

MODERN *and* CONTEMPORARY POETRY *and* POETICS

POETRY AND PERFORMANCE
DURING THE BRITISH
POETRY REVIVAL 1960-1980

Event and Effect

Juha Virtanen



Modern and Contemporary Poetry
and Poetics

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Poetry
and Performance
During the British
Poetry Revival
1960–1980

Event and Effect

palgrave
macmillan

Juha Virtanen
School of English, Rutherford College
University of Kent
Canterbury, UK

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Introduction

In March 2011, I sat down in my bedroom to enjoy the broadcast of *Make Perhaps This Out Sense of Can You*, a radio documentary about Bob Cobbing produced by Falling Tree Productions for BBC Radio 4. The programme featured several speakers, including the poets and writers Iain Sinclair, Peter Finch, Peter Barry, Paula Claire and Lawrence Upton. The discussions alluded to Cobbing's career as a poet, artist and composer; his role at the Poetry Society during the 'poetry wars' of the 1970s, where the conventional poetry establishment and the new wave of avant-garde poets competed for the control of this national arts organization; his influence as an activist within the British Poetry Revival, a term coined by Eric Mottram to describe the innovative poetics that emerged in the UK between the early 1960s and the late 1970s; and as the leader of Writers Forum, a workshop and small press that nurtured and published many of the poets associated with experimental poetry in London during the second half of the twentieth century.¹ Some of these voices were already familiar to me from conferences, poetry readings or other public events. Yet the disembodied and uninterrupted quality of the broadcast meant that I was often unable to determine the identity of each speaker in real time. Consequently, when the latter parts of the documentary turned to reflect upon Cobbing's legacy, and the Revival in general, I was unable to identify the contributor that raised an interesting proposition. This male speaker suggested that in recent years younger poets and academics have developed a fresh interest in this episode of British poetry, and therefore this once 'invisible history' is now becoming more visible. The identity of that

speaker remained a mystery even though I continued to ruminate over this idea long after the programme had finished. Over a year later, I attended a lecture by Iain Sinclair at the University of Kent. As I listened to Sinclair speak I realized his voice was identical to the commentator from the radio documentary. I was finally able to ascribe a name to those earlier utterances about invisible histories.

The purpose behind this anecdote requires some elaboration. *Event and Effect* is not a book about Cobbing, although brief references to his various achievements will be made in some of the chapters that follow. Nor is it a book about Sinclair. *Event and Effect* is, however, deeply interested in the invisible histories of the British Poetry Revival. The optimism in Sinclair's observations during the documentary revise his earlier comments from the introduction to the 1996 anthology *Conductors of Chaos*, where the Revival is described as an "off-piste, unnoticed" episode, exiled to ephemeral pamphlets and chapbooks that were untraceable without "a team of private detectives" (xiv). In 2011, Robert Sheppard also expressed similar regrets about the comparative lack of attention to this period of British poetry in the epilogue of *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*: the current scenes of innovative poetry in the UK, the essay argues, fail to embrace their own history, and consequently episodes such as "the *English Intelligencer* or the Albert Hall Poetry Reading" still require a firmer "pegging into history [...], which means neither wilfully ignoring nor turning it into mythology, but acknowledging its specificity and evaluating it" (215). Sheppard does acknowledge the contributions made by critics such as Barry or Andrew Duncan, but he nevertheless insists on the need for more studies of this nature.² While scholarship on the Revival would certainly benefit from further development, Sinclair's comments during the Cobbing documentary suggest that there are some reasons to shift from Sheppard's regrets to a more optimistic point of view. There were additional studies already available in 2007, when Sheppard originally wrote his piece, and subsequent years have seen a flourishing of poetic activity within the UK, both creatively and critically.³ In other words, perhaps Sheppard's call for more rigorous studies is currently being answered. In its own way, *Event and Effect* seeks to contribute to this ongoing flurry of scholarly activity. In the chapters that follow, I too intend to approach several episodes in the histories of the British Poetry Revival that have hitherto been more or less overlooked. I will also endeavour to examine these episodes without turning them into an uncritical mythology and will instead seek to address and evaluate their specificity. At the same time, however, the exact episodes

and objects of research that are examined in *Event and Effect* depart slightly from the elusive pamphlets and chapbooks that Sinclair alludes to in *Conductors of Chaos*. While the chapters in this book inevitably involve some analysis of poetry (primarily by Allen Ginsberg, Denise Riley, Eric Mottram and Allen Fisher), their predominant focus is on individual poetry performances that took place in the UK during the period of the British Poetry Revival.

This focus on studying ‘poetry and performance’ during the Revival means that certain important definitions, borders and parameters, as well as methodological and theoretical perspectives, need to be addressed from the outset. To begin with definitions, what does the study of poetry and performance mean in the context of this book? This question, as David Kennedy and Keith Tuma noted in their introduction to *Additional Apparitions*, does not have a simple answer:

The problem with defining performance or poetry in performance or the poetry reading itself is that we are not talking about one kind of activity, practice, or institution. This is not only a matter of distinguishing between modes of reading or performance; nor is it only the problem of naming accurately the different kinds of audiences, sites and occasions for a public reading or performance. For even within one kind of reading or performance the relationship of audience to text and poet-performer might take on many variations. (11)

Defining poetry and performance, in other words, is difficult precisely because of the elusiveness of the term ‘performance’ within the field of poetry. It is a term that is used to refer to a number of different approaches spanning across performance writing to sound poetry, to slam and dub poetry, and everything in between—not to mention the significant distinctions between individual practices within each of these fields. As Kennedy and Tuma indicate, the term might also need to account for the multiple variations that occur in the reception of each performance event. In more conservative contexts, related terms such as ‘performance poet’ can also be used in a problematic, pejorative sense as a dismissive distinction “from ‘page poets’—poets who write primarily to be published” (Dawes 283). To put it bluntly, there are too many variations for this single definition to adequately describe.

As a result of these multiple implications of what poetry and performance might mean, a study that seeks to explore the topic needs to be wary

of monolithic pronouncements. While most live poetry performances will share the very basic characteristic of a poet performing their work in front of an audience, the aforementioned variations render it difficult to produce generalizations without performing acts of exclusion. For instance, performance in the context of Cobbing's work would often involve improvisations based on scores designed as indeterminate invitations, where the "issue of what images instigate what sounds, and the lengths and tones and volumes of the performance are left to the combined sense of a particular occasion" ("Bob Cobbing's Voice Prints", n.p.); likewise, Cobbing's oeuvre frequently included collaborations with musicians, dancers and other poets.⁴ Caroline Bergvall's work, in both theory and practice, generally seeks to show the context and means for writing, which can be "activated for and through a stage, [...] a site, [...] a time-frame, [...] a performer's body, [...] the body of a voice or the body of a page", and where "everything about a piece of work is active and carries meaning" ("What Do We Mean By Performance Writing?" 6). In his own writings about performance, Chris Cheek has argued that "while seeming bound to time and focus and singular event more than the book", these events are "no less mobile and complex and plural and multiply situated" (Kennedy & Tuma 119); thus, Cheek sees these events as encompassing not only the poetry reading itself, but also the introductory notes provided by the organizer, the "by-performances that occur around the bar" and a constellation of other related exchanges (Kennedy & Tuma 126). In the critical discourse regarding performance poetry, slam or dub poetry, a comparison is frequently made between these performances and those by musical groups, as exemplified by references to traditions "of orality and musicality more suited to a calypso concert" (Voyce 123), and with observations about how certain performers develop a considerable following that is "often linked to some music scene whether it be hip-hop, reggae, punk or rock and roll" (Dawes 287).⁵ Each of these examples points towards a shared understanding that poetry performances involve something more than a simple recitation of a written text. However, the exact aesthetic, political and cultural motivations for these praxes are all distinct. Cobbing's work, in both print and performance, is engaged with unsettling systems of language; Bergvall's calls attention to what is marginalized and erased by political powers and dominant discourses; while a poet of colour might utilize performance as "a site for reclaiming the powers of identity and belonging that reinforce self and culture, past and present" (Ramey 120). Moreover, these cursory examples are themselves

only a small indication of the approaches involved with the practice. Any overarching definition of poetry and performance would therefore run the risk of overlooking some of the multifarious nuances that the term entails.

In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that studies of poetry and performance continue to be a comparatively rare sight within contemporary academia. Although the topic has been discussed in various articles, anthologies and monographs, most of these publications agree that there is more to be done.⁶ This sentiment is made clear in Charles Bernstein's introduction to *Close Listening*, widely recognized as a landmark study in the field. Although poetry readings have become "one of the most important sites" for distributing poetic works in North America, Bernstein observes, the infrequency of scholarly examinations of the "distinctive features of the poem-in-performance" has meant that large archives of audio and video documentation are still left unstudied (5). What is needed, the essay asserts, is a more thorough integration between the history of modern poetry and the histories of performance arts and philosophies of language.

This assertion is of course partially performative: Bernstein's edited volume itself provides several significant contributions towards demonstrating the crucial importance of performance to the practice of contemporary poetry, and his introductory essay makes several astute observations about the proliferation of poetry and performance since the 1950s, such as the parallel developments between poetry and performance art. Broadly speaking, dramatic innovations such as happenings often promoted the use of group collaborations that sought to restructure the relationships between the performers and their audience, which offers a parallel to some of the practices and ideas demonstrated by poets such as Bergvall, Cobbing and Cheek in the brief examples above.⁷ These participatory practices could also be associated with the socio-political developments that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Political activities such as the protests against the Vietnam War—as well as demonstrations and occupations at university campuses—frequently incorporated performance techniques; and vice versa, a considerable proportion of performance arts continue to be closely motivated by political activism.⁸ However, Bernstein's introduction tacitly admits certain oversights within the essays collected in *Close Listening*. His explicit reference to the importance of performance to poetry in *North America* suggests that the anthology is perhaps less focused on the significance of poetry performances within the UK. The subsequent essays confirm this: with the exception of Marjorie Perloff's briefer references to Maggie O'Sullivan and Caroline Bergvall, Maria Damon's epigraphs from

Benjamin Zephaniah, and Peter Middleton's discussion of O'Sullivan, poets with associations to the UK receive no detailed attention.

Despite this omission, the collection's introductory observations about the significance of readings and performances are equally applicable to the context of innovative poetry in the UK. Allen Fisher's recollections of his early involvement with the scene in the 1960s and 1970s describe a vibrant nexus of readings and related events:

By 1964, Better Books was getting really interesting in central London, just off Charing Cross Road [...] [A] big basement with a lot of installation art, eventually, but a lot of performances [...] which included film. Around that time the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Arts] set up in Dover Street, [...] was very vibrant. For instance, I remember a notable exhibition called *Between Poetry and Painting*. It showed a relation between concrete poetry and visual poetry, and spoken poetry as well. [...] Towards the end of the sixties, I was involved in the small press scene: Association of Little Presses, exhibitions, performances, events, fairs, that sort of thing. [...] At the same time, Better Books is still going on, until it ran out of money, and moved to the front of Charing Cross Road. The readings became much tighter; less performances, more just poetry readings. Eventually, the poetry scene moved [...] to Indica, first of all. [...] There were events at the Roundhouse, and there was the London Musicians Collective, and the London Film Co-op, which were in the same building. We would use it for poetry performances. All of this is going on at the same time, more or less, and the pubs were also [...] socially linked to it. ("An Interview with Allen Fisher")⁹

Such occasions were also an important site for the dissemination and development of innovative poetry in the UK. In Mottram's view, the majority of poets associated with the Revival were published through small presses and magazines, which received little attention from the literary establishments and were overlooked by the Arts Council and national media ("The British Poetry Revival" 5). In addition to specialist bookshops such as Better Books or *Compendium*, performances played an integral role in distributing new work. Even if certain poets, such as Denise Riley, felt apprehensive about the prospect of performing, they recognized that "poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package" ("An Interview with Denise Riley").¹⁰ It is also worth noting that several younger poets at the time found performances to be a formative factor in developing their initial publications. Lee Harwood's 1965 publication *title illegible* was largely composed of work that he had previously

read at Writers Forum, and Fisher's attendance at readings helped him establish connections within the London poetry scene:

I would attend readings, but wouldn't let it be known that I was also somebody doing stuff. [...] Places around Great Newport Street. There was a small place in Herne Hill that I would go to, for smaller poetry readings. Quite early on, I would attend concerts where jazz and poetry were being mixed [...] It wasn't always very good, but it was socially quite interesting [...] That kind of introduced me to the performance side of things: hearing poetry read, and hearing music with it. It was to do with the live ambiance, not just of the reading itself, but the social ambiance; meeting people, joining a kind of nexus of people. And of course they start publishing magazines and you take part in them. ("An Interview with Allen Fisher")

The predominantly Americanist focus in *Close Listening* means that any archives or documents pertaining to these events go unmentioned in the study, irrespective of their relevance to the broader assertions that Bernstein makes in his essay.

Of course, this is not to say that poets and critics based in the UK have been inattentive to the significant role of performance within British poetry.¹¹ The essays collected in Kennedy and Tuma, for instance, contain some key examples of such reflections: Middleton provides a detailed record of a reading by Allen Fisher and analyses this event in connection with the role of research in Fisher's poetry (45–48); Frances Presley discusses the role of performance in her collaborative work with Elizabeth James (172–179); and Caroline Bergvall gives an account of the process involved with her site-specific piece "Say: 'Parsley'" (191–200). Bergvall's own poetic and pedagogic works have also, as indicated above, offered important perspectives regarding the remits of the practice: she views the act of writing itself as a performance, but simultaneously, develops writings that equally call for active participation—whether this is in a private reading, an installation or in a performance by Bergvall herself.¹² Likewise, as *Skin upon skin* demonstrates, cheek's work frequently questions the boundaries of production in poetry, at times eschewing the publication of a printed text in favour of live events and a CD recording (Hampson). Yet the majority of these examples pertain to comparatively recent events and projects that date from the 1990s or 2000s. The performances that occurred during the period of the Revival—which are, in various ways, an important point of reference for many of the practices described above—still await further critical attention.

Nevertheless, the references to specific performances in the essays gathered in *Additional Apparitions* highlight another curious feature in *Close Listening*: although Bernstein regrets the rarity of studies about the distinctive features of the poem-in-performance, many of the anthology's essays scarcely make references to actual readings or performances. Instead they address the visual performances of a printed text or analyse the general concepts of sound and aurality, a term Bernstein uses to refer to the "sounding of the *writing*" (13). This broad view is productive in many ways, but it also means that the physical event of performing a text is not always addressed as closely as it deserves. Douglas Oliver's earlier study of the vocal articulations of a written text, by contrast, tries to approach the physical act of performing a poem through a more specific methodology. His *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* focuses exclusively on the sound of poetic stresses as a factor that unifies our sound perception with "some conception of the meaning and emotional significance of the stress-bearing syllable in relation to the overall meaning" (5). While this approach does entail a 'close listening' of recorded vocal performances, Oliver's methodology also seems restrictive in its exactness. His emphasis on stressed syllables, for instance, places considerable limitations on the scope of the study: in an effort to appeal to a more public sphere of readers, Oliver openly omits both obscure literary passages and "the more avant-garde views of poetic prosody in the Poundian and post-Poundian traditions" (*Poetry and Narrative in Performance* xiv). Furthermore, the study as a whole is based on a quasi-scientific method of recording several readers reciting the same set of extracts, after which the tapes were evaluated by a "group of experienced listeners" in order to determine the 'best reading' that was subsequently used as the standard to which Oliver compared all other readings in his study (*Poetry and Narrative in Performance* 25). Although Oliver would later describe performances as dynamic events where possibilities for artistic action begin ("Poetry's Subject" 52), his monograph instead regards written texts strictly as instructive scripts. This approach—together with Oliver's emphasis on a best reading—seems difficult to apply to debates outside of traditional verse, as Fisher's comments demonstrate:

John Seed [...] was at one time very reticent about giving public performances, because he thought it over-stabilized the meaning within the poetry's line, because you put an emphasis here or there, rather than make it available as a multiple [...] There was a debate about that. Anthony Barnett,

a musician as well as a poet, would argue that poetry is composed and music is improvised. I was in a group of poets that did not think that at all. It is as open as music is, or is not [...] I find that I sometimes read something that on the page might seem to be the same thing, but read in three different audience situations it would feel and be understood differently. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

In other words, Fisher’s conception of poetry as something found “in the process of its making” (“The Mathematics of Rimbaud” 2) complicates the applicability of Oliver’s methodology, while Seed’s reticence suggests that notions of an authoritative best reading may actually estrange poets from performance altogether.¹³ Thus, a different tack is required in order to examine actual events of a ‘post-Poundian’ poem-in-performance.

With this in mind, what would be a more viable approach? Baz Kershaw’s *The Politics of Performance* begins with the central assumption that radical theatre enacts an “ideological transaction” between the performers and their audience, where the spectators are fundamentally engaged in the active construction of the event (16–17). Drawing on Richard Schechner’s definitions of the indeterminate precinct where performances occur, Kershaw argues that the actual *production* is simply the most concentrated part of the event: everything that occurs in the preparatory stages or the aftermath of the performance may significantly affect its efficacy (*The Politics of Performance* 22).¹⁴ Although such connections are not always transparent, Kershaw’s concepts could allow studies of poetry and performance to develop a critical framework where events are examined via poetical, theoretical and socio-political receptions, interventions and reinventions. This method bears some similarities to the aforementioned practices of Bergvall, Cobbing and Cheek, but it also recalls the position that Middleton assumes in sections of *Distant Reading*. Middleton identifies poems as heterogeneous objects that cannot be contained in a singular format, but are instead manifested through a multitude of versions, publications and performances (*Distant Reading* xi). Consequently, *Distant Reading* argues that the process of poetry is an intersubjective nexus of “publication, performance and reception” where “meaning is constantly in flux” (xv). Such a view appears more viable for the analysis of the performances of innovative poetry than the restrictive methodology in Oliver’s study, but again *Distant Reading* spends relatively little time in discussing actual performance events. Middleton’s primary interest is instead the theory and history of modern poetry readings, as well

as “arguments about the performance of authorship” and the “intersubjectivity of oral performance” (*Distant Reading* xvi). As a consequence, even the most detailed discussions of performance events within the book—such as Middleton’s descriptions of readings by Ginsberg, Susan Howe and John Ashbery—rarely extend over more than a few pages. Thus, while the scholarship in *Distant Reading* is undeniably influential, its somewhat macroscopic focus on the theory and history of modern poetry readings means that episodic accounts of performance events play a comparatively minor role in the work as a whole.

This overview of previous studies on poetry and performance has not furnished us with a concrete definition of these terms themselves; indeed, it has primarily emphasized the difficulty of producing such a definition. However, by observing the existing scholarship, we can at least arrive at a summary of how poetry and performance is understood in the context of *this* book. Like *Close Listening*, *Additional Apparitions* and *Distant Reading*, the subsequent chapters recognize the performance of poetry as a multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon, which encompasses a number of different practices—such as poetry readings, collaborations and multimedia work—as well as a nexus of poetical, theoretical and socio-political receptions, interventions and reinventions. The studies in this book also recognize that the performance does not solely entail the poets themselves; instead, both the audience and the performance space can play an active and significant role within the event. But while the chapters of this book might adopt a relatively similar ethos as these previous studies, they apply this understanding of performance in a slightly different manner. Unlike the essays in *Close Listening*, this book focuses exclusively on performances that took place in the UK. Allen Ginsberg—due to his significant role in the First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall—is the only American poet discussed in detail. Unlike the focus on the theory and history of modern poetry readings in Middleton’s study, the chapters of this book are more episodic in nature. Each will examine the ‘event histories’ of a specific poetry performance, by both documenting the proceedings of each individual event and by subjecting these to detailed interpretation and study. Finally, unlike the more contemporary events discussed in *Additional Apparitions*, this book draws upon textual or audio-visual archival materials—housed at the British Library, King’s College, London, and the University of Kent—in order to examine performances that occurred during the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s and 1970s.

In other words, *Event and Effect* is a study of four performance events, which occurred across two decades where poets in the UK—influenced by, among others, the poetic innovations of modernism, as well as Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry*—rejected the conservatism represented by the Movement poets (such as Philip Larkin), and began to incorporate a range of experimental and innovative practices within their poetics.¹⁵ These performances are the First International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall in 1965; Denise Riley’s first public performance at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977; Eric Mottram’s collaborative performance piece *Pollock Record*; and Allen Fisher’s *Blood Bone Brain* project from the 1970s. Although the subsequent chapters will inevitably address some broader concepts and concerns involving poetry and performance, *Event and Effect* makes no pretence of offering a definitive account of this phenomenon. Nor does it offer an exhaustive examination of the performances that took place during the Revival; the events discussed in this book took place in London and Cambridge, and although these locations were central to the poetry of this period, important developments were also taking place across Scotland, Newcastle and elsewhere. The various events in London and Cambridge were also too multiple to capture comprehensively in a single study. The selections of this book should therefore not be read as an attempt to construct a pantheon. What *Event and Effect* offers is a detailed ‘archaeological’ account and analysis of previously unexamined—and, at times, almost forgotten—events, which hopefully serve as an indicative cross-section of the diverse performances that took place during this period, as well as the potential dialogues between them.

Restricting the scope in this manner has been necessary for the sake of clarity, but it must also be acknowledged that these borders and parameters are not without issues. As many scholars have noted before, the British Poetry Revival exhibited a notable lack of diversity, as the poets associated with the movement were predominantly white men. Given its topic, these demographics have also been reflected in the chapters of *Event and Effect*. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that this is a vexed issue that continues to be debated. Contemporary critics have proposed that this situation might be partially explained by British poetry’s tendency to focus on “economic rather than identitarian political categories” (Lang & Nowell Smith 8). Previous studies have also suggested that the paucity of female writers in particular was related to the social circumstances of the scene: many of the readings and events took place in pubs, which could be a hostile and unwelcoming milieu for women (*Poetry of Saying* 161–162).

Such impressions are supported by the poet Frances Presley's recollections of how she struggled with the male-dominated inner circles when she attended readings and performances in the 1980s (Hampson & Edwards 137). However, others have argued that more could have been done to attract women to the movement.¹⁶ David and Christine Kennedy's recent work also includes a critical history regarding the treatment of female writers by male critics and editors (Kennedy & Kennedy 34–47). Similar debates are also addressed in relation to Denise Riley's first public performance in Chap. 3 of this book. Comparatively less has been said about the lack of poets of colour within the movement, and—as Abigail Lang and David Nowell Smith observe—the “broader history of postcolonial experimental poetic practice in Britain remains to be told” (9). A useful progenitor for such histories might be Stephen Voynce's discussion of the Caribbean Arts Movement, as it relates techniques such as the fragmentation of lines and words in Kamau Brathwaite's poetry to his views regarding the links between language and political change (102–161). In the future, fruitful studies might also be developed through a detailed exploration of the potential dialogues between the experimental poetics of, say, black British writing and those of the UK avant-garde. As Lauri Ramey has noted, both fields have suffered from being “marginalized and excluded” by orthodox presses, which tend to favour “almost exclusively social realist” traditions (123); it is therefore possible that further examinations of such connections could assist in bridging any preconceived gaps that perhaps still exist between them.¹⁷ However, due to its explicit focus on the Revival as we currently understand it, such analyses are beyond the remit of this present study.

Finally, I want to outline some of the methodological and theoretical perspectives for the chapters in this book. One of the key concerns of the research for *Event and Effect* involved finding a viable method for investigating bygone events as objects of study. In 1993, Peggy Phelan argued that the “only life” of a performance was “in the present”; that it could not participate in the “circulation of representation of representations” through recordings or other documentation without becoming “something other than performance”; and that, since a performance's being “becomes itself through disappearance”, it cannot enter the “economy of reproduction” without betraying “the promise of its own ontology” (73). The problem that Phelan points towards can be illustrated by revisiting the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter. Because I was unable to identify certain contributors to the radio documentary, some of their comments remained

anonymous and unattributable. I was unable to keep up with the details I was hearing, and ultimately those details disappeared from my memory. Moreover, Phelan might suggest that the actual performances—that is, the utterances of the various contributors—were always beyond my reach. By being recorded, edited and repeated during a radio broadcast, these utterances had already entered into the economy of reproduction and become something other than performance. Such debates take place across the entire field of performance studies, where arguments regarding “the intransmissibility of events” frequently suggest that a retrospective description would be unable to capture the authentic impressions aroused by a lived experience (“How to Read a Poetry Reading”). If poetry readings and performances are intrinsically linked to a specific time and place, they too might be conditioned by Phelan’s ontology of disappearance. This predicament could explain why studies such as *Additional Apparitions* or *Distant Reading* primarily make reference to events that the respective authors have themselves attended.

The archival focus of *Event and Effect* unavoidably means that the subsequent chapters will adopt a different view. Instead of Phelan’s arguments, this book is more closely aligned with critics who contend that the notion of a “lost moment that can only be described in its non-existence” is an overly romanticized myth, which skews and restricts our understanding of performance (Clausen 7). While it should be acknowledged that the archival documentation that forms the basis of my studies inevitably offers only limited perspectives, it also seems counterproductive to over-value the primacy of first-hand experience, as this can equally be conditioned—and limited—by numerous circumstantial factors: two separate audience members rarely experience the same performance in an entirely identical manner. In light of this, it is not necessary to reject performance documentation as an *otherness* that betrays the integrity of the event; instead, these artefacts may be utilized as tools that subject “the apparently non-graspable” to new methods of interpretation and analysis (Clausen 15). The ambiguities and ambivalences that may arise from this approach should not be unfamiliar to readers of poetry criticism from the previous four decades, where the reification of literary texts as stable and autonomous units of meaning has repeatedly been challenged. Innovative poetry often appears “radically incomplete and unfinishable” (Kennedy & Tuma 106), to the extent that we are unsure if we will ever arrive at a conclusive reading of a particular poem; nevertheless, these poems can still be analysed in rigorous and insightful ways. Likewise, while the studies in *Event and*

Effect are necessarily inconclusive in their nature, they nonetheless reveal new perspectives about the performances they examine. They may not fully capture the lived experience of witnessing these events in person, but they still bring us closer to them. It seems strange to relegate events that happened around 40 or 50 years ago to a status of irretrievable sacredness when other academics have published studies of Charles Dickens' public readings and an entire field of research is dedicated to Shakespearean performances.¹⁸

The specific materials that were utilized in researching each individual performance are detailed in the chapters that follow. These include existing accounts available in biographies, interviews or memoirs, which were collated together in order to determine possible correlations and discrepancies; archival documents such as preparatory materials, sources and notes that were developed in conjunction with a particular event; film footage and audio recordings, whenever such media was available; and new interviews with Allen Fisher and Denise Riley, transcripts of which are available in Chaps. 7 and 8 of this book. These materials are considered in unison with close readings of poetry, criticism and various theoretical perspectives; I will also make reference to the wider socio-political and historical contexts of each performance. Therefore, the methodological approach of *Event and Effect* could be likened to an archaeologist studying the fragments of a prehistoric vase. Each object, medium, and source is brought together to give a more complete impression of the supposedly 'irretrievable' performance. The assembled fragments may not conjoin perfectly, and several dimensions may remain absent and inaccessible. But just as the archaeologist is able to infer conclusions about the vase despite the remaining cracks, so can a synthesis of texts, archival documents, audio-visual recordings and interviews provide sufficient data to examine the details of these events.

The structure of each chapter is underpinned by a focus on both 'event' and 'effect'. On one level, these terms designate the bipartite structure of the analyses within them: each chapter is equally dedicated to an archaeological 'reconstruction' of the performance (the event) and a close investigation of the particular significations, implications and contexts of each occasion (the effect). However, theoretical discourses of event are also central to the critical thinking within this study. In defining postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard offers the following characterization:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules [...] The artist and writer [...] are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*. (81)

I have not quoted Lyotard in order to evoke the various debates around postmodernism; nor do I wish to claim that the poets discussed in this book identify as postmodernists. Innovative poets in the UK as a whole are generally suspicious of the term, and prefer to use nomenclatures such as ‘late modernist’ or ‘neo modernist’, or ‘linguistically innovative’ or ‘parallel tradition’ instead. Yet in the rare instances where critics do discuss the Revival or its various legacies with reference to postmodernism, they do so with explicit reference to this Lyotardian definition. When Redell Olsen examines the conceptual and formal possibilities of ‘postmodern’ poetry in the UK, she makes extended references to Lyotard’s theories (42–60); likewise, Sheppard has stated that he uses the term exclusively in its Lyotardian sense (*Poetry of Saying* 2). In the context of these studies, the references to Lyotard suggest that—as the quotation above implies—many of the poets associated with the Revival were informed by poetics which suspended naturalization, and instead worked towards new, and initially difficult, meanings (*Poetry of Saying* 3). However, it is important to note that Lyotard’s postmodern artworks also possess the characteristics of an *event*: they have not been produced by prior assumptions or rules, but are instead kinetic records of the activities that led to their creation. They are events, in other words, because they arise from exploratory techniques and encounters. The logical extension of this is that—as events—these texts and artworks are more fluid than stable; are permeable rather than closed; and are perhaps even open to retrospective revision and reinterpretation. In sum, these characterizations are not light years away from the aforementioned parallels I outlined between the analysis of ‘radically incomplete and unfinishable’ innovative poetry and seemingly ‘non-graspable’ performance events. In both circumstances, the object of that analysis is conditioned by degrees of ephemerality.

This is pertinent, as each poet examined in the subsequent chapters—irrespective of their individual differences—demonstrates a degree of awareness of the fluidity, permeability and temporality that is implied by Lyotard’s characterizations of event-like artworks. We can see this in Ginsberg’s reliance on the “natural inspiration of the moment” to keep the

poem moving (*Deliberate Prose* 241); in Riley's analysis of the instabilities in "the individual temporality of being a woman" (*Am I That Name?* 93); in Mottram's ambivalent assessment of the poem as a "process of relationships" ("Declaring a Behaviour" n.p.); and in Fisher's conception of poetry as something "always 'yet to be found' in the process of its making" ("The Mathematics of Rimbaud" 2). None of these articulations suggest a preference for closedness or stability; instead, they all gesture towards a poetics that see time, subjectivities, and the production of poetry as a nexus of contingencies that can change in accordance with the particularities of a given moment. Not only does this reveal a degree of overlap between the individual practices of the poets discussed in this book, but it also indicates how performance might be a particularly relevant concern for those practices. If we follow Cheek's understanding of the poetry reading as a "meshwork"—or a gathering—"of differentially inflicted components" (Kennedy & Tuma 106), then the event of performing a poem might be able to foster these aforementioned emphases on "contingencies and instabilities" to a greater degree than "any other mode of work" (Kaye 23). Such events can therefore situate the complex theoretical thinking behind these respective poetics in physical action; consequently, they can also evince how—beyond its role in networking or dissemination—performance was an inextricable component of the poetic experimentation that took place during the Revival.

Further conceptualizations of the event can help to elaborate on this idea. To be specific, I am less interested in Alain Badiou's analyses of events as something that is outside ontology (Badiou 173–265); instead, I want to focus on the implications of the perspectives Gilles Deleuze outlined in *The Fold*. In it, he argues that A. N. Whitehead's theories are—after the Stoics and Leibniz—one of the rare occasions where philosophy has adopted the event as a central concept (*The Fold* 86). This tacit endorsement indicates that Deleuze sees his own ideas on the concept as owing a debt to Whitehead's work, in which being and becoming—as well as permanence and change—operate on equal footing. This can be seen in one of Whitehead's earliest discussions of the event in *The Concept of Nature*, which focuses on Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment in London:

At first sight we should hardly call [the Needle] an event. It seems to lack the element of time and transitoriness. But does it? [...] some hundreds of millions of years ago, the earth was not in existence; twenty million years ago

there was no Thames; eighty years ago, there was no Thames Embankment, and when I was a small boy Cleopatra's Needle was not there. And now that it is there, none of us expect it to be eternal. (166)

These hypotheses are designed to undermine the supposed permanence of the Needle's existence at the Embankment. For Whitehead, the Needle's presence is in fact an event. Even as it stands on the Embankment, it is undergoing a series of intricate changes: a physicist might observe that it loses molecules and gains others throughout the day and, on a less molecular level, all of us can see that it gets dirtier and receives an occasional wash. The supposedly static 'permanence' of the Needle is therefore available only if the object is defined in exceptionally abstract terms. A more accurate explanation, Whitehead argues, would posit that within the general "structure of events", one can detect a "certain continuous limited stream of events" where "any chunk of that stream, during any hour, or any day, or any second has the character of being the situation of Cleopatra's Needle" (*Concept of Nature* 166). Its existence, in other words, is not static. It is characterized by moments of renewal, novelty and fresh creation—all of which designate it as an event (Shaviro 18).

What is at stake in this example is Whitehead's central theory that events are the ultimate components of reality. The expressions in this early illustration from *The Concept of Nature* may be somewhat ambiguous, but *Process and Reality* offers a more systematic development of this idea. There, Whitehead outlines distinctions between the properties of events—or 'actual entities'—and actual occasions: whereas an event might refer to "the more general sense of a nexus of actual occasions, interrelated in some determinate fashion in one extensive quantum", an actual occasion is defined as a "limiting type of an event with only one member" (*Process and Reality* 73). To relate this back to the example of Cleopatra's Needle, an actual occasion describes an isolated incident where one perceives the monument. Such an occasion is, in other words, the process by which anything is experienced. An event could on the other hand be identified as a grouping of these incidents, such as the obelisk's presence on the Thames Embankment—and the numerous perceptions thereof—throughout the day and beyond. This combination of actual occasions and actual entities effectively evokes a view of reality where the world is composed entirely of events. On this conception, happenings take primacy over things and the central question of philosophy is process instead of substance.¹⁹

In proposing this, Whitehead acknowledges that our interactions with actual occasions may be unrecognizable in empirical terms, as they are discontinuous and always ruptured by new encounters and perceptions (*The Concept of Nature* 169). These discontinuities do not, however, mean that each bygone actual occasion is ultimately lost; rather, each new encounter inherits the data of these past occasions. The transformations enacted by each rupture are therefore more akin to slight modulations instead of radical upheavals. This suggests that the key idea in Whitehead's philosophy is less about irretrievability than it is about active production: our collective perceptions of the Needle on the Embankment, for example, are a phenomenon that is actively produced by all parties involved in the encounters. As a result, the perceivers and the perceived are joined during the duration of such encounters. The former does not observe the latter from a passive position, as both occupy the same flux of actual occasions that characterize the world as a whole (*Process and Reality* 88). Consequently, it may be difficult to distinguish the perceiver and the perceived as two discrete entities with stable positions and characteristics; a more appropriate view would instead, Whitehead implies, identify them as two different coordinates that occur on a particular line.

From this synoptic sketch of Whitehead's schemata, it is already possible to determine certain parallels between his theories of the event and the previous discussions of this chapter. His characterization of the Needle as an event conditioned by the continuous inflections of actual occasions, for instance, resembles some of the implications found in Lyotard's event-like artworks. As with Lyotard's aforementioned descriptions, Whitehead's concept of reality stresses the role of active production and kinetic encounters, where the perceived object may be more fluid than stable, permeable rather than closed, and open to states of perpetual renewal. Succinctly put, Lyotard's concepts share Whitehead's position of rejecting morphological questions—whether these pertain to pre-established aesthetic rules, or structures in nature—in favour of concerns relating to dynamic process (*Process and Reality* 7). On the basis of these shared concerns, it would follow that Whitehead's notions of event can also be read into the common ground between the poets discussed in this book. As I noted above, the divergent projects of Ginsberg, Riley, Mottram and Fisher are—at least in part—informed by poetics that regard time, subjectivities and the production of poetry as a nexus of contingencies that can change in accordance with the particularities of a given moment. Such contingencies are also present in Whitehead. By insisting on the role of

active production between the perceiver and the perceived, he overturns essentialist distinctions between subject and object. Therefore, as “all actual things are alike objects [...] and all actual things are subjects” (*Process and Reality* 56), he eschews hierarchical categorizations between the two and instead argues that their exact relations are contingent upon the conditions of each actual occasion and encounter. The concerns of these four poets and of Whitehead focus on the event and active production; in other words, both correlate with intersubjective notions of fluidity, permeability and temporality.

This brings us to the event of a poetry performance. Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted the difficulties of defining poetry and performance via Kennedy and Tuma’s notion that even an individual event can encompass a range of relationships between the audience, the text and the poet-performer. I subsequently alluded to similar ideas by referring to the poetry performance as a multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon or, alternatively, as a meshwork of differentially inflicted components. Whitehead’s theories can also supply us with concepts that help to describe these situations. His example of Cleopatra’s Needle as an actively produced event introduces us to a nexus of intersubjective encounters where each actual occasion will be, if only minutely, unique. This model can, in turn, be applied to the plurality of audience responses to an individual performance: the impressions of the crowd can vary greatly, depending on a host of other circumstantial factors, such as, for instance, the view offered by a particular seat. Furthermore, Whitehead also argues that reality is a process where each entity has its own absolute self-attainment (*Process and Reality* 60). As a consequence of this self-attainment, such entities maintain a certain sense of singularity, as if they were an individual node within a nexus or a constellation of other nodes. At the same time, because Whitehead does not subscribe to hierarchical distinctions between subject and object, these singular entities are nevertheless *all* connected to one another, and “consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations” (*Process and Reality* 61). Applied to a poetry performance, this formulation suggests that the various audience responses can be understood as being simultaneously both unique to a particular member of that audience *as well as* connected to the event’s collective experience as a whole. On this understanding, the poetry performance is characterized by a kind of ‘cacophonous collectivity’ where the event is both singular (we all witness the same proceedings) and plural (we all form distinct responses to it). Simply put, Whitehead’s theories allow us to think of the poetry

performance as an event that actively involves the audience in its artistic production. Both the performing poet and the audience *author* the event, and this intersubjective ‘authorship’ means that the narratives of such events are multiple.

Deleuze would likely agree with this application of Whitehead’s concepts. Towards the end of the aforementioned chapter in *The Fold*, he writes:

A concert is being performed tonight. It is the event. Vibrations of sound disperse, periodic movements go through space [...] The sources of the sounds, instrumental or vocal, are not content only to send the sounds out: each one perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own. These are active perceptions that are expressed among each other, or else prehensions that are prehending one another. (91)

In a chapter that has alluded to *The Concept of Nature* and made references to several cosmological concepts, this is a significant gesture. When Whitehead’s own writing refers to the arts, he lapses into notions of aesthetic delight that supersedes judgement (*Process and Reality* 188), which seems out of step with his metaphysical schemata as a whole. Here, Deleuze instead analyses an aesthetic encounter—specifically, a performance—according to Whitehead’s theories of the event: the descriptions of the cooperative perceptions and prehensions among the orchestra, for instance, are in tune with my earlier characterizations of the active production between the perceiver and the perceived. In other words, Deleuze—similarly to my suggestion that the poetry reading is an occasion of intersubjective authorship—sees performances as events where several active perceptions are expressed among one other.

The description of the concert in *The Fold* also gives us an additional insight into an earlier analogy Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

When Glenn Gould speeds up the performance of a piece, he is not just displaying virtuosity, he is transforming the musical points into lines, he is making the whole piece proliferate. The number is no longer a universal concept measuring elements [...] but has itself become a multiplicity that varies according to the dimensions considered. (9)

Here, the transformation of musical points into lines recalls Deleuze's later description of the concert where, rather than standing out solely as discreet and separable points, the performed voices and sounds form a nexus of connections. To specify, both Gould at the piano and the interactions of the orchestra can therefore be seen as demonstrating degrees of confluence with Whitehead's theories: each analogy gestures towards a multiplicity of becomings in an interrelated nexus of actual occasions where fluidity, permeability and temporality all play a crucial role. But despite these similarities, the example in *A Thousand Plateaus* is not explicitly about the event—at least not to the extent that the extract from *The Fold* is. Instead, it refers to the modalities of the rhizome. This famous concept is crucial for *A Thousand Plateaus*, both as a theory and as an organizing principle. Rhizomes offer an alternative model to the structures of a tree or a root: while these arborescent formations can generate fixed hierarchies and limitations, a rhizome avoids such fixities. It does not follow the structures of a tree or a root but instead it expands across multiple dimensions (*A Thousand Plateaus* 9). When it is broken, it can begin again along one of its previous lines—or along entirely new ones—while its manifestations may develop as ramified surface extensions or concretize into bulbs and tubers (*A Thousand Plateaus* 7). These multiplicities are the precise context for the proliferation of Gould's piece: the musical points are no longer constrained by the arborescent structures of the score (where one note follows another), as they are now meshed together via the interconnected dimensions of the performance.

