talks about the shape and disposition of Pound’s poetry having both an oral and a visual impact, citing some of Pound’s modernist verse. “Here are lynxes ...” is one of the works cited (spacing and punctuation as in the book). Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and music: The Complete Criticism*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 14.

²⁵ On reading “Here are lynxes ...”, Schafer writes: “This is no matter of fancy typography; it is the tempo of the breathing forest.” Pound/Schafer, *Ezra Pound and Music*, 14.

²⁶ Kahn quotes Beat writer Michael McClure, on his poems being “voice notations”. Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 338.

²⁷ Mitchell writes on the “visible language” of poet-rhetorician-philosophers being a form that combines picture and speech to “[make] us see” with ... striking figures, the devices associated with classical rhetoric.” W.J.T. Mitchell, “Visible Language: Blake’s Art of Writing,” in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 114.

²⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, “What Is an Image?,” *New Literary History* 15, no. 3, *Image/Imago/Imagination* (Spring 1984), 504. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0028-6087%28198421%2915%3A3%3C503%3AWIAI%3E2.O.C0%3B2-S>

²⁹ Mitchell, “What is an Image?,” 515.

entire text becomes the image or a “verbal icon”,³⁰ or, in Pound’s words, “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”³¹

Absolute rhythm

Pound’s theory of absolute rhythm offers a way to paint these image-word-complexes as sound, to “communicat[e] poetic meaning without resorting to imitation.”³² (Imitation being an admission that music is second to poetry.) Words make space according to their own time-laws, sounding their own music in an “absolute rhythm”³³ that articulates form.

Joseph Coroniti analyzes the “adoption”, “reading”, “appropriation”, “interpretation” and (other) meaningful uses of poetry in 20th century song and recitative, comparing settings of Blake, Shakespeare, Whitman and Pound.³⁴ He studies how the poem generates musical content, affective gesture and rhythm, including the “absolute rhythm” of Steve Reich’s *Desert Music*. When Reich sets the poetry of William Carlos Williams, the fusion of words and music is heard as a “new, predominantly musical, work”.³⁵ In his words—

All pieces with texts—operas, cantatas, whatever—have ... to work first as pieces of music that one listens to with eyes closed, without understanding a word. Otherwise ... they are dead “settings.” I picked out passages, organised them into a shape and then the music started coming. So the words were a motor or the driving force ...³⁶

³⁰ Mitchell, “An Image?”, 516.

³¹ Mitchell, “An Image?”, 516 (Pound quoted).

³² Joseph Coroniti, *Poetry as Text in Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: from Stravinsky to Reich* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 7.

³³ Absolute rhythm, in Pound’s words, is the “breath-pattern of the master artificer, above analysis;” a rhythm that was “part of the poetic idea itself, not a discipline over which a poem is strung” (quoted on page 15). The discipline he referred to here was the metrical structure of the sonnet form. Pound/Schafer, *Ezra Pound and music*, 473.

³⁴ Coroniti compares different settings—sometimes between different composers setting the same text— asking if there can be a meaningful relationship between words and music that respects the poetic intent of the text. In his opinion, the poet has literal priority over the composer, because “he got there first” (page 42). The terms “adoption”, “reading”, “appropriation” and “interpretation” are used throughout the book to point out the wrongful use of the text. Coroniti, *Poetry as Text*.

³⁵ Coroniti, *Poetry as Text*, 22.

³⁶ Coroniti, *Poetry as Text*, 22 (Reich quotation).

Reich is “goaded” by the text into writing a *conceptual response* to Williams’ poetry.³⁷ He plays in the between spaces of poetry and music—focusing on that “flickering of attention between what the words mean and how they sound when set to music”³⁸—to paint, to colour, the unspoken insides of words, their inner song. The slow-moving harmonies pattern themselves into a poetic drawing (out) of the text.