Thus, the ideas behind Deleuze and Guattari's reference to Gould may not be explicitly formed with Whitehead in mind; nevertheless, its point about rhizomic multiplicities can still be related to the broader implications of Whitehead's theories in the following way. Elaborating on the relations between rhizomatic connections, Deleuze and Guattari draw our attention to the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that occur between a wasp and an orchid. The wasp is deterritorialized—that is, made fluid—by becoming a piece of the orchid's reproductive apparatus; simultaneously, the wasp also reterritorializes—or reconfigures—the orchid by transporting its pollen (*A Thousand Plateaus* 11). Both parties are altered as a consequence: the “becoming-wasp of the orchid” and the “becoming-orchid of the wasp” interlink as these two heterogeneous elements form a rhizome (*A Thousand Plateaus* 11). This model, in turn, gestures towards the conception of performances as events of intersubjective authorship and cacophonous collectivity that can be derived from

Whitehead. As I noted above, his concepts allow space for considering the various audience responses to an individual performance as being both unique to a particular member of that audience as well as connected to the event's collective experience as a whole. As in the example of the orchid and the wasp, the various constituents of this cacophonous collectivity all permeate each other's pores and interstices; the responses and encounters of the event are therefore merged through an intricate rhizomic spreading, where it may be difficult to distinguish the exact borders between subject and object. Effectively, this combination of Whitehead's concepts and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics suggests that, as an event authored by both the poet-performer *and* the audience, the poetry performance cannot be mapped according to configurations that favour arborescent hierarchies and fixities.

It should be acknowledged that this approach denotes a slight departure from previous conceptualizations of poetry performances. For instance, while Middleton's work recognizes that the work of performance occurs in a field of interaction and intersubjectivity—just as the models derived via Whitehead and Deleuze and Guattari suggest—*Distant Reading* also seeks to analyse and problematize how the 'performance of authorship' features in such occasions. Briefly put, this idea of performing authorship suggests that the performing poet utters "the words of a written text as if every single one bore the indelible mark of their composer" (*Distant Reading* 33), and where the "poetic utterances carry and assertoric force that depends on the presence of the performative author" (*Distant Reading* 46). According to this view, such asseverations are an inscription of the poet's authority within the event. However, due to their dependence on the presence and the authority of the performer-poet, these notions also create hierarchies in our understanding of the event: in spite of its interactions and intersubjectivities, the event is ultimately presented as an act of performing authorship, which places the poet in a somewhat privileged position. The models I have proposed above, however, complicate the apparent fixity of such hierarchies. From these complications, questions emerge. If, as I have suggested, both the poet and the audience author the event, could the plurality of this intersubjective authorship undermine the authority of the poet performing *their* authorship, and assign different significations for the performance? How might the poet's individual asseverations be configured in an event that is characterized by the notions derived from Whitehead and Deleuze and Guattari—that is, a non-hierarchical spreading of active perceptions that are expressed among

each other? Moreover, do all poets—or poetry performances—seek to assert their authoritative asseverations in this manner? What alternative modes of performing might these events reveal?

At this stage, it should be made expressly clear that the chapters that follow are not exclusively ‘Whiteheadian’ or ‘Deleuzoguattarian’ readings of the individual performances they discuss. Although the concepts outlined above will reappear at various stages throughout this book, the intellectual frameworks of the subsequent chapters will also pay due attention to the respective content-specific features of each performance. Consequently, the discussions therein will also draw upon relevant theoretical perspectives from Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Raoul Vaneigem and several others. In addition, the chapters will pay close attention to how the individual performances relate to the role of contingency and instability within the poetics of each respective poet. However, while these performances are all ‘reconstructed’ and analysed individually, they have been organized in such a manner that—when read in sequence—they map out a certain thematic narrative. That narrative, in turn, might also be understood alongside the concepts derived from the theories of Whitehead and Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the questions these concepts raise for the spectre of performing authorship. Step by step, the performances in the subsequent chapters demonstrate a gradual move away from the performances of authorship, and a shift towards more pluralistic, rhizomatic performances characterized by a cacophonous collectivity of active production, where—increasingly—both the poet-performer and the audience author the event.

This narrative is shaped across each of the following chapters. It initially appears in the divergent and incongruous aspirations of the participants and audiences at the First International Poetry Incarnation, which derailed Ginsberg’s original intentions of staging a great spiritual occasion; instead, the event’s intersubjective active production facilitated new and unanticipated dialogues between poems such as “Who Be Kind To” and the manifold social contexts of the counterculture and the New Left—as well as a multiplex of historical representations offered by the Royal Albert Hall.

While such dialogues were an unexpected effect of the Incarnation, Riley’s performance at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977 incorporates similar acts of active production in a slightly more deliberate fashion. Even though the event’s immediate milieu—a hall at an elite university—recalled the characteristics of a formal poetry reading, Riley introduced a series of discontinuities throughout her performance, which destabilized the

formalities of the event. Consequently, instead of performing her authorship, Riley's reading enacted a kind of metacommentary on the social situations of the event in order to challenge any preconceptions one might impose upon a 'feminist poetry reading'.

Mottram's collaborative piece *Pollock Record* exhibits a continuation of this challenge to the privileged position of performing one's authorship. By blending together indeterminate structures and contributions from three separate performers, Mottram's work configures the performed poem as an unstable temporal phenomenon, and gestures towards the role that memory—both collectively and individually—can play in the active production of the event.

Finally, in Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain* the collective authoring of the event is an explicit component of the work: as Fisher's notes for the project state, the audience is "invited to perform" (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 1 a.1*). As a consequence, *Blood Bone Brain* additionally highlights the significance of performance documentation for the continued production of the event. The syntheses between these four events are evaluated in the epilogue, where I also include some concluding remarks on poetry and performance in the UK today.

Alternative trajectories were undoubtedly possible. Readers may, for instance, question the level of detail dedicated to Ginsberg's performance in a book that is concerned with events during the British Poetry Revival. Likewise, others may query the absence of poets such as Cobbing, who was undoubtedly a major figure in the Revival and its various legacies. This chapter's references to poets such as Bergvall might also lead certain readers to wonder why she does not feature more largely in *Event and Effect* as a whole. The answers to such questions are fairly simple. Given Ginsberg's centrality to the First International Poetry Incarnation, it would have been impossible to discuss this landmark event without paying close attention to his role within it. Further, a study of an individual event in a single chapter would not have done justice to Cobbing's long career in performance; his work in this field, in other words, is better suited for a full-length monograph such as Steve Willey's forthcoming *Sounding the Room in British Poetry*. Finally, Bergvall, who was born in 1962, was too young to be active in the decades examined here.

Ultimately, the selections of this book were made on the basis of the breadth of archival material available, as well as their relevance to the aforementioned themes of intersubjective active production in the context of a particular event from the 1960s and 1970s. With this in mind, I want

to reiterate that the chapters in *Event and Effect* should not be read as an attempt to construct a pantheon. A range of Revival poets—including cris cheek, Ulli Freer, Bill Griffiths, Geraldine Monk, Maggie O’Sullivan and Carlyle Reedy—demand further critical attention, not to mention the long list of UK-based poets (and performances) that have come into prominence in the subsequent decades. It is my hope that more academics would make further use of the archival collections that have sprung into being since the late 1990s, as these resources can help to bring the invisible history of the Revival and its various aftermaths to a less tenebrous space. To this end, I include some additional suggestions regarding this invisibility within the epilogue that concludes this book.

NOTES

1. For more about the struggles at the Poetry Society, see Peter Barry’s *Poetry Wars*, especially Chaps. 1–5; For more about Mottram’s descriptions regarding the Revival, see “The British Poetry Revival” 15–50; For more about Cobbing’s activities as an organizer and publisher see, for example, Robert Sheppard’s *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* 108–133; or, Peter Mayer’s *Bob Cobbing and Writers Forum*.
2. Specifically, Sheppard is most likely thinking of texts such as Barry’s *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* and *Poetry Wars*; and Duncan’s *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry* and *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*.
3. Examples of other studies already available in 2007 include, for example, David Miller & Richard Price’s *British Poetry Magazines 1914–2000* and Randall Stevenson’s *The Last of England?* The current flourish is represented by a number of important works, including *Modernist Legacies* (edited by Abigail Lang and David Nowell Smith); *Clasp* (edited by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards); *CUSP* (edited by Geraldine Monk); David and Christine Kennedy’s *Women’s Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970–2000*; and Alex Latter’s *Late Modernism and the English Intelligencer*. The *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, launched by Sheppard together with Scott Thurston and currently edited by Thurston and Gareth Farmer, published its first issue in 2009.
4. For more discussion of Cobbing’s work within these practices, see Sheppard’s *Poetry of Saying* 214–232.
5. For more discussion on performance poetry, slams and dub poetry, see Wheeler 127–164 or Bernstein 324–359. For discussion of black British poetry, see Ramey 109–136.

6. Many of these studies are, of course, discussed at length in the current and subsequent chapters of this book. Additional perspectives, which I do not discuss in as much detail, include: Pamela Clunies-Ross' "Promoting Poetry Events"; John Glasco's "A Real Good Noise"; Donald Hall's "The Poetry Reading" 63–77; Denise Levertov's *Light Up the Cave* 46–56; David Thompson's edited volume *Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives*; and Stephen Vincent & Ellen Zweig's edited volume *The Poetry Reading*.
7. For more on this view of happenings, see Moore-Gilbert & Seed 1–15.
8. For descriptions of such protests, see Roszak 124; for more discussions about radical politics and performance art, see Baz Kershaw's *The Radical in Performance* 7.
9. A full transcript of this interview is available in Chap. 7. For an additional account of Fisher's experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, see Lang & Nowell Smith 41–57. Further recollections of the London poetry scene around this time can be found in Hampson & Edwards 7–14.
10. A full transcript of this interview is available in Chap. 8.
11. In addition to the material discussed here, see, for example, Lopez 73–88.
12. For more on Bergvall's own comments about this, see Bergvall & Stammers.
13. Fisher's use of process will be discussed in more detail within Chap. 5.
14. For more on Schechner's definitions of the performance's precinct, see Schechner 39.
15. For a more detailed account of this, see *Poetry of Saying* 20–76.
16. See, for example, Hampson & Edwards 85.
17. Certain parallels could be drawn, for instance, between Mottram's aforementioned criticisms of the literary establishment and Dawes' view that "the publishing world does not reflect the kind of activity that is going on in poetry among Black British writers" (290).
18. For examples of such studies, see Andrews' *Charles Dickens and his performing selves*; and Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*.
19. For further elaboration of these arguments, see Shaviro 17.

Be Kind to This Place: Allen Ginsberg and the First International Poetry Incarnation

The First International Poetry Incarnation took place at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 11 June 1965. It attracted an estimated audience of seven or eight thousand, which makes it one of the largest poetry readings in living memory. It also became known as the UK's first ever happening, and was recognized as an important early episode for London's 'cultural revolution' during the 1960s.¹ As a consequence, the performance is often cited as a key event in the histories of both British poetry and the UK's countercultural underground. Examples of such references include Lesley Wheeler's assertion that the event "galvanized" the city's poetry scene (165), as well as the introduction to Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards' *Clasp*, where the Incarnation is described as an early indicator that London was developing an oppositional undercurrent to mainstream culture (8). The significance of the Incarnation is also intimated in Sheppard's explicit identification of the performance as one of the events he wishes was more firmly pegged into history (*When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* 215). But Sheppard's wish also begs the question: if the Incarnation continues to enjoy such popular renown, why is this 'pegging into history' still necessary?

A plausible explanation for Sheppard's position is that although the Incarnation is widely chronicled in various memoirs and biographies, these reports frequently involve ornate descriptions, which yield surprisingly little in terms of information and analysis. For instance, in a short statement by the Austrian sound poet Ernst Jandl, the event is characterized as a moment where "no-one was one, but we each were the thousands,

re-shaped in one beautiful body of voices and echoes, with Allen Ginsberg on our soul” (qtd. in *POT! Anthology* 11). While Jandl’s comments may capture the event’s intended ambiance, they also epitomize a form of register that has mythologized the Incarnation as a moment of “common dreaminess in which all was permissive and benign” (Nuttall 183). Some commentators have claimed that, in this permissive atmosphere, the audience witnessed hours of poetry that resonated with “mind-expanding ripples of empathy” like “uncut and precious stones in a translucent pool” (*Children of Albion* 337). More recent recollections have been less poetic in their descriptions. In these reports, the Incarnation is depicted as an “incredibly long-winded” event, which felt “kind of foreign” and seemed like “one of the worst poetry readings” of all time (qtd. in Green 70; 73; 71). Thus, our current understanding of the Incarnation faces a predicament: although its sheer scale alone undoubtedly makes it a prominent performance, its history is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. What is therefore needed is an account that seeks to negotiate between these discrepancies in order to arrive at a more specific understanding of the event and its significances.

The Incarnation was undoubtedly a key event in the history of poetic innovation within the UK. At the same time—and as I indicated in the latter sections of the Introduction—it would be impossible to produce such an account without addressing Allen Ginsberg’s role in the event: Ginsberg was the evening’s headlining performer and—as the subsequent sections of this chapter demonstrate—his presence in London was a catalyst for the event’s initial organization. With this in mind, then, while this chapter is interested in the Incarnation itself—as well as in negotiating the contradictions and discrepancies within the responses to it—Ginsberg’s performance inevitably occupies a central position in these discussions. Any other approach would be a misrepresentation of what transpired that night. However, it should be stressed that this chapter does not seek to depict the Incarnation from a strictly Americanist perspective. The extent to which the British Poetry Revival was influenced by American post-war poetry has of course been a subject of debate; however, Ginsberg’s position in this chapter should not be read as a conscious contribution to such arguments.² I am principally interested in the Incarnation as an event, and examine Ginsberg’s reading in order to consider how his performance interacts with the aspirations and actualities of that event. The discussions about Ginsberg that appear in this chapter are—in other words—a component of a larger picture that also involves analyses regarding the Incarnation’s social

contexts, the event's relationship with its regal venue, and its afterlife within the Revival.

In light of Ginsberg's crucial role within the Incarnation, it may be helpful to begin with some observations on his longstanding relationship to performance. While Ginsberg was by no means the only American poet who saw breath as a key unit of composition, his conception of the line as a "single breath unit" was physically embodied in his performances (*Deliberate Prose* 230). For instance, a young Ginsberg could recite the entirety of "Howl" in 20 or 22 min; however, by the early 1980s, he would require 27 min to deliver a full rendition, as his decreased lung capacity had limited "the long breath of his youth" (*Allen Ginsberg: A Life* 495). Due to the physical nature of this delivery, it is easy to understand why Middleton identifies the poet as a central example of the performance of authorship. As *Distant Reading* observes, Ginsberg's charismatic performances relied heavily on his substantial presence, which imbued the poet's prophetic pronouncements with a sense of power and authority (33). This reliance on the poet's physical presence has led others to suggest that there was a tension between Ginsberg's performances and his written work. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, for example, has noted that Ginsberg's latter works display a "shocking decline in the quality of his poetry on the printed page", which was primarily due to Ginsberg being "more and more successful as a performer" (qtd. in Vale 206). Theodore Roszak goes a step further by describing Ginsberg as a "vagabond proselytizer", whose poems are simply a "subsidiary way" of promoting the "countercultural life" that Ginsberg also embodied with his hair, his beard and his "mischievous grin" (129). Such analyses may not be entirely inaccurate: the technical achievements of poems such as "Hum Bom!" do not necessarily match the complexities of "Howl" or "Kaddish", and it is conceivable that Ginsberg's popularity in the 1960s reached further than his poetry alone. However, these comments tacitly assume that Ginsberg's performances and public appearances were auxiliary activities, which eventually superseded his writing. This seems erroneous, as these two practices had been closely interlinked from the very beginning of his career. For instance, when Ginsberg performed the first part of "Howl" at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in October 1955, the strange and ecstatic intensity of his delivery left the audience "standing in wonder, or cheering" (McClure 15); although Ginsberg had been relatively unknown in San Francisco up to that point, his performance made such an impression that it soon led to the publication of *Howl and Other Poems*.³ In other words, performing his

authorship was not an extraneous practice for Ginsberg; his embodied and impassioned testimonies catalysed his arrival as a poet (*Distant Reading* 62).

Accounts of the Six Gallery reading have been a stable component of the mythos surrounding Ginsberg's career, as seen in the first-hand accounts by poets such as Michael McClure, in biographies of Ginsberg, in studies of the San Francisco Renaissance, and in monographs dedicated to the composition of "Howl"; furthermore, the reading has also been reimagined in both fiction and film.⁴ Consequently, a broad consensus about the proceedings of the event has been reached. Less is said about the Six Gallery itself. As recently as 2011, Jonah Raskin claimed that the Gallery was significant only for its insignificance, as it hosted no noteworthy events or exhibitions apart from the reading in 1955 ("Howl and the Six Gallery Reading" 23). Yet this view disregards the intriguing history of the space itself: according to McClure, the Gallery was a former "automobile repair shop" that had been converted to a cooperative space for the arts by a group of young artists, and it regularly housed various avant-garde performances (12–13). True to the cooperative ethos of the Gallery, the décor and set design for the reading in October 1955 were both sourced from local artists. These included splintered and weeping sculptures by Fred Martin, whose designs were based on deconstructed orange crates that had been swathed in muslin and dipped in plaster; and the podium for the evening had likewise been built from former fruit crates (McClure 13).

At first, these features may not appear particularly notable. As Middleton notes, most poetry readings tend to take place in temporary locations such as pubs, lecture halls and galleries, all of which primarily serve other social purposes (*Distant Reading* 30). But while such descriptions coincide with many aspects of the Six Gallery reading, the event also formed a more nuanced relationship with its venue. The space of the Six Gallery demonstrates how any material, once appropriately challenged, can be made to perform. The podium and Martin's sculptures were both found objects that were subsequently remodelled into entirely different artefacts. Their transformations are therefore similar to Stephen Fredman's descriptions of contextual practice, whereby the artist uncovers "new energies and images through juxtaposing found materials or by directing aesthetic attention to an existing but previously ignored context" (3). That context, in this particular instance, is especially significant. As Walter Ebeling observes, California's citrus industry had been a contributory force to the state's economy since the early nineteenth century (352–361); therefore, the

splintered deformities of Martin's sculptures act as a visual chorus to the monstrous commodity forms that arise in Ginsberg's descriptions of neon fruit supermarkets, as well as his apocalyptic tracts against the monetary horrors of Moloch (*Collected Poems* 136; 131).⁵ In other words, while Ginsberg may not have performed these particular passages during the evening in question, the visual chorus of Martin's pieces nevertheless echoed his cries about the "the tobacco haze of Capitalism" (*Collected Poems* 127).

These reverberations between the Six Gallery reading and its location can be extended even further, as the venue's former life as a garage suggests a serendipitous but strangely profound connection with Ginsberg's writing. Because cars recall Ford's pioneering modes of mass production, they are intrinsically connected to the factories and smokestacks that "Howl" associates with Moloch; however, these vehicles are simultaneously a source of liberation for the poem's protagonists, who drive across the country on their quest to find visions of eternity (*Collected Poems* 129). To paraphrase concepts from Michel de Certeau, the dramatis personae of "Howl" utilize cars as subversions from within; they operate these symbols of the dominant order in another register, and thus divert that order without leaving it entirely (32). A similar shift is also enacted via the Gallery's conversion from a commercial space into a cooperative arts venue. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre provides a brief description of events that occurred at Halles Centrales—a former wholesale market in Paris—between 1969 and 1971: this space, which was originally "designed to facilitate the distribution of food", was briefly transformed into "a gathering-place and a scene of permanent festival—in short, into a centre of play rather than work" (167). Lefebvre explicitly identifies these transformations as a type of *détournement*, a concept he derives from Guy Debord's Letterist and Situationist publications. Although the aesthetic understanding of the term pertains to the use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble, Debord and Gil Wolman also assert that it is possible to "detour entire situations by deliberately changing" one of their determinant conditions (14). Lefebvre's discussion builds upon this assertion and argues that any space, irrespective of its original purpose, can outlast its primary functions and be diverted—or reappropriated—by being utilized in a role that differs from its original use (*The Production of Space* 167). The reappropriation of the site for the Six Gallery reading is broadly analogous with the *détournement* of Halles Centrales: both the space and Martin's fruit crates were consigned to new roles that resisted their original

governing functions. These diversions, in turn, corresponded with the symbolic actions of Ginsberg's performance. "Howl" is ultimately a poem of empathy, as evidenced by the declaration that the speaker cannot be safe if Carl Solomon is not safe (*Collected Poems* 130). In this context, Ginsberg's efforts to "recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose" are articulated in an attempt to divert the 'lacklove' of Moloch and reappropriate language to a more compassionate use (*Collected Poems* 130). Therefore, if Ginsberg's poem sought to enact a temporary halt to the dominant cultures of 1950s America, the space and the décor of the Six Gallery resonated with comparable aspirations.

The manifold *détournements* that form the serendipitous background to the Six Gallery reading are worth noting, as they provide an important context for the spatial significations of the Incarnation. Before this, however, it is important to outline the details of the proceedings themselves.

What actually happened on 11 June 1965? Although the Incarnation arose from a nexus of activities in London, much of the available literature places Ginsberg at the event's inception. The poet arrived to London that summer after facing deportation from Prague, where both his presence and his sexual theories had attracted unwanted attention from the authorities. On Ed Sanders' advice, Ginsberg visited Better Books and performed an impromptu reading there (*London Calling* 145). The bookshop is also credited as the place where the concept of the Incarnation was first formulated, although disagreements exist over the persons present. Michael Horovitz claims that he hatched the plan together with Ginsberg and Alexander Trocchi (Green 67); others, however, remember that the idea came to life when Ginsberg—together with Barbara Rubin, Barry Miles, Sue Miles, Daniel Richter and Jill Richter—realized that Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso were also due to be in London that summer.⁶ The planners were additionally excited by the prospect that Andrei Voznesensky, Pablo Neruda and Pablo Fernandez might also be available to perform—although ultimately none of them was.⁷ Most accounts agree that Barbara Rubin booked the venue, while the Richters were responsible for financing the booking deposit (*In the Sixties* 57). The event's publicity and administration were coordinated by the Poets Cooperative, a haphazardly formed loose grouping of artists that included Ginsberg, Horovitz, Ferlinghetti, Trocchi, John Esam, Harry Fainlight, Simon Vinkenoog, Dan Richter and Julie Felix. As a part of the promotional campaign, John Hopkins photographed the poets beside the statue of Shakespeare on the Albert Memorial, located near the venue; the performance was also mentioned in

major newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* (*London Calling* 146). Clearly, the Incarnation was put in motion with considerable aspirations. If, as Michael Schumacher puts it, the organizers intended to stage a “poetry breakthrough” that was comparable to the Six Gallery reading, they approached the occasion on a much grander scale (446).

Despite being credited as a happening (which would imply that it involved a great deal of collaboration and improvisation), the proceedings of the Incarnation primarily consisted of individual poetry readings. Trocchi hosted the affair, where everyone involved with the Poets Cooperative—except for Felix, the group’s only female member—performed, as did Corso, Jandl, Adrian Mitchell, Anselm Hollo, Paulo Leoni, Pete Brown, Christopher Logue, George Macbeth, Spike Hawkins and Tom McGrath. During the intermissions, the audience also heard taped recordings of William Burroughs; and the guitarist Davy Graham closed the evening with an improvised song. A full recording of the event was captured on the BBC’s fixed live feed from the Hall, while the filmmaker Peter Whitehead shot brief segments of the performances. According to Miles’ recollections, the poets performed from a “centre dais” positioned where a “boxing ring” often stood, while the seats immediately next to the stage were primarily occupied by the readers, organizers and their friends; however, “there was no real division between the audience and poets” and the crowd was free to share bottles of wine, as well as “three-paper joints” (*London Calling* 148). Miles also notes that the floor of the Hall was decorated with flowers that were “salvaged after the Floral Hall at Covent Garden Market closed for the day” (*London Calling* 148).

The film produced from Whitehead’s footage provides a similar impression. As the title *Wholly Communion* suggests, the director presents the Incarnation as an iconic moment for the UK’s emergent counterculture, with its separate audiences all in the one place at the one time. The film opens with an image of the sun above a statue, before moving to a panoramic shot of the Hall, accompanied by a voiceover of Ginsberg chanting. When filming the performances, Whitehead follows the poets as if he were another observer in the crowd. Thick clouds of smoke drift onto the screen. At one stage, Ginsberg is shown reclining on Barbara Rubin’s lap, smoking and enjoying a drink. In another scene, Brown and Horovitz join Jandl for a performance of “The Furore of Sneezing” by Kurt Schwitters. While Ginsberg reads, Whitehead focuses on a woman in the audience, who dances along to the rhythms of the poem. These images instil a compelling portrait of the sense of connection and liberation that is frequently

associated with the Incarnation. Even the more incongruous moments, such as the point where Vinkenoog—under the influence of mescaline—interrupts Fainlight’s reading by screaming ‘love’ repeatedly, appear demonstrative of the event’s free and festive spirit.⁸ As Trocchi tells the audience after Vinkenoog has calmed down, such incidents are unavoidable when one puts a crowd of thousands “in a hall with a few poets trying to be natural” (*Wholly Communion*). The performance—as mediated through Whitehead’s film—is ultimately akin to a Bakhtinian carnival, during which “life is subject only to its laws, that is; the laws of its freedom” (Bakhtin 7).

This carnivalesque spectacle would cohere well with aspects of Ginsberg’s activities during the summer of 1965. While in Prague, the poet famously participated in the May Day celebrations, where he chanted mantras to the crowds and was ultimately chosen as the King of May (Morgan 408). Likewise, Horovitz’s commitment to promoting the arts “as a public festival” often valorized similar carnivalesque practices (Nuttall 182); indeed, Horovitz’s *Live New Departures*—a travelling circus of poetry and jazz events that he launched around 1960—aspired towards a comparable festival atmosphere. Irrespective of these resonances, it seems limiting to frame the Incarnation as a carnivalesque expression of freedom in a “utopian realm of community” (Bakhtin 9). Due to the prohibitive price of film, Whitehead was forced to shoot frugally, and only captured less than 1 h of footage from the 8 h event (*Gathering of the Tribes*). This already limited resource was subsequently reduced further to the 32 min runtime of *Wholly Communion*; therefore, while the film is an invaluable document of the occasion, it presents a carefully orchestrated sequence of events. A wider survey of the evening depicts the proceedings as a site of multiple conflicts and confrontations. At one level, there was a great degree of suspicion and resentment among the poets present. For instance, Jeff Nuttall was so displeased about being excluded from the roster of performers that he and John Latham made plans to interrupt the proceedings by charging at the stage covered in paint.⁹ Similarly, while the recording of Jandl’s performance reveals that his sound poems were extremely well received by the audience—so much so that the crowd joins in—Pete Brown later dismissed Jandl’s work as a “throwback to the bohemian artistic crowd of the 50s and the early 60s” (qtd. in Green 73). Later on, when Brown and Horovitz decided to join Jandl on stage, the recording captures several voices from the background objecting to this, and even commanding the two to sit back down (“The First International Poetry Incarnation”).

Confrontations also occurred between the poets and the audience. Miles notes that Ginsberg was privately suspicious about many of his fellow performers, and particularly doubted whether any of the British poets on the stage were good enough (*London Calling* 142). In fact, the recording of Ginsberg's reading evinces that the poet was unable to maintain his discretion during the performance. Early on, while he is leafing through his poems, Ginsberg drunkenly complains about having to "re-navigate through all this bad poetry" read by others; moments later, when the audience applauds after the word 'shit' is read out during Ginsberg's rendition of "The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*" he furiously orders everyone to shut up, before exclaiming that they have heard enough shit already ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). The audience responds to these exclamations with derisions against Ginsberg. The first part of his reading is frequently interrupted by protests from the crowd: not all of these are clearly audible on the surviving recordings, but some—such as "may I have some poetry, sir?" and "bring back Christopher Logue"—directly attack Ginsberg and his work ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). Such derisions hardly seem apposite to the poet's original wishes to stage a "great spiritual event" (*In the Sixties* 61). Evidently, the communion was not wholly achieved. The myriad tensions among the participants, as well as those between the audience and some of the performers, indicate that the Incarnation involves a more complex set of relations than those of a carnivalesque spectacle.

How might these relations be mapped out more specifically? Earlier in this chapter, I examined the resonances between the Six Gallery reading and its immediate surroundings. If the Incarnation aspired to be a comparable poetry breakthrough, as Schumacher has claimed, perhaps this event also presents a certain serendipitous mutuality with its locus. For instance, an argument could be made that the Albert Hall was hired in an attempt to emulate artists such as Bob Dylan or The Beatles. In 1963, the Albert Hall had hosted a rare concert from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, and Dylan had performed there for two nights in May 1965; moreover, Ginsberg and some of his fellow poets—including Horowitz and Brown—are known to have coveted the scale of celebrity enjoyed by these musicians. Yet these comparisons do not seem adequate: the Royal Albert Hall, as its name suggests, is a space encoded with particular representations, which suggests that the Incarnation should be paralleled with these broader contexts and histories. Named after the deceased Prince Consort by Queen Victoria in 1867, the Albert Hall is historically, materially and

symbolically intermingled with the memorial that faces the entrance to the Hall.¹⁰ Indeed, if the Hall was built to fulfil the intentions of Albert Prince Consort, as the inscription on the building's terracotta frieze declares, the venue itself acts as a kind of monument.¹¹ Consequently, it performs certain duties: as Deleuze and Guattari note, a monument's "action is not memory but fabulation" (*What is Philosophy* 168), and the Albert Hall does indeed emanate a myriad of narratives. Although the Hall may have been initially funded through the profits of the Great Exhibition in 1851, which is generally portrayed as an egalitarian occasion, the building itself signifies discourses of privilege and power. Its neo-classical architecture is a conscious allusion to the arenas of the Roman Empire, and Queen Victoria's only recorded comments about the building stated: "it looks like the British Constitution" (R. Williams 10). In other words, while its design recalls the empires of antiquity, Queen Victoria's comments tacitly associate the Hall with a nebulous doctrine of a more recent imperial power.¹²

In Lefebvre's theories, monuments represent both the prestige and the power of the State, as well as the "artificiality of empty celebrations, ceremonies and rituals" (*Critique of Everyday Life vol. 1* 232). Yet Lefebvre nevertheless identifies these constructions as sites of ambivalence and conflict: they simultaneously promote the labour of those who built them—thus condemning the rulers for whom they were built—and they often involve such diverse purposes that no "functionality can characterise them, or exhaust their social function" (*Critique of Everyday Life vol. 2* 309). Such tensions can also be associated with the history of the Albert Hall, as it occasionally hosted events that opposed its symbolic discourses of power. The suffragettes held several meetings there from 1907 onwards, and would often disrupt other political gatherings in the Hall as a form of protest; on one such occasion, one campaigner even planned to hide in the pipes of the Hall's organ in order to project their message (R. Williams 47). In the 1920s, the tabloid *Sunday Graphic* expressed its exasperation over the fact that this memorial for royalty was used for pro-Bolshevik meetings, where the Russian Revolution was celebrated and excited cheers echoed across the Hall whenever Lenin's name was mentioned (R. Williams 47). At the same time, it would be a mistake to read these incidents as an indication of unbiased permissiveness on the part of the Hall's authorities. Restrictions on its uses were also in place, both before and after the Incarnation took place. Earlier in this chapter, Miles' description of the venue's layout alluded to the boxing matches that were at times held there; such events had, however, been banned from the premises until 1908, as a

result of Edward VII's distaste for the sport (R. Williams 45). In 1972, amid concerns regarding the profanities in his lyrics, Frank Zappa was asked to present a script to the venue's management in advance of his approaching concert. His refusal to abide by these orders ultimately led to the cancellation of the event; moreover, this incident was followed by a prolonged ban that prohibited all 'pop groups' from performing at the Hall. This restriction was in force until the 1980s (R. Williams 117).

To recapitulate, the space of the Albert Hall signifies discourses that often privilege one form of cultural practice while suppressing others; concurrently, the history of the venue also includes occasions that—to one degree or another—oppose its dominant modes and representations. These instances may not result in the kind of *détournement* that can be found in Lefebvre's analysis of Halles Centrales, or perhaps even at the Six Gallery, but they nevertheless exhibit comparable characteristics. In de Certeau's terms, the "cautious but fundamental inversions" of objects and practices are enacted through maintaining their difference in the space of the dominant culture (31–32); as such, these diversions can form a set of 'tactics' that potentially change the organization of a space without designating a new and discrete locus (38). In this context, the oppositional events in the Hall's history can be understood as occasions where the venue's function was momentarily diverted from the fabulations of its spatial narratives: the suffragette's interventions rendered the Hall's majestic musical instrument to an organ of protest, while the pro-Bolshevik gathering inverted the Hall from a royal monument to a centre that partly celebrated an overthrow of royalty. Therefore, by diverting some of the venue's determinant circumstances, perhaps these occasions also performed a temporary halt to the Hall's cultural discourses.

There are some plausible grounds for drawing parallels between these developments and the proceedings of the Incarnation. Trocchi had been connected to Debord's Letterist International since 1955 and remained a member of the Situationists until the mid-1960s; thus, it is likely that he was aware of the movement's writings about concepts such as *détournement*. Many of the Incarnation's participants also recall that their antics seemingly disturbed the personnel of the Hall: although Horowitz was permitted to hire the venue for his Festival of the New Moon in 1966, the Hall's management eventually attempted to ban the participants from ever performing there again (Green 74). It is also likely that the event influenced Ginsberg's understanding of visual spectacles in political actions. When the poet advised a group of activists in Berkeley to arm themselves

with masses of flowers for a protest in November 1965 (*Deliberate Prose* 10), it seems conceivable that—given the proximity between these two events—he derived this idea from the floral décor of the Incarnation. In this respect, perhaps the event’s carnivalesque performances could be seen as an attempt to divert the Hall, which represented a space of establishment culture, to a countercultural space of play that celebrated individual freedom from conservative traditions and conventions, and consequently fostered a temporary sense of liberation from the existing systems of formalized power.

However, as we have seen, these carnivalesque practices may not demonstrate the full scope of the event. As such, it is important to also consider the other forms of diversions and tactics that may have emerged during the Incarnation. For instance, the event was not without explicit political statements. Vinkenoog, who was the first to read, opened his performance by declaring that the evening presented the world’s poets on peace alert (*Gathering of the Tribes*). Later on, Trocchi’s introduction to McGrath’s reading included a statement that *Peace News*, which McGrath edited, had become a particularly pertinent publication during the previous 3 months. Both of these asseverations refer directly to the Vietnam War, where US ground units had first been deployed in March that year. Although Harold Wilson’s Labour government—which supported the American foreign policy—did not commit troops to Vietnam, the UK’s younger generations nevertheless felt a growing discontentment about the escalation of the war (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 34). Such sentiments resonated within some of the performances during the Incarnation. The poems read by McGrath and Ginsberg feature unfavourable references to the war, and one of the biggest ovations for the evening was given to Mitchell’s “To Whom It May Concern”. Given the poem’s apparent lack of nuanced prosody—as evidenced by couplets such as “I smell something burning, hope it’s just my brains./They’re only dropping peppermints and daisy-chains”—the applause it received was most likely inspired by a commonality of sentiment based around the refrain “Tell me lies about Vietnam” (*Children of Albion* 222). In the Introduction, I noted that Kershaw defines the politics of performance as an ideological transaction between the performers and the audience; specifically, the two constituents share a collective and interactive ability to recognize the signs that are used during the event (*The Politics of Performance* 16). Mitchell’s reading confirms that the Incarnation featured several moments of similar transactions, which revolved around statements of dissent against the war in

Vietnam. As a consequence, it is possible to regard the performance as an event that attempts to temporarily divert a space encoded with signs of bygone imperial powers, and instead utilize it as a place of protest against a war that was considered a symbol of “American corruption, interventionism and neo-imperialism” (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 57).

If the Incarnation is understood as a protest against the war in Vietnam, the event could be regarded as one of the first of its kind within the UK: staged so quickly after the war had commenced in full, the performance preceded both the 1966 and 1967 demonstrations organized by CND—the acronym for Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a peace organization first formed in 1957—as well as the emergence of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in 1968 (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 34). However, such a view might be difficult to assert confidently and uncritically, as the messages of the event appear somewhat muddled. Although individual performers at the Incarnation vocally abhorred the war, several others made no references to the conflict. Furthermore, the invocation that the Poets Cooperative prepared as an announcement for the event makes no reference to the conflict. If anything, its allusions to ‘poet-epiphanies’ and ‘new consciousness’ seemingly place its emphasis on personal, rather than political, change (*POT! Anthology* 9). As a result of these ambivalent messages, the Incarnation has previously been criticized for squandering its intended “natural indignation at global inhumanity” by merely forming an uneasy consolidation of a “self-congratulatory community” (Coupe 167).

Perhaps the Incarnation’s ambivalent stance on the Vietnam War can be better understood through its social and cultural contexts. Critics such as Kenneth Westhues have noted that the earliest sociological studies of the counterculture did not always develop a clear and analytic definition of the movement’s ideologies (8). For instance, while Roszak makes no distinction between the countercultural penchant “for magic and for exotic ritual” and “the youthful political activism of the sixties” (124), subsequent scholars—such as Jack Whalen and Richard Flacks—have been more careful in noting the aspirational differences between the counterculture and the New Left. Specifically, Whalen and Flacks argue that although both movements were characterized by anti-establishment principles, the former was more focused on expressive and personal retreatism towards liberty and autonomy, whereas the latter emphasized revolutionary action in the name of equality and democracy (12–14). In the context of American politics, Whalen and Flacks identify the Vietnam War as a rare point of convergence between these distinct movements. Both aggressively

opposed the draft policy: the New Left did so as part of their broader resistance to the governmental war machine, while the counterculture objected to it on the grounds of its imposition on personal freedom and self-expression (Whalen & Flacks 15).

These draft policies were not in force in the UK, but many of the concepts outlined in Whalen and Flacks are nevertheless relevant to the Incarnation. Since its emergence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the New Left in Britain saw itself as a participatory and spontaneous movement that was committed to a range of political endeavours (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 27). These included direct involvement with the “anti-racist action in Notting Hill and Kensington in the aftermath of the race riots” in 1958; the peace campaigns organized by CND; and the marches against the Atomic Weapons Establishment near the Berkshire village of Aldermaston in 1958 (Moore-Gilbert & Seed 27). This kind of direct activism seems less prominent within the first issue of *International Times*—the underground newspaper founded by Miles in October 1966 and first edited by McGrath—which is often identified as the formal arrival of the counterculture in England (Nelson 45). Instead, the issue is broadly more focused on artistic and cultural matters: alongside a poem from Mitchell, the contents include a review of Yoko Ono’s exhibition at the Indica Gallery; discussions of the Destruction in Art Symposium—a gathering of artists, poets and scientists that was held in London earlier that year; and information about the use of cannabis and LSD. The only article that explicitly discusses foreign policy and politics is Alex Gross’ report on the Red Guards in China (8). In other words, although it would be unfair to suggest this issue of *International Times* is entirely devoid of politics, its articles nevertheless seem primarily motivated by a desire for a more autonomous and creative life as an artist or artisan.

At the same time, although the British counterculture claimed to shun ideologies and politics, they were not entirely unaffected by the ideals and activities of the New Left (Nelson 11). Even as it focused on cultural topics, the first *International Times* made gestures towards political statements; for instance, its review of The Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *US* contains a condemnation of the Vietnam War as “organised and accidental mass murder, systematic torture, brazen deceit and chronic duplicity” (Marowitz 1). As the publication developed, its discussions about political activism became increasingly explicit—especially in the aftermath of May 1968. Eventually, some of the paper’s contributors appeared to eschew retreatism in favour of direct action:

An alternative society cannot exist. An alternative is something alongside but independent of something else. Will our existing government permit a part of the community to break off and live outside its laws? No. The laws have got to be changed. The new society must be made out of the one we've got. (Hammerton 8)

These tensions are mirrored in certain aspects of the Incarnation. Although many present that night would later contribute to *International Times* and other underground presses, several participants—including Nuttall, Miles, Hawkins, Brown and Horovitz—had also taken part in direct actions such as the CND campaigns and the marches at Aldermaston (Nuttall 181). In other words, the community that gathered for the event was formed of convergences between countercultural individualism and more direct forms of political action. This helps to explain why it is difficult to configure the Incarnation's diverted space explicitly as an imitation of rock concerts; or as a carnivalesque celebration of countercultural freedoms; or as a protest against the war in Vietnam. All of these aspirations are present simultaneously, each colliding with the others. These collisions can in turn be understood according to the theoretical perspectives of poetry performances outlined in the Introduction. Like Whitehead's analysis of Cleopatra's Needle as an event that is actively produced through a nexus of intersubjective encounters, the divergent aspirations of the Incarnation are simultaneously unique to a particular contingent of its participants, while also connected to the event's collective experience as a whole. The ambivalences within the event's significations can therefore be understood as a result of its cacophonous collectivity, which involves myriad acts of intersubjective 'authorship'.

Ginsberg's performance ultimately epitomizes the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation. At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that Ginsberg's charismatic presence often made his readings appear as a paragon of the performance of authorship. To a certain extent, this also characterizes Ginsberg's behaviour at the Incarnation, where he consciously occupies the first person and seemingly closes "the gap between author and text" (*Distant Reading* 62). This relationship is noticeable from the very start of his reading: when Trocchi announces that it is "about time Allen Ginsberg came on stage", his voice carries a hint of anticipation, and the poet's entrance to the dais is greeted with rapturous applause ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). It almost sounds as if the entire event becomes centred on Ginsberg's celebrity; such a welcome gives some

credence to Roszak's claim that the poet only needs to present himself as a visual spectacle, without any reference to his poetry, in order to make a statement to his audience (129). Indeed, it is tempting to identify these moments as early adumbrations of Schumacher's view that Ginsberg shifted from a literary figure to a public prophet during the second half of the 1960s (445). But how accurate are these preliminary impressions?

Ginsberg originally envisioned the evening as a "public incarnation of a new consciousness" (*London Calling* 151), which matches the scenes of his reading that were included in *Wholly Communion*. As I observed earlier, Ginsberg both opened and closed the evening with a Tibetan mantra; in addition, while he reads Hollo's translation of Voznesensky's "Three Pears/America", the film depicts the poet gesticulating and contorting his body according to the poem's cadences. The aforementioned footage of the female audience member dancing along to the reading of "The Change" similarly recalls the trance techniques, magic rites and healing ceremonies that were frequently incorporated into avant-garde performances during the 1960s (Berghaus 132–136). The performed text amplifies these representations. Schumacher argues that the poem marked an ending to the visionary quest that Ginsberg had pursued since 1948, after he allegedly heard William Blake's voice in his apartment (442). The poet himself recounted this change of heart in a journal entry from 8 January 1963, where he identifies death as a natural sign that instructs him to "shut up and live in the present temporary form", as the "Body" is only capable to be "what it at present is" (*Indian Journals* 154). This acceptance of the present bodily form is reiterated within the poem. Its early stages recount a passage through "the portals to what Is"—which amounts to an embodied reality comprising sheets, skin and hair—where Ginsberg can identify both tears and laughter as "allright", before concluding that "I am that I am" (*Collected Poems* 324). But while the poem recounts a moment of personal change for Ginsberg, the recordings from the Incarnation reveal that it was not performed with confessional tones. Instead, many of its lines are vocalized almost as if they were imperative commands, through which Ginsberg intends to guide his audience to experience the selfsame transformation ("The First International Poetry Incarnation"). Likewise, the references to both tears and laughter as being 'allright' appear to inform the listeners of the potential responses to the poem's illuminations; Ginsberg himself claimed to have wept while he composed the text (Morgan 376). Thus, some of the documentation leads us to see Ginsberg's reading as a shamanic ritual: like Schechner's

descriptions of ritualistic performances specify, the poet presents himself as a spiritual healer who has experienced a vision, which he must convert into song so that its message can be delivered back to his community (42).

Such impressions would cohere well with Roszak's analyses of Ginsberg, in so far as they construe the poet as being transformed by the visionary powers of his work, which he subsequently presents as an example to his generation (128). But this is not the complete picture, as the early part of Ginsberg's performance was a strangely paradoxical affair. As the aforementioned interruptions and taunts from audience indicate, Ginsberg's asseverations did not necessarily inspire transcendent experiences throughout the Hall; in fact, it might be more accurate to suggest that his phantasmagoria of shamanic rituals collapses during the performance. Bill Morgan argues that "The Change" was structurally modelled on the traditional mantric-pranayamic-belly-breathing cycle, so that a vocal performance of the poem would replicate this pattern in order to produce a temporary physical change for the reader (376–377). Yet the recordings from the Incarnation do not convey these impressions. Although the second section of the poem was intended to be vocalized as one long sigh, Ginsberg aggressively snarls his way through lines such as "like a baby crying Fuck/me in the asshole" or "so that I do/live I will die" (*Collected Poems* 325; 329). The overriding impression from the recordings of this section is hostility rather than spiritual change: Ginsberg veers away from the cathartic and therapeutic rituals that are associated with shamanic performances, and his reading begins to resemble a debate between an evangelical orator and his audience. A few days after the Incarnation, Ginsberg wrote an unpublished letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, where he deeply regretted his conduct. In it, he explains that by the time he began his performance, he was too drunk and too disappointed in the other participants to read as he had intended to, which resulted in a hysterical rendition of his material (*London Calling* 151). Behind this sombre confession is a sense of failure: while some in the crowd may have experienced a sense of elation during the Incarnation, Ginsberg's performance itself fell short of his grand aspirations of a shamanic ritual that would offer his audience forms of hope and survival.¹³ The event eluded the intentions of the poet-performer.

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

subsided, and he is able to read uninterrupted (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). The receptive ambiance is fitting, as “Who Be Kind To” is ineradicably connected with the Incarnation: Ginsberg had composed it specifically for the occasion on 8 June. The recordings also indicate that the poet felt a palpable yearning to read this text. Before he commences, voices from the crowd request both “Howl” and “Sunflower Sutra” but Ginsberg declines these suggestions and questions the value of reading something old (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). Here, the poet forgoes his renowned works—and, to an extent, his status as a celebrity—in order to perform material that directly addresses his present situation.

In some respects, the poem traverses the event’s myriad aspirations. Although early lines refer to the devastations of napalm during the Vietnam War, the poem does not dwell upon such imagery; instead, it shifts to enthuse about the joyful voices of The Beatles, which are followed by depictions of Thelonious Monk playing piano in a nightclub (*Collected Poems* 360–361). The reference to Monk recalls the well-established connections between the Beats and jazz, but the inclusion of The Beatles bears a more specific connection to the Incarnation. As I observed earlier, Ginsberg coveted the group’s phenomenal popularity, and in the early 1960s his admiration verged on idolatry. The poet would often tell friends and associates that this music could change society once and for all (Morgan 394); he even tried to demonstrate the band’s ‘melopoeia’ to an elderly Ezra Pound during a visit to Rapallo in 1967 (Carpenter 897–899). Furthermore, in the weeks that preceded the Incarnation, Ginsberg had travelled to Liverpool and spoken highly of the city’s rock ‘n’ roll scene as a new centre of consciousness in the human universe (Schumacher 446). In this context, the poem’s references illustrate a distinct claim. If Liverpool and The Beatles are presented as exemplars of a kindness that is capable of creating societal change, perhaps Ginsberg wishes to perform a comparable ideological transaction with his audience. This might even explain the proximity between the poem’s imagery of Monk and its references to The Beatles performing in the Cavern nightclub. By conflating the soundtrack of the new human consciousness with the music that inspired the Beats, Ginsberg situates his generation as the precursors of the 1960s’ zeitgeist.

From these extracts, it would seem as if the transformations depicted in “Who Be Kind To” are primarily expressive and personal. As Ginsberg reads on, the poem progresses to an explicit and carefully articulated vision of orgiastic liberation: the soul blesses and kisses its mortal and corporeal form, while an array of body parts—including necks, thighs, vaginas,

‘cocks’ and ‘asses’—all come together in a desire to make love in London “as if it were 2001 the years/of thrilling god” (*Collected Poems* 361–362). Thus, despite the poem’s early allusions to napalm in Vietnam, it does not utilize the full force of its fervour to remonstrate the war. Instead, these lines endorse the countercultural ideals of expressing intimate needs and desires irrespective of the established institutions and relationships that restrict personal freedom (Whalen & Flacks 13). That is to say, Ginsberg’s concluding remarks seemingly augment the Albert Hall as a carnivalesque place of play: to paraphrase de Certeau again, “Who Be Kind To” performs within a terrain that is organized by establishment culture, and seeks to create surprises in the cracks of its proprietary powers (37). Indeed, if the poem intends to invoke the ‘new consciousness’ arising from Liverpool, Ginsberg’s call to make love in London seemingly urges the audience to claim the Hall as one of the giant auditoriums of the planet where the “peaceful kiss of sex” might manifest itself (*Collected Poems* 361).

Despite these countercultural asseverations for liberty and autonomy, it would be reductive to understand Ginsberg’s performance of “Who Be Kind To” as an eschewal of politics. More accurately, the poem flickers between the Incarnation’s carnivalesque antics and its natural indignation over a global inhumanity. Through this process, the poet articulates a more nuanced analysis of the war in Vietnam. An earlier excerpt from the poem, which follows soon after Ginsberg’s aforementioned reference to the napalm deathbed of Vietnam, unfolds as an immense panorama of urban isolation, alienating technologies and an overarching fear of a nuclear apocalypse. The imagery of this section traverses from references to radar towers and flowers in an ancient brook to the worm infestations and mushroom clouds on the ears of “Sleeping Dr. Einstein” (*Collected Poem* 360). Ginsberg catalogues lonely neighbours spending their evenings weeping by televisions; disappearing fathers and mothers; as well as “aged, large nosed” and “angry” politicians in various centres of power—including Whitehall, the Kremlin and the White House—all nervously dialling a “bald voice box” that is connected to “electrodes underground” and converging via “wires vaster than a kitten’s eye” (*Collected Poems* 359–360). In this context, “Who Be Kind To” identifies Vietnam as a symptom of a larger malaise that—together with the amalgamation of these subsequent images—represents a cold war that is being carried out against humanity. Like the nightmarish Moloch in “Howl”, this conflict, which is both symbolic and actual, is the fundamental target of Ginsberg’s critique. The violent realities of this war also permeate the body: throughout the

passage, Ginsberg fixes upon isolated physical fragments such as tears, eyes, large noses and ears; in fact, as these features are all associated with one solitary part of the anatomy—that is, the head—this dismemberment is effectively twofold. First, the head is isolated from the body and itemized as individual components. Second, as the bald voice box demonstrates, speech is also disassociated through telephones and wires. Here the ‘cold war’ of the poem is enacted with such brutal techniques that, under its over-powering forces, the body fragments. The consequences of this fragmentation are particularly significant for the poem’s political figures: instead of voicing their policies in public, the politicians remain secluded in their galleries of power, where they feed their mandates into a vast underground network of wires; through this disassociation, the fragmented statesmen abdicate all responsibility for themselves and their actions. If we consider this via Lefebvre’s concepts, “Who Be Kind To” ultimately rages against cultures where the body “disappropriates” itself in multiple ways (*The Production of Space* 166).

Correspondingly, perhaps the orgy of tenderness in which the poem culminates acts as a counterpoint to these cultures of disappropriation. Like the imagery of the politicians described in the previous paragraph, the orgiastic moments of “Who Be Kind To” focus upon details of the body: thighs, vaginas, mouths, hands, cocks and asses are all identified within this section. Yet these somatic features escape the alienation associated with the disappropriated politicians. As the dismembered statesmen resign their bodies to an underground convergence of wires, they eventually exist only as sadistic noises on the radio, which are without physical form (*Collected Poems* 362). By contrast, the organs in the orgy of tenderness are shown to be in harmony with their souls and bodies. It could therefore be suggested that while these body parts are itemized individually, they are in fact being converted—or *detourned*—into something else (Debord & Wolman 13). Deleuze and Guattari have criticized Freud’s study of the “Wolf Man” Sergei Pankejeff, as his psychoanalytic process ignored the fact that wolves are pack animals and reductively interpreted crowds as a single person.¹⁴ Instead, *A Thousand Plateaus* argues that becoming-wolf relies upon the individual subject’s relationship to the wolf-multiplicity of the pack, specifically in terms of “how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays”, and how it does or “does not hold the multiplicity” overall (32). A comparable becoming is signified by the poem’s orgy of tenderness. Ginsberg’s call to make love in London is an invocation for becoming a multiplicity. In this respect, the carnivalesque tones of the

poem are not a representation of a simple *joie de vivre*; more appropriately, they are the *jouissance* of a “people who are continually growing and renewed” (Bakhtin 19).¹⁵

Consequently, perhaps the performance of “Who Be Kind To” resonates with some of the diversions and *détournements* that were present during the Incarnation. The first volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* argues that the eroticism of advertising is devoid of genuine sensuality, by which Lefebvre means a sensuality that implies beauty, charm, passion and fulfilment; instead, the superficial appearance of adverts presents a weary and mechanical image that can only lead to dissatisfaction (35). These mechanical qualities, in turn, parallel the alienating techniques that are shown to disappropriate the body in *The Production of Space*. Although Ginsberg’s poem is also laced with eroticism, the orgy it depicts symbolizes an act of resistance against such dominating forces, as the body is reappropriated and its sociality is realized as a subject within a multiplicity. Therefore, while Ginsberg does not distinguish between bodies and sexuality in accordance with Lefebvre’s writings, the two share a comparable understanding of the body and *détournement*.¹⁶ If the Incarnation sought to reappropriate the representational space of the Albert Hall, Ginsberg’s concluding performance served as a reminder that any revolutionary change must also include the reappropriation of the body as a part of its agenda (*The Production of Space* 167).

In the end, Ginsberg’s performance does not delineate clear distinctions among the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation, as it instead traverses the complex intersubjective network of these ambitions. The evening as a whole is ultimately a site of manifold ambivalences. Although the occasion seeks to enact a *détournement* of the Hall’s representational space, these attempts are almost exhaustingly incongruous. As the early parts of Ginsberg’s reading demonstrate, some of these aspirations may at times derail others: because the event’s carnivalesque practices generated a non-hierarchical space, Ginsberg’s shamanic phantasmagoria struggled to present the poet as a spiritual leader who presided over the crowd; and his own intoxication further impinged on this particular mode of performance. Likewise, the evening’s countercultural indulgences sometimes diluted its protest against the war in Vietnam. In this respect, the performed diversions can be read as behaving similarly to de Certeau’s tactics—that is, as operating in “the chance offerings of the moment” without the advantage of “planning [a] general strategy” (37). Indeed, the Incarnation’s *détournements* are seemingly only enacted through isolated occasions.

Nevertheless, perhaps the performance of “Who Be Kind To” represents one such moment of convergence: Ginsberg manoeuvres through celebrations of countercultural autonomy and a nuanced critique of the Vietnam War, which he eventually identifies as another component of the lacklove of Moloch and the tobacco haze of capitalism that he howled against in San Francisco a decade earlier. In this respect, the reappropriated bodies in the poem’s orgy of tenderness not only resonate with the reappropriated space of the occasion, but also with the calls for empathy that echo throughout Ginsberg’s career. Without this poem, the Incarnation might only have amounted to an inebriated mimicry of an atavistic healing ritual. It is through “Who Be Kind To” that Ginsberg extends beyond his individuality as a speaker and instead enters into a dialogue with the active production of intersubjective social relations that were occurring across the Albert Hall, as well as the multiplex of historical contexts from which the event emerged. In a quasi-paradoxical process, the performance of this poem simultaneously asserts the presence of the author-poet as well as the cacophonous collectivity of a multiplicity.

As such, these multifarious facets of the Incarnation indicate the unexpected eventualities that may occur within the intersubjective authorship of a performance. It seems as if the organizers themselves were unprepared for the proceedings: when Trocchi first entered the dais, he expressed his enormous surprise over the scale of the audience (*Gathering of the Tribes*); 8 h later, he unexpectedly brought the evening to an abrupt close with a simple ‘that’s all folks’ (“Poetry Reading: Allen Ginsberg”). But did the event’s reverberations continue? Today at least, the Incarnation’s countercultural optimism might be difficult to consider without a degree of cynicism. As Nuttall explained:

There was a shift between ’66 and ’67 from poetry and art and jazz and anti-nuclear politics to just sex and drugs, legalise pot. It was the arrival of capitalism. (qtd. in Green 223)

Given the Incarnation’s proximity to Nuttall’s chronology, Green’s own speculations of the event as an early symptom for this arrival of capitalism seem unsurprising (viii). However, for others the immediate aftermath of the event was an incredibly vibrant period. Miles valorizes the performance as a catalyst that created a community and a framework for London’s emergent counterculture (*London Calling* 151). This catalytic force seemingly spread to continental Europe as well: Vinkenoog was so moved

by his participation that he organized a similar event in Amsterdam a year after the Incarnation; more recently, critics such as Gaston Franssen have identified Vinkenoog's *Poëzie in Carré* (Poetry in the Carré Theatre) as "the breakthrough of performance poetry" in The Netherlands (36).

In addition to countercultural publications such as *International Times*, the reverberations of the Incarnation can also be seen in one of the earliest anthologies that collected poets associated with the British Poetry Revival in one volume. Admittedly, the scope of Horovitz's *Children of Albion* is much broader than the performance that inspired its editor. Many of the 63 contributors—such as Andrew Crozier, Tom Raworth, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Lee Harwood—had very little direct involvement with the proceedings of the Incarnation. Nevertheless, the anthology is self-consciously presented as a scion of the event: it is dedicated to Ginsberg and its epigraph is sourced from "Who Be Kind To". It features many of the poems that were performed during the evening, including Mitchell's "To Whom It May Concern" and McGrath's "The Evidence"; and Horovitz's afterword—which describes the occasion as "the greatest stimulus for poetry this century" (*Children of Albion* 339)—is an early example of the accounts that mythologize the evening through ornate descriptions. A similar tendency can be seen in Edwin Morgan's "For the International Poetry Incarnation". Written as a tribute to the event, Morgan's poem seemingly derives its inspiration from the invocation that the Poets Cooperative prepared in advance of the Incarnation; at the very least, Morgan's punctuation—especially with his frequent use of exclamation marks—and his astronomical imagery of "spacebreakers", "starmen", and the "blue white" curves of the earth are highly reminiscent of this earlier piece (*Children of Albion* 229). "For the International Poetry Incarnation" therefore acts as an extension of the invocation's calls for cosmic poetry visitations, planet-chant carnivals, and cosmonaut poets (*POT! Anthology* 9). In other words, if the initial announcement in 1965 sought to imagine the event as an extraterrestrial occasion of personal change, Morgan's poem reaffirms this impression by adopting a comparable imagery and tone. A contrasting view can be seen in McGrath's "Before You Sleep", which reflects on the Incarnation in a more critical manner: the poem openly expresses doubts about the political efficacy of poets, whom McGrath deems to be mostly "gross egotists" incapable of delivering social change or revolutions "of love and flowers and poetry" (*Children of Albion* 203).

The two poems from Morgan and McGrath therefore represent the event's competing aspirations of countercultural play and protestation against the Vietnam War. While these ambitions may have been brought together momentarily during Ginsberg's performance of "Who Be Kind To", the conflicting views presented in the anthologized poems indicate that these tensions continued after the event had concluded. In addition, *Children of Albion* did little to redress the disparities of the Incarnation's all-male line-up: with only 5 women featured amongst the 63 contributors, the volume contains substantially more sons than daughters.¹⁷ As such, despite the egalitarian rhetoric that appears in his afterword, Horovitz's editorial preferences nevertheless established "an elite of his own" that hardly appeared "hospitable to women" (Booth 73; Buck 101). Ultimately, perhaps the internal contradictions and contestations within *Children of Albion* are a better representation of the Incarnation's legacy than the self-consciously valorizing accounts therein.¹⁸

Some of the event's further reverberations might be more difficult to quantify through material objects, as the performance also provided a social nexus where poets could meet. For instance, the Scottish poet Hayden Murphy has expressed his gratitude over the new friendships he forged that evening. After meeting the concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard that night, Murphy began corresponding with him; eventually, Houédard invited Murphy to join him at a performance in Gloucestershire in 1966 (Murphy 2). During the same event, Jandl, Cobbing and Brown collaborated in a reprisal of Schwitters' "The Furore of Sneezing", which Jandl had also performed at the Albert Hall (Murphy 2). Likewise, Cobbing—who had already published a pamphlet from Ginsberg in 1963—is seen sitting close to the American poet during *Wholly Communion*. *Children of Albion* also includes further indications of similar creative correspondences: for example, Harwood dedicates a poem to Houédard; Hollo dedicates one of his to Raworth; and Raworth writes another for Harwood. Such relations correlate well with the event's manifold social situations. If Ginsberg concluded his reading with an invocation for becoming a multiplicity, these ideological transactions throughout the audience—as well as those forged in the event's nebulous aftermaths—effectively respond to his call.

Nonetheless, these transactions should be considered with caution. The Incarnation was not a unique progenitor for innovative poetry and performance in post-war Britain. Wheeler's brief discussion of the event—which I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter—comes dangerously

close to asserting this view: she describes Ginsberg's 'galvanizing' reading as a metaphoric "return" of the gift "Charles Dickens and Fanny Kemble gave to the United States" with their reading tours in the nineteenth century, which overemphasizes the Incarnation's impact (165). Although poets such as Nuttall felt that Ginsberg's arrival was a healing wind for London's artistic community, the years that preceded the performance on 11 June had already experienced an acceleration of small press publishing and performance events (228). In addition to Horovitz's aforementioned curatorship of *Live New Departures*, Cobbing had started his workshops and publishing ventures with Writers Forum as early as 1951 (*Poetry Wars* 215).¹⁹ Thus, when Ginsberg arrived in London in 1965, the city's poetry scene may have been rhizomatically scattered, but it was nevertheless incredibly active:

When Cobbing [...] and I were putting on our shows in hired rooms, exclaiming our poetry in public parks, swinging the duplicator handle throughout the long Saturday afternoons of 1963 we had no idea the same thing was happening all over the world. (Nuttall 161)

In other words, the social multiplicities that occurred during the Incarnation are not unique attributes of a singular event. Rather, as Fisher's comments in the Introduction demonstrate, poetry readings frequently enable their audiences to join a nexus of people; as such events are actively produced by all of those in attendance, these physical interactions of bodies with each other are a crucial component of the event's sociality. Of course, as Ginsberg's early clashes with the audience reveal, these convergences may not have occurred across the entirety of the Hall; nor did they take place consistently throughout the event's duration. However, in the brief moments when the Incarnation managed to conjoin subjects within a pack, it facilitated a social situation that can potentially take place in any event of this nature.²⁰ The distinguishing factor of the Incarnation is that its monumental space encouraged these multiplicities on a considerably larger scale.

To summarize, the Incarnation's iconic status might make it appealing to regard the performance as a *sui generis* occasion that is quite unlike anything else. This chapter has instead endeavoured to resist such perceptions. Although I have attempted to 'reconstruct' and analyse the event in its specificity, I have also placed it in dialogue with a plurality of other contexts and events. These have included the parallels between Ginsberg's performance at the Albert Hall and his earlier howls at the Six Gallery; the

Incarnation's relationship to carnivalesque spectacles; the broader history of *détournements* within the Hall's representational space; UK-based protests against the war in Vietnam; and the different aspirations of the counter-culture and the New Left. All of these dialogues suggest that the event—and Ginsberg's performance there—cannot be fully configured through concepts such as the performance of authorship. Instead, Ginsberg's utterances are at times undermined by the intersubjective aspirations of the crowd, and his reading instead forges new relations in the non-hierarchical spreading of communal convergences and cultural discourses that populated the event. These relations may not have been what Ginsberg—or any of his fellow organizers—initially intended, but they nonetheless form a part of the active perceptions that 'authored' the Incarnation. The chapters that follow will also explore similar themes. However, while the Incarnation was examined through a panoramic scope of historical, socio-political and theoretical contexts, the following chapters will—in varying degrees—investigate how similar discourses might be more consciously present within the proceedings of a particular event. The first of these will focus on Denise Riley's reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account of these contexts, see Hewison, especially Chaps. 3 and 4.
2. For further discussion and examples of the debates concerning post-war American poetry and the British Poetry Revival, see Hickman 81–108; Clive Bush's contribution to *Clasp* (Hampson & Edwards 15–20); or *Poetry of Saying* 40–47.
3. For a more detailed description of these events, see Miles' *Allen Ginsberg: A Life* 197; for a slightly different account, see Morgan 203–204.
4. In addition to the aforementioned texts, see Schumacher's *Dharma Lion*; Michael Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance*; John Suiter's *Poets on the Peaks*; Raskin's *American Scream*; Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*; and the film *Howl*.
5. Also see Marx's description of capitalist value as a "live monster that is fruitful and multiplies" (189).
6. More than one account seems to support this latter version of events. See for, example, Green 66; and Miles' *In the Sixties* 57.
7. Voznesensky was present in the audience, although he did not read. Some have suggested that he declined to take part as he was not enamoured with

the Incarnation's chaotic atmosphere, although others maintain that Soviet authorities pressured the poet not to take part. See Green 66–71.

8. In actuality, the reading was a disastrous experience for Fainlight, who remained deeply scarred by it for the rest of his life. See Miles' *London Calling* 149, or Green 71.
9. The full idea was to conduct the interruption as a happening, where he and Latham would be covered in paint and pages of books, and stage a fight with one another, ripping these pages off in the process. This never took place, however, because Latham had blocked his pores by spreading the paint too thickly, and passed out before they were able to get on stage. Ultimately, Nuttall had to bathe Latham in order to scrub off the paint (*Gathering of the Tribes*).
10. After Prince Albert's death, some of the funds that had originally been earmarked for the construction of the Hall were diverted towards the memorial. Queen Victoria attached Albert's name to the Hall when she laid the building's foundation stone on 20 May 1867 (R. Williams 10).
11. In full, the inscription reads "This hall was erected for the advancement of the arts and sciences and works of industry of all nations in fulfilment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort" (R. Williams 10).
12. Unlike countries such as the USA, British law has never adopted a written constitution. Consequently, the notion of a 'British Constitution' is more accurately defined by practice and convention.
13. For testimonies that depict audience members enjoying a moment of elation during the Incarnation, see the interviews in *Gathering of the Tribes*. For an analysis of Ginsberg's performances as events that offer forms of hope and survival, see Mottram's *Allen Ginsberg in the Sixties* 12.
14. For Freud's original analysis, see Freud 400–426.
15. I am using *jouissance* in a broader sense, and do not wish to exclusively associate it with the different theories about the term developed in the writings of Barthes, Cixous or Zizek.
16. For more on Lefebvre's writings on bodies and sexuality, see *The Production of Space* 166–167.
17. The expression 'more sons than daughters' is frequently used in critiques of the gender disparity in *Children of Albion*. See, for example, *Poetry Wars* 37.
18. Further discussions regarding *Children of Albion* are available, for example, in *Poetry of Saying* 40–47.
19. More examples of the activities that were taking place in London can be found in the reflections collected in Hampson & Edwards' *Clasp*.
20. For Middleton's views on the sociality of poetry events, see "How to Read a Poetry Reading".

This Blank Space from Which I Speak: Denise Riley at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, April 15th 1977

Towards the end of the last chapter, I noted that the demographics of the poets anthologized in *Children of Albion* were disproportionately homogenous, as the vast majority were men. I also highlighted that the inclusion of five women in Horovitz's anthology did very little to redress the social imbalance at the Incarnation itself: the only affiliate of the Poets Cooperative to not perform that night was the folk musician Julie Felix, who was the group's sole female member. Although Felix did eventually play her own concert at the Albert Hall in 1966, her absence from the performance in the summer of 1965 highlights a questionable dynamic in the socialities that surrounded the Incarnation. For instance, Libby Houston has stated that she was frequently the only woman who performed at Horovitz's *Live New Departures* (44). Moreover, although she easily identified with her male co-performers, the extent to which this camaraderie was reciprocated seems unclear: when Horovitz and Pete Brown attempted to start their own reading agency, they immediately assumed that Houston, as a woman, was the ideal candidate to oversee the organization's administrative duties; noting the unfairness of the proposal, she rejected the offer (Houston 44).

However, these dynamics were not limited to the organizers of the Incarnation. When *The New Poetry*—an anthology of more conservative, mainstream work edited by Al Alvarez—was originally published in 1962, its contributors were all men; the revised edition of 1966 added only two women—Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton—to its table of contents.¹ A similar pattern can also be seen in some of the publications that were

more directly associated with the Revival. As Barry observes, during Mottram's editorship between 1971 and 1977, *Poetry Review* published around 200 poets, of whom only 20 were women; moreover, these 20 poets were generally more widely known than their male counterparts, which suggests that the journal was all the more unlikely to feature work from less established female poets (*Poetry Wars* 35–36). The same obstacle did not apply to younger male poets, as the Mottram-edited *Poetry Review* was—for example—one of the first publications to feature work from Bill Griffiths (*Poetry Wars* 220).² These disparities can also be seen in retrospective anthologies such as Mottram's "British Poetry Revival" section in *The New British Poetry* and Sinclair's *Conductors of Chaos*: the former features only 2 women among its 25 contributors, while the ratio in the latter is 5 out of a total of 36.³ Even in Maggie O'Sullivan's *Out of Everywhere*, which focuses exclusively on female writers, UK-based poets are represented by 9 out of a total of 30 contributors, with the rest of the poets hailing from North America. In other words, this apparent elision of female poets is not solely restricted to isolated publications, but it is rather a persistent issue that extends from the British Poetry Revival to its subsequent legacies.

Performance played a part in this problem. As I noted in the Introduction, previous studies have argued that the venues where readings and performances were held during the 1960s and 1970s were often hostile environments for women: these events were characterized by a social dynamic where female participants were defined in relation to male audiences and male poets, and consequently subjected to the machismo that accompanied such attitudes (*Poetry of Saying* 161). Less is said about why so little was seemingly done at the time to redress the disparities produced by these socialities; according to Lang and Nowell Smith, the day-to-day situations that were related to these obstacles may have been regarded as innocuous during the 1960s and 1970s, and individual practices that contributed to this social climate were therefore left unchallenged (9).

Nevertheless, the combined effect of these socialities meant that female poets were further marginalized within an already marginalized creative environment, and this is reflected in the political stances of their writing.⁴ Speaking at the Papers on Patriarchy conference in London in 1976, Cora Kaplan described poetry as "a privileged metalanguage" of patriarchal cultures ("Language and Gender" 21). Around the same time, Wendy Mulford observed that her writing was "read and heard mainly by men"

that were interested in her work “at the level of the production of meaning”, and expressed her wish to join her voice “within the voices of other *women* struggling to deconstruct the lie of culture” (33). The underlying sentiment in both Kaplan and Mulford, in other words, is the aspiration for a community of female authors, performers, readers and audience members.⁵ Therefore, it is understandable that when the Women’s Liberation Movement emerged out of the countercultural and political activisms of 1968, many female artists found an audience within its constituents and several feminists turned to art and literature. As with their US counterparts, these organizations provided a potential nexus where women could ‘deconstruct the lie of culture’ together, for example through networks, magazines, and actions that promoted the ideals of “radical equality throughout very different feminist social structures and cultural locales” (Voyce 165).⁶

Poetry was a key medium for the Women’s Liberation Movement, as Lilian Mohin’s *One Foot on the Mountain* demonstrates. While it does not explicitly declare itself as such, the anthology’s introduction reads almost as if it were a manifesto for the volume’s cultural politics. Mohin speaks of a growing community of women who are determined to voice new truths—both about themselves and about the world as a whole—within the public sphere (6). In addition, she argues that the brevity of poetry makes it an “ideal vehicle for the kind of politics we propose”, as the short form allows for female writers to “snatch moments” away from their everyday labour as “mothers, as wives, as workers at the bottom of the heap” (1). Mohin’s reference to the autobiographical contexts of composition is telling, as the anthology’s poems primarily contained broadly realist “politically committed poems of experience” (Montefiore 8). The editor’s own ‘sleep/power’ serves as an apt example of this style: the poem begins with a depiction of a domestic sleeping arrangement between a couple, which is then cast in a different light via the lines “who falls asleep first/is about power” (144). In other words, the experiential account transforms to a political question of supremacy, which the speaker resolves by observing that the partner’s continued state of consciousness presumably means that the speaker is winning (Mohin 144). While the poem’s use of punctuation is inconsistent, its form remains relatively conventional. As Claire Buck notes of other poems in the anthology, Mohin begins with a private and individual experience that might be comparable to confessional poetry,

which she then relates—through further explicit connections within the poem—to feminist political discourse (91). Due to these aesthetic preferences, critics have questioned whether Mohin’s editorial practices were unequivocally receptive to work that engaged with more innovative forms and techniques (*Poetry of Saying* 162). Others have concluded that experimental female poets faced a twofold impasse: not only were they marginalized within an already marginal feminist poetics, but they were also underrepresented in the publications affiliated with the Revival (Buck 96).⁷

This context is crucial for understanding Denise Riley’s first public reading, which she performed at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977. Although feminism informs the concerns of Riley’s work, her poetry is radically different from the poets represented in Mohin’s anthology: while *One Foot on the Mountain* generally featured empirical poems based on biographical experiences, Riley’s works are influenced by poststructuralist tenets of difference in both language and gender, ambivalence, ambiguity and resistance to binaries. Such allegiances cohere comfortably with the experimental practices of the Revival; however, some critics have intimated that Riley appears anomalous in this context as well. For instance, *Poetry of Saying* argues that compared with some of the work included in *Out of Everywhere*, Riley’s poetry seems relatively restrained and more in sync with “traditional rhetorical figures” (163). Furthermore, if the Revival is considered an invisible phenomenon, it might be difficult to identify Riley as an archetypal example of this invisibility. When *The Observer* newspaper released a list of ‘Britain’s top 300 intellectuals’ in May 2011, Riley was featured alongside conventional poets such as Carol Ann Duffy and Andrew Motion (Naughton); likewise, her 2012 poem “Part Song” won that year’s Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. These ambivalences are emphasized even further if we consider Riley’s apparent discomfort with poetry and the public sphere. Her career has contained several years of poetic silence: after her *Selected Poems* came out in 2000, Riley published no new poetry until around 2012—although she continued producing books on theory and philosophy; a new collection, *Say Something Back*, was finally released in 2016 (and subsequently shortlisted for a number of prizes). Similarly, although Ginsberg’s readings often relied on his physical presence, Riley’s work seemingly resists this type of performance of authorship, as “Dark Looks” demonstrates:

Who anyone is or I am is nothing to the work. The writer properly should be the last person that the reader and *listener* need think about
 yet the poet with her signature stands up trembling, grateful, mortally embarrassed
 and especially embarrassing to herself, patting her hair and twittering “If, if only
 I need not have a physical appearance!” (*Selected Poems* 74)

In light of this context, it is important to consider how Riley’s reading in 1977 might negotiate around these social and aesthetic ambivalences. Such considerations may also reveal how early examples of several consistent characteristics within Riley’s oeuvre in general can already be perceived within this first performance.

In order to situate Riley’s performance in the context of her written work, I want to begin by examining her pamphlet *Marxism for Infants*, which was first published by Mulford’s Street Editions in 1977 as an edition of 300 copies. At first glance, the pamphlet seemingly coheres with Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ characterization of small press publications as “analogous to women’s cultural products; feminized, disparaged, unread, marginalized” (63): it is composed of A4 sheets stapled together, with poems appearing only on one side of each sheet; likewise, although Riley’s name appears on the cover, the pamphlet also suggests a degree of anonymity, as there are no table of contents or page numbers, and—with the exception of “a note on sex and the reclaiming of language” and “Making a Liberty Belle”—the poems are all untitled. Yet these signs of anonymity are not equal to silence, because the design of the publication also sets forth a certain series of statements. The cover image by Julia Ball depicts a downward triangle divided by four horizontal lines: the first of these intersects the triangle at the top, while the subsequent two pierce it in the middle; the final line crosses the triangle close to its downward tip. The areas demarcated by these lines contain various densities of shading: while the top of the triangle is coloured only faintly, the tones of the lower sections become increasingly bold; eventually, it is also possible to distinguish white oval shapes amid the thick shading. In sum, the definition of each fragment becomes clearer as their size decreases. The significations of

this image might be understood in relation to the yonic symbolism of downward triangles. The intersecting lines fragment this symbolically gendered representation, and each dissection seemingly generates a clearer definition of the individual fragments. However, since the triangle as a whole remains indeterminable, the image suggests that these supposedly clear definitions remain partial and illusory. As such, this gestures towards the idea that any narrowly defined gendered identity will be an inadequate configuration that is tantamount to an interpretive violence.

These aspects in the visual appearance of *Marxism for Infants* can be contrasted with the image on the cover of *One Foot on the Mountain*. While the hands in Mohin's cover might also allude to yonic representations of female anatomy, the implications of this image seem somewhat different. For instance, the hands in Mohin's anthology could also connote physical experience or vocal projection; to borrow from Kaplan's descriptions of her early desires for self-expression, Mohin's image tacitly calls for "a culture where women could, without impediment, exist as speaking subjects" ("Speaking/writing/feminism" 58). This call is subsequently affirmed by Mohin's introduction, where she argues that women "must begin to change language so that it reflects our experience of the world" (4). In other words, the empirical poems of Mohin's anthology emphasize a connection between physical bodies, rhetoric and gendered identities.⁸ Riley's pamphlet is instead concerned with a more ambiguous set of gendered signs and identifiers, as "a note on sex and 'the reclaiming of language'" demonstrates. This poem—which opens both *Marxism for Infants* and the later *Selected Poems*—almost reads as if it were a statement of intent for Riley's poetics.⁹ As a brief summary, the poem describes a "Savage" visiting her native land, which serves as an extended metaphor for women as colonized subjects. One of the key issues within this metaphor is the difficulty to "write 'she', and for that" to be simply a statement of fact instead of a strong image "of everything which is not-you" (*Marxism for Infants* n.p.). By highlighting this difficulty, Riley provides a riposte to poets such as Mohin, who valorized the task of reclaiming and changing language to "feminist associations" (4). From Riley's perspective, such reclamations are an uneasy project because "language is older than you, it is there before you and you're in it, already" ("[Poetry Reading]").

As this riposte implies, "a note on sex and 'the reclaiming of language'" is partially informed by Riley's studies of Foucault during the early 1970s ("A Short History of Some Preoccupations" 121–129). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that statements are enunciative functions

that involve units such as sentences, propositions or fragments (117). Instead of providing these units with a fixed limit or identity, this enunciative function relates them to a field of objects where they may be opened up by multiple different subjective positions. Statements, in other words, place their respective units in a space of coordination and coexistence, thus allowing them to be used and repeated. Foucault therefore rejects the notion of unchanging essences, and instead identifies meaning as situational. A similar proposal is discernible in the ‘she’ of Riley’s poem. Although one may wish for the pronoun to be a simple statement of fact, other subjective positions flock “densely around” the word and seek a way in “between the gaps” (*Marxism for Infants* n.p.); the discursive formations of ‘she’ are therefore conditioned by temporal accumulations and interplays of differences, substitutions, and transformations that problematize the supposed fixity of a ‘reclaimable’ essence (Foucault 41). In this context, it is unsurprising that the ‘Savage’ of the poem is ultimately only offered woodcarvings that represent—but are not—herself (*Marxism for Infants* n.p.).

Similar perspectives occur across Riley’s poetry and theoretical work, as indicated by her sustained critique of the lyric ‘I’. Overall, Riley suspects that the “confessional or self-aggrandizing” forms of the pronoun may be “irretrievably outdated” (*Words of Selves* 94). Instead, acknowledging the influence of both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida, she argues that the structure of self-referential language promises “an authenticity that is closely tied to originality”, while it simultaneously “cancels this possibility”; the first person pronoun may belong to a speaker for as “long as she pronounces it”, but since it also belongs to everyone else, its “grammatical offer of uniqueness [...] is radically untrue” and it is always snatched away (“Is There Linguistic Guilt?” 76).¹⁰ In other words, while a speaker may refer to the ‘I’ in an attempt to designate their body in space, the temporalities of the pronoun are incapable of guaranteeing a stable singularity. Instead, its connection as a referent to the body exists only at the time of the utterance, and even in that “momentary site of space-time individuality” the identification is liable to change (“Is There Linguistic Guilt?” 76). Consequently, as with Derrida’s critique of contradictorily coherent centred structures (352), the pronouns in many of Riley’s poems can be viewed as entering into a state of play. In *Marxism for Infants*, this occurs through the degrees of ambiguity that exist between the pronouns and their signifieds: in one poem, the binary blurring of “she-husband” (n.p.) conjoins the female pronoun with a figure of patriarchal privilege and

power; another section makes consistent references to a ‘she’ before declaring “‘She’ is I” (n.p.), which creates a state of disassociation between the self and the other. These patterns are also extended beyond brief pronominal occurrences. After beginning a poem with “you’ve met I’ve met people in rooms before”, Riley goes on to write

& at the mirror your face outdated
 since you are already gone ahead of it
 to this on which you are embarked & goodbye (n.p.)

Who are the people that the ‘you’ and ‘I’ have met before? While the referent could simply be other persons, it could equally be either of the two pronouns specified in the poem’s first line. Again, the poem engages in interplays between the self and the other, but this time they are sustained throughout the poem. Who exactly perceives the ‘face outdated’ at the mirror? Is it the speaker, or the other person or an entirely different voice? The poem leaves these questions unsettled, and therefore its destabilized referents remain in a state of uncertainty.