Reich paints in absolute rhythm, a rhythm that is part of the poetic idea itself, not a discipline over which the poem was strung. “Rhythm” as the drawing of form through pattern is a relatively new notion. On reading temporal space in literature, Mitchell traces the etymology of “rhythm” to the earliest Greek texts.³⁹ Modern studies have suggested that the word is derived from the root ερϋ- (ery), which suggests the act of “drawing”, as in “to draw, inscribe, engrave” and in the first sense of the word, which is “to pull”, as in to “form, shape, or pattern.”

Pound saw music as pure rhythm, where melody and harmony are the variation of the rhythms of the individual notes and their variable varied confluence. He thought the tempo of every masterwork was absolute, exactly in concert with the patterned vibrations of overtones. Sounds reveal themselves over time. If the tempo is absolute, then “it should be possible to show that any given rhythm implies about it a musical form—fugue, sonata, ... a form, perfect, complete. Ergo,

*the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony ...*⁴⁰

: Poetry as song.

³⁷ Coroniti, *Poetry as Text*, 21 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Coroniti, *Poetry as Text*, 19 (Reich quoted).

³⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory,” in *The Language of Images*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 280.

⁴⁰ Pound/Schafer, *Ezra Pound and music*, 469 (emphasis and disposition added).

When words sing

Poetry is when words sing, said a 6-year old boy when Schafer asked him to describe poetry.⁴¹

Schafer learnt of Pound during a Poetry and Music class taught by media theorist Marshall McLuhan while at the University of Toronto;⁴² he studied Pound's theories of rhythm, later publishing a book of Pound's writings on music. Poetry is thought to be the middle ground between words and music, or perhaps, a "composite art" of word(image)sound. When the shapes of poetic thought are broken up, the experience is both visual and aural—see hear :

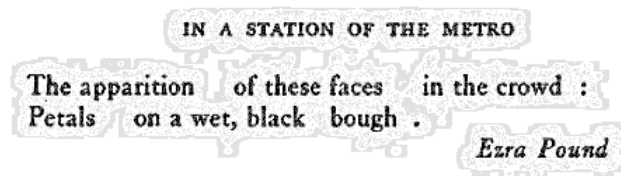


Figure A9. Ezra Pound, *In a station of the metro*⁴³ (1913)

The contemporary composer's interest in asymmetrical texts may be traced back to the "*vers libres* adventure in poetry,"⁴⁴ with their pauses and broken shapes, inviting recall, anticipating the imagined .

Pronounce.

⁴¹ Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, viii.

⁴² Scott, R. Murray Schafer, 14.

⁴³ Pound, *In a station of the Metro*, originally published in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (April 1913): 12 (Chicago: Poetry Magazine Archive, Poetry Foundation), accessed December 6, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=12675>.

⁴⁴ Pound/Schafer, *Ezra Pound and Music*, 13.

Schafer's guide to word painting⁴⁵ has us working up from the natural sound and meaning of the words—their *phenomenology*, echoing Bachelard: the force of a letter reveals the “real thought attached to a word”.⁴⁶

Listen.

In his classroom, Schafer explored the psychological and physiological makeup of the whisper,⁴⁷ and questioned its evil twin, the scream. He wrote sound poems—a word cloud of inarticulate vocal expressions—as magic spells to agitate passion, and ward off civilised spirits:

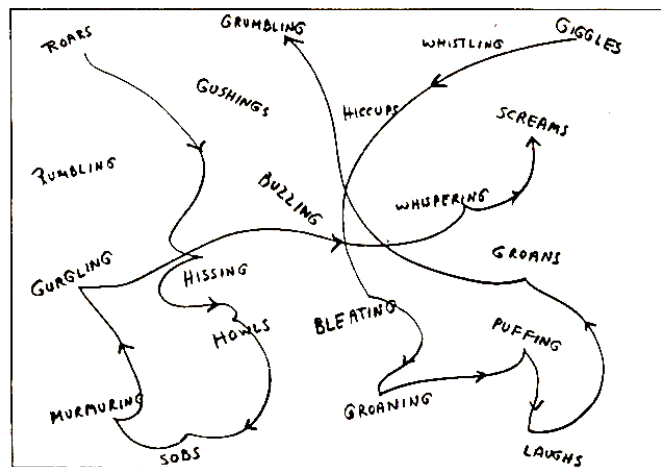


Figure A10. “sound poem”⁴⁸ by Schafer

Compose :

⁴⁵ Schafer's instructions on setting a word to music: “Pronounce. Listen. Compose.” (emphasis and disposition added in paper). Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, 191.