Previous studies have noted similar developments in poems across Riley’s career.¹¹ However, I have outlined these tendencies within *Marxism for Infants* in order to address an issue that is closely related to the ambiguous pronouns of these poems: namely, the bodies they would commonly designate. As the poets in Mohin’s anthology drew upon autobiographical experiences as source material for their work, the speaker (and their body) often holds a clear presence within their poems. Riley instead identifies more closely with Foucault’s desire to write “in order to have no face” (18), as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that “I am from the start outside myself and open to the world” (530). Considering the interplay between the pronouns in Riley’s work, how do these influences manifest themselves in the personae of her poems? Moreover, what ramifications will this hold for the speaking body? Some indication of Riley’s views can be found in her essay “Bad Words”. Espousing the “notion of linguistic impartiality”, Riley argues that each subject is more effectively freed when they confront and concede their “sheer contingency as a linguistic subject”; that is, we become ourselves only through accepting our own impersonality “as someone who is accidentally spoken [...] by any language whatsoever” (53). In light of this ambivalence about expressing a ‘self’ through language, it is plausible that—in accepting its

impersonality—a linguistic subject could also experience a degree of unease about their own body. Such thoughts seem to inform Riley’s responses when Romana Huk asked her about literary representations of a “primordial feminine” as a source of recovery for female identities:

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

Therefore, it seems likely that the ambiguous pronominal signifiers in Riley’s first pamphlet are—at least in part—a political stance: if these pronouns do not have a stable body, they can potentially avoid the interpretive violence of a narrowly defined gendered body.

These formulations provide crucial context to some of the corporeal references within *Marxism for Infants*. Towards the end of one poem, the speaker declares:

I cannot understand the function of the
 living body
 except by enacting it myself
 and except in so far as I am a body
 which rises towards the world (n.p.)

The lines are a direct quotation from *Phenomenology of Perception*, and thus they allude to Merleau-Ponty’s notion that we cannot “gain a removed knowledge” of ‘the body’ (87); while the body is a consistent component of our perceptual field, its reflexivity means that one cannot experience the entirety of their body directly. However, further interpretations are also possible. To say that the ‘living body’ is enacted is a multifarious statement: ‘enact’ is primarily used as a legal term for passing a bill into law, but it also signifies putting an idea or belief into practice, as well as acting out a role on stage. If the ‘enacting’ in the poem is understood as a legal term, the lines could additionally be related to the legitimizing rights and restrictions exerted on the body through law, which would correspond with some of Riley’s experiences in political activism. For instance, before abortions were

legalized for registered practitioners in the UK through The Abortion Act of 1967, Riley was involved with campaigns for the Abortion Law Reform Association (“Waiting” 248). But there is also scope to read the poem’s use of ‘enacting’ as a gesture towards performing a particular role. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* suggests that the “regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity”, and goes on to argue that the coherence and continuity of a person rely on “socially instituted and maintained forms of intelligibility”; consequently, “those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings” who do not adhere to these “gendered norms of cultural intelligibility” may call “the very notion of the ‘person’” into question (23). In other words, *Gender Trouble* does not consider the body as a ‘being’, but rather as “a surface whose permeability is politically regulated” (177). Stable sexual and gendered identities only appear as such because they cohere with regulatory modes of normative behaviour. The enactment of the living body in Riley’s poem follows a similar pattern: in rising towards the world, the body might become “visible *as* a body”—specifically “*as* a female” body—that comes under the scrutiny of patriarchal culture and politics (*Am I That Name?* 106); however, the pronominal play in *Marxism for Infants* simultaneously suggests that Riley refutes the legitimacy of the gendered intelligibilities that would allow such scrutiny to occur. In this context, the enactment in the poem becomes situational and contingent—as seen in Riley’s use of ‘except’ and ‘in so far as’—rather than coherent and stabilizing. It may rise towards the world, but it does so discontinuously.

Therefore, the poem is ultimately focused on contingencies that might allow the living body to rise *against* the scrutinies of a patriarchal world. Riley elaborates upon these contingencies elsewhere in her work. As Carol Watts has observed, the arguments in *Am I That Name?* assert that there is more to life than the categorical designation of ‘woman’ (154). Specifically, Riley refutes “the supposition that women’s bodies are systematically and exhaustively different”, and instead argues that women only sometimes “live in the flesh distinctively of women [...] and this is a function of historical categorizations as well as of an individual daily phenomenology” (*Am I That Name?* 105). It therefore follows that, since the recognition of the body as a gendered entity—or indeed as a body at all—is dependent on particular conditions and categories, the gendered self-consciousness of being a woman can be challenged through acting out the full ambiguity of that category (*Am I That Name?* 112). In *Marxism for Infants*, such strategies are enacted through the pamphlet’s pronominal slippages and

ambiguous authorial presences, but Riley's two collaborative publications with Wendy Mulford develop these notions even further. All of the poems in 1978's *No Fee: A Line or Two for Free* were printed anonymously, which intentionally confused normative assumptions for autonomy and the ownership of voice.¹² Similar practices are also present in 1982's *Some Poems 1968–1978*. The end of the pamphlet includes a note that explains:

The first 11 poems are from *Bravo to Girls and Heroes*. The next 11 are from *Marxism for Infants*. The next 12 from *No Fee: A Line or Two for Free*, of which the first 7 are by Denise Riley and the last 5 by Wendy Mulford (*Some Poems* n.p.)

However, while *Some Poems* ultimately does identify the authors of each poem, it only does so on the very last page of the collection; as a result, the experience of reading the pamphlet is tantamount to the ambiguities associated with *No Fee*. In both cases, the authorial bodies feel amorphous. Like the assemblages described in *A Thousand Plateaus*, these books strive to be unattributable (4). Such impressions are affirmed by the critical reception of these works: reviewing *Some Poems* in 1983, Middleton described the poems therein as collaborative quotations where “each speaks the words of the other”, as an “endorsement and extension of their own” (“Breaking the Perspex” 5); likewise, DuPlessis felt that it was “hard to see where certain poems begin and end” (68). Therefore, if Riley's early works resist the normative modes of gendered categorization and performance, these resistances are partially developed through a poetics that problematizes the smooth designation of authorial bodies.

Such poetics might carry considerable implications for Riley's performances at poetry readings. By writing ‘in order to have no face’, Riley's approach to the body also departs from some of the major orientations in women's performance art during the 1970s. These events generally related to personal experiences or collective pasts, with occasional divergences to more specific feminist activism; furthermore, many performances of this nature derived their material from medieval witchcraft, as well as “non-Western goddesses and fertility figures and ancient matriarchal cultures” (Carlson 161). While these practices may seem somewhat similar to the Incarnation's aspirations towards shamanic rituals, Riley's readings would be an uneasy companion to this kind of performance art. Instead, as Nigel Wheale wrote in 1993:

Denise Riley only reads [...] there is no framing conversation, or chit-chat [...] the vocal delivery of the poems is very distinctive, it is decidedly a [...] kind of declaiming which is an urgent address to listeners, hardly ever dropping to colloquial speech registers. (76–77)

Such impressions are seemingly in stark contrast to the proceedings discussed in the previous chapter, as the performances of the Incarnation extended far beyond the readings from the podium. Wheale's descriptions indicate that Riley's approach is instead more closely aligned with Frederick Stern's characterization of formal poetry readings. Building upon Erving Goffman's studies on lectures, Stern argues that the formal poetry reading is a performance where the aim is the presentation of the poetry as text, rather than the antics of the poet-performer (74).¹³ By refuting the role of antics, Stern wishes to exclude all forms of acting or spectacle from the poet's performance, and focus solely on the soundings of "the text as *voiced*" (73). If Wheale's account is mapped onto Stern's binary descriptions, it seems reasonable to conclude that Riley's readings are the 'formal' counterpoint to the multifarious 'antics' of the Incarnation. However, without wishing to refute Wheale's impressions, I would also suggest that Riley's first public reading in 1977 outflanks and challenges many of the proposals in Stern's article. In particular, the performance includes several collaborative exchanges between Mulford and Riley, which often enact the theoretical and political commitments that appear in Riley's early poetry.

In interviews, Riley has described the Cambridge Poetry Festivals as large and ambitiously international affairs, which hosted a generous range of writers from Europe and the United States (Riley & Huk). Richard Burns had originally conceived the idea for the festival in 1972, although the first event did not take place until three years later; consequently, the festival in 1977 was only the second event in the series. This instalment was coordinated by Paul Johnstone, with help from Peter Robinson, and it featured readings and talks from poets such as Seamus Heaney, Iain Sinclair, Robert Duncan, John James, Robert Creeley, Roy Fisher, Allen Fisher, Michael Horovitz, Jeff Nuttall and Geoffrey Hill; in addition to these male readers, Frances Horovitz, Jude Walker, Elaine Feinstein, Elaine Randell, and Bella Akhmadulina also performed (Berengarten). In this respect, the festival characterizes certain traits of the communal nexuses that I discussed at the end of the previous chapter: due to the high number of poets present, many of the audience members for the readings were not only spectators, but also practitioners; for instance, John James, Douglas Oliver, Martin Thom,

Michael Haslam, Nick Totton, Ian Patterson and Andrew Crozier were most likely among the audience at Riley's reading. But while the social nexuses of the Cambridge Poetry Festivals may recall certain facets of the Incarnation, these events did not necessarily share the disordered and anarchic spirit that characterized the proceedings at the Albert Hall. For instance, Riley's reading took place at the Cambridge Union hall, a venue where "the polished wooden panelling and seating" could evoke a "feeling of permanence" among the audience (*Distant Reading* 98). This description closely matches Stern's arguments, which identify lecture halls as the ideal locations for formal readings (73). In addition, the relative renown of participants such as Duncan or Creeley is also accounted for by Stern's analysis, which suggests that the audience's foremost desire is to "hear the human" as the "face and voice" that they can associate with the "language on the printed page" of the poem; "the poet as star, yes, but also the poet as human being" (77). Thus, the prima facie image of Cambridge Poetry Festival seemingly matches many of Stern's definitions of formal readings, where the focus is on the presentation of the text, as well as—in the case of well-known poets—the performance of authorship.

However, it might be difficult to consider Riley's reading on 15 April 1977 in these exact terms. Although Riley had written poems privately from a very young age, none of her work had appeared in print during the first half of the 1970s; *Marxism for Infants* only appeared just in time for the second festival ("An Interview with Denise Riley"). It is therefore likely that, aside from close friends and associates, the audience was comparatively unfamiliar with Riley's work in print. At the very least, it seems reasonable to assume that the audience were more familiar with Mulford, whose *Big Red Chair* had been published some time earlier in 1975. Nevertheless, Mulford's contribution is situated as an intermission between two sets from Riley, which seemingly places a greater emphasis on Riley's work. Riley recalls that she experienced a severe sense of dread in the weeks that preceded the event:

I was completely new. I can't emphasize strongly enough my horror at having to do any reading [...] [The] Cambridge Poetry Festival reading [...] was the first poetry reading I had ever done in all my born days. [...] I was so sick with fear and horror and loathing of having to stand up and make a spectacle of myself. It went totally against all my natural inclinations. For at

least three weeks ahead of it, I didn't sleep and I got through the event propped up with Valium and a couple of shots of brandy ("An Interview with Denise Riley")

By placing a 'completely new' poet as its focal point, Riley's first reading appears to eschew Stern's notion of the poet as a star: instead of featuring a renowned poet to attract curious spectators, as Stern suggests, the reading is configured as a way of 'introducing' a young writer to a larger audience. Riley's account of the event supports these impressions:

Wendy [...] decided she wanted to make a pamphlet [of *Marxism for Infants*], much to my surprise. In the small press world [...] because the channels of disseminating the written work were so slight, so fragile, so vulnerable, so restricted [...] and it relied on [...] personal acquaintances in a small town [...], [t]hat meant that poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package. I quickly found out that, as a newly 'forced into print' writer, you did not have the liberty [to not do readings] [...] you would be letting down a row of people who had put time and effort into producing your work and hoped to get a few copies around. ("An Interview with Denise Riley")

However, this is not to say that the performance was simply a promotional tool for *Marxism for Infants*. Although Riley's second set did conclude with a reading from the pamphlet, the event also features frequent diversions away from the characterizations in Stern's work. In fact, such manoeuvres are already performed at the very start of the reading: out of sync but still in unison, Riley and Mulford start by uttering, "Am I, she asked, going to make feminist scrambled eggs" ("[Poetry Reading]"). Mulford begins a fraction earlier, which effectively renders Riley's words to be echoes of Mulford's earlier utterances; furthermore, as indicated by 'Am I, *she* asked', the opening ultimately involves two voices relating a third. The beginning of the reading therefore attempts to obscure the centrality of the poets on the stage, as the utterance makes it difficult to ascertain which poet is positioned as the principal 'feature' of the event.

The ambiguity of the opening is furthered by the utterance itself. What is its point of origin? More pressingly, what does it communicate? According to Riley, the phrase was based on a private joke she and Mulford had shared with Fielding Dawson the night before the reading, which involved mild irony "about how far and how thoroughly one could extend the domain of feminism" ("An Interview with Denise Riley"). Although

she insists that the utterance was included almost accidentally and bears no relationship to the poetry that was read that evening, the phrase still resonates with certain aspects of the event. Immediately after the utterance, Riley reads out a statement where she expresses a wish for feminist writing to move beyond “fuzzy thinking disguised by passionate sincerity”, and argues that if “feminism is to be attended like a pep rally, the group loyalty” of the Women’s Liberation Movement will become its “own undoing” (“[Poetry Reading]”). It is therefore possible that the soft ‘scrambled eggs’ of the opening intentionally resonate with the ‘fuzzy thinking’ Riley critiques during her statement.¹⁴ But her charge is not solely grounded on aesthetics: as her concluding remarks indicate, these criticisms also address feminism as a political movement. In 1975, the socialist-feminist newsletter *Red Rag* published an article Riley had written about housing for single mothers. Early in that essay, she notes that despite the “good practical work” of groups tangential to the Women’s Liberation Movement, the single mother remains “effectively voiceless inside” the movement as a whole (“The Force of Circumstance” 26). Although Riley’s poems make no pretence of speaking as a single mother—or indeed as any singular identity—these concerns still relate to the political statements that open her performance in 1977.¹⁵ Underneath its intentional irony, perhaps the utterance ‘am I, she asked, going to make feminist scrambled eggs’ also raises questions about voice, voicelessness and voicing. The blurring of the two voices during the reading highlights an inconstancy in the role of the speaker, while the muddled effects of ‘feminist scrambled eggs’ points towards debates regarding the specific methods through which this political position might be successfully articulated.

If the opening to Riley’s reading raises concerns about how this voicelessness might be rectified, are similar ideas enacted elsewhere during the performance? After her statement, Riley pauses for a while and almost humorously opines, “This stirred everyone up a bit”, and her sudden shift in tone makes the audience laugh (“[Poetry Reading]”). In this respect, the first part of the performance changes its modes at a rapid pace. Riley recalls that she and Mulford wanted to challenge “the audience’s expectations of what a reading by feminist poets might be” like, which goes some way towards explaining the defamiliarizing tendencies of the opening (“An Interview with Denise Riley”). Like the pronouns in her work, the beginning of the performance refuses to settle to a narrowly defined identity. Once Riley begins reading her poems, the proceedings seemingly assume a more stable ambiance. Much akin to Wheale’s earlier description,

she reads through many of her earlier poems that would later be published in *No Fee*, including “In 1970” and “Affections Must Not”. There are hardly any pauses between the individual poems, Riley rarely mentions their titles, and she reads through them at considerable speed. While her voice at times seems more restrained than it did at the start of the performance, there are several points where her cadences give the reading an increased sense of immediacy and urgency. For instance, when reading “Affections Must Not”, Riley slows down her pace, and pauses for a short while after the line “support, support” (*Selected Poems* 20). When she begins the next stanza, her fast pace seems amplified due to the preceding silence:

the houses are murmuring with many small pockets of emotion
 on which spongy grounds adults’ lives are being erected and paid
 for daily
 while their feet and their children’s feet are tangled around like
 those of fen larks
 in the fine steely wires which run to and fro between love and
 economics. (*Selected Poems* 20)

Afterwards, she returns to her slower pace: when she reads the poem’s concluding line, “I. neglect. the house”, she emphasizes the pauses indicated by the punctuation; the applause on the recording seems almost thunderous (“[Poetry Reading]”). Regardless of Riley’s anxieties, it is a strong and confident performance.

When asked about her reasons for this demeanour and speed, Riley responded:

my feeling—which wasn’t unique to me at the time—[was] that anecdotes or biographical details and stories between poems only serve to make it difficult to whoever’s listening to you to listen to the poem. Instead, they’ll be thinking about your childhood, and the sad death of your favourite spaniel when you were ten, or the boy who pulled your pigtails when you were at school, or whatever it was [...] [It] knowingly or unknowingly draw[s] out the sympathy of the audience to the persona of the poet. As a highly anxious reader, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to notice me. (“An Interview with Denise Riley”)

Although this approach may have begun as an unconscious decision, Riley's praxis as a reader resonates with certain aspects of her poetics. In her own words, Riley consciously developed a performance technique that eschews the appeal of these sympathetic biographical anecdotes:

In time [...] I worked out a technique for myself [...] of reading quite loudly and quite calmly, without any intervening talk. The way that I described what I was doing to myself was that I was putting up a barrage of words behind which I, the 'biographical' person, could be quite invisible. It was an illusion of invisibility. I hoped that I could make a distancing effect by a loud and clear style of speaking. ("An Interview with Denise Riley")

Early indications of these techniques already appear on the recordings from 1977. Riley's reading not only departs from the trends of contemporaneous feminist performance art and the performance of authorship that sometimes arises in Ginsberg's asseverations; it also questions the procedures of events that emphasize authenticity and truthful reproduction, and consequently centre their attentions on the (gendered) living body. In other words, Riley's reading corresponds with the pronominal slippage of her poems, as it continues to generate a certain distance between the poetry that is read and the poet on the stage. If the collaborative utterance from Riley and Mulford was designed to experiment with the rigid definitions of who speaks during a performance, then Riley's subsequent reading issues similar subversions in a more understated fashion.

These developments point towards some notable implications. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to *Gender Trouble* in order to suggest that certain poems in *Marxism for Infants* resist the normative performances that constitute the imaginable and intelligible domain of gender. For Butler, these appearances are achieved through performative discourses and twists that conceal the impossibility of a gendered essence and instead produce the *appearance* of an internal core on the surface of the body (*Gender Trouble* 173). Because such enactments can only provide a superficial imitation of this essentialist core, Butler identifies performativity as a site through which the very notion of a subject can be contested ("Gender as Performance" 111). As *Gender Trouble* argues, the abiding gendered self is

structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground"[...] in the arbitrary

relation between such acts, in the possibility of the failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition. (179)

Butler's temporal and contingent groundlessness is analogous with some of the strategies demonstrated during the reading in 1977: Riley's manoeuvres between collaborative utterances, statements and a barrage of words all denote shifts that highlight a discontinuity within the proceedings. For instance, by Riley's own description, the ironic qualities of the opening sought to question the audience's assumptions about a reading by feminist poets; that is to say, the reading began with a type of parodic repetition that challenged the anticipated expectations and identifications. Similarly, the 'barrage of words' within Riley's delivery emphasizes her views on the 'arbitrary relations' between the poem and the biographical persona on stage. These practices are in stark contrast to the "theatre of argument" exhibited in certain feminist performance groups during the mid-1970s, where the intention was to reclaim the experience of women (Wandor 87). The myriad contingencies perceivable in Riley's reading imply that such a narrowly defined unifying experience may not exist; that gender is "not 'one', but multiple" (*Gender Trouble* 14). As Riley writes in *Am I That Name?*:

That "women" is indeterminate and impossible is no cause for lament. It is what makes feminism; which has hardly been an indiscriminate embrace anyway of the fragilities and peculiarities of the category. What these do demand is a willingness, at times, to shred this "women" to bits—to develop a [...] versatility (114)

The discontinuities produced by the aforementioned shifts effectively enact such versatilities. If Riley's poems in *Marxism for Infants* and elsewhere resist the lyric 'I' as a singular heroic persona, her performance continues to transgress the social foundations and conventions that produce these singularizations.

These discontinuous transgressions are also apparent in further aspects of the reading. After Mulford finishes her set, Riley advises the audience that she will begin her second set with a couple of poems by other female writers ("[Poetry Reading]"). Her demeanour is once again altered during this section, as the reading involves far more interaction with the audience. For instance, before reading a poem by Elinor Wylie, Riley claims that Wylie had been "struck out of the lists of Penguin [America] for being

married three times” and humorously states, “I feel quite ambivalent about that” (“[Poetry Reading]”). Similarly, before reading H.D.’s “Sea Rose”, Riley describes it as an “extremely good poem” that “doesn’t get into anthologies very much” (“[Poetry Reading]”). These instances, in other words, form a further facet to the event’s discontinuities: they create an additional distance between the poems and the poets reading, and incorporate more supplementary voices to the performance. Simultaneously, however, they also evince further developments. When asked about her motivations for reading these particular poets, Riley replied:

The further motivation was the idea [...] [to] take some time to introduce something that the audience might enjoy, something they might recognize, and which would give their strained ears a break. Or, if they didn’t recognize it and they liked it, they could go away and look up the author. [...] [While] H.D. was certainly known and read by anyone who had an interest in the less familiar shores of early twentieth century writing [...] [i]t was before the revival of interest in her work [...] in the very late seventies and early eighties. (“An Interview with Denise Riley”)

In other words, the decision to read work by other poets was motivated by an aspiration to exhibit material that might be unfamiliar to some of the audience. Given that Riley’s chosen poets were both female, it might be tempting to construe the act as a declaration of a modernist—or a para-modernist—tradition of feminist writing; but while this may be one possible interpretation, the decision also illustrates Riley and Mulford’s approaches to the social situation of a reading. For instance, the event is followed by a discussion with the audience, during which Mulford states that she is politically accustomed to working with “collective networks” in “collective ways” (“[Discussion]”). Samuel Solomon, who argues that Riley’s deferred and ambiguous speakers at times recall of the social individual in Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach”, associates similar notions of collectivization to publications such as *Marxism for Infants* (173). In both cases, the individual is identified as an ensemble of social relations; consequently, perhaps it is possible to consider the decision to read these additional poems—along with the performance’s other discontinuities—as an indication of a will to speak *for* and *about* the cacophonous collectivity of social multiplicities.

To clarify, I do not wish to present the social situation of Riley’s reading as a binary opposition of collectivism *versus* individualism; when one

member of the audience proposes that such notions are both disturbing and unsatisfying, Riley agrees and notes that she equally regards them as dubious (“[Discussion]”). Instead, these relationships operate in a more intricate manner. During my interview with Riley, she noted that her immediate fascination with poetry is based on the form’s egalitarian possibilities:

What I like for myself, what I still like about poetry, is that there is a kind of democracy about it: it is cheap to produce, it is cheap to circulate, you can write it, as I often did, on the back of an envelope on the top of a bus [...] You don’t need a big apparatus. (“An Interview with Denise Riley”)

The reading in 1977 demonstrates that Riley’s early poetics are already at least as deeply concerned with questions of democracy and solidarity as her subsequent work.¹⁶ However, as the discussions with the audience in Cambridge reveal, she also saw a close link between these questions and issues of gender. At one point, Riley posits that feminism is crucially concerned with the “examination of economic and emotional realities” that force one to “penetrate the mystery of production”; in terms of poetry, Riley relates these concerns to questions such as “what is this individual authorial production” and “what are you as the hero of your own production” (“[Discussion]”). Mulford additionally observes that this ‘mystery of production’ also applies to poetry readings, which she sees as “the end bit, like the production of a book” (“[Discussion]”). Riley agrees that there is a connection between these ideas and her concerns about performance as a field of “structured heroism”, where people pay money to come into a room and observe “a set of identifying factors” such as the poet and their individual voice (“[Discussion]”). In other words, this structured heroism of performance can be understood alongside some of Sheppard’s characterizations of poetry readings from the period, where the pub-based culture of these events sometimes aspired towards a macho ethos of poetry stars and ‘groupies’ (*Poetry of Saying* 161). In Riley’s own experience, similar socialities were also present in Cambridge: although instances of crude misogyny may have been rare, Riley nevertheless felt that the milieu had a “strong element of younger and middle-aged men’s club” (“An Interview with Denise Riley”). Consequently, it is likely that these phallogocentric socialities are at the heart of the ‘realities’ that Mulford and Riley wished to contest. The performance’s feminist commitments are conjoined with its attention towards the issues of reading one’s poetry in

public. As Riley argues during the event itself: “one produces the other” (“[Discussion]”).

But how does this mystery of production operate? When I asked Riley to elaborate on some of these ideas, she could no longer remember the exact intentions behind her aphoristic remark. However, hearing it again led her to reflect on Heinrich von Kleist’s dramaturgical essay, “On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking”. While she had not read the essay in 1977, she felt that its ideas resonated with her statements at the festival:

Kleist [...] [says] that having to stand up on your feet and be forced into speech by the dynamics of the occasion will generate this effect, to your own astonishment—that your thought is formed not a priori in your mind, but in the accident of uttering. It’s also Tristan Tzara’s “thought is made in the mouth”. I believe profoundly in both of those notions as phenomena, which can hit you while you are reading poetry and while you are in that exposed state [...] once you are there and there is no possibility of physically taking flight, a certain inventiveness—which you cannot take credit for, because it is not the inventiveness of thought, but of the occasion of utterance—takes over and that might suddenly produce a [...]remark [...] which wouldn’t have been the result of a premeditated thought. (“An Interview with Denise Riley”).

Although these comments were prompted by the phrase rather than its content, they are still pertinent to Riley’s critique of the mystery of production. In the previous chapters, I have alluded to the performance of authorship, where—as Middleton describes—the ordinary act of speaking is assumed to be a reliable index of the individuality of the speaker, and the poet’s physical presence during a reading grants the poem its relevance to a specific body, point of view and history (Bernstein 268). Thus, the performance of authorship also incorporates a tacit assertion for the performance of ownership. This praxis may consequently lead to problematic conclusions: its reliable index could potentially manifest as the identifying factors of the phallogocentric hierarchies and economic realities that Riley and Mulford seek to challenge. In contrast, Kleist describes the act of speaking as an instance where “it is not *we* who know things”, but rather, that knowledge only arises from a “certain *condition* of ours” (408). This formulation—which is comparable to Riley’s sense of being forced into speech by the dynamics of an occasion—complicates the performance of ownership, as it indicates that the utterance may not in fact *belong* to the speaker,

but to the event itself; such moments represent yet another form of discontinuity, which seeks to interrogate the apparent arbitrariness of proprietary asseverations.

Two moments from the latter stages of the reading indicate some of the multiple forms that this challenge to ownership might assume. When Riley begins reading through the entirety of *Marxism for Infants*, her voice again seems to return to her technique of a barrage of words. However, an unexpected and unintentional noise soon invades the recording: as she reads on, a faint sound of a vacuum cleaner can be heard in the background. This noise becomes increasingly disruptive, and it is clearly audible when Riley reaches the following stanza:

I heard the water freezing in a thousand launderettes
 with a dense white shutter
 I heard the roar of a thousand vacuum cleaners
 stammer away into uncarpeted silence (*Marxism for Infants* n.p.)

Before the third line, she pauses for a brief moment and—as if to acknowledge the noise in the background—interjects with “here it is”, which is met with laughter and applause from the audience (“[Poetry Reading]”). This interjection seems slightly out of character for the reading, as it sounds oddly casual in the context of Riley’s urgent addresses. On first impression, it might appear as if Riley’s biographical self was now emerging through the barrage of words, but in the context of Butler and Kleist’s respective theories, this may not be wholly accurate. Rather, it represents a discontinuity that closely resembles an occasion of utterance without premeditated thought. In doing so, the interjection affirms that Riley’s impersonal demeanour is itself another performative tactic, as it suggests that her barrage of words may not actually *hide* the persona of the poet per se. More precisely, it renders that persona entirely indeterminable, so that one is unable to identify a single and consistent mode of performance across the duration of the event. Her ironic quip therefore reveals an implicit awareness of how the performing self may slide into being performed, and indicates that the multiple ‘voices’ during the performance do not represent collective utterances that belong to a multiplicity in a simplistic sense. Instead, they are collective because they slip away from ownership altogether.¹⁷

While still concerned with ideas of ownership, the second example assumes a slightly different approach. After leading the discussion with the audience, Riley announces that she wishes to conclude the evening by reading one of Mulford's poems, which she has not seen or read in print before ("[Discussion]"). To emphasize the unknown quality of the work, Riley seemingly needs to remove the poem from a sealed box—or at the very least, the recording captures the sound of a box being opened. At first blush, this conclusion recalls the beginning of the performance where the mutual utterance blended Mulford and Riley's voices together, but it simultaneously anticipates the collaborative quotations that the two would enact later on in *No Fee* and *Some Poems*. Earlier in this chapter, I noted that critics described these poems as ambiguous texts that spoke the words of the other as an endorsement and extension of their own. The conclusion to Riley and Mulford's reading performs these practices directly; one quite literally speaks the words of the other. Consequently, if the boundarylessness of these collaborative collections renders authorship a riddle, the end of the reading equally problematizes the performance of authorship. However, this is not simply achieved with the substitution of Riley's voice for Mulford's text. As the prefatory remarks reveal, Riley is entirely unfamiliar with the poem, which means she held no premeditated approaches to reading it. In this respect, the moment resembles Riley's later readings of Kleist, in that this utterance is also formed on ellipsis. In other words, the final moments of the reading act as another representation of the meta-commentary that underlies the occasion. If the event began by voicing suspicions about expressing a socialist-feminist perspective through uncritical 'fuzzy thinking', the readings themselves perform extensive investigations into modes that might articulate this position more effectively. Throughout, Riley and Mulford enter into a manifold play on boundarylessness, which does not simply substitute the individual voice with that of a collective. In the process of the event's continuous discontinuities, the idea of ownership itself begins to deteriorate.

This is a notable development from the previous chapter's discussions of the intersubjective 'authorship' that occurred in the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation. While these ambivalent relations may have been an unexpected effect of the active perceptions that contributed to the event in 1965, Riley and Mulford's performance incorporates its own ambiguities in a slightly more deliberate manner. Their continuous discontinuities challenge the hierarchical model of Stern's formal poetry readings, where the presentation of poetry is partially committed to paying homage to the

poet and their work (77). Instead of performing her authorship, Riley seeks to associate her asseverations with a non-hierarchical spreading of active perceptions that eschews even a tacit assertion of ownership: the collaborative and individual opening addresses destabilize the assumed parameters of a feminist poetry reading, as they force the audience to reconsider their preconceptions of such events; likewise, her barrage of words involves a degree of self-annihilation, which places the presence of an authorial persona in a state of flux. What emerges from this flux is a performance engaged in an experimental metacommentary that—while still manoeuvring within the confines of a formal reading—seeks to deconstruct and undermine the structured heroism that is perpetuated by these events. To put this differently, Riley—unlike the participants of the Incarnation—is less interested in experimenting with the anarchic antics of performance than she is in exploring the event’s sociality. Ultimately, perhaps her first reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival holds a mirror to the complex public estimations of Riley’s poetry that I described at the beginning of this chapter: it is neither this nor that, but radically in between.

Nevertheless, even if the challenges to the structured heroism of poetry readings appear to be a deliberate component of Riley’s performance, this does not automatically mean that the event’s metacommentary was a meticulously planned procedure. When I spoke to Riley about some of my impressions while listening to the recordings from 1977, she stated that much of what occurred was unintentional and likely to have stemmed from the horror she experienced at the time (“An Interview with Denise Riley”). Likewise, I do not wish to argue that everyone in attendance necessarily perceived the events as I have described them here. Indeed, some of the responses caught on the taped discussion suggest that the crowd felt somewhat sceptical about the acts that challenged the issues of authorship and ownership. When Riley finishes reading Mulford’s poem, a woman from the audience interjects that she would have liked to hear the piece in “Wendy’s voice”, as it is written in “her method”, in the same way that Riley’s poems were to her measure; this audience member also suggests that the collaborative utterances envisaged by Riley and Mulford might “lead to a very neutral kind of speech”, as—in her view—readings can be useful in conveying the “varieties of an individual’s measure” (“[Discussion]”). In other words, while the audience member remains unsatisfied with the connotations of individualism, she still considers performance as an arena that presents the author’s personality

("[Discussion]"). Others in the audience seemingly agreed with this: one member notes that his decision to read his own work in readings is "to do with scarcity" as "you have so little chance to read your own poetry", while another suggests that "you know your own material better" ("[Discussion]"). To a certain extent, each of these comments affirms many of the arguments made by Stern. Thus, while Riley and Mulford seek to challenge some of the social conventions of the reading, the audience does not appear to be overwhelmingly in favour of their proposals.

Instead, I have approached the event from this perspective in order to arrive at two slightly different claims. Firstly, I want to suggest that Riley's first public reading deserves to be recognized as a significant event. In the context of the Revival, it provides further documentation of the problematic gender dynamics of this period and its contemporary legacies. The readings and discussion appear deeply informed by Riley and Mulford's feminist politics, which serve to further clarify the inequalities I described at the start of this chapter: during the discussion, Mulford notes, "as women, we have found quite a big barrier in getting over the bit about *doing* the performance" ("[Discussion]"). The occasion is also noteworthy in the context of Riley's career. Despite the poet's apprehensions and retrospective embarrassment, she delivers a powerful performance. The barrage of words projected during the event gives early indications of the urgent addresses that Wheale commends in his descriptions of Riley's later readings. Likewise, the occasion also indicates early examples of Riley's poetics. As I argued above, she and Mulford staged the post-reading discussion partially in order to question the privileged relationship in which the poet is the "hero of his own poems and body of work" ("[Discussion]"). These ideas resurface nearly three decades later in Riley's interview with Huk, where she expresses concerns about being the 'heroine' of her own work. In part, Riley's theoretical work in *Am I That Name?* and *Words of Selves* is also rooted in the questions she first iterated at the performance in 1977. In this respect, the recordings from the event provide an important source for a more complete understanding of Riley's poetic and intellectual development.

I have also tried to demonstrate that Riley's reading is not necessarily as different from the Incarnation as it might initially seem. Although Stern argues that a formal poetry reading and the antics of a festival are separated by a distinct set of characteristics, the boundary between the two is actually a more permeable membrane. Even when a performance is focused on the presentation of poetry, the event can still engage with a range of

performative strategies. For example, the parallels between the discontinuities of Riley's reading and the ambiguous personae of her early work demonstrate how performances can sometimes incorporate tactics that further enact the particular commitments of the poems. Perhaps more importantly—as Kleist's production of thought indicates—these practices are not always based on premeditated decisions, but rather emerge during the event itself. In other words, Stern's characterizations can be subverted through utilizing the formal poetry reading as a space where one can challenge the structural complicities of this format. Both Riley and Mulford are aware of the proximity between the performance of authorship and that of ownership, which leads them to incorporate performative actions that seek to deconstruct these privileged relationships. Thus, rather than considering Riley's reading as being diametrically opposed to events like the Incarnation, perhaps these performances are better understood as co-existing on a sliding scale: both events encompass a wide array of practices that extend the action of the performance beyond its elocutionary elements. Of course, this is not to say that the two are seamlessly comparable. Riley and Mulford's collective resistance to ownership generates a distance between the poet-reader and the material that is read; this distance, in turn, departs from the somatic attentions of the Incarnation. Similar distances also inform the very different procedures that are found in Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*, which is the topic of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. For further discussion of Alvarez's anthology and its relationship to *Children of Albion*, see Buck 101.
2. Further discussion about Mottram's editorship of *Poetry Review* appears in the next chapter, where I consider how the tensions at the Poetry Society may relate to the performance of *Pollock Record*.
3. Further discussion of the disparities in anthologies featuring poets from the Revival can be found in *Poetry of Saying* 162. However, Mandy Bloomfield has questioned whether Sheppard goes far enough in addressing these concerns (96). Additional perspectives are also available in Kennedy & Kennedy 18–47.
4. For a more detailed discussion of this, see O'Sullivan 9–10 or Buck 84.
5. Similar arguments can also be found in Presley's account of her experiences in the 1980s. See Hampson & Edwards 139.
6. For more on the Women's Liberation Movement in the USA, see Voyce 162–201.

7. A far more detailed account of these issues is available in Linda Kinnahan's *Lyric Interventions*.
8. In Kinnahan's view, Mohin's introduction seems reluctant to adopt high powered displays of theoretical agility, as this could potentially replicate the hierarchical forms of power that are implicit in "the authority invested in theory" (*Lyric Interventions* xv).
9. A similar description of "a note on sex and 'the reclaiming of language'" can be found in Buck 95. Further discussion of the work is available, for example, in Dowson & Entwistle 164–165.
10. Elements of this essay are reproduced in the second chapter of *Words of Selves*.
11. In addition to the previously cited studies, see Wills 35–52; Kinnahan's "Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry" 621–670; Kennedy & Kennedy 83–99; Herd 234–249; and Watts 157–172.
12. A similar argument is made in Kinnahan's "Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry" 647.
13. For Goffman's work on lectures, see Goffman 160–196.
14. Riley reflected upon the utterance further during the course of the interview. See Chap. 8 of this book for the full transcript.
15. A more complete analysis of the *Red Rag* article and its relationship to Riley's early poetry is available in Solomon 167–199.
16. For further arguments about the role of solidarity in Riley's later work, see Herd 235.
17. The arguments in this paragraph are partly informed by the theories Riley formulates in *Words of Selves* 153–162.

Memories Arrested in Space: Eric Mottram's *Pollock Record*

As the conclusion to the previous chapter mentioned, some members of Riley and Mulford's audience seemed more at ease with the structural heroism of 'formal poetry readings' that the two poets were attempting to challenge. In spite of these disagreements, the tone of the debates in the post-reading discussion in 1977 remained primarily civil. The same cannot be said about an exchange that took place during the first Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975. When Eric Mottram and Lee Harwood delivered a joint presentation on imagination and invention in contemporary British poetry, one attendee found Mottram's binary proposals about static communities of traditional poetry and the newness of experimentation so disagreeable that he accused the poet of outrageous pomposity; for a brief interval, this altercation brought the proceedings to a halt (Harwood & Mottram). The comparative differences of these two anecdotes mirror the progression between this chapter and the preceding one. While the previous study focused on the discontinuities that Riley enacted in order to subvert the performance of authorship, this chapter examines Mottram's *Pollock Record*—a collaborative performance project from 1978—in order to consider the multiple ways in which documentation, collaboration and memory may destabilize the poem and the performance as a whole.

The contextual factors around Mottram's poetry in general—and *Pollock Record* in particular—introduce some additional complexities that distinguish this examination from those in the previous two chapters. While the works of poets such as Ginsberg and Riley have received a certain degree of scholarly attention, Mottram's legacy is—as Barry has observed—

predominantly based on his work as a critic, teacher and editor (*Poetry Wars* 144). Indeed, while a majority of studies about the Revival will inevitably make some reference to Mottram's essays, his editorship of *Poetry Review* or his work as a scholar of American Studies, considerably less is said about his poetry. This lack of critical attention is further compounded by the fact that most of Mottram's poetry is nowadays unavailable outside of special collections and archives at university libraries. It is therefore no surprise that the chapter on Mottram in Clive Bush's *Out of Dissent*—a monograph from 1997 that is itself largely out of print—remains one of the only examples of a sustained critical discussion about his poetic oeuvre. Consequently, any contemporary engagement with Mottram's poetry requires a considerable degree of archival excavation before these fugitive publications could be brought to a less tenebrous space.

But even within this context, *Pollock Record* resembles a lost world. It has survived—albeit in an ephemeral capacity—through two printed versions: the first of these appeared in an issue of *PS Magazine* (*Performance Studies Magazine*) in 1979 (12–13), while the second was published posthumously as a set of loose cards through Writers Forum in January 1998. The note included in the latter of these indicates that Mottram considered *Pollock Record* to be a companion piece to *Precipice of Fishes*, which is another Mottram poem from the late 1970s; indeed the note specifies that the two projects could be performed together. This publication history suggests that *Pollock Record* was primarily designed for performance. Yet no known recordings of the piece exist, and the particulars of when and where it was performed remain uncertain. The leaflets and correspondence available in Mottram's archives at King's College, London, do not reveal specific clues about these crucial details.¹ Moreover, of the three poets known to have taken part in the performance—Mottram, Bill Griffiths and Allen Fisher—two passed away some time ago: Mottram in 1995 and Griffiths in 2007. Fisher is, understandably, also unable to recall the precise dates and circumstances in which the performance may have taken place (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”).² In other words, an examination of *Pollock Record* is unlike the discussions of the previous chapters, as the performance cannot be situated in a particular time and space. We can ascertain that the piece was performed at least once, as Mottram discusses the details of such an event in two separate interviews, conducted by Peterjon Skelt and Steve Pereira, respectively.³ From these accounts, we can infer that the performed version of *Pollock Record* was

based around “three big sheets with all kinds of materials on them, with black lines around them”; during the event, the three collaborators would “read one selection one after another”, and the proceedings were brought to an end when one of them “reread one of the sections” that had already been uttered (Mottram, qtd. in Skelt 25). Nevertheless, as much as these descriptions are a useful thumbnail sketch of the performance, they do not contain enough details to enable a closer analysis of it.

Due to these complexities, we must ask: is it even possible to examine *Pollock Record* more closely? A straightforward answer may not be readily available. At the very least, it is reasonable to suggest that Mottram’s willingness to reflect on the event indicates that performance played a key role in his poetry and poetics. This is—to a certain extent—confirmed by Bush’s argument that Mottram’s poems are performances where “a deadly game of destruction/creation is being played” (428); in addition, Bush notes that Mottram consistently insisted that the limits of poetry be expanded through “visual play, oral improvisation, the fearless mixing of media and [...] performance” (448). Although *Out of Dissent* does not elaborate on how these practices might have converged within Mottram’s oeuvre itself, his critical writings on other poets often touched on similar subjects. For instance, the topic informs his contributions to the aforementioned talk at Cambridge in 1975. Making reference to works by poets such as Fisher and Cobbing, Mottram claims that performance—whether it occurs through live events or via typographical design—is a site of “imaginative inventions through which materials, feelings and connections are made” (Harwood & Mottram). Noting that these intersections go beyond any “purist definitions” of poetic boundaries, Mottram also demands that performance is a phenomenon that both poets and critics will need to “consider seriously” (Harwood & Mottram). These stipulations were not an isolated incident: while interviewing other poets, being interviewed himself, or when writing papers for journals, anthologies or conferences, Mottram consistently identified performance as such a large constituent of contemporary poetics that without it “no proper account of twentieth century poetry is possible” (“Notes on Poetics” 38).⁴

Mottram’s multiple discussions of poetry and performance can therefore be seen as a continuum of ongoing attempts to understand the nature and significance of the phenomenon. As a result of this ongoing process, his conclusions may not always be entirely satisfying. For instance, in arguing that performance allows for the dissemination of the poem’s “sounds and rhythms” (“Notes on Poetics” 39), Mottram places too much emphasis on

the “living presence of the poet” (“Declaring a Behaviour” n.p.). Especially when compared with Riley and Mulford’s performance in 1977, these arguments seem to lack a sufficiently critical account of how this performance of authorship can also be linked to problematic notions of ‘structural heroism’ and ‘the performance of ownership’. However, as Mottram’s thoughts about poetry and performance rarely settled into a unilateral view, his relationship to these notions is also marked with ambivalence. Elsewhere, he also claimed that the act of reading—even if this is done privately—is indicative of an ability to perform the poem (“Eric Mottram Interviewed by Mark Wallace” 25); similarly, when Mottram describes his own encounters with Andrew Marvell’s poetry, he asserts that each occasion of reading one of these texts continues the production of the poem (qtd. in *Necessary Business* 191). Both arguments comprehend the act of reading as an event where new realizations or discoveries can emerge. This attention to the intersubjective ‘authorship’—which Mottram calls a ‘theatre of interchange’—is closely linked to his descriptions of performances as “densities of recognized and unrecognized information” that are “placed in an incremental series of measures” (“Declaring a Behaviour” n.p.). As these occasions consist of both unrecognized and recognized components, Mottram’s observations acknowledge that each event is a moment of production that always remains incomplete. Each time, something is omitted as well as received; even if “some of the poetic information” remains unchanged, other aspects exist “in a continual state of metamorphosis” where “a new kind of authenticity continually arises” (“Declaring a Behaviour” n.p.). In light of these divergent arguments, Mottram’s essays on poetry and performance can be summarized as an endeavour to manoeuvre through slippage: while the poet may seem like an authoritative presence, they are simultaneously unable to control the metamorphoses of the text; likewise, the performed poems are themselves both realized and unrecognizable. By reflecting on the crises of these instabilities, Mottram’s analyses regularly return to questions of fluidity, permeability and temporality.

It is also important to note that Mottram’s arguments about the parallels between the act of reading and the act of performing suggest a possible method for examining *Pollock Record* in performance. Perhaps an investigation of this nature must commence with the grounding material for the event itself—that is, the sheets that Mottram designed in preparation for it. This trajectory marks a slight departure from the methodologies that informed the previous chapters. As Philip Auslander has noted, a large

majority of performance art from the 1960s and 1970s considered the relationship between performance and documentation as an ontological equation, whereby the event was seen as the preceding act that both authored and authorized the document (21). To elaborate, performance documentation served as a record that could provide evidence of what occurred during the event, and thus contribute to a partial reconstruction of the occasion. In many ways, my earlier analyses of the Incarnation and Riley's reading in 1977 followed a similar approach. Contrarily, the sheets for *Pollock Record* shift our attention from media to script. The ontological framework in Auslander's essay perceives media—that is, the various documents from the event—as a record of the performance; by comparison, an investigation of Mottram's sheets approaches the event from a speculative, preceding space that considers these documents as evidence of what *might* have occurred. In other words, a performance of *Pollock Record* can be examined as if it were an Austinian illocutionary act, in so far as the sheets allow for the “performance of an act *in* saying something” (Austin 99). The force of the utterances on the sheets themselves may begin to call *Pollock Record* back into being; to read it is to perform it, which effectively enacts the ambivalences of authorship and slippage that Mottram charted in his various essays.

But what exactly is uttered on these sheets? The archives at King's contain two of the three sheets that Mottram described in his interviews with Skelt and Pereira (MOTTRAM 2/2/77). Both items are dated 1978, and they contain the same selections of materials; as such, although the location of the third sheet is unknown, it is most likely identical to the others. Engaging with the sheets is a physically challenging task. Mottram's description of the sheets as ‘big’ is in fact something of an understatement: each individual item actually consists of two sheets taped together, and measures 35 in. (88.9 cm) in height and 25 in. (63.5 cm) in width. The textual components are not written on the ‘canvas’ directly, but instead they are glued onto the sheets. The arrangement of the materials also differs from the subsequent version that was published in *PS Magazine* a year later. The length of each textual fragment varies: some are comprised of several stanzas, whereas others feature only a single line. In places where a particular fragment has been obscured by the tape that connects the two halves, the words have been rewritten by hand in order to ensure visibility. Black lines designate the borders of each individual section, and very little space is left blank; consequently, when one of the sheets is unfolded on a table, it covers such a wide expanse that reading it becomes a disorienting

and vertiginous experience. Even in visual terms, it feels almost impossible to focus on the whole range of text. The indeterminable order of the material itself only amplifies this sense of disorientation; each fragment can only be observed individually. After a while, the sheets slowly begin to reveal patterns within the imagery and the themes of the work: much of the material alludes to paintings and visuality; references to bodies or bodily functions, as well as objects of nature, are also prominently present. As the title of the project implies, these patterns all seemingly relate to the painter Jackson Pollock.

This referential and collagist praxis is a common feature in Mottram's work. His poems, as Bush notes, were often "coaxed into shape by [...] various [...] materials which [had] been *noticed*" as a result of learning, experience and chance (458). For instance, both *Local Movement* and *Tunis*—published in 1973 and 1976, respectively—conclude with extensive source lists, which feature both academic and artistic materials, including lyrics from Captain Beefheart and Neil Young, cut-ups from issues of *Art News*, as well as Stravinsky's "Tilim-Bom". The frequency with which Mottram used collage and assemblage is also highlighted in a paper that Pierre Joris delivered at a conference on the poet's work in 1997:

Analysing several of the poems in *Against Tyranny* [...] I discovered that some 95% of their language matter was taken over from Paul Nizan's *Aden Arabie* & Sartre's preface to that book [...] phrases & words lifted, rearranged into a new design that make them an unmistakable Mottram poem (Joris)

It seems fair to suggest that these methods are informed by Mottram's academic background. Earlier, I intimated that his career as a Lecturer in English and American Literature made him a pioneer in American Studies within British higher education: for example, the Institute of United States Studies, which Mottram co-founded in 1963, was at that point one of the few academic centres dedicated to studying the subject. In this capacity, Mottram seemed as interested in collage as he evidently was in his creative work. His essays were often written as "a series of block paragraphs, substantially made up of quotation from various sources, with an explicit thread of linking commentary" (*Poetry Wars* 146). For instance, one two-page spread in *Towards Design in Poetry*—first published as a pamphlet in 1977—features large blocks of quotations from Charles Baudelaire, Herbert Marcuse, Marx, Jerzy Grotowski and Andrei Codrescu; comments

from Mottram himself, which often consist of a single sentence between two quotes, are firmly relegated into a supporting role (28–29). Mottram's scholarly work is therefore rarely interested in a didactic explication of its subject matter. Rather, it provides a set of broad principles—as well as a catalogue of further resources—that the reader may elaborate upon through their own intellectual engagement.⁵

A similar approach can be seen in the sheets for *Pollock Record*. If the glued fragments are examined in parallel with Mottram's notes for the project—which include quotations from B.H. Friedman's biography of Pollock, along with Frank O'Hara's monograph about the painter—the primacy of Pollock's presence becomes increasingly clear. Moreover, some of the fragments on the sheets openly acknowledge their sources. When one section reads “I can control the flow of paint:/there is no accident just as there is/no beginning and no end—1950 film” (MOTTRAM 2/2/77), the last two words act as a citation for the lines that preceded them: the ‘1950 film’ alludes to Hans Namuth's footage of the painter at work, and the earlier lines borrow from the voiceover that Pollock provided for the movie.⁶ Although these explicit citations are rare, a comparable method of quotation occurs throughout: another fragment, which reads “I have no fears about/making changes/destroying the image/life comes through” (MOTTRAM 2/2/77), is lifted entirely from an article Pollock wrote for the first and only issue of *Possibilities* in 1947.⁷ Likewise, *Pollock Record*'s lunar imagery is also connected to the painter, who often recited poetry to the moon (Landau 113), and referred to it in paintings such as *The Moon-Woman Cuts the Circle*. Even Mottram's mythological allusions—such as the lines “suckled by a she-wolf/fucked by a bull” (MOTTRAM 2/2/77), which refer to both Romulus and Remus and the conception of the Minotaur—are linked to Pollock: O'Hara's monograph explicitly associates these myths with the paintings *She-Wolf* and *Pasiphaë* (18–19).

Nevertheless, *Pollock Record* is not simply an echo chamber for the painter and his works, as Mottram's collages also borrow from Pound's *Guide to Kulchur*, William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*, poems by Jack Spicer and Paul Valéry, as well as the writings of Antonin Artaud—none of which bears any direct connection to Pollock. Indeed, certain sections of *Pollock Record* reveal a palpable absence between the textual content and the painter who is ostensibly the poem's primary topic. Consider, for example, the aforementioned references to Romulus and Remus and the Minotaur. As I mentioned above, Mottram's decision to incorporate the classical allusions was most likely informed by O'Hara's

monograph, which analysed *She-Wolf* and *Pasiphaë* from a mythical perspective; however, while Pollock's titles may refer to these myths, such narratives are not overtly apparent in the paintings themselves. Romulus and Remus are not explicitly present in *She-Wolf*, and the painting's wolf-like figure has a backside that resembles a mastodon's head; both of these discrepancies problematize the parallels between the image and the myth.⁸ Moreover, given that the title of *Pasiphaë* did not originate from Pollock, the painting's links to the conception of the Minotaur seem nominal at best. According to Lee Kasner, when James Johnson Sweeney suggested that Pollock should use *Pasiphaë* as a title, the painter responded with: "who the hell is Pasiphaë?" (qtd. in Emmerling 42). These distinctions between what *Pollock Record* includes and what Pollock's paintings omit suggest that Mottram's poem may not simply be about the painter per se; instead, Mottram attempts to incorporate Pollock within a wider constellation of materials.

The possible constellatory effects of *Pollock Record*'s collagist practice can be observed in the lines "memories arrested in space/ 'a gesture I shall never forget'" (MOTTRAM 2/2/77). The first line is a direct quote from Pollock's description of his technique, but the second is a detail from Henry James' early short story, "The Madonna of the Future".⁹ In the story, the narrator meets Theobald, an American expatriate artist who has spent several years working on his masterpiece—a modern version of Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*. Yet when the narrator finally sees Theobald's painting, he discovers it is only a blank canvas, "cracked and discoloured by time" (James 217). The second line in Mottram's fragment is taken from the scene that occurs immediately after this revelation: Theobald, reflecting upon his inability to transfer his vision to his easel, raises his hand towards the blank canvas—thus making the gesture that the narrator will never forget. Mottram's juxtaposition therefore forges a symbiotic relationship between a canonical American author—who was praised for his stylistic precision—and Pollock, who was hailed as one of the greatest American painters of the twentieth century (Landau 11). In addition, the pairing reimagines James' words as a commentary on Pollock's paintings. O'Hara describes the painter's work as a portrait of movements, created by his "ability to quicken a line by thinning it" or "to slow it by flooding" (26); likewise, Mottram's juxtaposition implies that Pollock's paintings are a record of his physical movements, in so far as they trace his gestures over an empty canvas. In this sense, then, the interactions

between *Pollock Record*'s resources can generate a network of new meanings and intersections.

Given the notable Americentrism of these resources, it is possible that the interactions among *Pollock Record*'s collagist fragments were imbued by Mottram's academic background. Like the poets anthologized in Allen's *The New American Poetry*, Pollock's work was partially informed by a belief in the "vitality of a specifically *American* tradition" (Hickman 88). Through his job at King's, Mottram was deeply engaged in researching these traditions, as well as introducing them to many of his students: reading lists for his modules included both Pound and Williams, as well as Charles Olson, the Beats, Anne Waldman, Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and many more (Hampson & Edwards 15). Thus, it might be possible that the constellatory fragments of *Pollock Record* adopt the painter as a totemic figure, through which Mottram can pay tribute to American art and literature, which he saw as a great "stimulus" for innovative poetry in the UK ("The British Poetry Revival" 39). Although this interpretation admittedly relies on a problematic impression of British poets "passively absorbing the influence of Americans" (*Poetry Wars* 145), it nevertheless could explain why some components of *Pollock Record* seemingly develop connections between Pollock and matters that were more personal to Mottram himself. Consider, for instance, the line "I want you to fall in love with the picture, not the painter fall in love with the truth with yourself" (MOTTRAM 2/2/77). On a prima facie reading, this seems like a description of a possible aesthetic response to an artist's work, which eschews the lures of fame. This interpretation has some parallels with Pollock's biography: Namuth's film triggered an acute crisis for the painter, who felt he had compromised his principles by pretending to paint in front of the camera (Emmerling 76–77). Mottram was similarly concerned with the integrity of art and of the artist: his essays consistently deride the "poet demagogues" among the "establishment poets" and the "poet-laureates" ("Notes on Poetics" 37); for Mottram, these conventional writers degrade poetry by writing inconsequential, empirical poems designed for "quick consumption" (Mottram & Green n.p.). To borrow from Adorno and Horkheimer, Mottram believed that culture and entertainment could only be brought together through the "debasement of culture" (114). This loathing of "art that is uncritically formal [...] unambitious" and "academic yet narrow-minded" (Hickman 87) is an ethos that Mottram shared with the poets in *The New American Poetry*.

Such concerns would have been especially pertinent for Mottram during the composition of *Pollock Record*. Although the sheets themselves are dated 1978, there is evidence that Mottram had begun working on the poem at least a year earlier: a letter from Fisher, dated 14 November 1977, asks Mottram about his progress with a poem about Pollock (MOTTRAM 5/86/1-90).¹⁰ This places the project within a tumultuous period in Mottram's career as a poet and editor, as it would have been composed soon after the Arts Council's Witt Investigation into the organization of the Poetry Society. In July 1976, the investigators interviewed Mottram in his capacity as the editor of *Poetry Review*; it was a deeply insulting experience for the poet, who regarded the panel as bureaucratic nonentities that were unfit to question his judgements (*Poetry Wars* 75–78). When the Witt Report was finally published in October that year, it deemed that the layout and formatting of Mottram's issues were unsuitable for the representative publication for the National Poetry Centre. Ultimately, the recommendations of the Witt Report proved so divisive that, in March 1977, many of Mottram's associates walked out of the Society en masse. The poet himself responded to these events with an acrimonious boycott of the Poetry Society, which he upheld for the remainder of his life. In this context, aspects of *Pollock Record* appear to signify an extensive asseveration of Mottram's concerns about culture. As a consequence, the piece reaches beyond paying tribute to American art and literature; instead, it gestures towards the conflicts between commodity and autonomy that characterized much of the poet's professional life from 1971 to 1977, when the experimental and the establishment poets fought over the control of the Poetry Society.¹¹

I will return to the possible connections between *Pollock Record* and the fallout at the Poetry Society in due course. For the time being, I want to address certain additional implications in the line 'I want you to fall in love with the picture, not the painter fall in love with the truth with yourself'. Mottram's notes indicate that the line is adapted from Jiddu Krishnamurti's *Life in Freedom*. Again, the source carries a connection to Pollock's biography: the painter had been mesmerized by Krishnamurti's theosophy as a young man (Landau 24). However, because the sentiment coheres so closely with Mottram's convictions about what it means to be "concerned about art in" a "consumerist society" (Bush 519), it would be reductive to consider their significance solely in reference to Pollock's personal beliefs. Instead, Mottram operates akin to a paradigmatic *bricoleur*, in so far as he assembles his work from materials "which had not been conceived with an

eye to the operation for which they are used”, without “hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous” (Derrida 360). As a result, the line cannot be construed as a one-way tribute to Pollock. The quotations in *Pollock Record* permeate each other’s pores and interstices, creating layer upon layer of new relations in the process; therefore, the interactions between these materials cannot be construed as a passive absorption of American influences. More accurately, *Pollock Record* is an arena where Mottram attempts to actively work *with* Pollock as a mutual collaborator.

Why would Mottram wish to work with Pollock in this particular manner? One possible answer lies in *Pollock Record*’s creative development. Mottram’s preparatory notes suggest that while the project was ultimately designed predominantly for performance, this may not have been the poet’s original intention. The handwritten drafts for some of the fragments are labelled as “J.P. Elegy”; this could indicate that Mottram originally began *Pollock Record* as a component to his sequence *Elegies*, which was ultimately published through Galloping Dog Press in 1981. Indeed, Mottram did write an elegy for Pollock: *A Book of Herne* includes a poem titled “Elegy 18: Jackson Pollock as Herne” (53–54). However, the contents of this piece bear no relation to the fragments on the sheets; furthermore, the notes labelled “J.P. Elegy” also contain additional annotations that read “A J.P. Record”. In light of these ambivalences, it seems logical to surmise that Mottram commenced the project with an intention to include it in *Elegies*, but subsequently decided to revise it as a more ephemeral performance text.

It is difficult to determine the motivations for this decision on the basis of Mottram’s comments about Pollock, as his bibliography does not include extensive discussions about the painter. A transcript for “Transformations: American arts in the 1950s”, a talk delivered at the Tate Gallery in 1986, does mention Pollock, but only in passing (MOTTRAM 9/1/4-6). However, two of Mottram’s essays on poetics, design and performance—both published contemporaneously with the composition of *Pollock Record*—provide a possible answer. The first of these, “Open Field Poetry”, features a characteristic range of resources and examples, which the author cites in order to define these poetics as “a collage of moments” that demand a “properly indicative notation for articulation and performance” (15; 30). These arguments are undoubtedly informed by Olson’s influential essay “Projective Verse”, but Mottram is also keen to distance

his proposals from this prior account: the essay begins with references to Williams' 1948 lecture "The Poem as a Field of Action", and its references to "Projective Verse" are comparatively minor. Furthermore, the original manuscript for "Open Field Poetry" includes a note to Peter Hodgkiss—the editor of *Poetry Information*, who published the essay in 1977—where Mottram expresses his intention to broaden the concepts of 'field composition' beyond Olson's theories (MOTTRAM 9/18/10-13). As such, the essay is less interested in Olsonian notions of breath, and instead focuses on the implications that arise from the temporal, event-like qualities of open field works. For Mottram, the collage of moments and performance within these poetries identifies the text as a form that "exists and does not exist, exactly as contemporary descriptions in the philosophy of physics allow" ("Open Field Poetry" 15). In other words, by rejecting the illusion of permanence, "Open Field Poetry" sees poems—at least in part—as transient phenomena (15).

Similar arguments are also present in *Towards Design in Poetry*, the 1977 pamphlet I referred to earlier in this chapter. There, Mottram describes poetry as "a complex of possibilities in a piece of material" that features a "number of invitations to actions" (46). In addition, the pamphlet quotes from Harold Rosenberg's 1972 interview with Willem de Kooning, where de Kooning's paintings are described as events (42). Of course, this is not the only instance where Rosenberg described paintings in such a manner. The term also appears in "The American Action Painters", where it is used in reference to Pollock. Rosenberg argues that Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists saw their canvas "as an arena in which to act", and consequently no longer arrived at the easel with an image in mind but instead with material in front of them; this "encounter" produced an image that "was not a picture but an event" (25). Such an estimation of 'action painting' is comparable to Lyotard's theories about postmodern artworks, in that both are identified as events (Lyotard 81). But these concepts are also mirrored by Mottram's views on writing, which emphasize the primacy of "making the social event" of the poem, "and of course, in rare occasions performing it" (qtd. in Allen & Duncan 307). Here, as with Rosenberg and Lyotard, the work of art is situated within a temporal encounter; Mottram's emphasis on the 'social event' of the poem indicates a stance that, like Whitehead's conception of reality, prizes happenings over things, and process over substance. The motivations behind *Pollock Record*—which intended to "bring the relatively unexpected into the performance" (Mottram qtd. in Allen & Duncan 307)—could therefore be understood as

an enactment of concepts such as ephemera, transformation and indeterminacy, which inform the event-like artworks described in “Open Field Poetry” and *Towards Design in Poetry*. In other words, if *Pollock Record* is an arena where Mottram works *with* Pollock as a mutual collaborator, this interaction seemingly occurs via fusing the painter’s technique with the performance of the poem. Similarly to Rosenberg’s descriptions of action painting, Mottram’s collaged fragments are offered as the materials that his performers can use during a reading; however, as *Pollock Record* resisted premeditated ideas of order, the performed poem would ultimately be a result of this encounter between the sheets and the poet-performers. As I glance over the documents at Mottram’s archives, I notice a peculiar couplet on the sheets: “unframed space/in which to dance” (MOTTRAM 2/2/77). It seems like an apt summary of the interconnections between action painting and Mottram’s project. While the lines undoubtedly refer to Pollock’s techniques, they also evince the contingencies and instabilities through which *Pollock Record* may potentially be called into being.

To summarize, the above analysis of the sheets indicates that *Pollock Record* was designed to perform akin to Rosenberg’s descriptions of action painting. In this respect, Mottram’s project had a precedent in the inter-medial happenings that Allan Kaprow developed in the late fifties and early sixties. In his own words, Kaprow began his career as an action painter, but moved away from working with canvas after it began to feel too constricting as a space:

[the canvas is] still a stage. It’s pretty comfortable working in the middle, but as soon as you get to the edge you have to stop; and I didn’t feel like stopping. (qtd. in Sandford 224)

This desire for an expansive performance space was directly influenced by Pollock’s paintings. Kaprow thought that the scale of these works “could go on forever, in any direction including out”, which effectively rendered galleries obsolete by widening the field “of environmental and spatial referents” (“Jackson Pollock: An Artist’s Symposium” 61). In moving from painting to performance, Kaprow translated these impressions to his ‘rules’ for happenings, where “the performance [...] should take place over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing locales” (*Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* 190). *Pollock Record*, which relied on the unexpected eventualities that might occur during the event, conceivably signals a certain similitude with the fluidity of Kaprow’s happenings.

However, the poem's relationship to action painting is not without certain dubieties. Although the parallels between Mottram's project and Rosenberg's descriptions are informed by the poet's erudition, *Pollock Record's* status as an 'action poem' is problematized by the complexities involved with its performances.

Specifically, Mottram's project seems confused about the distinctions between the act of reading and the act of painting. For Rosenberg, Abstract Expressionism documented an encounter between the blank canvas and the artist and their materials. By contrast, Mottram's sheets are not the resultant document of a previous performance; they are the prerequisite materials *for* a performance. As a consequence, the project's process designates a relatively restrained frame of action: instead of capturing the physical movements of an artist's body on the blank canvas, the performers of *Pollock Record* simply read pre-prepared sections in an indeterminate order. It would therefore follow that—rather than the sheets or the subsequent versions published via *PS Magazine* and Writers Forum—a recorded version of *Pollock Record* would provide a more faithful adaptation of Pollock's paintings as performance documentation; yet such objects are seemingly excluded from Mottram's project. If, as Mottram claimed, the process of *Pollock Record* was motivated by the intention to stress the poem's "spatiality and [...] atemporal nature" (qtd. in *Necessary Business* 207), a recording would confine the project to a specific time and place, which would violate its intended ephemerality. In other words, a performance of *Pollock Record* is fundamentally characterized by an impossible absence: "to gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is a lie" (Derrida 84). Because the event ultimately veers away from Pollock's techniques, it might be difficult to view *Pollock Record* as an unframed space where Mottram and his collaborators can perform. In his paintings, Pollock operates akin to an *engineer*, who is the supposed origin of their own work, and supposedly constructs it out of nothing (Derrida 360). By contrast, in borrowing their utterances from fragments that are already sourced from borrowed quotations, Mottram and his fellow performers act as *bricoleurs* who are—in a sense—twice removed.

There is evidence that Mottram felt a degree of unease about these discrepancies between *Pollock Record's* designs and the praxis of performing it. In discussing the project with Pereira, Mottram concedes that if he felt "more courageous and less nervous", he would prefer to "invent things on the spot" (qtd. in Allen & Duncan 306). Despite these apparent anxieties, the conceptual aspects of performing *Pollock Record* reveal some

nanced and unexpected possibilities: although the event may not cohere with Pollock's techniques of action painting, it does—perhaps more interestingly—enact Mottram's understanding of performances as networks of recognized and unrecognized information. Consider Mottram's descriptions of performing the piece:

When we did the performance [...] Bill Griffiths, Allen Fisher and myself, the idea was this: I asked each to read one section and the three of us read one selection one after another. The poem would stop when you reread one of the sections. It was implied that you could be thoroughly perverse and curtail it very quickly because you were fed up to the teeth with the whole darn thing, or you could try and go on and on and on (qtd. in Skelt 25)

This account primarily reiterates the details I outlined earlier in the thumbnail sketch of the event. At the same time, the implication that the duration of the performance could be conditioned by either an active decision or an accident introduces a sense of suspense in the proceedings. Mottram continues:

Someone in the audience—I think it may have been Paige Mitchell—said to me afterwards—what I didn't bargain for [...] the tension was getting chronic: everyone wondering who was going to be the first to do the damage. I never even thought of that. Which was also interesting: that it had that effect on the audience. (qtd. in Skelt 25)

To elaborate, the indeterminate qualities of *Pollock Record's* duration produced an unexpected audience response. Their focus flickered between the present moment of reading and the immediate future of the event's conclusion, which heightened the tensions of the crowd. Like Deleuze's account of the concert in *The Fold*, the performance of *Pollock Record* implicitly identifies the spectator as a participant who contributes to the occasion's "active perceptions that are expressed among each other" (91). As a consequence, a performance of *Pollock Record* reconfigures the relationship between the audience and the poet-performers continuously throughout its duration. If they were inclined to do so, the readers could assert their authorial control by concluding the event intentionally; in these instances, the performance would ultimately mirror the hierarchies of the performance of authorship. Conversely, if the performance concluded as a result of an accidental repetition, the poet-performers were—like the

audience—unable to control the exact direction of the event. Like the crises of instability that Mottram charts in his essays on poetry and performance, *Pollock Record*—as a live event—is conditioned by its ambivalences between spectator and participant, authorship and slippage, and events and conclusions.

According to Mottram’s account, all three performers were—on this occasion—committed to carrying on as long as possible. Fisher remembers that they consequently felt nervous about the event, as their sense of uncertainty “create[d] a sense of energy, or an anticipation, of how things might go wrong” (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”). Due to this energy and anticipation, the performance was less about Pollock and more about keeping record; that is, the attentions of the poet-performers shifted from painterly procedures to the role of memory. Mottram’s account concludes with an observation of the event’s conclusion:

Bill Griffiths was the first to repeat one of the passages. It went on for about twenty minutes. He was not too pleased, because it WAS a mistake! He wanted to keep going much longer. (qtd. in Skelt 25)

In other words, Griffiths simply forgot that the fragment had already been read. This indicates that a live performance of *Pollock Record* is conditioned by both memory and forgetting; the entire occasion is transformed by what is noticed and what is not. Of course, these factors play a role in any encounter of this nature. For instance, when the contemporary poet and critic Drew Milne read at the University of Kent in 2010, he gave a rendition of his piece “city of dogs”. Before he began, Milne displayed the text to the audience and mentioned that its sections could be read in any order. While I remember the visual appearance of the page that night, I have no recollection of the specific contents of the poem; even when I subsequently read the poem in print, I was unable to piece together a memory of the version Milne had performed on that particular occasion. In this sense, then, *Pollock Record*—like “city of dogs”—does not regard its ‘script’ as a mnemonic tool “that subjects the apparently non-graspable to a new way of reading” (Clausen 15). Instead, Mottram’s piece is a complex *enactment* of memory.

This proposal requires some further elaboration. A performance of *Pollock Record* places the poem on a complex temporal plane where each decision by the poet-performers arises from a conscious reflection on the past. In other words, like Whitehead’s conception of the present as a

boundary that is simultaneously “blurred by a fading into memory” and by the “emergence from anticipation” (*Concept of Nature* 68), the performance emanated from the flux between past and present utterances. This mirrors some of the relationships that are forged within Mottram’s collagist practice as a whole, but it also demonstrates a key feature in the materiality of the piece. Because the performed *Pollock Record* is conditioned by the order in which the fragments are read, it regards poetry as a temporal and spatial phenomenon, where the text only exists for the duration of a particular occasion. Its transience arises from a continuum of moments that are sliding into history; its permanence is entirely conditioned by memory. In this respect, then, it might initially seem as if *Pollock Record* enacts memory according to a Bergsonian model, where the mind is only able to retrieve the odd recollection or two—while the past trails behind the present and preserves itself automatically (Bergson 184). Such a model of forgetting through ‘retrieval failure’—to borrow a term from clinical psychology—would at least characterize the conclusion in Mottram’s account, where Griffiths failed to recall which fragments had already been vocalized. However, because the poem itself is only “being made as it is being read” (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”), forgetting is a crucial component of its ephemeral design. Retrieval failure therefore applies only to the circumstances pertaining to the conclusion of each performance. By relying on the self-annihilating qualities of memory, *Pollock Record*—as a performed poem—is more closely related to notions of ‘storage failure’, whereby a memory system is unable to produce a set of recollections.¹²

Rather than the Bergsonian model, *Pollock Record*’s enactment of memory is thus more akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of short-term memory, which includes forgetting as a part of its process (*Thousand Plateaus* 17). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, this memory-type is identified as having a rhizomatic formation (17), which similarly coheres with Fisher’s impressions of the event’s social situation:

[T]he lack of exact scoring [...] added an element of uncertainty and unknowingness. You didn’t know what was happening next. You didn’t know if Bill or Eric were going to the right-hand side whereas you had just come down. You would lose each other, actually. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

As a result of this nexus where the three collaborators would lose each other, the performance recognized memory and forgetting as social actions

that might not necessarily follow a linear sequence of events. The reading, in other words, was situated in a “nervous, temporal and collective rhizome” (*Thousand Plateaus* 17). Deleuze and Guattari contrast these qualities with the arborescent, centralized structures of long-term memory, which is represented by an imprint, engram, a tracing or photograph. The pairing is telling: while short-term memory inevitably ends in either retrieval or storage failure—and is therefore characterized by effacement—long-term memory is primarily epitomized by documentation. While this contrast recalls the binaries of absence and presence, these mnemonic concepts operate in a more distinctive manner. *A Thousand Plateaus* describes rhizomes as consisting only of lines, whereas the idea of long-term memory resembles punctual systems of memorization that subordinate the line to a point, in so far as they only acknowledge lines as the coordinates for a particular point (326). If these distinctions are related back to *Pollock Record*, we can suggest that the performance itself is situated in the rhizomatic structures of short-term memory, while the sheets are indicative of long-term memory; the materials glued onto these scripts represent the points and coordinates found in Deleuzoguattarian punctual systems. The event therefore converts the mnemonic sheets into transient short-term memories, and produces a new ephemeral poem in the process. In other words, the performance is an occasion where “the line frees itself from the point” and renders the coordinates on the sheets “indiscernible” (*Thousand Plateaus* 324), as illustrated by Fisher’s experiences of uncertainty and unknowingness. By rejecting the linear coordinates that might establish a sense of direction or permanence, *Pollock Record*’s conceptual framework ultimately evinces the project’s aesthetic and social stance: in refusing the stability of documents, the performance seeks to eschew positions of hierarchy and control.

This refusal underscores the dichotomous nature of *Pollock Record*: the sheets and the performance are not necessarily different approaches to grasping the same object, as both demand a different conceptualization of what that object actually is. While the sheets—and their subsequent versions in *PS Magazine* and the cards published by Writers Forum—may aspire towards the unframed space of action painting, the performance’s rejection of documents configures the event as an enactment of short-term memory. In light of Mottram’s concerns for culture in a consumerist society, the latter could therefore represent a resistance to commodification. Barbara Clausen observes that performance art often views documentation as a “transformation of the significance of performance from the

image to a news value to a cultural commodity" (7), and this position may have resonated with Mottram's mood towards the end of the 1970s. Barry argues that the walkout from the Poetry Society was followed by a period of 'elected silence', as Mottram and his associates were determined to shun the damaging influences of the culture industry; however, this boycott also led to a cultural zone of exclusion that marginalized and displaced the radical poetics of the Revival (*Poetry Wars* 118). Likewise, Sheppard notes that the poets involved with the walkout experienced its immediate aftermath as a loss of self-confidence and collective energy (*When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* 31). In this context, perhaps the performance of *Pollock Record*—with its multiple variations that dissipate and become re-forgotten at the end of each event—assumes its ephemeral status as a kind of wilful exile.

With this in mind, I would like to cast one final glance towards the sheets for *Pollock Record*. Neatly filed in their folder in Mottram's archives, they remain the most complete documents of its performed version. Yet they provide only effaced tracings of their past. The event itself may forever elude us. At the same time, if we remember Mottram's suggestion that to read is to perform a poem, the 'readings' on the sheets themselves mirror the procedures of the ephemeral event. Specifically, Mottram's collagist practices perform *with* their source materials by placing them in a striation of meanings and relationships. This seamless inclusion is likewise analogous with the enactments of memory that occurred during the performed versions of *Pollock Record*. Just as Mottram, Fisher and Griffiths would lose each other during the reading, the materials on the sheets abandon their original contexts and forge new connections through their networks of ambivalence.

As I unfold the sheets on the desk and begin to read them again, I start to wonder if this chapter has also made *Pollock Record* perform. While the conceptual framework of rhizomatic short-term memory may be read into a performance of *Pollock Record*, it is unlikely that such features belonged to Mottram's preliminary design; these concepts instead emerged as an unintended consequence of the event itself. In other words, if Mottram designed the poem as "a container" that would not "contain too rigidly" (qtd. in Allen & Duncan 306), he may not have realized the full extent of this elasticity. While many of Mottram's associates worked with radically open forms, the rhetoric of his own poetry often assumed the shape of stern directives (Bush 438). When I asked Fisher about whether Mottram was driven towards concepts such as process and indeterminacy, he responded:

Eric was far more self-conscious about his performances, far more self-critical [...] [He] was accomplished on a scholarly level. He would know where things were coming from. But I also think that the scholarly level sometimes inhibited him somewhat. It made him self-conscious of what he was doing. [...] He always maintained a modesty that was difficult to understand. He would say that he was still learning. His experimentation was kind of reserved, I would say. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

It is therefore possible that—by analysing the performance of *Pollock Record* in conjunction with the self-effacing and self-annihilating qualities of memory—this chapter has allowed Mottram’s project to assume new and unexpected forms. Without wishing to perform an interpretive violence, these analyses indicate that the project was unwittingly unimpeded; at its elusive core, *Pollock Record* challenges our preconceptions of where the beginning and end, departure and arrival, and the origin and destination of the event can occur. Of course, the full implications of these complex relations are difficult to survey solely through Mottram’s project. However, similar concerns will also be addressed in the next chapter, which focuses on the intermedial convergences between Allen Fisher’s various projects during the 1970s.

NOTES

1. Here, I refer specifically to the archived flyers and correspondence with event organizers (MOTTRAM 11/1); correspondence between Mottram and Allen Fisher (MOTTRAM 5/86/1-90); and correspondence between Mottram and Bill Griffiths (MOTTRAM 5/100/1-36).
2. Fisher suggested that the performance may have taken place at the Poetry Society, but the dates on the sheets for *Pollock Record* indicate that it was performed after the experimental Revival poets had walked away from the institution.
3. For the full transcripts of these interviews, see Skelt 15–41; and Allen & Duncan 301–314.
4. Further examples of Mottram’s frequent references to performance can be seen in Mottram’s interview with the poet Barry McSweeney (McSweeney & Mottram 38); “Confidence in Performance”, an essay written for a collection of interviews titled *The Life of Poetry* (MOTTRAM 9/15/56-57); and “The Poetry Performance”, an essay written in 1975 for the first issue of *PS Magazine* (MOTTRAM 9/15/49-55).

5. A similar observation can be found in *Poetry Wars* 146. Barry also provides a detailed account of Mottram as a critic and teacher in *Poetry Wars* 145–152.
6. A fuller account of Namuth's film is available in B.H. Friedman 162–198.
7. Similar sentiments are also expressed in Namuth's film. However, it is also possible that Mottram discovered the passage through O'Hara's monograph, which quotes Pollock's statement at length (32).
8. A more extensive discussion of the disassociation between *She-Wolf* and its mythological resources is available in Emmerling 43–44.
9. According to his preparatory notes, Mottram found the citation from Pollock as quoted in B.H. Friedman 178.
10. It is possible that Mottram started working on *Pollock Record* as early as the beginning of the 1970s: one of his handwritten drafts for a section of the poem is written behind a leaflet advertising a lecture at Durham University in 1971 (MOTTRAM 2/2/77). However, it is not possible to ascertain whether these sections were written during that year. It is equally possible that these flyers were simply serendipitously nearby when Mottram wrote the fragments at a later date.
11. A thorough account of the tensions at the Poetry Society during the 1970s is available in *Poetry Wars* 73–104; 113–120; 160–172. They are also addressed in *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* 14–30. Briefer, additional reflections are available in Hampson & Edwards 31–35; 82–86.
12. A more comprehensive account of the use of 'storage failure' and 'retrieval failure' in clinical psychology and neurology can be found in Parkin 66–100.

You Are Invited to Perform: Process, Mutation and Participation in Allen Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain*

Towards the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that the elusiveness of *Pollock Record* might partially be caused by its pliant structures, which can be made to perform even more loosely than Mottram had perhaps intended. At the very least, its semi-improvised, aleatory practices are a somewhat anomalous presence within Mottram's oeuvre in general.¹ When I asked Fisher about the source for these techniques, he proposed Mottram was influenced by the "Bob Cobbing nexus" ("An Interview with Allen Fisher"), which is most likely a reference to the longstanding activities of Cobbing's Writers Forum, as well as the Poets Forum he briefly ran at the premises of the Poetry Society. Although Cobbing's own performances primarily involved improvised sound poetry, it is possible to distinguish some similarities between his work and *Pollock Record*. For instance, in the early 1980s, Cobbing produced a series of 17 pamphlets and sheets entitled "Processual", which involved processed photocopies of materials from "fragments of adverts, Muybridge images [...] scientific language, [and] rubbish" (*Poetry of Saying* 223). Here, the elaborate variations in material resemble some aspects of performing *Pollock Record*, as both works developed indeterminate mutations from previously selected resources. In this respect, the two projects are linked in their emphasis of process over product.