⁴⁶ In the chapter on intimate immensity, Bachelard says that “[a]t times the sound of a vocable ... reveals and defines the real thought attached to the word.” On the same page, he also says that bad literature is not poetry in action, aiming at pictorial expression “at the expense of the fundamental images.” Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 215.

⁴⁷ “Pianissimo Secrets”, Schafer's exercises in whispers and whispering. Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, 195.

⁴⁸ Schafer, in sound poems drawn on blackboards, sought to reboot the human voice, freeing it from its “bespectacled muttering”, echoing McLuhan who told us that “just as the sewing machines ... created the straight line in clothes ... the linotype flattened the human vocal style” (quoted on page 170). Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, 197.

Eye music 2

Schafer, with his hand-drawn notes and letter charts, moved to the tempo of the Renaissance man, a time when word painting reached for a poetics of music⁴⁹—darkness symbolised in the blackest of notes, light shining through halves and wholes, or :

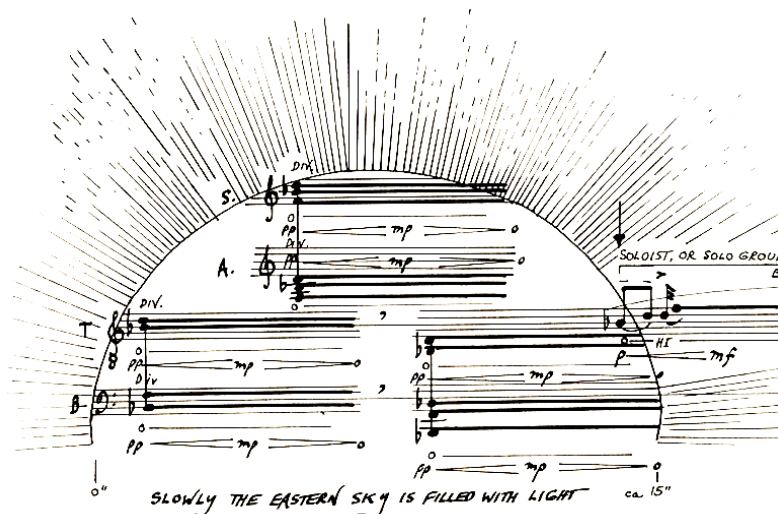


Figure A11. R Murray Schafer, *Sun*⁵⁰ (1982) (0''-15'')

Schafer scores his music by hand, sonifying what is primarily visual in performative choric soundscapes. In these picturesque tone poems, text is texture and words return as vocables, bursting with onomatopoeic potential. The composer(painter)poet draws music from the rhythmic sonorities of the word, through *melopoeia*,⁵¹ which orientates us to the word's intent.

Pronounce. *a g a i n*. **AGAIN.**

⁴⁹ Carter, "Word Painting" in *Grove Music Online*.

⁵⁰ R. Murray Schafer, *Sun* (Toronto: Arcana Editions, 1982), 3.

⁵¹ Pound distinguished three kinds of poetry—*melopoeia*, poetry with musical properties (sounds and their rhythms), *logopoeia*, the poetry of ideas, and *phanopoeia*, the poetry of images. Pound/Schafer, *Ezra Pound and music*, 3.

Exaggerate each letter, each sound, repeat *ad libitum*, expanding, extending, until the immense is rediscovered in the smallest of sounds.⁵²

Listen. **AGAIN.** *a g a i n .*

Sound the word in as many ways as possible, make it personal, there will be repercussions.⁵³

Compose :

The *Seventeen Haiku*⁵⁴ of Schafer bring us from dawn to after dark, in a continuous suite that includes lighting design. Light—*dark green, green, green to yellow, yellow to white, white, white tinged with yellow, bright white, darkening, turning to orange, orange, fading, deep blue, lanterns, with additional orange lights from above if necessary, lanterns, darkness, lanterns flicker offstage, total darkness*—washes and stains the tone poem. The minimal text (17 x 17 syllables) is given Schafer's maximalist treatment. He sensitises the text by multiplying the variations,⁵⁵ avoiding the habits of reduction;⁵⁶ in other words, the *haiku* are not appropriated or deconstructed, destroyed then reincarnated, by music.