However, I would argue that many of *Pollock Record's* ideas actually bear a closer resemblance to the work of one of its co-performers—that is, the work of Fisher himself. After all, several of Mottram's comments quoted in the previous chapter—including his statements about the reading of the poem as a part of its production—are made in the context of Fisher's

Necessary Business. First published through Fisher's own press, *Spanner*, in 1985, this long essay is ostensibly a comparative analysis of books by Mottram, *cris cheek* and J.H. Prynne; nevertheless, Fisher's readings of these three poets are equally revealing as articulations that pertain specifically to his own poetics.² For instance, one section in *Necessary Business* notes that "unless the work is made active by the reader, it might as well be the rotten meat" that the performance artist Stuart Brisley left to decompose for his piece "And for today...nothing"; Fisher subsequently follows this observation with a statement that pertains specifically to poetics: "significant poetry can only take place through participatory engagement" (235). Such arguments build upon Mottram's views on the connections between reading and performing. While *Necessary Business* also articulates similar links, the essay goes a step further and makes this an imperative condition for each valuable artwork. Specifically, Fisher's aesthetics asserts that works of art require the viewer's (or the reader's) "engagement" in order to be created or produced (*Necessary Business* 165); any artwork is therefore produced again and again through this active participation, where the viewer's/reader's prehensions must 'complete' the piece each time they encounter it. This is significant, as Fisher's emphasis on moments of active engagement associates all artworks with the qualities of an event. Likewise, as this participatory ethos places its emphasis on the engagement of each individual viewer/reader, Fisher's notions are not light years away from the Whiteheadian and Deleuzoguattarian perspectives that were first outlined in the Introduction: Fisher's event-like artworks are also situated in a nexus where several active perceptions are expressed among one another.

Necessary Business is not an isolated example of Fisher's interest in this topic: his essays on poetics and aesthetics often indicate a highly attuned understanding of the relationship between concepts such as reading, event and performance. For instance, "The Mathematics of Rimbaud"—a work that precedes *Necessary Business* by 3 years—argues that, due to the artistic innovations that occurred across the twentieth century, the idea of "art as objects and poetry as poems" has gradually lost its credibility (2). Consequently, the essay suggests that contemporary artworks are instead characterized by their focus on "objects and processes, process-showing and methodologies in a world of multiple possibilities" (2). As a specific example, Fisher describes how these constellated possibilities take place in the event of reading a poem:

as soon as a formal model is intelligible, [and it] admits semantic realisation where meaning is apparent, that meaning changes in relation to the meaning

another may give it, or in relation to living after the first realisation of the meaning. And the meaning may take on a multiplicity that is summated or left impossible and so forth. (“The Mathematics of Rimbaud” 3)

In this respect, “The Mathematics of Rimbaud” details a processual understanding of poetry that eschews all senses of pristine closure; instead, the work of reading is never truly finished. Although the essay itself was published in 1982, similar concepts are already perceivable in Fisher’s earlier works, which were mostly designed as elaborate projects that took shape across multiple publications and iterations.³ As Fisher recalls, this conceptual approach was influenced by his early involvement with art and poetry in the late sixties:

Conceptual art was very strong in London around 1966–7 and into the 1970s. It was a big influence on what I was doing, because I was also looking at some of the writers who were using arithmetic, maths and devices to make works, almost like renaissance machines but revived. This was not actually new in poetry, but it was newly conceptualized. There was a lot of talk at the time of process, as a counterforce. You had procedural ideas with fixed procedures, deterministic models, indeterminate models, which in themselves were deterministic [...] and process became very important at the same time. So, there were systems and process [...] interfering with each other, and I used both. [...] Concept art was doing away with ideas of products and encouraging the ideas of the ephemeral and processual activities; poems that would change each time you read them. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

Drawing upon these concepts, Fisher frequently published his own projects as serially released pamphlets, which would frequently show the process involved in the work alongside the poems themselves. These ephemeral publications therefore both documented and extended previously conducted research and activities.

During the course of this chapter, I will provide a more detailed account of the implications in Fisher’s theories about concepts such as process and active engagement. At this stage, however, I want to broaden the present discussion. How do Fisher’s concepts translate in practice? What demands do they place on the act of reading? Drew Milne has questioned whether Fisher’s ‘process showing’ leads to “too many” poems with an overarching

“unfinished quality” (Fisher & Milne 29). In all probability, Milne is referring to several poems from the early stages of *Place*, which often seem akin to brief historical annotations:

This is the manor of Lambeth
 Terra Ecclesial de Lanchei. In Brixistan Hundred.
 once held by Goda sister to the Confessor
 taxed for ten hides (16)

Similarly, while Sheppard has praised Fisher’s ability to apprehend a multiplicity in a single text, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry* argued that Fisher’s poems sometimes lack an appropriate degree of transformation, and consequently resemble “a cut up lecture on art history” or other topics (193). However, Barry suggests that works such as *Place* fully integrate their socio-historical and scientific data, thereby challenging our “preconceptions of what constitutes the poetic” (“Allen Fisher and ‘content-specific’ poetry” 200). In effect, Barry’s arguments describe a readerly experience that is closely aligned with Fisher’s poetics: he argues that Fisher’s poems are—among other things—about reading as a method of engaging with our senses of the world. In addition, he sees this praxis as the result of a sustained participatory engagement, where *Place* reveals itself through an active process that is comparable to study; moreover, this engagement must be re-enacted during each instance of reading. But while Barry likens this active process to study, perhaps it is also possible to regard these acts as an encounter or a performance.

Considering the scope and complexity of projects such as *Place* or *Gravity as consequence of a shape*, it is understandable that—while Fisher’s biographical notes generally refer to him as both a performer and a poet—the majority of academic attention to his work has hitherto centred on his poetry. Even when publications acknowledge the links between Fisher’s artistic practices, they often do so in restrictively categorical terms: for instance, Mottram’s retrospective overview of “The British Poetry Revival, 1960–1975” proposed that Fisher worked in “two different poetic areas, not radically different, but enough to make singularisation inappropriate”, thus delineating between Fisher’s work as a poet and his involvement with “the Fluxshoe group of performers of poetry” (41). These distinctions are especially peculiar in the context of Mottram’s subject matter: during the early 1970s, when Fisher began to develop his poetic tour de force *Place*,

this work was carried out in parallel “to at least two other projects: *Blood Bone Brain*, which was started in 1971, and the *Art of Flight*, started in 1972” (*Place* 5). Both of these parallel projects involved conceptual, processual and process-showing art that informed the composition of *Place*. Significantly, as both *Art of Flight* and *Blood Bone Brain* involved different performance practices, their interaction with *Place* indicates a considerable overlap between Fisher’s printed publications and his performances. In fact, contrary to Mottram’s essay, *Blood Bone Brain* enacts these intersections on a considerable scale, and incorporates many of Fisher’s other publications within its overall structure. When the project eventually culminated in 1981, Fisher summarized it as a “performance involving three ranges of words, musics [sic], visuals as well as smells and movements” that were “designed through earlier works elaborating, changing and extending them” (*Blood Bone Brain Documents I* a.1). Consequently, any document connected to the project will raise questions about where the beginning and end, departure and arrival, and origin and destination might occur. This chapter investigates these interactions between poetry and performance in Fisher’s work, first by exploring the multiple genealogies of *Blood Bone Brain*, and subsequently by analysing the synchronicities between the project and the materials it deploys in performance.

Blood Bone Brain exists across many forms and media. In November 2009, Fisher sent me a bibliographical list that featured 144 items published between 1968 and 2008. The document included five separate entries identified as a part of *Blood Bone Brain*, where the formats ranged from pamphlets to microfiche documents and cassette tapes.⁴ However, as the list was designed to catalogue only “the main published items” from this period (“RE: af.biblio”), these five listings are by no means an exhaustive index of the ephemeral materials that were involved with the project. It does not, for instance, include the programme notes Fisher prepared for an early performance of *Blood Bone Brain* at Nottingham’s Midland Group Gallery in 1973. *Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72*, a visual chapbook from 1974, is similarly not labelled as a part of the project, even though its introductory notes state that the work—or at least its process—“will also be included in the book *Blood Bone Brain*” (4). In addition to these objects, versions of the project were performed in Nottingham, Blackburn and London during the early 1970s, and a reduced iteration was also staged as a part of Fisher’s residency in San Francisco during the 1980s. Consequently, even a synoptic overview of *Blood Bone Brain* must pursue a complex nexus of

relationships. As the project's genealogy is composed of multifarious knotted lines, it may be difficult to distinguish its points of origin. In "Thumbnail Lecture", Fisher claims that the project originated from an interpretive reading of the Egyptian "hieroglyph of wholeness (a jug containing the heart; a bone; a bird of prey)" (62), but this oblique averment requires some further analysis. The reference to hieroglyphs does not pertain to archaeological investigations per se, as Fisher's claim is based on his *interpretations* of the symbol; the statement in "Thumbnail Lecture" therefore gestures towards techniques of assemblage (where the 'whole' comprises a three-part pictograph) and transformation (where the 'jug containing a heart' becomes 'blood' and—as if by homophony—the 'bird of prey' becomes 'brain'). In other words, the genealogy of *Blood Bone Brain* is not simply a linear chronology; one must also consider the manner in which each of its components is put to use.

Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72 provides a curiously apt point of entry for these considerations. Although the pamphlet was not published until 1974, its composition began earlier in the summer of 1972. The work comprises photographs depicting sinks, each with an adjusted colouration. While the introduction states that it will contribute to *Blood Bone Brain*, there are no signs of these photographs in the microfiche booklets that Fisher published after the project came to a close. When asked about the relationship between the two projects, the poet could no longer remember his erstwhile intentions ("An Interview with Allen Fisher"). However, this pamphlet is still indicative of the milieu that contributed to the initial gestation of *Blood Bone Brain*. Published by Beau Geste Press, *Taken the days* emerged out of a "map of interactions" that Fisher encountered in a small community working in and out of a farmhouse in Devon during the early 1970s ("Beau Geste Press" 74). As he recalls:

David Mayor [...] Felipe Ehrenberg, Marta Ehrenberg and a few other people [...] rented a [...] 15-bedroom house that was falling apart. [...] He would invite people down for performances, and there were three or four printing presses there; everything from a very cheap duplicator or mimeograph, through to a small letterpress, with some litho work and thermography as well. That opened it up to poetry and art, and music. There were dozens and dozens and dozens of people you would get to know from Japan, America and elsewhere. It was a very vibrant scene ("An Interview with Allen Fisher").⁵

This setting also became the operational base for the international festival of live, graphic and published art works known as the Fluxshoe tour (Anderson 26). Fluxshoe, as its name acknowledges, was not a seamless continuation of Fluxus art from the 1960s, but instead it was based on negotiations around the ideas of this preceding movement. As such, with their propensity towards multivalent performances that were specific, but also flexible for each individual event, Fluxshoe and Fluxus shared similar conceptions of event and experience. For example, the procedures of Tomas Schmit's Fluxus piece *Zyklus*—where water was poured from one glass to another until it spilled or evaporated—and Knud Petersen's two-balled football match for Fluxshoe in 1972 both treat a “nonart activity” as a performance (H. Higgins 111).⁶ They intervene with the normal expectations of an everyday experience and treat the mundane occasion as an aesthetic encounter. The composition of *Taken the days* experiments with similar procedures. The sink in the photographs is presented as an *objet trouvé*, and the pamphlet's process seems to regard the activities involved in its production—from eating the curry to operating the printing press—as something akin to a performance. In this respect, *Taken the days* recalls Philip Auslander's identification of performance documentation as ontological proof of an event that has taken place (21).

Similar traits can be seen in a range of pamphlets that Fisher developed in the summer he began documenting material for *Taken the days*. *Ffacece*, which was started in June that year, identifies itself as book A in a series “lettered A, B, C, D” (n.p.). Chronologically, this makes the pamphlet the first component of *Blood Bone Brain* that unequivocally identifies itself as part of the project. As with *Taken the days* the material is predominately visual: the pamphlet focuses on a series of distorted images featuring the guerrilla fighter Genaro Vasquez Rojas, who fought for the Guerreran National Civic Association in Mexico during the late 1960s, and was killed by the Mexican national forces in February 1972.⁷ This context, along with introductory statements such as “the guerilla forces are weak everywhere and the enemy, however scattered he may be, is strong everywhere” (*Ffacece* n.p.), might suggest that the pamphlet is responding to a specific political situation. However, this position is never explicitly stated. Although Felipe Ehrenberg at Beau Geste Press is identified as the person who supplied the photograph, *Ffacece* shows surprisingly little interest in expanding on the historical relevance of its sources. It is far more

concerned with the process of its making, as indicated by the inclusion of detailed notes for the colours used during the printing:

1. Run stencil A in Red 200 times
2. Run A in Green 175 times over red A
3. Run A in Blue 150 over green + red A
4. Run B in blk 125 over Blue/Green + red A
5. Run B in Red 100 times over Blue/Green + Red A + Blk B
6. Run B in yellow or similar 75 times over Blue/Green + Red A + Blk + Red B
7. Run copy of page 5 through stenciled run off in Red maybe 25 times over page 6. (All the time keeping 25 sheets back)
8. Run B in Red 150 times
9. Run B in Blue 125 times over Red B
10. Run B in Green 100 times over Red + Blue B
11. Run A in Blk 75 times over Green/Red + Blue
12. Run A in Red 50 times over Green/Red + Blue B + Blk A
13. Run copy of page 9 through stenciled Run off in blue maybe 25 times over page 6
14. Feed pages one to thirteen into thermograph + Run off in inks left over (*Ffacece* n.p.)

These details precede the actual presentation of the images. Thus, when the pictures first distort the physiognomic features and gradually drain the colour so that the final page features only faint outlines of the face, one is continually aware of the techniques used to achieve these effects. If *Ffacece* “is a document recording the nature of things” (n.p.), as its introductory note asserts, it does not observe ‘things’ as unmovable, consistent entities. Instead, to adapt concepts from Deleuze, the monadic presence of these images is in fact akin to a schema of permanence that is realized in flux through several interacting forces (*The Fold* 91). Things, in other words, are conditional and open to change (Fig. 5.1).

Ffacece’s acknowledgement that things can always be altered helps to explain why, in 1973, Fisher referred to books A, B and C of *Blood Bone Brain* as “book events” (*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n.p.). When asked about the significance of the term, Fisher explained that it emerged out of a need “to be in the process of, rather than in the completions of” the work; on this configuration, such books could also be seen as events akin to “performances” (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”). Book B of *Blood Bone Brain* affirms these views. The work on *Creek in the ceiling*

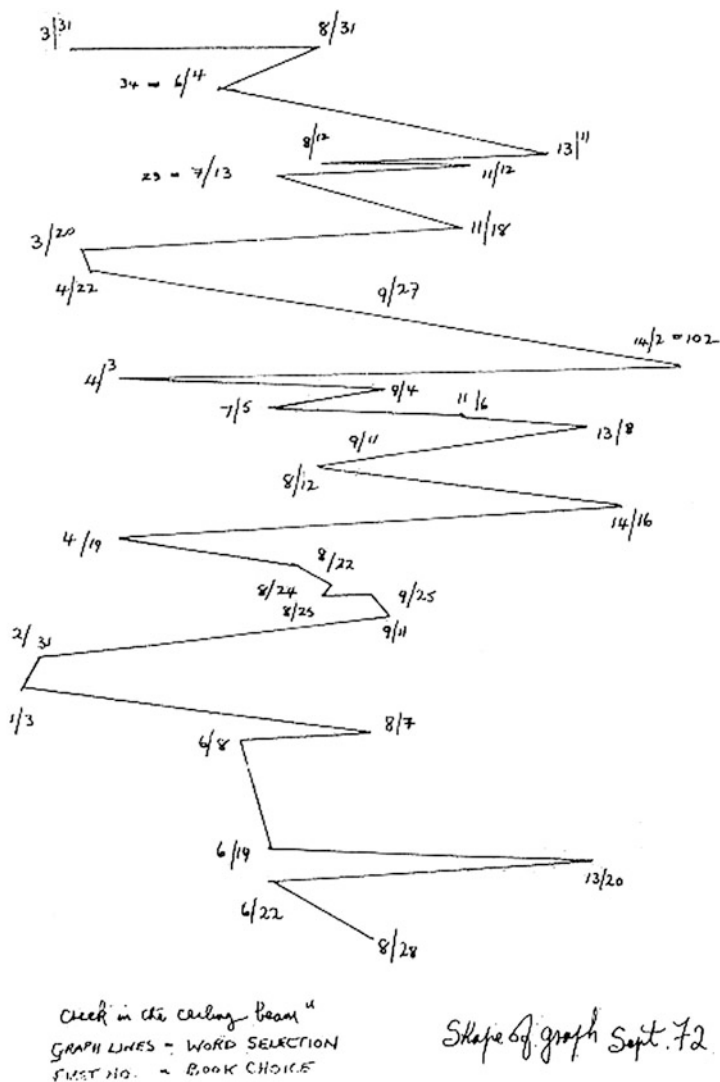


Fig. 5.1 The graph from *Creek in the ceiling beam*. Courtesy of Allen Fisher

beam commenced around July 1972; like *Ffacece*, it also featured a considerable degree of process showing—although the process, in this case, was far more intricate. The book comprised a poem “Creek in the ceiling beam”, which was composed through a selection of material sourced from writers such as John Ashbery, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, Robert Duncan, Larry Eigner, Roy Fisher, Jackson Mac Low, Charles Olson, Jack Spicer, Philip Whalen, Jonathan Williams and Louis Zukofsky. The lines were selected through an elaborate procedure where Fisher listed the times and dates he heard a ceiling beam creaking in his studio, plotted these times on a graph, and used the graph to select the material. In addition, the publication narrated Fisher’s quasi-jocular efforts to identify the causes behind the creak. As he explains:

I was aligning the sounds I was hearing in the beam that’s above me when I’m sleeping [...] I was linking it to the idea of ley lines and electric forces, and pigeons landing on the roof, and water systems not operating properly; whole ranges of things like that. Effectively, these were devices to connect different parts of location: where I had been, where I was going, where I had come from, where I knew people and where I knew particular aspects of the geography or geology [...] Some of these materials [included] cemeteries, which I was jokingly linking as if there were some secret significance in the link—but there isn’t of course. With those linkages and the timing of the creaks, I would develop poems. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

While the composition of the poem itself may rely upon these deterministic procedures, *Creek in the ceiling beam* as a whole is perhaps more reminiscent of Francis Ponge’s *Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi* (*How a fig tree utters and why*), in so far as both feature a considerable portfolio of material relating to the work.⁸ Like Ponge’s text, Fisher’s ‘book events’ situate the acts of writing “not at any finite point of completion but rather at its many instances of production” (“In the Place of Writing” 327). However, while Ponge’s process mostly relies on notes and facsimiles of earlier drafts, *Creek in the ceiling beam* also incorporates resources from Fisher’s extensive extra-textual research: diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs, as well as images of cisterns and hot water tanks, are all included. As the pamphlet appears so aware of its own production, its processual framework rejects the connotations of consumption that are associated with ‘completed’ books. Additionally, it acknowledges the vast scale of activities that may contribute to the process of its making.

Therefore, in contrast to the reader-response theories formulated by writers such as Wolfgang Iser, who regarded literary works as a performative “convergence of the text and the reader” (275), *Blood Bone Brain*’s early book events additionally identify the composition and construction of the work as comparable sites of convergence. This position—undoubtedly facilitated by Fisher’s work as a small press publisher—is also evident in *Sicily*, which was book C of the project. The schema for this component involved a series of cut-ups, but as before, Fisher was interested in showing the process of the work:

Sicily is almost over-elaborate in the ways it shows the printing process. There’s a moment when the book is unreadable—you wouldn’t try to read yellow print on yellow paper. The intention is not that you should be sitting down as with a novel. [...] [T]he description of the process is itself the process. I suppose I was influenced by collecting some of William Burroughs’ work from late sixties. [...] What particularly attracted me about Burroughs’ work wasn’t so much what he was telling me, in terms of his own fiction. It was to do with the way in which he displayed the cut-ups. It was the way in which the visual gave you messages and information that might have related to the text [...] It was to do with damage, destruction, almost to do with multiple consciousness. Those ideas interested me more than reading it as a fiction. [...] [W]hen he makes the cut-ups, the pages look damaged; they have thick black felt-tip pen or crossings out, retypings [...] They then provide the manuscript for the novels that Olympia and Grove Press and so on publish. They tidy all that up [...] It seems to me you then have a different text. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

Sicily also retains its visuality: the text features notations, crossings out, faint facsimiles of damaged clippings, as well as the waste left over from this process. But how are these visual elements meant to incorporate messages of ‘multiple consciousness’, as Fisher suggests? Perhaps the implications of the statement could be read in parallel to Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘assemblages’, specifically as they related to books. Fisher’s cut-ups are apprehensively conscious of a signifying totality that is manifested in the fiction, which threatens to present itself as the fixed face of the text; yet this fixity is continually dismantled by the visual design, which repeatedly defaces it (*Thousand Plateaus* 4). In other words, the process showing in *Sicily* unveils the damage involved with producing the book. This violence is simultaneously extended to the readerly experience: as Fisher mentions, the book contains yellow print on yellow pages that becomes almost impossible

to read, which suggests that there is no significant difference between what *Sicily* communicates and “how it is made” (*Thousand Plateaus* 4).

This notion of the book as assemblage is also a useful model for considering the relations between books A, B and C in *Blood Bone Brain*. Thus far, I have itemized each of these publications individually, whereas they were in fact conceived as components of a larger project; consequently, as Prynne would later note of other works by Fisher, these book events invite us to view each of them “in the light of the other” (153).⁹ Taking into account the gravitas *Efacece*, *Creek in the ceiling beam* and *Sicily* all place on procedure and process, it would appear as if they are less interested in straightforward signification than they are in function. As with the cut-ups in *Sicily*, our attentions move away from what is being *said* and towards what is being *done*. We must ask: how are these book events connected? How does reading one inform our encounters with another? What metamorphoses result from these convergences? One possible response to these questions lies in the final component of the series, book D. What contributions and connections does this book event entail?

Even in comparison to the preceding parts of the project, book D of *Blood Bone Brain* is radically elusive in its ephemerality. Although it was ultimately published in 1981 as a set of eight microfiches, which contained 784 pages in total, these documents actually serve as a textual archive for a series of performances from the first half of the 1970s. No full recordings of these events have survived, but the notational booklets Fisher prepared for them can shed some light on their proceedings. For instance, when *Blood Bone Brain* was performed as a part of a Fluxshoe event in Nottingham on 9 June 1973, the evening featured “music composed in loop from piano notes” played by Mottram, which Fisher had recorded to a cassette, while the performers—Felipe Ehrenberg, Paul Woodrow and his wife, all of whom had volunteered earlier that day—read “from [the] blue ‘poem’ sheets titled ‘creek in the ceiling beam’ [sic]” to a tape recorder (*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n. p.). The taped readings would subsequently be played back in various sequences. The specific volume of each reading was determined via Mac Low’s ‘playing card pip method’, which Fisher details as follows:

at each notated volume change [the] reader will be handed a playing card at which time he changes to fit the new volume as follows:—

Loudness indicated by suit

RED = LOUD BLACK = SOFT

pointed-up suits FULLY loud or soft
 rounded-top suits moderately loud or soft
 (*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n.p.)

As these details indicate, this performance already drew upon the project's earlier publications as its working material. Although the poem "Creek in the ceiling beam" was the most overt component, other elements of the project were incorporated in a slightly subtler manner. The looped music, for example, was based on the following notational pattern:

F
 FA
 CC
 EE

(*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n.p.)

This figure had previously appeared in *Ffacece*, along with a note specifying that it should be read "as in music" (n.p.). Similarly, an interpretation of the graph that charted the creaks in Fisher's beam was used as a score for controlling the volume of the FFACCEE tape (*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n.p.). The 1973 version of *Blood Bone Brain*, in other words, did not rely on simple reiterations of work that had appeared in the project's previous book events; instead, this performance incorporated these publications almost as if they were *transmedial* phenomena: certain motifs, along with the general aesthetic schema of procedure and process, are repeatedly filtered through a range of methods and technologies.¹⁰

The performance that followed in Blackburn on 14 July was closely modelled on the procedures developed for Nottingham. The evening began with a collage of the recordings from the previous event. After this, a selection of performers read from *Sicily*, and changed their volumes according to the playing cards handed to them. The music was composed from a tape of FFACECE that was cut into pieces and then rejoined by Fisher (*Blood Bone Brain Documents* 2 b.1 and b.2). However, while these early events were based on comparatively linear instructions, *Blood Bone Brain's* various metamorphoses were enacted to a more elaborate degree on 28 October 1974, at the premises of the Poetry Society in London. This

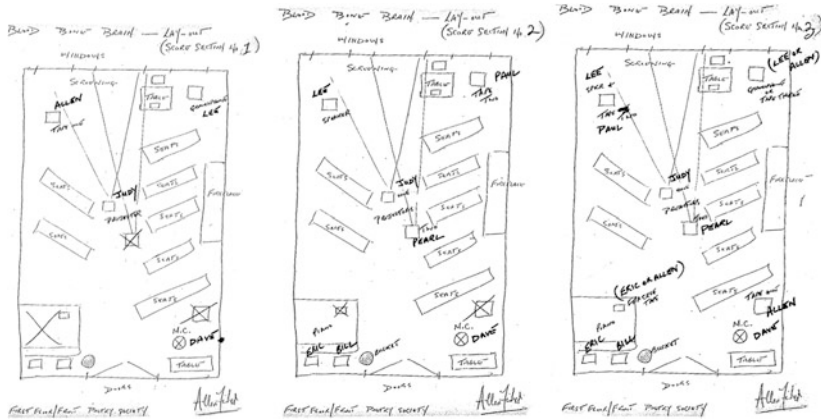


Fig. 5.2 Seating plans for *Blood Bone Brain* in London, 1974. Courtesy of Allen Fisher

iteration featured a greater number of performers, including music by Bill Griffiths and Eric Mottram, images projected by Jude Walker and Pearl White, as well as various materials read and recorded by Lee Harwood, Paul Brown and Fisher himself. “Creek in the ceiling beam” was read once again, although this time the reading happened at the start of the evening. This was followed by a recorded interview with Fisher, after which the proceedings properly began¹¹ (Fig. 5.2).

During the first set, two screens at the front were projected with BONE VISUALS, or various pictures of previously prepared ‘memory objects’, while a number of old records were played through a gramophone as BONE MUSICS. Lee Harwood, who was in charge of the gramophone, was provided a selection of 39 records and an invitation

To play a record every minute for 39 minutes.

To play the records in number order.

To observe the centre comments such as follows:-

“Middle” meaning start near the middle; or

“Cracked” meaning this record might break on you.

(*Blood Bone Brain Documents* 2 a.7)



Fig. 5.3 BONE VISUALS 1: Tulsa Hill Potato 1965 and BONE VISUALS 9: Norfolk grass (missing). Courtesy of Allen Fisher

The records would be changed in sync with the projected slides. The memory objects in BONE VISUALS were based on the ‘memory jars’ and other items that Fisher had previously prepared for a Fluxshoe exhibition. Observed in isolation, these artefacts resembled quasi-parodic time capsules: while the jars contained a broad range of quotidian realia—such as a potato—they are difficult to characterize as a symbolic “sanctification, commemoration, protection and elaboration” of an era or culture (Jarvis 228). Instead, they focused on ephemera and absence, as with ‘Norfolk Grass (missing)’; or damaged distortions such as boiled clocks; or decayed remains such as a sheep’s skull without its lower jaw. These sounds and images were accompanied by Fisher’s vocalizations of pre-prepared BONE WORDS, which he was free to read, elaborate upon, or ignore according to his preferences (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 4 a.2*). The words that were read would also be recorded on tape (Fig. 5.3).

The second set combined music, visual projections and performed words across two different themes: BLOOD and BRAIN. For instance, BLOOD & BRAIN MUSICS were based on a written score (Blood on Rain) for two performers—in this case Mottram and Griffiths, who were seated on a piano at the back of the room. One would follow the right hand score and repeatedly play bars one to forty for 13 min; afterwards, repetitions and variations of this pattern were carried out until 39 min had lapsed (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 2 a.4*). Meanwhile the second performer followed a similar pattern on the left hand score, although they were also allowed to improvise their own contributions (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 2 a.4*). The BRAIN VISUALS were subject to variation, but most likely included pictures taken in London and elsewhere. However, the materials for



Fig. 5.4 BLOOD VISUALS 1: Church, Camberwell cemetery, SE22. Courtesy of Allen Fisher

BLOOD VISUALS were far more localized and specific: all of the 39 images were based around south London, with 22 depicting churches, cemeteries or both. In contrast to BONE WORDS, which frequently involved poems by Fisher and others, BLOOD and BRAIN WORDS utilized a range of found texts and prose. Paul Brown, who read BRAIN WORDS, was given an arbitrary selection from John Buchan's *39 Steps* and instructed to record his reading.¹² Lee Harwood's BLOOD WORDS, on the other hand, consisted of information pertaining to the accompanying visuals:

Camberwell cemetery church

the cemetery once owned the 2 churches. the remains of one were all we found

the cemetery is in wood lane Peckham/Ref OS 34/74

at the apex of the triangle in the c in the c b

we drove from albany road, noting that R.W. Whites old factory had disappeared, to camberwell road and down into camberwell green where we

turned into Peckham road and rye lane via the one way system contrived to stop our entry and then to into peckham rye and the cemetery. (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 2* e.13)

By surveying the unities of ambiance within the spatial localizations of a modern city, as well as its principal axes of exits and pathways, BLOOD WORDS portrayed journeys comparable to a Situationist *dérive* (Debord 52). However, as with BONE WORDS, these texts were not a mandatory component; Harwood could also extemporize his “own words using the visuals as image vibration” (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 4* a.2) (Fig. 5.4).

The final set utilized the taped recordings from the first two. For instance, the primary task for Fisher and Brown was to replay their recordings back to the audience. Intermittently, David Miller—who acted as the master of ceremonies—presented the readers with numbered cards that indicated the desired volume of the sounds, ranging from silence up to an audible level. Similarly, Harwood was provided with a smaller selection of numbered cards for BLOOD WORDS, which he read according to the numbers Miller indicated. Mottram and Griffiths were also asked to observe Miller’s notations, and to play the bars that matched the number on the displayed card. Walker and White were given a limited number of slides to project, again according to Miller’s notations. There were also occasions where only one slide would be shown, or where half of a slide was masked; they were also permitted to manipulate the projections as they wished. As a result of these cues, the third set was occasionally reduced to silences and blank screens. In other words, the evening ended by enacting a series of variations of the performance that had just taken place. However, these variations could also be tantamount to violence: if the first two sets provided a loosely configured structure to the proceedings, the final section undermined it through effacement and defacement.

Despite the details above, my summaries of *Blood Bone Brain* in performance are unavoidably incomplete. Like the sheets for *Pollock Record*, Fisher’s microfiche archive only provides evidence of what may have occurred from a preceding, speculative space; what is left behind are plans of actions, not the actions themselves. The notes therefore resemble publications such as *Creek in the ceiling beam*, where the process occupies more space than the completed ‘product’ (that is, the performance or the poem). However, the existing schemata are detailed enough to reveal *Blood Bone Brain*’s genealogical links to Fluxus and Fluxshoe. The overarching

ethos of Fisher's project corresponds with Fluxus' eschewal of the art object as a non-functional commodity, as well as the inclusionary and intermedial methods of the group.¹³ While *Blood Bone Brain* as a whole traverses across a range of media, the performance in 1974 demonstrates how—in Irina Rajewsky's words—these “medial forms of articulation” are “present in their own materiality”, primarily in order to “contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire” event (52). The flexible, open-ended and non-site-specific designs of the project share common features with the Fluxus events staged by Schmit, George Brecht, Dick Higgins and others. At the same time, Fisher's elaborate notes are the antithesis of the simply scored Fluxus activities like Brecht's *Two Elimination Events*, which simply repeats the instructions to empty a vessel (H. Higgins 112–113). In this respect, while the origins of *Blood Bone Brain* may be linked to the constellations surrounding Fluxshoe and Beau Geste Press, by the time the performance arrived in London, its scope had extended far beyond the dimensions of this nexus.

An examination of the multiple genealogies of *Blood Bone Brain* can itemize the complex facets of the project, but this analysis may also generate as many questions as it answers. Apart from the readings of “Creek in the ceiling beam” and other aforementioned examples, how do these performances work with the early book events of the project? More specifically, what approach does *Blood Bone Brain* assume towards poetry and performance? To a degree, the event seems to resist such questions; the taped interview at the beginning of the performance claims its proceedings “are not yet within grasp”, and that “it is a note of decadence to call” them poetry (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 2* e.5). Nevertheless, in a letter to Fisher from November 1974, Mottram describes the occasion as an intersection performance that speaks via synchronicity (MOTTRAM 5/86/1-90). These intersections might be relatable to Fisher's later dictum in “The Mathematics of Rimbaud”: “poetry is always ‘yet to be found’ in the process of its making, and that making continues to take place through the physiology of the reader” (2). That is, perhaps a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* acts as a conceptual ‘physiology’ in which this making and remaking occurs (Fig. 5.5).

This proposal is necessarily tentative, as it can only be explored via the microfiche slides. However, in contrast to the loose instructions of Mottram's *Pollock Record*, Fisher's notes provide detailed indications of the intermedial exchanges that took place in a performance of *Blood Bone Brain*. Consider, for instance, “BONE WORDS: 2” and its accompanying



Fig. 5.5 BONE VISUALS 2: Remains of an edible book for book fair 1971. Courtesy of Allen Fisher

projection of a rotting *Edible* magazine. Fisher began producing these magazines in the late 1960s, “using rice paper, writing on it with cochineal” and printing them “via a gelatine press [with] shortcake pastry for covers”, before finally storing them “in individual sandwich bags” (“RE: Edible”). Primarily, *Edible* featured poems by Fisher, Pearl White, Dick Miller and others, and while some ‘poisonous’ editions were made of paper, others were genuinely edible.¹⁴ Therefore, each issue of the magazine was truly ephemeral, as it had to be eaten before it grew mouldy and rotten. These circumstances also inform the content of “BONE WORDS: 2”:

trying cochineal paste
 print rice
 1967 to eat trying
 open mouth hung
 press stretch clipped to deckle

eaten

[...]

not Happy Birth shortened

cake pastry

kneaded to conceal content

annealed wit

fat whipped past sonnet

rice patter

Pearl White Mouth Poem

in sandwich bag

ten pence.

(*Blood Bone Brain Documents* 4 a.7)

The poem depicts the production and the uses of the magazine on the slide; thus, the event of reading “BONE WORDS: 2” alongside the projection performs an intermedial enactment of Fisher’s poetics. The audience is presented with ‘an object’ (the magazine on the slide), while the performer simultaneously narrates the process of its making (through vocalizing the poem).

This analysis presupposes that the performance unfolded exactly as the notes stipulate; however, as *Blood Bone Brain* permitted a wide range of improvisation, the performed poem could also be elaborated upon or ignored in its entirety. It is therefore likely that the performed words differed significantly from the pre-prepared text. As Fisher explains:

what I tried in *Blood Bone Brain* performances was [...] to give myself different indicators to talk. It [was] like a theatre of memory [...] you arrange the slides in such a way that it gives your memory indicators. [...] When the slide would come up [...] I would use it to extrapolate and talk and improvise. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

To elaborate, “BONE WORDS: 2”—as it appears in the notes—is a prospective utterance: it is there to support the performers in case they feel unable to improvise. It consequently follows that, while the poem may enact an instance of process showing by describing the production of an

Edible magazine, its position within the performance is more akin to the impermanence of such ephemera. The ‘permanent’ documents, like the image of the *Edible* magazine and the poem that accompanies it, do not constitute stable bodies of work, but are instead *reproductions* (in the case of the projection) or *potentialities* (in the case of the text). As a result, this section of *Blood Bone Brain* bears a resemblance to the relations between fixity and damage in *Sicily*: the process of performing these works can destabilize their apparent materiality in multiple ways.

In this respect, the self-archived notes for *Blood Bone Brain* act as a plane of consistency for the project as a whole. They do not masquerade as totalizations, but instead present “consistencies and consolidations” that lead to “continuous variations, which go beyond constants and variables” (*Thousand Plateaus* 558). *Creek in the ceiling beam* provides an apt example of this. Whether read aloud, played as a collaged recording, or used as a ‘volume score’, this component plays a role across the first three performances of *Blood Bone Brain*. In 1974, however, its intermedial presentations were intensified. For instance, many of the cemeteries in BLOOD VISUALS also appear in Fisher’s quasi-jocular studies of the creaking beam. Additionally, the performance featured a large plank of wood that was meant to symbolize the beam itself; periodically, two volunteers would carry the beam among the audience, thus obscuring the crowd’s view of the slides. In this context, reading “Creek in the ceiling beam” at the start of the event acted as a prelude that foreshadowed certain themes in the performance. Yet the performance itself did not focus on the poem, but instead elaborated upon the process behind the text. Again, the structure of the event is comparable to the publication as a whole: *Blood Bone Brain* first presents the poem and then shows the concepts and resources involved in its composition. But are these ‘showings’ capable of generating new ideas about the work?

Earlier, I suggested that the BLOOD WORDS and VISUALS pertaining to Camberwell cemetery and church provided a verbal and visual account of an excursion that resembled a Situationist *dérive*. Although the ramshackle church is the most prominent feature on the slide, it is worth noting that the words identify it only as ‘remains’; furthermore, these remains are paired with another building that has been completely demolished. The surrounding cemetery, while marginal in the photograph, is therefore the milieu’s prevailing fixture. As a consequence, the synchronicities between the first BLOOD WORDS and VISUALS can be depicted via Raoul Vaneigem’s essay “Comments Against Urbanism”,

which identifies cemeteries as “the most natural areas for greenery that exists” because they are “the only ones to be harmoniously integrated within the framework of future cities” (123). At the same time, these interactions also denote a further reference to *Creek in the ceiling beam*, where a section titled “LOCATION OF SITE FOR EVENT” opens with a study of an Ordnance Survey Map for South London:

Found a straight line joining Camberwell Cemetery church and the cemetery church at Morden passing through, as it does, the cemetery and church at Mitcham and also Tooting Bec tube station. (n.p.)

The section continues with similar measurements: Fisher draws another straight line from Camberwell to churches and cemeteries in Herne Hill, Clapham Common, Barnes, Osterley, Heston and Harlington; he then forms a triangle by drawing a straight line from the cemetery church in Chelsea to the one near Wimbledon Park; finally, after drawing a central line from North Cheam to a church on New Park Road, Fisher returns to Camberwell, where he joins a straight line from the borough to the cemetery church at Twickenham, passing through a cemetery at Roehampton Vale and the room with the creaking beam (n.p.). In sum, Camberwell cemetery is a pivotal location for the ‘research’ carried out in the pamphlet, and the inclusion of the slide in the performance continues the intermedial variations of Fisher’s process showing.

Is it possible to negotiate between these contrasting interpretations of the first BLOOD WORDS and VISUALS? As I suggested earlier, Fisher’s investigation of the beam was partially humorous. In particular, the churches and cemeteries were included as a satirical nod to various studies on ley lines:

[T]hese straight lines were routes for the people delivering salt for the different prehistoric groups [...] They would line up to a particular node or a hill, or a valley or a gap. Quite often, something like a church or a tower would be built to give them this focus. Another thought about that in Britain is that people communicated through bonfires [...] [I]t’s an odd history, because it is very fraught with invention, and romanticism, and nonsense [...] It’s the same time as John Michell is writing his books, in which the alignments of churches are actually flying saucer landing sites; that kind of nonsense. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)¹⁵

It might therefore be tempting to liken this process to George Maciunas’ notions of Fluxus as “good, inventive gags” (qtd. in Hendricks 26).

However, since *Blood Bone Brain* operates by elaborating and extending its previous components, the images relating to *Creek in the ceiling beam* are also open to reconfigurations. Their significations can change in relation to the meaning another may give it, or in relation to living after the first realization of one particular understanding. For instance, in the spring of 1974—after the publication of *Creek in the ceiling beam* but before the London performance of *Blood Bone Brain*—Fisher published the first book of *Place*.¹⁶ It included the following short passage:

our brain volumes
 polluted by our senses that
 now can tell us nothing
 except that we are told we are flying or that
 yes the ceiling beam creaks
 & our children smell of the dead. (*Place* 53)

This explicit reference to the creaking beam undermines the light-hearted tones of the earlier pamphlet. Instead, Fisher's failures in finding the cause of the creaks are incorporated to a broader network of poor health and systemic violence at the hands of the state. Rather than learnt, this information is now transferred indifferently and unautonomously; this attempt at mastery over knowledge—in other words—mutilates the collective subjects of the passage, thus contributing to Fisher's calls for intelligence to be "humanised" (Bush 103). Consequently, the extract situates the investigations of *Creek in the ceiling beam* alongside the abstract "factual non-sense" that Fisher critiques throughout the first book of *Place*, which reveals the violence behind these previous 'gags' (12). A similar situation occurs in the performance of *Blood Bone Brain*. Although the photograph of Camberwell church and cemetery is linked to *Creek in the ceiling beam*, the significations of the image are diverted: as "BLOOD WORDS: 1" focuses on the dereliction of the building, it directs our attention away from the process of *Creek in the ceiling beam* and back towards the ideas proposed in Vaneigem's "Comments Against Urbanism". Just as some of London's churches were first built on top of pre-Christian sites, here the ubiquity of urbanism takes over from God (Vaneigem 122); consequently, BLOOD VISUAL 1 can be paired with economically deprived tower blocks—such as the Aylesbury Estate—which were built in London during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ Further still, the ubiquitous presence of urban

development also gestures towards Constantinos Doxiades' concepts of a *Dynamegalopolis*, a sprawling and chaotic city that has grown to the point of irrationality and dysfunction (345–346). The same cityscape appears in the subsequent books of *Place*:

the street IS a field of metal
 pressed and crushed
 the shops are TO LET
 to let the cars move
 cars move out to now centres
 already outside of
 visual clench [...]
 [...]
 so this is transforming to dream
 where ideal solutions are propelled
 into static cells pumping dynamic growth
Dynamegalopolis
 in which Scamozzi's bones shift in dust (320)

Thus, the meanings behind the first BLOOD WORDS and VISUAL stretch beyond process showing and satire to comment on the accumulative growth from an urban landscape to a *Dynamegalopolis*. However, like Vaneigem's essay, Fisher does not observe the decay of Camberwell church with an ecclesiastic nostalgia; rather, the situation is depicted as one conjuncture in a long procession of uncaring homogenous powers that are "on the verge of asserting total mind control" (Vaneigem 122).

In other words, a performance of *Blood Bone Brain* facilitates both a state of proposal and a breakage from that proposal: it may seek to incorporate elements from its previous components, but the event also allows these works to be undermined or transformed by additions, extractions and reconfigurations. The performance therefore invites its participants, whether they are performers or members of the audience, to enact the actualizing activities of reception and engagement that Fisher maps out in "Mathematics of Rimbaud" and *Necessary Business*. However,

these enactments are not solely dependent on circumstantial differences that pertain to the particular mood or ambiance of the event. As with *Creek in the ceiling beam* and the image of Camberwell church, these transformations might be influenced by factors that at first seem remote. In fact, the first book of *Place* is in dialogue with *Blood Bone Brain* so frequently that categorical distinctions between the two begin to seem inappropriate. For example, another fragment from the first book provides a fresh perspective for considering some of the memory objects in BONE VISUALS:

the tracks that confirmed our sanctuaries
 are torn apart
 in 1806 one area of waste near Stockwell and
 another at Norwood allotted for burial
 upon unquiet earth our senses are torn
 our memories jarred to forgetfulness (*Place* 30)

When read in isolation, the ‘jarring’ seems like a causally linked reverberation of the tearing that takes place in the preceding line. In this context, the fragment connects with the motifs of violence and debasement that are enforced upon the catatonic inhabitants of *Place*. The memories they possess—and the memories others may possess *about* them—are all components of the haemorrhaging senses that are polluted, stifled and ignored throughout the early parts of the book.

Yet the line could also refer to the memory jars of *Blood Bone Brain*, and thus allude to the process of performing BONE WORDS. As I argued earlier with reference to “BONE WORDS: 2”, Fisher’s use of the slides as a theatre of memory destabilized the apparent fixity of the pre-prepared texts. Therefore, the relationship between the projected objects and the spoken words is comparable to the consistent and inventive memories that Fisher describes in “The Mathematics of Rimbaud” (5). The memory objects represent the former, as their pathways seem more or less determined, structurally stable and difficult to divert; for instance, the remains of an *Edible* magazine would gradually decay to an inedible and unreadable state of forgetfulness. By contrast, BONE WORDS represent the poetics of inventive memory; they are topologies that disrupt the canalized and determined directions of consistent memory, and thus create new pathways in the process.¹⁸ As a result, memory is reinvigorated through inventions

and perceptions, as the correlations between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain* enact a mutual interrogation of the authoritarian structures that the works oppose. However, the synchronicities between these parallel projects flow in both directions: just as *Blood Bone Brain* can inform our reading of various fragments in *Place*, the poetic project also permeates the performance in multiple ways. At times, this may result in paradoxical circumstances. Although the ‘memories jarred to forgetfulness’ might be reinigorated by the poetics of inventive memory, this situation is simultaneously marked by impermanence. The improvised moments will also be torn and dismantled because—like the short-term memory practised in *Pollock Record*—they include forgetting as a part of the process. In fact, *Blood Bone Brain* anticipates this deterioration by incorporating the failures of memory within its proceedings; for instance, the silences and blank screens in the final set could be seen as representations of the damage inflicted upon our recollections. Thus, the performance asserts that the artistic production of ‘inventive memory’ can only take place momentarily in each moment of active reception.

Fisher describes these serial modes of production and reception as a process of ‘facture’—a term he derives from art history. In its traditional context, facture describes an artist’s handling of techniques such as brush-stroke, as well as the use of these materials in a descriptive and expressive capacity (Zurier 29). However, as the ‘faktura’ of Russian constructivism indicates, it can also denote systematic investigations that incorporate “the technical means of construction into the work itself” (Buchloch 89). Fisher’s use of facture is perhaps more closely related to the constructivist definition than it is to the traditional understanding; but even so, the ethics behind his definition remain distinctive. He contrasts facture with concepts such as ‘create’ or ‘make’, and argues that while these imply hierarchical “completions and finished products”, facture remains open and includes “the viewer in the production process of the art” (“RE: Facture”). As such, Fisher’s characterization is somewhat comparable to Jerome McGann’s version theory, which argues that each edition, revision or iteration of a particular work is a new—or variant—text.¹⁹ More significantly, Fisher’s facture also relates back to certain ideas in Whitehead and Deleuze. By involving the viewer in the art’s production process, facture continues the ethos of active engagement that Fisher theorized in “The Mathematics of Rimbaud” and *Necessary Business*. As I noted earlier in this chapter, these essays characterize artworks as being situated in a nexus where several active perceptions are expressed among each other; similar notions of intersubjective ‘authorship’



Fig. 5.6 BONE VISUALS 10: Sheep's skull less lower jaw, Westmorland, 1972. Courtesy of Allen Fisher

are likewise implied by the production processes of *facture*. Moreover, Fisher's understanding of *facture* as an eschewal of completions and finished products also reflects Whitehead's conceptions of reality, which stress the role of active production and kinetic encounters. Like Whitehead's processual concepts, Fisher's *factured* artworks—whether they are paintings, performances or poems—are more fluid than stable, are permeable rather than closed, and are open to states of perpetual renewal (Fig. 5.6).

These concepts are also present in “BONE WORDS: 10”, a text that further entangles the connections between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain*. The first book of *Place* concludes with an excursion to the Lake District, which—in the 1974 edition published through Aloes Books—contains the following extract:

in a steep climb
 old settlements Threkeld [sic] stood out
 as I stood there

lifting stones I
 picked up the skull of a sheep
 all around the sheep bleat
 the quarry exaggerating [sic] carrying their
 bodies' volume and vibrating it
 as I dropped the skull
 I recrossed that field retook the skull &
 left "bad luck" they sd.
 "all its flesh eaten lower jaw missing" (*Place: Book I* 99)

"BONE WORDS: 10" suggests that the poem is at least partially based on actual events. The prepared text is almost identical to the poem, and the accompanying slide features the skull in question. In fact, the notes for "BONE WORDS: 10" describe it as "an extract from *Lakes*, a set cut into" the first book of *Place* (*Blood Bone Brain Documents* 4 b.1). The diction is revealing: *Lakes* is not necessarily an inherent component of *Place*, but rather something that is cut into it. However, the 'cutting' in this instance does not suggest the 'damage' and 'destruction' that Fisher performs in works such as *Sicily*, as the relationship between *Lakes* and the rest of *Place: Book I* is far more symbiotic. For instance, the section that precedes Fisher's encounter with the sheep's skull combines descriptions of Dove Cottage with concerns about tremors in the earth, before concluding with lines that read as if they were stage directions for a play: "(at this point a reshewing of the plates/involved with place XIX on page 59)" (*Place: Book I* 98). The page in question features a short archaeological note:

a Neanderthal skull with a hole in its base
 artificially enlarged
 was found within a circle of stones on the "floor"
 in Monte Circeo, Italy (*Place: Book I* 59)

The relationship between 'place XIX' and the notes about Wordsworth's cottage seems oblique at best; however, the 'reshewing' of the Neanderthal skull conceivably operates as a prefiguration of the sheep's remains in the subsequent poem. By comingling Fisher's discovery on the field with this

previous scholarly encounter, *Place* fuses a covalent bond between the two fragments: the ‘steep climb’ of Threlkeld Knotts merges with Monte Circeo; the two skulls blend together; and two violent realities are simultaneously made present. After the Neanderthal skull in Monte Circeo was discovered in 1939, anthropologists proposed that its mutilated condition resulted from a ritualistic murder involving decapitation and cannibalism.²⁰ Thus, the experiential multidimensionality between these pages connects this ritualistic act with the consumed flesh on the sheep’s skull, which provides an impression of the continued brutality of ‘masters’ against their ‘inferiors’. The parallels between these sections can therefore be read alongside Fisher’s anger at London’s unchanging political superstructures, where justice and opportunity have been unevenly distributed since the times of antiquity:

In republican Rome
 centre of political gravity in an executive
 limited only by law the nomosic addition
 citizen auctoritas elected by the rich
 a class with inherited training arenas
 with disproportionate voting power (*Place* 348)

The covalent bonding between these fragments is also comparable to *Blood Bone Brain*’s intermedial synchronicities. In fact, the lines concerning the ‘plates involved’ almost mimic the interactions between the projected slides and the various participants. But what is the effect of incorporating the extract from *Lakes* into “BONE WORDS: 10”? How is the poem put to use during the performance?

Of course, like all BONE WORDS, the extract was open to elaboration or improvisation; however, the text included in Fisher’s notes for the performance already departs from the version printed in the 1974 edition of *Place*. Where the poem reads ‘lifting stones I/picked up the skull’, *Blood Bone Brain* removes the pronoun entirely; likewise, the ‘sheep’ are removed from ‘all around the sheep bleat’; the bodies’ ‘volumes vibrating it’ becomes the ‘volumes vibrating them’ (*Blood Bone Brain Documents* 4 b.1).²¹ Finally, while the poem recounts that the speaker dropped the skull, the pronoun is once again removed from “BONE WORDS: 10”; the impersonal line is effectively suspended in isolation between the two stanzas. Although these

edits are minor, the persistent removal of the ‘I’ is striking. However, facture can offer a possible explanation for these edits. In David Summer’s work, facture is described as a semiotically indexical concept, in so far as it implies an “immediate relation to a prior cause” in the way that a footprint denotes “the former immediate presence of a foot” (74). A similar situation occurs with the performance of “BONE WORDS: 10”: irrespective of their specific substance, the spoken words would nevertheless respond to the previous encounter with the skull. In addition, Summer describes the language of facture as notional metaphors that stress the reflective capacities of the mind in formulating concepts and relations (107). To illustrate this proposal, he draws upon tools developed during hominid evolution and proposes that the facture of these implements not only allowed adaptation, but also created the expectation of further adaptations, thus multiplying agency by enabling the activities that make these alterations possible (109). The process of facture in “BONE WORDS: 10” is analogous with these conditions of ‘notionality’. This section of *Lakes*, which is first modified by its intersections with *Place*, is further adapted by its inclusion within *Blood Bone Brain*, where it is potentially reconfigured during each event. Therefore, the diminishing presence of the first person in “BONE WORDS: 10” acts as an indicator of Fisher’s intentions to include the audience in the process of facturing the performance, either by taking part physically or by actively engaging with the responses inspired by its intermedial synchronicities. In sum, the facturing of *Blood Bone Brain* does not simply permit the intersubjective authorship of the event; more precisely, the performance’s emphasis on fluidity, permeability and temporality *demand*s that a collective authoring takes place. In an event where “you are invited to perform” (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 1 a.1*), any individual ‘performance of authorship’ gradually loses its credibility.

I have outlined these intersections between *Edible* magazine, *Creek in the ceiling beam* and sections of *Place* in order to emphasize the strangely chimeric practices of *Blood Bone Brain*. Initially, it might seem as if the project constantly twists back on itself to consume its previous components: *Ffacece*, *Creek in the ceiling beam* and *Sicily* are all assimilated among the various performances; furthermore, it might seem as if these materials do not quite satiate *Blood Bone Brain*, as the project also ingests other works that were developed beforehand or in parallel to it. In some respects, these manoeuvres bear a resemblance to certain descriptions of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘body without organs’. Originally borrowed from Artaud’s essay “To Have Done With Judgement of God”, Deleuze and Guattari use this term to describe an undifferentiated and unhierarchical plane that is beyond

surface appearances.²² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they also describe how the body without organs can exist as three distinct types: it can take shape as a ‘healthy’ and operative model, or as “the cancerous BwO of the fascist inside us”, or even as “the empty BwO of a drug addict, paranoiac, or hypochondriac” (181). Like the healthy model of the concept, *Blood Bone Brain* operates as a conjunction of flows—or a continuum of intensities—that can be plugged into “other collective machines” and assemblages (*Thousand Plateaus* 179); during these convergences, it transmits its own intensities while other energies are transmitted through it, and both sites are transformed as a consequence (*Thousand Plateaus* 4). A similar process occurs throughout the examples discussed in this chapter. For publications such as *Ffacece*, which *Blood Bone Brain* alters from visuals to music, these mutations occur on a material level. More frequently, however, these manifold convergences can also alter our perceptions of *Blood Bone Brain* and the materials that pass through it. For instance, the research in *Creek in the ceiling beam* helps to explain the inclusion of Camberwell church in BLOOD VISUALS; at the same time, the intersections between the slide and the corresponding BLOOD WORDS evoke new realizations about the social realities behind *Creek in the ceiling beam*. Similar conjunctions may also flow from multiple directions, as demonstrated by the aforementioned synchronicities between *Place* and *Blood Bone Brain*.

These parallels point towards additional dimensions in the frameworks of *Blood Bone Brain*, which go beyond the prima facie proposals of consumption and ingestion. *A Thousand Plateaus* characterizes the body without organs as being akin to an egg, insofar that it is a “perfectly contemporary [...] milieu of experimentation” (181). To extrapolate, the body without organs is not simply an embryonic state that anticipates a maturational development to a completed ‘actual’ body; rather, it is continually in the process of constructing itself adjacent to such bodies. It is an unenclosed horizon rather than an attainable goal. Consequently, the body without organs is related to the ‘plane of consistency’ that Deleuze and Guattari describe as being marked by continuous variations (*Thousand Plateaus* 558); like these planes, a healthy, operative model of the body without organs is a reservoir of potentialities that are activated and actualized through the convergences described above. By contrast, if *Blood Bone Brain* only consumed its previous components, it could potentially lapse into the pattern of endless reproduction that characterizes the cancerous body without organs. But, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate, the performance resists this repetitive immobility. Through the collective,

intersubjective facture between the audience and the performers, the performance is a permeable—rather than a closed—system. It refuses to settle, and continually reinvents itself: each performance elaborated on the previous occasions, and while Fisher’s individual instructions were detailed, their content remained open to adaptation and improvisation. Briefly put, it is through enacting the open-ended and kinetic encounters of facture that the performance develops its abilities to connect, conjugate and continue—all of which similarly characterize the body without organs (*Thousand Plateaus* 178). Through these perpetual transformations, each version of the project is a new and fresh creation facilitated by the potentialities within its preparatory materials; as such, the performance is able to offer a counterforce to the linear, ‘unchanging’ changes discovered at Camberwell church, Threlkeld Knotts and elsewhere.

In sum, facture and the body without organs offer complementary frameworks that help to characterize the ways in which *Blood Bone Brain*’s intersubjective authorship operates and renews itself. But these comparisons also raise an additional question: if this project is so open to states of perpetual renewal, does it ever reach an end? In February 2009, when I asked Fisher for details about the performance at Earl’s Court, he could scarcely recall more than a few of them. Likewise, when Mottram discussed *Blood Bone Brain* during the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975, he observed that—as a performer—it was difficult to focus on the event as a whole (Harwood & Mottram). In light of these comments, it seems that rather than conferring their authority on the proceedings, the performers of *Blood Bone Brain* willingly allowed the audience to ‘author’ the event. Consequently, the publication of the microfiche documents does not necessarily bring the project to a halt, as *Blood Bone Brain* continues to wander. For instance, when David Bromige watched Fisher perform a reduced version of the project in San Francisco, he jotted the following impressions in his notebook:

graveyards—patterns of starch on protein—remains of an edible book [...]—
As I stand alone in a dark room old house—sheep skull—grave yard—there is
a yellow haze which prevails—dice—gas fire with imitation wood—[...] stick
of rock as mimic ciggie—block of apartments in imitative city—intersection
accident (25–26)

Graveyards, edible books and sheep skulls are, among other phrases, clear references to the projected slides. However, others seem more obscure. For

example, what are the sources for ‘As I stand alone in a dark room’ or ‘there is a yellow haze which prevails’? Are they based on some of the improvised contents, or are they Bromige’s own, private perceptions? Could ‘intersection accident’ perhaps describe his estimation of the performance itself? By Bromige’s own admission, his notes allow for variant readings, and it may therefore be counterproductive to speculate upon their origins. Nevertheless, these annotations document one additional instance in the receptions of *Blood Bone Brain*.

But *Blood Bone Brain* wanders even further, and cuts across different media in the process. When I interviewed Fisher in August 2010, I casually mentioned that I was slowly accumulating extracts from the microfiche booklets as printed copies. Fisher replied by suggesting that these copies represented another new transformation of the project. Based on this reasoning, the poet’s current intentions to convert his notes into electronic files would result in a further set of metamorphoses (“Re: Blood Bone Brain Images”). Over 40 years after the project was performed at Earl’s Court, the facture of *Blood Bone Brain* continues. Thus, as I begin to re-examine the microfiche slides at the University of Kent’s Templeman Library, I am reminded of my earlier thoughts about Mottram’s *Pollock Record*. Has *Blood Bone Brain* been ‘made to perform’ during the course of this chapter? On reflection, perhaps the structure of my analyses emulates Fisher’s facturing process: by tracing the multiple convergences that take place in *Blood Bone Brain*, I have often returned to the same sections, slides and words—only to discover that their apparent meaning has changed in relation to the meanings another work has given them, or as a consequence of reconsidering my first realization of a possible meaning. Furthermore, it is possible that the synchronicities outlined within this chapter extend, elaborate or depart from the prefigured intentions of Fisher’s schemata. In this sense, although my proposals were composed long after the event and over a considerable period of time, they are similar to Bromige’s notations. Both encounters are capable of continuing *Blood Bone Brain*’s production and transformation.

An extension of these thoughts pertains to the function of *Blood Bone Brain*’s archival documents. What role do they play in the continued production of the project? At the end of the previous chapter, I suggested that while the sheets for *Pollock Record* only provide a script for performance, they also act as the most complete documents of the event; I additionally argued that this configuration complicates the common ontologies of performance documentation. As the present chapter has

demonstrated, a similar relationship occurs with the microfiche archive for Fisher's project: these documents can also call *Blood Bone Brain* back into being. But while Mottram's sheets are all but lost in the archives at King's, Fisher published his notes as serialized pamphlets. Even if these documents are impossible to consult without specialist equipment, they still demonstrate an intention for wider dissemination. In this respect, perhaps Fisher's reasons for publishing the notes are revealed in the penultimate sentence of his introduction to these documents: you are invited to perform. Earlier, I associated this statement with the notional qualities of *facture*, whereby the audience is able to participate in authoring the event. However, the notes for the Nottingham performance of *Blood Bone Brain* indicate that Fisher's invitation reached even further. The booklet requests that the "Author/Composer" be informed of any adaptations or further performances so that "he may try and attend" (*Blood Bone Brain: A Performance* n.p.); in other words, the invitation to perform ultimately transforms the author to an attendee, thus waiving any remaining trace of the performance of authorship. At the time, it would appear as if this invitation went largely unanswered, but perhaps the continued *facture* of *Blood Bone Brain* is also possible through a scholarly examination of the microfiche notes. Therefore, rather than a monument of lost moments that can only be desired in their non-existence, their function is more akin to Whitehead's description of Cleopatra's Needle: the documents are a certain stream of events which maintain some permanence of character, and thus enable the continued becomings and transformations of *Blood Bone Brain* (*Concept of Nature* 167).

NOTES

1. Indeed, the primary examples of aleatory performance practices in Mottram's oeuvre are limited to *Pollock Record* and its companion piece *Precipice of Fishes*.
2. A more detailed discussion of *Necessary Business* can be found in *Poetry of Saying* 194–199.
3. In an exchange with Drew Milne, Fisher specifies that, since 1965, all of his poems have been written as components of larger projects, ranging from multi-volume poetic sequences to intermedial performances (Fisher & Milne 30).
4. For the pamphlets, see *Ffacece*, *Creek in the ceiling beam*, and *Sicily*; for the microfiche documents, see *Blood Bone Brain Documents 1–8*; for the cassette, see *The Art of Flight/Blood Bone Brain*.

5. It is likely that the international contacts mentioned by Fisher consisted of affiliates from the Fluxus movement. Artists such as Takehisa Kosugi, Yukio Tsuchiya, Ryo and Hiroko Koike are known to have visited the farmhouse (Anderson 26).
6. For more on Schmit's piece, see K. Friedman 45.
7. Further context on Vasquez Rojas is available in Weinberg 242–243.
8. For *Comment une figure de paroles et pourquoi*, see Ponge.
9. Prynne was writing in response to receiving copies of Fisher's *Necessary Business* and *Boogie Break*, which Fisher had sent to him (Prynne 153).
10. For a more detailed discussion of transmedial works, see Rajewsky 46.
11. In addition to *Blood Bone Brain Documents 2*, a transcript of this interview is now more widely available in *The Marvels of Lambeth* 17–19.
12. The frequent use of the number 39 is based on the “39 weeks” of the Fluxshoe tour (*Blood Bone Brain Documents 2* c.1).
13. A more detailed account of these features in Fluxus is available in D. Higgins 18–21.
14. As Fisher recalls: “I remember an Association of Little Presses exhibition in 1969 and 1970 where [copies of *Edible*] were on sale and the national press came. The Daily Telegraph reporter bit through and the poisonous supplement [...] got caught in his teeth and his brief newspaper review complained about it. Another paper [...] photographed me on a park bench with other office workers eating their lunch and me eating my book” (“RE: Edible”).
15. For more on the texts and ideas that Fisher satirized with his process, see Michell; or Watkins.
16. The original edition, published by Aloes Books, was a limited edition. The first book of *Place* was subsequently reprinted by Truck Press in 1976, and finally made more widely available when Reality Street published a collected volume of the project in 2005.
17. For more about the pre-Christian sites upon which some of London's churches were built, see Pennick 38.
18. My analysis here is based on both the arguments in “Mathematics of Rimbaud”, as well as Waddington's concept of ‘chreods’, which refers to the developmental pathway of a cell as it grows to become a part of a particular organ. Fisher refers to Waddington's work in his essay. For more on the concept of chreods, see Waddington 106.
19. For a more thorough discussion of McGann's ideas of versioning, see *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* 55–65; and *The Textual Condition* 88–98.
20. This theory was contested in the 1980s, when a different argument suggested that the skull's condition was actually due to damage from hyenas and other wild animals. However, when *Place: Book I* was written, the

notion of a cannibalistic ritual was the leading theory about the skull. See, for example, Blanc 119–136.

21. The last edit listed here has become a consistent part of the poem, as it is reproduced in the subsequent editions of *Place* published by Truck Press and Reality Street.
22. For the original use of the phrase, see Artaud 571.

Epilogue

At this stage, I would like to perform a liberal pastiche of Fisher’s process showing, and openly comment upon the deliberations of the previous chapter. Specifically, I want to focus on the chapter’s final sentence, where the allusions to Whitehead’s theorizations of Cleopatra’s Needle tacitly acknowledge certain concepts that loomed behind my study of *Blood Bone Brain*, but which were not necessarily discussed at length. I chose to leave these perspectives undeclared primarily because addressing them here will permit me to begin synthesizing the overlaps and correspondences among the events discussed in this book.

Although Fisher’s understanding of facture and process—at least as he describes it in “The Mathematics of Rimbaud”—is articulated with explicit reference to scientists such as David Bohm, René Thom and C.H. Waddington, it is also worth noting the parallels between Fisher’s arguments and Whitehead’s theories. For instance, the previous chapter already compared the implications of Fisher’s facture to some of Whitehead’s theories. These overlaps are also apparent in comments that Fisher made during an interview with Steve Willey and Alex Davies:

If you imagine that I’ve just read something and you’ve responded to it, in another hour it might be quite different for you due to all sorts of circumstantial differences, not just to do with the weather or whether you’re warm or hot or who you’re with or the ambiance of the place. As you extend that, there’s a whole range of potentials and that’s why I eventually [...] realised along with others that there’s a factoring process in which you make a piece of work which others have received, but the actual production takes place in

the receiving, whether that happens to be you re-reading it or you reading it or hearing it. So the actual production of the art process [...] happens continually at different times. (“Allen Fisher Interview”)¹

This was not a throwaway statement. When I asked Fisher about his views on ‘process’ during the interviews I conducted with him, he articulated his approach in a similar manner:

We’re having this conversation at this café at the moment, but if we did it tomorrow it would be a different conversation as it might be colder, it might be hotter, we might be doing it at a different café. [...] If you bring that down to the production of the poetry, you can say that the poem is always being made by your interface and interaction with other people around you. (“An Interview with Allen Fisher”)

In the previous chapter, these concepts were discussed in direct relation to the manifold mutations of *Blood Bone Brain*. However, there is also a clear similarity between Fisher’s analogies and Whitehead’s descriptions of Cleopatra’s Needle, which I first discussed in the Introduction. There, I quoted the following passage from *The Concept of Nature*:

[The Needle] seems to lack the element of time and transitoriness. But does it? [...] some hundreds of millions of years ago, the earth was not in existence; twenty million years ago there was no Thames; eighty years ago, there was no Thames Embankment, and when I was a small boy Cleopatra’s Needle was not there. (166)

Whitehead’s conceptualizations of the Needle’s impermanence—along with his proposal that the obelisk changes every day due to its loss of molecules, or its relative state of cleanliness and so on—seems remarkably close to the analogies that Fisher draws upon in order to explain his facturing process. Given that Olson, who was an early influence on Fisher, was inspired by Whitehead’s theories, the parallels between these statements undoubtedly have some connection to Olson’s poetics; however, I am presently not concerned with these Olsonian echoes.² In the context of this study, the parallels between Fisher and Whitehead highlight a significant moment of return: the poetics that inform the procedures of *Blood Bone Brain* mirror the theoretical discussions about poetry and performance that I outlined at the beginning of this book.

As the previous chapter has already intimated, the parallels between Fisher's project and the theorizations I delineated in the Introduction can be extended even further. In addition to its similarities with the 'body without organs', *Blood Bone Brain's* ability to connect, conjugate and continue indicates that its continual active production is characterized by moments of renewal, novelty and fresh creation. In this respect, Fisher's project—whether it is observed via a live performance, or its multiple published components—is linked to Whitehead's understanding of 'events' as the ultimate units of reality. Likewise, Fisher's intention to involve the audience as participants overlaps with Whitehead's argument that "all actual things are alike objects [...] and all actual things are subjects" (*Process and Reality* 56), as both gestures overturn categorical distinctions between the perceiver and the perceived, subject and object, and performer and audience. These constituents are no longer designated by stable positions and characteristics, but are instead placed in a flux of encounters and actual occasions that are conditioned by fluidity, permeability and temporality. Thus, while the Introduction to this book suggested that Whitehead's theories could be applied to the intersubjective 'authorship' that is implicit in all poetry performances, *Blood Bone Brain* goes one step further: its openness to renewal and adaptation explicitly demands that these collective and cacophonous acts take place.

While the previous chapter explored *Blood Bone Brain's* renewals from an academic perspective, I have also experienced them in a creative capacity. In May 2013, I was invited to present aspects of this study at POLYply, an interdisciplinary performance series organized by Royal Holloway, University of London. After I noticed that it was 39 years since *Blood Bone Brain* was last performed in London, I approached this event as an opportunity to respond to the invitation to perform that Fisher had included in his microfiche slides. Using Fisher's notes as a starting point, I collaborated with a group of young London-based poets—Ollie Evans, Robert Kiely, Mendoza, Daniel O'Donnell-Smith, Nat Raha and Steve Willey—to stage a re-encounter with the project. True to *Blood Bone Brain's* ethos of continued production, this performance did not simply regurgitate Fisher's earlier materials, but instead mixed these with new music, visuals and writing that was selected and prepared by the performers. For example, Raha and Mendoza visited several sites depicted in BLOOD VISUALS, and photographed them in their contemporary setting; these were subsequently displayed in tandem with the slides from 1974. Fortuitously, Fisher himself was able to attend and watch the event.

The author took his seat in the audience, and the continual renewals of *Blood Bone Brain* carried on around him.³

The links between the events examined in the preceding four chapters and the theories in the Introduction are not limited to the parallels between Whitehead and *Blood Bone Brain*. Comparable overlaps can also be observed in Mottram's *Pollock Record*. In Chap. 4, I argued that a performance of Mottram's piece converts the mnemonic sheets into transient short-term memories. In other words, if the sheets resemble the punctual systems of Deleuzoguattarian long-term memory, the event frees the lines of short-term memory from the coordinates of these punctual systems, and renders them indiscernible. This relationship reflects the description of Glenn Gould's performances in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which I first discussed in the Introduction. To recapitulate, the passage in question argues that Gould transforms "the musical points into lines" and makes "the whole piece proliferate", thus rendering "the number" from a measurement of "elements according to their placement" to a "multiplicity that varies according to the dimensions considered" (9). Previously, I noted that Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions demonstrate a degree of confluence with Whitehead's theories, as Gould's performance signifies multiple becomings that vary in relation to the specific conditions of each actual occasion. Mottram's *Pollock Record* engaged with similar concepts. Since it was unlikely that the poem adopted the same structure in two separate performances, Mottram's project gestured towards a multiplicity that fluctuates according to the circumstances of each event. In other words, *Pollock Record*—like *Blood Bone Brain*—depends upon a continual process of renewal. The two performances additionally coincide in their conception of the audience as active participants. Although *Pollock Record* may not extend its participatory invitations as openly as *Blood Bone Brain*, its performances nevertheless reconfigure the relationships between the audience and the poet-performers continuously throughout each event. In some cases, the readers were able to assert their control by concluding the performance deliberately. However, when the reading stopped due to an accidental repetition, *Pollock Record* involved acts of collective remembering and forgetting; on these occasions, both the performers and the audience shared the selfsame tensions of unknowingness and anticipation. Such performances were therefore non-hierarchical events where multifarious active perceptions were expressed among one another.

Admittedly, the explicit prominence of process and indeterminacy in the structures of *Blood Bone Brain* and *Pollock Record* renders these overlaps

relatively transparent. The shared social nexuses between Fisher and Mottram likewise increased the likelihood that their projects would evince at least some similar influences. But can the Whiteheadian or Deleuzoguattarian parallels from the above summaries be extended to the events that were examined within the first half of this book? In Chap. 3, I argued that Riley's first public performance is perpetually characterized by degrees of ambiguity; that there is perhaps less emphasis on experimenting with the techniques of the spectacle, as Riley and Mulford were more focused on exploring and challenging the social situations of the event. While these strategies may seem distinct from the respective praxes of Mottram and Fisher, they nevertheless share some common interests with *Pollock Record* and *Blood Bone Brain*. For instance, Riley eschews the parameters of Stern's formal poetry readings by refusing to perform her authorship; the reading is instead characterized by continuous discontinuities that destabilize the proceedings. In this respect, Riley's reading mirrors the collaborative efforts of *Pollock Record*, which also sought to challenge authorship and ownership with its multiple readers and collagist fragments. Chapter 3 additionally argued that the discontinuities in Riley's reading were indicative of her poetics, as they mirrored the pronominal slippage in her early poetry—as well as the theoretical positions she outlines in studies such as *Am I That Name?*; furthermore, these strategies also anticipate some of her later work, where she continues to “perform her gender within ideologically produced sexualities” (I. Davidson 91). This pairing of performance and poetics corresponds with *Blood Bone Brain*, where the continual mutations and renewals of the project enact a manifestation of Fisher's facturing process.

In light of these parallels, it might also be possible to map out Riley's performance alongside the theoretical perspectives of the Introduction. Chapter 3 argued that continuous discontinuities in Riley's reading associated her asseverations with a non-hierarchical spreading of active perceptions that moved beyond assertions of authorship. Riley and Mulford's collaborative opening—along with Riley's statement immediately after it—forced the audience to reconsider their possible preconceptions of a feminist poetry reading. Likewise, the barrage of words in her performance was informed by self-annihilating tendencies, which placed the presence of an authorial persona in a state of flux. The second half of the reading, in which Riley read work by Mulford and others, involved a manifold play on boundarylessness where the poet-performer's complex collective utterances slipped away from authorship—and ownership—altogether. In sum, Riley's

performance was not static. Similarly to Whitehead's actual occasions around Cleopatra's Needle, each discontinuity introduced new encounters and perceptions within the event. While these transformations were not necessarily as extreme as those in *Pollock Record* and *Blood Bone Brain*, they nevertheless ruptured the formalities of the performance by proliferating a continual series of slight modulations. The distinctions between these three performances are—in this sense—differences of degree, as opposed to essence or kind: each of them evinces a kineticism that renders the occasion more fluid than stable, and permeable rather than closed.

Finally, this thread can also be read back into the proceedings of the Incarnation. Chapter 2 argued that Ginsberg's inebriation foiled his original intentions of conducting a great spiritual event, thus undermining his shamanic performance of authorship. As a consequence, the poet's rendition of "Who Be Kind To" extended beyond his individuality as a speaker, and instead entered into a dialogue with the intersubjective social relations that were occurring across the Albert Hall, as well as the multiplex of historical contexts from which the event emerged. In the chapter itself, I noted that these manifold developments gestured towards the unexpected eventualities that may occur within the intersubjective authorship of a performance. However, the dialogues between "Who Be Kind To" and the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation can also be understood through the Whiteheadian analogies in Fisher's aforementioned interviews. The significations that Ginsberg's poem formed in the context of the Hall indicate that its meaning is "always being made by" a cacophonous and collective set of interfaces and interactions ("An Interview with Allen Fisher"). In other words, the "circumstantial differences" of the Incarnation and its regal venue situated "Who Be Kind To" in a different context, which yielded a new understanding of the poem ("Allen Fisher Interview"); the event's intersubjective authorship allowed Ginsberg's asseverations to be conditioned by their specific time, place and audience. On this configuration, Chap. 2 ultimately analysed "Who Be Kind To" as a document that—like the microfiche archive of *Blood Bone Brain*—represents a certain stream of events, which maintain some permanence of character and thus enable the continued becomings and transformations of the text (*Concept of Nature* 167).

The discussions of the preceding chapters are therefore looped. When read from start to finish, each respective study denotes a gradual move away from the performance of authorship, and a shift towards more pluralistic, rhizomatic performances, where both the poet-performer and—

increasingly—the audience author the event. At the same time, the above syntheses demonstrate that they can also be read in reverse. Fisher’s explanatory analogies for his facturing process bring us back to Whitehead’s description of Cleopatra’s Needle, which allows us to reconsider *Blood Bone Brain* through the theoretical notions that were first outlined in the Introduction. These concepts can in turn be utilized to tease out overlaps, parallels and reverberations across *Blood Bone Brain*, *Pollock Record*, Riley’s reading at the Cambridge Poetry Festival, as well as the myriad aspirations of the Incarnation. In other words, the chapters all inform one another in a multidirectional manner: to borrow from *The Fold*, each ultimately “perceives its own, and perceives the others while perceiving its own” (91).

Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that these looped readings involve a degree of abstraction and generalization. While they reveal overlaps between the four performances, they also unavoidably efface some of the particularities and specificities of each individual event. Despite the parallels between them, these performances cannot be compressed into a homogenous whole. Indeed, this kind of monolithic and totalizing gesture was never a desirable goal for this book; as I noted in the Introduction, poetry performances cannot be confined to configurations that favour arborescent hierarchies and fixities. Thus, it would be erroneous to interpret the aforesaid conceptual overlaps as a motion towards a theory of poetry and performance. They are—somewhat more plainly—indicative examples of themes and ideas that *may* arise when hitherto unexamined ‘event histories’ of individual readings and performances are more firmly pegged into history. While the looped themes and readings have provided this book with its structure, my core interest throughout has been the ‘archaeological’ reconstruction and analysis of specific events and effects.

Therefore, I hope that the individual chapters of this book will ultimately offer some further perspectives to the existing discourses on poetry and performance. As I observed in the Introduction, previous studies on the subject have tended to conduct their enquiries with reference to sound, elocution or rhetoric. This focus characterizes both Oliver’s quasi-scientific methodologies in *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* and Middleton’s *Distant Reading*, where the diverse theoretical tools include sound symbolism and the linguistics of Saussure and Derrida. As a result, many of these studies emphasize the performance of authorship. Even Middleton—whose study recognizes that the poet-performer and the audience enact performances that generate an intersubjective network (*Distant Reading*

93)—draws upon this concept at length. Specifically, *Distant Reading* argues that the performance of authorship “fascinates poets and audiences” due to the author’s role as “the subjective crossroads for [...] complex transactions of institutional legitimation in the contemporary world” (36). To elaborate, these perspectives associate poetry readings with the “means of negotiating the authorization of the claim to a public voice”, where the “poetic utterances carry an assertoric force that depends on the presence of a performative author” (*Distant Reading* 46). Similar arguments can also be found in Stern’s description of formal poetry readings; in Wheeler’s estimations of the voice as an invocation of the body (23); in Tony Lopez’s descriptions of poets delivering a “definitive performance” of a “definitive [...] text” (80); and in Denise Levertov’s claim that the personality of the poet is inherently imprinted on the poem (53).

In contrast, the preceding chapters have consistently departed from the performance of authorship. In some cases, the intersubjective authorship of the event has undermined the authority of the performing poet, while in others the poet has deliberately sought to explore alternative modes of performance. The myriad aspirations of the Incarnation, Riley’s continuous discontinuities, *Pollock Record*’s short-term memories, and *Blood Bone Brain*’s multiple mutations are all difficult to survey with reference to assertoric forces that perform authorship. Equally, these events seem distinct from Bernstein’s notions of ‘aurality’. In some respects, they instead correlate with Middleton’s analysis of collective events where the audience and poet “collaborate in the performance of the poem”, and create “an intersubjective network, which can then become an element of the poem itself” (*Distant Reading* 93). But although the previous chapters have frequently focused on the interactions between the poem and the event’s intersubjective networks, these discussions have also departed from Middleton’s use of the term. In *Distant Reading*, intersubjectivity is understood according to Habermas’ arguments about socialization through “communicatively produced intersubjectivity” (93); instead, the Whiteheadian and Deleuzoguattarian perspectives of this study have more often analysed it in relation to perception, fluidity and permeability.⁴ Moreover, when Middleton observes that an intersubjective performance is only partially under the sway of the author, he notes that this can produce a “turbulent” and “unpredictable” occasion that is “capable of warping as well as amplifying” the performed work (*Distant Reading* 101). Here the oppositional connotations of ‘warping’ and ‘amplifying’ imply that these unpredictable turbulences are perhaps undesirable. On the contrary,

certain performances—as the chapters on *Pollock Record* and *Blood Bone Brain* demonstrate—are actively engaged with these uncertainties.

I have no desire to present these departures as a repudiation of the arguments within the existing scholarship on poetry and performance. Rather, I have summarized them here simply in order to highlight that disparities do exist. The diverse dimensions of poetry and performance—in theory and in practice—are more complex than the drama of speaking and listening. Consequently, any engaged examination of the phenomena will eventually encounter histories that are so numerous and inconclusive that a single unifying theory seems unattainable. Like Pound towards the end of his *Cantos*, we “cannot make it cohere” (810), and this conjuncture is ultimately both desirable and productive. In this respect, the studies of this book are—in the broadest possible sense—a celebration of the potential insights that can surface when the study of poetry and performance diversifies from the history of the phenomenon itself to also incorporate the minor histories of individual events and effects. Although I began with allusions to Sinclair’s notion of ‘invisible’ histories, it is worth noting that these notions should not be romanticized. Declarative claims about poetry belonging in exile can also perpetuate a fetishization of such clandestine states, which may expel quondam performances and events to a state of unexamined anonymity. This would not be a constructive development: the individual event histories of poetry and performance deserve to be brought into a less tenebrous space.