In the second movement (Figure A12), a cool breeze in the form of sopranos and altos enters, singing . . . :

⁵² In this chapter, Bachelard writes extensively on the phenomenology of the word; how “vast” is a vocal value (page 213), and when we think or read “ah”, our vocal cords adduct and our voice is ready to sing (page 214). Bachelard, “Intimate Immensity” in *Poetics of Space*, 201-226.

⁵³ Bachelard speaks of the doublet of resonances and repercussions in the phenomenological inquiry into poetry. The word “repercussions” is used in the same way he uses the word “reverberations”, something that brings greater depth to our existence. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 7..

⁵⁴ Score information on narrative, lighting design and staged movement. R. Murray Schafer, *Seventeen Haiku* (Toronto: Arcana Editions, 1997).

⁵⁵ In the phenomenology of roundness, future and past (time) are gathered into a metaphysical present, a poetic instant. In multiplying the instant, through variation and repetition, the future overlaps with a just-past instant—causing imagination (future) and memory (past) to gather into (the centre of) a living being (present), the dialectics of future/past time creating a poetic instant. In this and the following citation, I am using a Bachelard-ian lens to examine the performativity of a Schaferesque word painting. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 249.

⁵⁶ Bachelard sees exaggeration as a way to fuel and expand the poetic imagination. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 234.

TRANSLATION: A COOL BREEZE, WINDING,
WANDERING ALONG...
AT LAST IT HAS COME!
STAGE LIGHTING: GREEN, GROWING BRIGHTER

THE SONG ATTEMPTS TO ILLUSTRATE THE ARRIVAL OF A COOL BREEZE. IT CONSISTS OF FREE SECTIONS, MARKED (A) AND CONDUCTED SECTIONS, MARKED (B). DURING THE FREE SECTIONS THE SOPRANOS AND ALTOS OVERLAP ONE ANOTHER AS THEY GRADUALLY ENTER FROM BACKSTAGE, MOVING AS THOUGH CARRIED BY A GENTLE BREEZE. DURING THE CONDUCTED SECTIONS THEY MAY PAUSE AND SING TOGETHER. BY THE TIME THE LAST BARS ARE REACHED, ALL SINGERS HAVE ARRIVED AT THEIR POSITIONS ON STAGE.

Figure A12. R Murray Schafer, *Seventeen Haiku*⁵⁷ (1997) (2nd mvt)

In the performance directions (see score, above), singers are asked to overlap one another as they gradually enter from backstage. The first word—*suzu* (“cool”)—is repeated, repeatedly, expanding, extending with each repetition, of each singer, as though carried by the breeze, sound synchronous with movement. *Poetry in motion*. The processional music exaggerates the instant, unfolding-refolding word-figures over time, producing a poetic space of re-sounding re-turning time.

Schafer is not the first composer to have challenged our listening places. In the 1960s, the Swedish choral movement paved the way by staging choral theatre, by including choralography⁵⁸ in concert with music. Eskil Hemberg’s *Eighteen Movements for mixed chorus* (1969),⁵⁹ for instance, plays on the double meaning of the word

⁵⁷ Schafer, *Seventeen Haiku*, 3.

⁵⁸ Green quotes Frank Pooler and Gail L. Shoup who developed the concept of choralography, defining it as “intended to denote fairly simple movement that can be used by a choir to augment, visually, the impact of its work aurally.” Danny Green, “Choralography: Expressive Movement for Choral Singing,” *The Choral Journal* 25, no. 3 (November 1984): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546460>.

⁵⁹ Eskil Hemberg, *Eighteen Movements for mixed choir: choreographic choral suite* (Stockholm: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1969).

“movement.” A choreographic choral suite of nursery rhymes—“acts” with patterned movements: walking-sitting-standing sequences, singing while *lying on the floor*, against a backdrop of projected Calder drawings—challenges notions of “choir” and “choral performance” along the philosophical lines of Cage. The word painting was obvious, literally, seen.

What probably distinguishes Schafer from other composers who work with words, voice, and spatialized sound, is that he starts from a phenomenology of the word: a sense of its sound and inner rhythms, the “absolute rhythm” of the text. The phenomenology of the word is a phenomenology of listening, in/to words—Schafer composes listening, a listening that is embodied through re-sounding letters and vocables. Perhaps we could call this style of word painting a live performance/installation, a wind sculpture, a word mobile reflecting, distending, reporting, in-habiting, re-placing sound.

Poetry in motion

Our word-sounds reverberate in the performance space, active, activating space. Robert Morgan, in his study of musical space both on and off the page, suspects that “the increased interest in the performance space coincided with gradual undermining of tonal conventions in the 19th century ... the weakening of one musical space countered by the strengthening of another, more literal one.”⁶⁰ Our eyes seem to have been roped in to help our ears.

A moment of silence, please.

(This space has been left intentionally blank.)

Space : the visual equivalence of silence.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Robert P. Morgan, “Musical Time/Musical Space,” in *The Language of Images*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 269.

⁶¹ Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 82.

Silence as the prelude to listening.

Space : as listening.

The listening space returns sound in/to its sender. Re-turning re-sounding (in) time, sound spreads in space, the “referrals”⁶² multiply, folding future over past into presence. This presence, from Nancy’s listening position, is “a *coming* and a *passing*, an *extending* and a *penetrating* ... To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, *at the same time*, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me”⁶³ These are the repercussions of exaggerating well beyond words.

The listening place performs poetically, future-past-present sound-movement re-folding space with time “as built in our ears and unfold in our auditory imagination.”⁶⁴ Sound “re-invests and invents space”, vibrating up and left, down and right, across the expanse of the stage, covering all basses, every nook, corner, cranny, reverberating the insides of the word-space à la Bachelard.⁶⁵ Nancy says that the “setting in motion of place is identically that of the present instant,”⁶⁶ the poetic instant. In this instant, the echo of memory and imagination confound each other; the words, cut up by tooth and tongue, give up their Soul.

We didn’t hear a Thing.

Nancy spends some time meditating on the translations of *entendre* (which hugs both hearing and understanding) and *écouter* (listening). He argues that because music has been “indexed to a mode of signification rather than a mode of sensibilities,”⁶⁷ we never truly listen when we can read the signs. When we are *unable* to decode the

⁶² Nancy, *Listening*, 7. Nancy writes that as it spreads in space, sound refers to itself—re-sounding while it is still re-sounding.

⁶³ Nancy, *Listening*, 13-14 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴ Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 123.

⁶⁵ Voegelin writes beautifully on the way sound “re-invests and invents space”, to “extol their histories and expand their present circumstance”, evoking Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*. Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 130.

⁶⁶ Nancy, *Listening*, 18.

⁶⁷ Nancy, *Listening*, 57.

dis/assemblage of word-sounds, we “strain towards a sense beyond sound,”⁶⁸ and truly listen—for the meaning of ‘ah,’⁶⁹ consonant friends, and stray sibilants.

Ah.

Eye music 3D

The Renaissance and Baroque composer was encouraged to think like a poet, that is “to recognise the meter of the verse,... *and* like a painter, place the beautiful or frightful images lifelike before the eyes of the listeners through music.”⁷⁰ Word painting tended towards pictorialism and the imitation of nature, in search of a poetics of music. The eye is king.

“Visuality overwhelms aurality in the cultural balance of the senses,”⁷¹ we read in Kahn. How do we provoke listening? I sense the answer is in space, enough for words that sing.

The spatial form, as Mitchell conceives it, makes “history and temporality intelligible;”⁷² *visible*. Translating this for the choral space, the “pictorial aspect of poetry [in performance] is not simply its imagery but the patterns of order which allow its storage and retrieval in the mind.”⁷³ Drawing sound in the performance space, patterned movement “reifies” the [musical] experience.⁷⁴

The “rhythm” of music and poetry comes to us via dance, suggests Pollitt:

ῥυθμοί (“rhythmos”) were originally the “positions” that the human body was made to assume in the course of a dance, in other words the patterns or *schemata* that the body made. In the course of a dance certain obvious patterns or positions, like the raising or lowering of a foot, were naturally repeated, thus marking intervals in the dance. Since music and singing were

⁶⁸ Nancy, *Listening*, 6.

⁶⁹ Bachelard, “Intimate Immensity” in *Poetics of Space*, 201-226. This chapter has been brought to us by the word “vast” and the vowel-sound “ah”.

⁷⁰ The quote belongs to German-Czech polymath Mauritius Johann Vogt (1669-1730) (emphasis added). Haynes and Burgess, *The Pathetick Musician*, 49.

⁷¹ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 158.

⁷² Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 295.

⁷³ Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 289.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 295.

synchronised with dancing, the recurrent positions taken by the dance in the course of his movements also marked distinct intervals in the music ... This explains why the basic [rhythmic unit] of music and poetry was called a πονζ, “foot.”⁷⁵

The rhythm of our feet, a choir-body moving, in and out of position, setting words in motion, patterning place; choreo/graphic movement reveals the poem’s inner music in absolute rhythm, sound in subtle changes, legibly notated in their stead. The eye watches, listening.

Using a “language of vision [to] tell us things ... that words alone cannot touch”⁷⁶—using our *imagination*—we see a “theatre of the flesh”,⁷⁷ verbal icons, a complex of image(word)music. In staging listening, we place ourselves inside the repercussions of words inside us. Past future presence. The entire performance space becomes a Bachelard-ian word painting, a *sculpture*, singing in a poetics of music.

Take a long look, lines of poetry form in space. Imagine this.

Stay a while, have a listen :

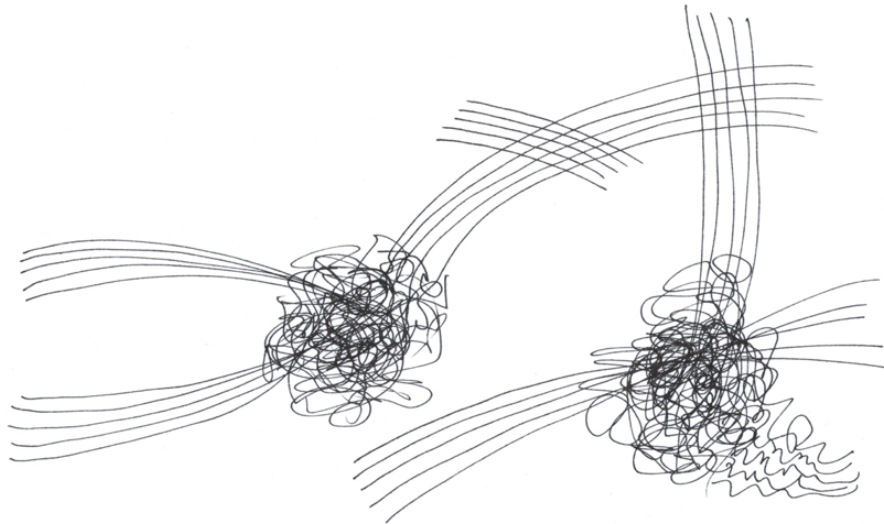


Figure A13. Jennifer Tham, Eye hear | “Knots and Crosses” (2018)

⁷⁵ Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 280 (Pollitt quotation).

⁷⁶ Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 298.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, “Spatial Form,” 294.

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This research has been inspired and imprinted by word paintings of absolute rhythm, in particular the graphic scores and phenomenological choral soundscapes of R Murray Schafer, CA812 class readings, conversations with Owen, Allyson, Peter and Claudette, and the writings in the following books and articles:

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