With this in mind, I would like to conclude with a few brief observations about the contemporary scenes of innovative poetry and performance within the UK. In 1979, Ken Edwards described the British Poetry Revival as a period of “growth and flowering” that “some bright critic” would someday declare “a kind of golden age” (9). As the timeframe of this book has focused on the same period, it is interesting to note that other poets from Edwards’ generation have described the poetry scenes of the 2010s in similar terms: in 2011, Andrew Duncan argued that the London poetry scene was at “a historic peak right now” (“Irrepressible Creativity”); likewise, when Sheppard was interviewed in 2012, he posited that the UK as a whole was “living through a golden age of avant-garde poetry” (qtd. in Loydell & Sheppard). Without delving too deeply into such comparisons, it is—at the very least—safe to say that the various scenes across the country appear incredibly lively: there are times when different readings, performances and related events seem to be scheduled for nearly every night of a particular week. Of course, many of these contemporary events take place

on university campuses (the Contemporary Poetics Research Centre at Birkbeck is just one example of a notable hive of activity), but several more or less regular series have also found a home outside of these institutional spaces—even though their organizers often still either work or study in higher education.

In London, the current series of off-campus poetry readings include (at least) Xing the Line at IKLECTIC in Lambeth, Contraband Live in various pubs around Farringdon, Shearsman Readings at Swedenborg Hall in Bloomsbury, Capital Letters at St Margaret's House in Bethnal Green, Non-Threatening Theatre at T. Chances in Tottenham, No Money at The George Tavern in Shadwell, and Social Anxiety at The Birds Nest in Deptford. In Brighton, the most regular reading series include Hi Zero at The Hope and Ruin and Horseplay at the Black Dove. Manchester hosts both The Other Room series at the Castle Hotel and Peter Barlow's Cigarette, which takes place at the Deansgate branch of the book retailer Waterstones. Liverpool was the home for the recently ceased Storm and Golden Sky, but Gramophone Ray Gun at the city's Everyman Bistro and Theatre Bar continues to be active. In Newcastle, the most recent series seems to be Rivet, which has taken place at venues such as The Northern Charter and NewBridge Books. Caesura stages regular events at Summerhall in Edinburgh. Readings and performances for The Cardiff Poetry Experiment usually take place at a café called Waterloo Tea, although the series has also hosted poets at Jacob's Antiques. The Free Range series at Water Lane Coffee in Canterbury regularly features poets in its line-up. Recently launched ventures include Anathema in Bristol, Electric Arc Furnace in Sheffield, Entropics in Southampton, and Zarf in Leeds. Active scenes can also be found in Cambridge, Glasgow, Norwich, Plymouth and elsewhere—although I am presently unable to identify a regular series within these locations. This list is of course far from exhaustive, but it nevertheless provides a brief glimpse of the breadth of current scenes across the country. If the UK is presently undergoing a “remarkable flourishing of poetic activity”, in which the legacies of the Revival are being pursued “in thrilling, and thrillingly unpredictable, directions” (Lang & Nowell Smith 1), these events are some of the sites where this pursuit is taking place.

In the Introduction, I noted that the Revival is often recognized as having suffered from a lack of diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity. Similar critiques have also been made about the contemporary scenes of UK-based innovative poetry: in 2007, Andrea Brady observed that

carpeted rooms above pubs, where the “same five or six old men” perform to each other, often dissuade “women from entering into, or staying in, the poetry scene” (qtd. in Wagner); others have noted that “reading series [and] presses dedicated [...] to innovative and experimental poetics” still tend to feature only a few poets of colour (Parmar). Thus, while the current scenes may be more diverse than they were in the previous decades, the exact extent of their inclusivity continues to be debated. These debates take various forms, but I will offer two recent events as indicative examples. During the second Camaradefest, held at the Rich Mix in October 2014, the poets Samantha Walton and Lila Matsumoto performed a collaborative piece titled “Checklist: Your Privilege, Or, Minority Poets Tell All—and it’s bad”. Composed as a series of questions, with identifiable references to various poets and poems, the piece interrogated instances of sexism and chauvinism within contemporary poetry; moreover, by posing these examples as *questions*—that is, as problems that require a solution—Walton and Matsumoto challenged their audience to imagine alternative communal practices.⁵ In 2015, Samuel Solomon and Dorothy Wang founded the Race & Poetry & Poetics in the UK research group, with the explicit aim of creating a platform for questions, dialogues and collaborations in response to the subject of race and poetry and poetics in the UK. The group’s first conference—organized by Solomon, Wang, Robert Hampson, Nat Raha and Nisha Ramayya—took place in February 2016; many of the participants felt that the event offered “heartening proof that there is a significant intellectual and creative community willing to engage the issue of race in contemporary poetry” (Lê).⁶ These engagements are likely to continue in the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*’s upcoming special issue on race, which will be guest-edited by Sandeep Parmar.

Social media has made it relatively easy to stay up to date with the proliferation of these events and performances. The internet has also enabled a broader distribution of subsequent performance documentation. Sheppard has observed that while the lack of adequate and affordable technical support caused difficulties with recording events during the 1980s, poets today rarely “read in public [...] without being recorded” (qtd. in Loydell & Sheppard). A number of these recordings can be located online. For instance, the small press Veer Books films most of the performances associated with its launch events, which are afterwards uploaded on Vimeo.⁷ Clips from the events curated by the poet Steven Fowler can be found on YouTube.⁸ Videos of each event organized by The Other Room

can be viewed on their website.⁹ Likewise, audio recordings of every Free Range performance can be accessed through Soundcloud.¹⁰ A vast archive of both recent and older recordings is available through Brady's Archive of the Now.¹¹ While these resources are enormously helpful, there are also cases where the wider availability of recorded documentation is not always clear. Some years ago, the poet and historian Philip Kuhn donated a digital recorder to Jeff Hilson, the poet who organizes Xing the Line, on the understanding that Hilson would record readings from his series and periodically send the SD cards to Kuhn in Devon. While Kuhn's intention is to ultimately forward these recordings to the British Library, his primary objective is to store the files in his own personal archive (Hilson). Thus, despite Hilson's commitment to record as much as possible, the posterity of these documents might seem slightly more secure if they were catalogued in a more consistent and accessible manner. Perhaps the contemporary nexuses that are dotted around the country could collaborate on a coordinated effort to document as many events as possible, and thus build a communal database that archives the numerous performances that are presently occurring in pubs, lecture halls, cafés and galleries across the country. Existing resources, such as Archive of the Now, could possibly serve as a platform for a project of this nature. A tremendous range of performances, interventions and debates await our attention. Let's talk—and keep talking—about them.

NOTES

1. It is possible that 'factoring process' is a typo in the Opened interview transcript. At the very least, it seems clear that the situation Fisher describes in this quote is identical to his notions of facture, which were discussed in the previous chapter.
2. A convincing account of how Fisher both identifies with and dissociates himself from Olson can be found in *Poetry of Saying* 58–64.
3. Images from this event are available at <https://polyply.wordpress.com/2013/04/29/polyply-25/>.
4. In this respect, my arguments are perhaps more closely aligned with Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, which argues that it is not the performance per se that creates the theatrical event, but rather, the presence of an audience. As Brook writes: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (11).

5. A video of the performance is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UX5mQzy020o>.
6. Videos from the Race & Poetry & Poetics in the UK conference are available at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRxVbm-5-zFu3i38Hs2840WFmLEjVk5S9>.
7. The Veer Books Vimeo account is available at <https://vimeo.com/user13781373>.
8. Fowler's YouTube account is available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/fowlerpoetry/videos>.
9. An archive of films from The Other Room events is available at <https://otherroom.org/videos/>.
10. Recordings from Free Range are available at <https://soundcloud.com/free-range>.
11. Archive of the Now can be found at <http://www.archiveofthenow.org/>.

An Interview with Allen Fisher

JV: Because so many of the events and publications from the 1960s and 1970s presently exist in a fugitive state, I would like to begin with a few questions that try to map out this field. Your biographical notes often state you have been involved with poetry and performance since the early sixties. How did you first encounter these practices?

AF: I'll be slow answering, but I'll get there. Initially, it wasn't very public. I would attend readings, but wouldn't let it be known that I was also somebody doing stuff. I attended readings, and music performances in central London. Places around Great Newport Street. There was a small place in Herne Hill that I would go to, for smaller poetry readings. Quite early on, I would attend concerts where jazz and poetry were being mixed. Ronnie Scott's club was cheap to get in on Sundays ...

Do you mean events like Michael Horowitz's Live New Departures?

Yes. I went to those. Spike Milligan did stuff. It wasn't always very good, but it was socially quite interesting. I like jazz and some of the poetry was okay, so I enjoyed that mix. At school I'd read Kerouac, and knew that he was interested in poetry and jazz. That kind of introduced me to the performance

Interviewed by Juha Virtanen. Recorded over two separate meetings at a café outside St. James's Church, London. The first meeting took place on 27 February 2009. The second meeting took place on 18 August 2010.

side of things: hearing poetry read, and hearing music with it. It was to do with the live ambiance, not just of the reading itself, but the social ambiance; meeting people, joining a kind of nexus of people. And of course they start publishing magazines and you take part in them.

By 1964, Better Books was getting really interesting in central London, just off Charing Cross Road—very big Better Books at the time. Big basement with a lot of installation art, eventually, but a lot of performances; managed by Bob Cobbing and people like Jeff Nuttall, eventually managed by people like Lee Harwood and Paul Selby and Bill Butler. Butler also ran Unicorn Bookshop in Brighton. We were learning a lot from the small presses in America. The dates are going to be haywire, but I'm thinking of magazines like *The World*, *C Press*—a whole range of magazines I'm going to forget. I always remember Ed Sanders' Fuck You Press, simply because it's so outlandish. It overlapped a lot with some of the performances and activities that were going on at the Better Books basement, which included film. Around that time the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Arts] set up in Dover Street, which was quite low-key, inasmuch as it wasn't as institutionalized as it became, or as it is now. It's relying so much on government grants that it's a different kettle of fish, really. But it was very vibrant. For instance, I remember a notable exhibition called *Between Poetry and Painting*. It showed a relation between concrete poetry and visual poetry, and spoken poetry as well, and concrete poetry spoken. Of course Cobbing is involved, but then there is a huge nexus of Europeans and South Americans involved.

Eric Mottram also ran a series of poetry readings at the ICA, didn't he?

Yes, but by that time it had moved. I think that was in the early seventies. Towards the end of the sixties, I was involved in the small press scene: Association of Little Presses, exhibitions, performances, events, fairs, that sort of thing. I had started a magazine called *Edible*, and I had started making books that you could eat. I had poisonous editions that had paper inside them, so you couldn't quite eat them—they had supplements you had to take out. All of those are of course gone, except for one box with a rotten object in them; in fact, I photographed it and used it for *Blood Bone Brain*.

Just around 1970, there was a revival of Fluxus in Britain, mainly through David Mayor, who was a Cambridge graduate who went to Exeter to do a MA or a PhD on John Cage and Stockhausen. He pulled out. Together with Felipe Ehrenberg, Marta Ehrenberg and a few other people, he rented a farmhouse in Devon—a huge 15-bedroom house that was falling apart. The farm had moved to a decent bungalow on the corner of the estate. He would invite people down for performances, and there were three or four printing

presses there; everything from a very cheap duplicator or mimeograph, through to a small letterpress, with some litho work and thermography as well. That opened it up to poetry and art, and music. There were dozens and dozens and dozens of people you would get to know from Japan, America and elsewhere. It was a very vibrant scene. It eventually became a kind of touring circus for Fluxshoe, which puns almost with Sanders' Fuck You Press. That got some support from the Arts Council in terms of the touring money, so that the institutes who were hosting the events would get enough money to put them on. A lot of performances, a lot exchanges. I started taking part on a conceptual art level: jars of objects, using the objects as memory pieces to make performances, using distorted and unusual reel-to-reel tapes. You could run them around the room around milk bottles and such. I was working on that right through the 1970s, and compiled it under the banner *Blood Bone Brain*. It had lots of smaller elements: some were performances, while others were publications, books and pamphlets, or ephemeral handouts.

At the same time, Better Books is still going on, until it ran out of money, and moved to the front of Charing Cross Road. The readings became much tighter; less performances, more just poetry readings. Eventually, the poetry scene moved via something called Duck Soup to Indica, first of all, which was a gallery just down the road here. Barry Miles got money to set that up from different rock bands, and Yoko Ono exhibited there. He set up a bookshop alongside it, which was also financed by them, along with *International Times*. That was another poetry nexus, but it didn't have that many performances there, as far as I remember. I might have done one there, but maybe not. There were events at the Roundhouse, and there was the London Musicians Collective, and the London Film Co-op, which were in the same building, just by Camden. We would use it for poetry performances. All of this is going on at the same time, more or less, and the pubs were also socially linked to it. There'd be certain pubs or cafés where you could always find people. Better Books, for instance, was around a couple of pubs where you could turn up during the week and always find somebody of interest to talk to. That dissipated gradually in the seventies as people got jobs and did different things.

That's really the complexity of it, almost over-synoptic, but it's bound to be.

I can give you another level now, which is conceptual really. Conceptual art was very strong in London around 1966–1967 and into the 1970s. It was a big influence on what I was doing, because I was also looking at some of the writers who were using arithmetic, maths and devices to make works, almost

like renaissance machines but revived. This was not actually new in poetry, but it was newly conceptualized. There was a lot of talk at the time of process, as a counterforce. You had procedural ideas with fixed procedures, deterministic models, indeterminate models, which in themselves were deterministic in a sense—John Cage and such like—and process became very important at the same time. So, there were systems and process counterbalancing each other or interfering with each other, and I used both. So I wrote a series of books called *Place*, which was about showing the process while demonstrating the work. Concept art was doing away with ideas of products and encouraging the ideas of the ephemeral and processual activities; poems that would change each time you read them. Of course, in retrospect, you could say that doesn't work, because people still ran around collecting all these ephemeral bits of paper and turning them to objects. That's not how it was thought of at the time.

Around that time, in the very early seventies, I got together with Dick Miller—and eventually with Jim Pennington, who was a friend of his. They had met at the London College of Printing. We set up something called Aloes Books. What still is important about it to me is that it brought together people you had heard of with people who were unknown. We printed some Jack Spicer, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Patti Smith, Kathy Acker and a whole range of others. The idea was that one would fund the other. It didn't really work like that, really, but that's how it was conceived.

You mentioned the Fluxshoe tour, where parts of Blood Bone Brain were performed. How did the tour evolve? Did it naturally emanate from the farmhouse in Devon, or was there a more prolonged period of planning involved?

I don't know. I don't remember how I first met them. They had a printing press and I had a printing press, so there was a link there, probably. We were interested in similar work, so whenever they had events and I could make it, I would come. If I couldn't, I would send them stuff. David was also editing a magazine called *Schmuck*, and I would contribute to it: small things, big things. I also sent him a huge tea chest with a six-inch foam hose in it. The idea was that when you opened the box, it would burst out. At the time, I was working for a lead and solder manufacturer, and I would send David fluxes. But there were people in London I knew at the time: filmmakers and performers who would also take part, and other people whom I have forgotten now. As I remember, Fluxshoe didn't perform much in London ...

I think it only came as near as Croydon or Guildford ...

Yes. As far as I remember, much of it wasn't recorded at all. There was a Fluxshoe Catalogue, but it only had a few things in it. Then there was a Fluxshoe Addenda, which was a folder of loose leaves, and we were usually very cavalier about products. Felipe was much more focused on them, as he was interested in making a living selling objects. He and Marta separated eventually, and went their separate ways. I haven't seen Felipe since. Marta married someone in Holland and now lives partially in Holland and partially in Mexico City, so I sometimes see her en route. David moved into alternative medicine and became an acupuncturist.

You spoke about your work in conceptual art, which sometimes comes together with performance and your poetry in works such as Blood Bone Brain. I read an essay by Eric Mottram where he argues that these practices are distinct enough to make singularization inappropriate. Do you feel there is this boundary in your work?

I wouldn't be rude about what Eric said, but I would say that it's too categorical. I would say they overlap.

That was my sense of it as well, particularly with something like Place and Blood Bone Brain.

Yes, very much so. In fact, *Creek in the ceiling beam*, which was a part of *Blood Bone Brain*, was a complex, cheeky and joking device to make a poem based on a beam that was recorded in my bedroom. In the process of doing that I photographed a lot of cemeteries around London. I also got Jude Walker to photograph the jars, because they'd become too cumbersome to carry around. So the performance became these photographs and the words around them, which was sometimes poetry, and sometimes it was difficult to say what it was. The same is true for *Place*. If you read through some of the earlier books and look at the pages in isolation, it is difficult to say whether it is poetry or not. I don't care one way or the other—I'm not very worried about that.

Yes, there's an interview with Mottram where he speaks of your work as an invitation for the audience to participate in the recreation of language, sound and syntax. That seems like more viable characterization to me, but I want to touch upon that idea of 'audience'. If you designed performances that

included audience participation, did you have any expectations for that audience?

I guess the truth of it is that there is an initial reliance on people you see quite a bit in readings and performances, and you can rely on them to take part. Then there is a second layer of people who you don't know, but who recognize what is going on and take part. Then there is another layer of people who you don't know at all, and who actually don't want to take part, and that is fine also. How you define it is quite hard, because they are not just poets. They are not just readers of poetry either. That I thought was an advantage, because the two could interact in different ways in different genres and modes.

We have spoken a lot about your conceptual background, which I think ties in with your philosophical or theoretical stances. In "Mathematics of Rimbaud"—if I may paraphrase—you seem to describe poetry as a mode that is simultaneously manifested in a stable consistency and in an ever-changing inconsistency, always yet to be found in the process of its making. Could you elaborate on this notion?

Just to make it a huge generality, which you can apply to anything: in the first place, the context changes—quite regularly. We're having this conversation at this café at the moment, but if we did it tomorrow it would be a different conversation as it might be colder, it might be hotter, we might be doing it at a different café. So the nuance would be slightly different, but not by much, and that applies to everything. But if, however, in the process of making something—as a part of the idea of making it—you take that into an account, or encourage that interaction with the context, it's almost Situationist. It's as if you have a choice in a situation; you can choose to just observe, in which case your interaction with it is reactionary, or you can say that because you are there, you are also responsible, and you may as well contribute. That's a political and theoretical level. If you bring that down to the production of the poetry, you can say that the poem is always being made by your interface and interaction with other people around you. I find that I sometimes read something that on the page might seem to be the same thing, but read in three different audience situations, it would feel and be understood differently. Some might say that its contrary to academic practice, but I don't think it is. It's elaborated differently from conventional practice.

It reminds me about another thing. Where this interface didn't work, and where it came to blows really, was at the Poetry Society. A lot of us were

working with it there, and the interaction with the poets who were more conventionally minded found it inappropriate or aggressive, or rubbish—that it wasn't proper, and all the rest of it. That interaction made it quite important. It almost brought about a tightening of the need to be deliberately in the process of making, rather than in the process of having been made. The difference there is somebody who made a poem and brought it to show you, like making an object that they had polished and given to you, as opposed to somebody who said, "this is something in the process of making, what do you think". It would feel differently for that reason.

It can get exaggerated. There are elements of writing poetry that remain fixed to a certain extent. The words are the same words this week as they were last week, in a sense. In performance, I use improvisation: I change words, I'll use mistakes and elaborate on mistakes, rather than always correct them. That's just a very small instance of how that interactive action can occur. It's also quite obvious that in some spaces people can hear everything and elsewhere they can't. You get that with everything, really. If you are open to that fact, and encouraging others to be open to it, it can change what happens. I think it improves what happens.

That's really interesting, because I feel anxious about 'process' as a linear concept—that is, a direct development from A to B, which implies a pre-determined or desired conclusion. But, during the interview that you played at the beginning of Blood Bone Brain, you state that the project should remain viable and undefined, which suggests that its conclusion is indeterminate and unspecified. It's almost more like 'practice' instead of 'process'. How would you negotiate with such terminologies?

I think the terminology now is fraught. By 'process', as I use it, and 'process showing', which is another term that crops up there, you show the process while you're doing something. It has a multiplicity that you are indicating is actually missing in some chemical sense of it perhaps. Like a chemical transition during an experiment would be linear, in the sense that it would start somewhere and end somewhere, and you could almost anticipate it. You'd want to anticipate it; otherwise you would worry about it. Of course, philosophically and in terms of physics, that's not the case anyway. Linearity is actually a convenience and a representation—a misrepresentation, in fact. Our existences are much more involved in non-linearity than linearity. I would always want to come back and say that 'process'—within one categorical understanding of it—could be fixed, and that is needed in order to make understanding comprehensible. It's needed to create an analysis.

I think it is just as philosophically and politically appropriate to say that it's not as reliable and fixed as that. It's not necessarily repeatable.

To me, parts of that sounds almost Deleuzian ...

I would say that they came after the event and they were able to collate this huge array of materials. I think they are very good on assemblage. Their last chapter in *A Thousand Plateaus* on concrete rules is really very good. I haven't fully engaged with some of *Anti-Oedipus*. It moved to an area I was less interested in. But I think their work around *A Thousand Plateaus*—the work around rhizomics and nomadics—really interested me. It still does.

But it wasn't a direct influence per se.

No. But I felt very warmly towards it as soon as I understood it. I think where some of the work came from, I also came from; their range of references include Kafka and Beckett and Francis Bacon and so on, all of which were early influences to me. They also looked upon the French philosophers that I had heard about from Mottram, Pierre Joris and other acquaintances: everything from Derrida and Barthes to more esoteric materials. I think I have always had a hankering for that philosophical and conceptual under-current. I've always got substance and energy from it. I still do.

Which, in some ways, brings me to the issue of sources. In the notes for Creek in the ceiling you provide a list of your 'bed time reading material', which include poets like Williams, Olson and so forth. What sort of work were you reading during the early seventies? A lot of critics seem keen to point out a certain Olsonian influence.

When Charles Olson came to London in 1967, I hadn't read *Maximus*. In fact, because of the age I was, I couldn't buy it then; previous generations could, because they had sources I did not know about, but it was a bit later when I got a hold of it; maybe a year, or two years later. What I bought at the time was "Proprioception" and another pamphlet called "A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn". The expansiveness, the spread of texts, the use of fragments, the whole range of open field, is not simply Olson. It's Pound's *Cantos*, Williams' *Paterson*, Zukofsky's *A*, it's some of the work around Olson that isn't Olson, but arguably derives from him—Snyder, James Koller and Lew Welch, those people. You can almost find it in O'Hara's "Second Avenue". It's a much larger nexus than simply Olson. But, it's true to say that by the time I published *Before Ideas, Ideas*, I had read some of *Maximus*.

I met Eric Mottram after that book, because he wrote to me wanting to meet me because he had read the book. At that time, he was living in Kensington. He would have been my first encounter with somebody who knew anything about this stuff in a scholarly sense. Most of the people I met before that had known the work because they were practitioners. Eric really wasn't at the time. He was a teacher. He must've been at King's by this time. I learnt a lot from him in that regard, but I learnt in a kind of an after the event way. He was someone I could go and ask, "What's this about" and so forth. We would argue about it. There wouldn't necessarily be an agreement. He had a good library and was much more knowledgeable about some of the material—on Pound, for instance, which I had never been taught in any formal way. He was quite useful for it.

By the time the first book of *Place* comes out, I certainly had *Maximus* on board, which crops up in the poem. As do Williams and a few others. That continues, on and off. I still think of Olson as someone who understood 'process' in the way I was thinking of it.

I think that term is partly coming out of Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. At the same time, it is coming out of ideas that I was looking at in biology; things articulated by Waddington, René Thom, catastrophe theory and that side of things. Although it talked about a deterministic process—as you mentioned earlier, from one point to a known other—some of the knowledge of the journey is quite interesting. It's not as rigid or fixed as you first might expect. I got very interested in ideas of punctuated equilibrium, and I got interested in ideas that quantum physics elaborates on. You don't move from one place to another through a slow transition, but you jump and suddenly change. I'm interested in that sudden change idea. I would call all that a part of the process.

You mentioned meeting Mottram, which was something I planned to ask about later on. You participated in each other's performance work: Mottram played piano for Blood Bone Brain and you took part in Mottram's Pollock Record, which is another project I am researching. Do you remember much of this particular performance?

I don't remember it much. I think it was at the Poetry Society [pauses].

Eric was picking up on ideas from the Bob Cobbing nexus, the textual nexus of this kind, but also because he was interested, like I was, in painting. *Pollock* would be, I suppose, a tribute and a kind of celebration of the painter. It's interesting to note that Bill, Eric and I are all quite different people, very different in our approaches to work. Eric was far more self-conscious about

his performances, far more self-critical. Bill was very assured as a performer, very accomplished and erudite. I think it was partially because he was very alliterative and lyrical and had a lot of bases in early written forms—oral forms, essentially. Eric was accomplished on a scholarly level. He would know where things were coming from. But I also think that the scholarly level sometimes inhibited him somewhat. It made him self-conscious of what he was doing. For our performance—however one wants to categorize it—we were all quite nervous about it; nervous in the positive sense that creates a sense of energy, or an anticipation, of how things might go wrong, how you might trip up and how you might recover. As far as I remember the sheet, the lines overlap a bit and they are not unidirectional. You had to make decisions about where you're reading. Because of the lack of exact scoring—that you might expect to run in a certain sequence—it added an element of uncertainty and unknowingness. You didn't know what was happening next. You didn't know if Bill or Eric were going to the right-hand side whereas you had just come down. You would lose each other, actually. That loss was a benefit as much as anything else. It would create an energy and a dynamic. The work therefore is being made as it is being read, you might say. If you perform it again, it is very unlikely it would happen the same way.

There's an interesting debate that goes on about that. I remember talking to John Seed, who was at one time very reticent about giving public performances, because he thought it over-stabilized the meaning within the poetry's line, because you put an emphasis here or there, rather than make it available as a multiple. He was against performance for that reason. There was a debate about that. Anthony Barnett, a musician as well as a poet, would argue that poetry is composed and music is improvised. I was in a group of poets that did not think that at all. It is as open as music is, or is not ...

Surely reading it aloud gives you the same—if not more—variety, because you are free to alter the emphases during each event.

Yes. That was the debate, anyhow. Eric had taken advantage of the fact that we had this nexus of space, where lots of people could be expected to be reliably turning up. There was some empathy and sympathy from the audience, to an extent. They might have put up with all sorts of problems. That doesn't actually explain it, because the actual event, I haven't quite got in my head. I remember the text and reading it.

From Mottram's interviews, I understand that the audience found the anticipation for the conclusion of the piece almost unbearably intense. Perhaps the uncertainty you mention was mutually experienced. In some ways, the

performance seems to exemplify poetry in the process of its making—almost in action. Was Mottram also experimenting with these concepts?

He was much more reserved about that, but he did try. He always maintained a modesty that was difficult to understand. He would say that he was still learning. His experimentation was kind of reserved, I would say. Nonetheless, he was trying things. He felt that there was a licence to do so by the social nexus at the time. For a long time, we lived very close to each other. He was in Herne Hill, and I was in Brixton Hill. I would see him for music sessions at least once a week, and other sessions at other times. We would have quite a strong exchange.

Just a final thought on this event, although it relates to other topics: there seemed to be a lot of collaborations taking place at the time—events that incorporated several different artists—which seems raise questions about ‘authorship’. Questions about how the performance environment affects the ‘authorship’, and where the poem is situated during the event. For example, would you say the poem emanated from the source material, from the vocalization, or in the audience hearing it?

Can I just reverse the question? The problem with the question is that it presupposes that there is an end result. I don’t think that’s true. We then have to question what is the result, and I think the result is different for different people at different times. I think there is a result already on the page. It’s the written text you can take off your shelf. That’s an end result, but it’s not the only result. The performance could be a second result. You might also have a recording of that. The recording might not be very good because it was made some time ago, so that’s another result, where you listen to it having been performed. There’s a lot of debate in music, for instance, at the time. People like David Toop, for instance, didn’t want to be recorded, because he felt like his improvisation was being fixed in an end result. Actually, that’s a silly thing to worry about, because you can have ten different recordings and ten different results. I’ll come back to authorship in a minute, but what I would say is that the ‘product’—the outcome—is not singular. And it doesn’t complete.

That leads to a problem about authorship. It relates to a—and I don’t want to sound rude—conservative text by Roland Barthes, called “Death of the Author”, in which it’s clear that there is no author because nobody’s reading anything, and there is no point in talking about the author if it’s not being read. Then it starts to shift, and there’s a blur that’s occurring between where

the text is read, who it's read by and so forth. Then you might say, conceptually and philosophically, if that's the case then, why don't we actually plan for that; why don't we write so that there is an openness in the work which doesn't complete? That doesn't always happen. But if it's there as a potential, and in *Pollock Record* it really is because even on the page you do not know the actual order, then authorship is not necessarily singular. The idea of the author as an individual is being lost somewhere. You could say that it has a problem and a solution at the same time. The solution is that it's making the text more democratic in a sense—it is open to more than the individual who made it. On another level, that might be thought of as a negative or a positive. If you require fixity in order to make a statement about that fixity, you've got a problem there. The debate is about intention, and how you articulate intention. Do I know my intentions in the sense of knowing anyway?

I think it's an interesting, complex question that reveals a lack of confidence in some peoples' reading processes. They need to somehow have that authority, whereas I really don't. I wouldn't give that licence to just push it somewhere else and say it doesn't matter. That's not true either. It's not so amorphous or ephemeral or so inconsequential as to be meaningless and worthless. So what *is* worth it? It's a philosophical and social debate about how the engagement is taking place. The answer is quite difficult. But it's a good difficulty.

Absolutely. Could we talk a little more about Blood Bone Brain? It was performed—or one of its performances took place—at the National Poetry Centre. Do you have any recollections of the event? How did people react to it?

I don't know. A part of the answer is that some of the audience are people who are doing things themselves, so they are a part of a network of understanding and sympathies. Not expectations in the sense that they know what they will get, but that they know they will get something. Some of those people are performers themselves, and others aren't. Those that are have a different level of sympathy and maybe a set of demands over things that are working and not working.

The performances were ephemeral in the sense that they are difficult to gather, and difficult to record, because they take place at different locations in the room. The duration is quite long, so there are moments where you are attentive and others where you are inattentive. They were environmental, and because you're walking through the space, you would experience emphases differently. If you were close to the piano, for example, you would

have a different experience of the event. Because I was involved in the event as a performer as well as instigator, it was difficult to know how the audience was responding at the time. There was positive response after it. I didn't get negative responses. That isn't a very full answer, but I don't have a full recollection of the audience.

You mentioned the performance being environmental, which brings up notions of space and place. Of course, both feature heavily across your work. How are they present in Blood Bone Brain?

First of all, it's almost as if it were a map. I'm not sure if diagram is the right word, but it's a way of documenting, and a documentation of history, both in the small sense of what happened yesterday, and in the large sense of where we are. In that sense it's like a palimpsest. The expectation of one being on top of another isn't necessarily an expectation of one being older than the other. It's quite a fluid map, in a sense. *Blood Bone Brain* is more fluid as a map than *Place*, which still ends up as a set of books. *Blood Bone Brain* doesn't have that so much.

It also feels as if during the performance of Blood Bone Brain, with its changing slides and movements within the audience, the space itself was mutating. Your "Thumbnail Lecture" notes that the project began from an interpretation of the Egyptian hieroglyphs for wholeness. Do you mind elaborating on this source of inspiration?

It's a device in some ways. I'm interested in energy and structure and thinking, and it seemed to me to embody those things, and it made it easier for me to remember them. I associated 'blood' with the energy side of it, and 'bone' was to do with structure, and 'brain' which helped me understand frames of structures. It was very metonymic and allegorical. It was never taken in a mystical, serious sense. I didn't study Egyptian religion or anything like that. It was a convenience, really—a device that allowed me to understand different aspects of my work.

But it seems to me there is also a spatial element to them. It's almost as if you are taking the body and making it into a place.

That's very interesting, because I got very interested in human physiology halfway through the 1970s when my wife got kidney problems. They both packed up, and so she was on a machine, which I had to connect her to. Her blood would leave the body and come back in, as if it were a fake kidney that

cleaned the blood. I almost think that *Blood Bone Brain* got rearticulated in the mid-seventies because of that. I did an Open University degree, and used a lot of the human physiology from there.

But it's very interesting. The body is a place. I almost must have said that somewhere. And I don't think I would be the first either. I also think that Williams, as a doctor, may have thought something similar. It's also like Olson's "Proprioception". Proprioception, as he understands it, is so interesting. I've used it a lot. "Proprioception" gives you a much deeper understanding of the body in its relationship to gravity, its relationship to light, its relationship to blood pressure, heart, all sorts of organs that you don't normally take on board as being about perception as such. But they are a part of your physicality, a part of who you are. It is one of my favourite Olson books—probably partly because you can't quite understand it. It's always a challenge to look at it, and I like that.

That might be another answer to the earlier discussion about authorship and fixity. How is it that I was enjoying reading people like Olson, or like Pound, and not understanding what I was reading? How is it that I went back to that stuff, and still do? You don't actually conclude. If you did, you wouldn't need to go back.

One final question: during the introductory notes to the microfiches for Blood Bone Brain, you describe the work as both a document and performance. But, during the taped interview for the performance in 1974, you say it would be a note of decadence to call it poetry. But if the idea of poems has gradually lost credibility, how far does an event like Blood Bone Brain actually permeate into poetry? What is the relationship between the two?

It is quite often useful to say that 'this is a piece of music', or 'this is a piece of visual art', or 'this is poetry'. I also think that it's not necessarily always useful. So what is the benefit to getting the answer to the question, then? Let's work with that. The benefit might be: "I'm just hearing this piece of music, and it reminds me that last time I heard it, it worked better when it was played in a certain way, but now I prefer this way". If we expand that, it doesn't mean we worry about whether or not it's music. When you worry about whether it is music, it is because you're comparing it to other music. It's an Aristotelian problem, really. So when we come back to *Blood Bone Brain*, in order to call it poetry, we must consider the context. What poetry? Is it the same as *Paradise Lost*? Well, not really. Is it a bit more like Cage's lectures? Is it in a nexus of Olson's *Maximus*? Some of it is, I guess. So my answer is loose really. I'm not evading the question. I want to know what the answer is

needed for, and then we can work backwards. If we need this to be poetry, we can talk about ways in which aspects of *Blood Bone Brain* are poetry, in the way they deal with space and existence, or how they question and analyse everyday life. In other ways, they're not like poetry at all; they're more like everyday life. That's not derogatory, necessarily, as it's open to that. So, I'm not anxious about it. The anxiety is likely to come from somebody who says that they can't give it an appropriate critical value or an I. A. Richards analysis.

Categories are like that. If they are to become something to use, in a broader sense, you have to decide first what you need. The answer to the question is: it varies.

[The first part of the interview concluded here. What follows is a transcript of the second part. Between these two interviews, Fisher had given a reading at the University of Kent in November 2009.]

I want to begin by returning to the reading you did at Kent last November. During the event, you briefly mentioned that Blood Bone Brain was about memory. Would you mind elaborating on this statement?

It could be quite a long question, but the quickest way of answering it is to do with performance—or it can be introduced through this idea of performance. If you are in a performance situation, you could choose to have a score, or a set of notes, or a book of poems; or you could choose to memorize it. Those are the two extremes, I suppose. And what I tried in *Blood Bone Brain* performances was to do neither of those things, but to give myself different indicators to talk. It is like a theatre of memory, in that regard. It's almost like the idea of memory rooms that people like Cicero promoted as an idea; when you're giving a talk you don't have a paper in front of you, and you go to a room in your head called geography and then talk about that. That seems a bit simplistic, though. My experience of it has been through art history, really. I don't use notes or papers when I give lectures on art, but I couldn't do it without slides and images. So what you do is you arrange the slides in such a way that it gives your memory indicators. In *Blood Bone Brain* I set up something called memory jars, which were initially jars with objects in them, and things like that. When the slide would come up, or if I had the jars with me at an exhibition, I would use it to extrapolate and talk and improvise. So that's the first system of memory that is inside of *Blood Bone Brain*.

There's another level of memory that is to do with place, to do with where you are. I made fun of that a lot in *Creek in the ceiling beam*, where I was

aligning the sounds I was hearing in the beam that's above me when I'm sleeping—it went crack every so often. I was linking it to the idea of ley lines and electric forces, and pigeons landing on the roof, and water systems not operating properly; whole ranges of things like that. Effectively, these were devices to connect different parts of location: where I had been, where I was going, where I had come from, where I knew people and where I knew particular aspects of the geography or geology that interested me. It's kind of a different, narrative layer. It gave me something to come back to and use to arrive at something else. Some of these materials, there were lots of cemeteries, which I was jokingly linking as if there were some secret significance in the link—but there isn't of course. With those linkages and the timing of the creaks, I would develop poems. Almost like a Mac Low mode or something like that, which isn't memory at all.

Was there any other reason to choose the cemeteries apart from these parodic qualities?

There was something else behind it. Many of the Christian sites in parts of London are built on top of pre-Christian sites. It was said, I don't think it was ever proven, that St. Leonard's Church on top of the hill at Streatham was a prehistoric site. Whether or not that was the case, I don't know, but some churches have certainly been built on such sites. That's one of the initial pretexts to make them connect, because one of the ley line ideas in Alfred Watkins was that these straight lines were routes for the people delivering salt for the different prehistoric groups, so that they would be able to line up the next part of their journey. They would line up to a particular node or a hill, or a valley or a gap. Quite often, something like a church or a tower would be built to give them this focus. Another thought about that in Britain is that people communicated through bonfires, on tops of hills and so on. Some would say that's the serious side of it, but it's an odd history, because it is very fraught with invention, and romanticism and nonsense, as well as one or two facts. I'm subverting myself so I don't fall into the nonsense of it. It's the same time as John Michell is writing his books, in which the alignments of churches are actually flying saucer landing sites; that kind of nonsense.

There's a further issue that's to do with parody. I recently listened to a recording of Mottram speaking at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975, where he talks about Blood Bone Brain for a brief while. In his view, the performance parodies the works of John Cage. What do you think he meant by that?

If it was a parody, I don't think I'd be taking the piss out of John Cage. I think I'm more likely to be reverential, to some extent—in awe of him, really. I just thought of him as a major artist. I still do, albeit he's passed away now. The first issue of *Spanner* was an interview with Cage. I don't remember or know when I first read *Silence* or his lectures, but I think I might have—almost for certain, I would have learnt from Cage's writing and some of the performances I saw him do with his music. In the seventies, he was here quite a bit. He was still in the situation where people would walk out en masse from being so disgusted and shocked by it all. I think it was at the Saville Theatre where he did one of his lectures with microphones strapped to his throat, where all you could hear was this incredibly loud noise. There must have been about 300 people there, and in the end, only six remained. Cage is also quite well known as being one of the instigators of the first happening in 1952 at Black Mountain. I think he has always been a major influence on any performance I have helped build, or have instigated or have built myself. I feel just thankful, really. I don't think I would call it a parody.

I'd like to talk a bit further about the context for the work, particularly in terms of books A, B and C. In the introduction to the texts, you refer to them as 'book events'. Was the term related specifically to those projects, or did you use it more widely?

It was specifically for those projects, although it comes out of experience in other ways, with books as events. Part of the event is the production of the book, which is often collective and involves many people. It comes out of a process of learning to do something in a way where you put up with the inadequacies of your skills, and see them as a part of the process of what it is. Not to denigrate it either. There are parts of a performance that just don't work, and some that do. It's just a part of what you're doing, effectively. There is almost a need to be in the process of, rather than the completions of. Books are events in that regard, they are like performances. I think they still are, for me.

That really comes across in books A, B and C ...

The books quite often note that they are being made, so to speak. I've always had a liking for that kind of 'process showing'. Even in the writing of poetry, I like to show some of the ways in which it's being made, as a part of the work, rather than a separate set of notes. That's not always the case, as some

of the notation is a part of the poem—it's going to depend on the work I'm talking about.

In the booklet for the Nottingham show—which I might misquote, as the ink has faded on the copy I have read—you mention that the overall structure for the performance was based on Sicily. On my understanding, Sicily was based on cut-ups and recycling. How did that method relate to Blood Bone Brain?

I don't know. A part of the relation is to do with printing. *Sicily* is almost over-elaborate in the ways it shows the printing process. There's a moment when the book is unreadable—you wouldn't try to read yellow print on yellow paper. The intention is not that you should be sitting down as with a novel. So in parts of the book, the description of the process is itself the process. I suppose I was influenced by collecting some of William Burroughs' work from the late sixties. In fact, I was one of the publishers of *White Subway*, which was one the best collections of his work, probably still is. What particularly attracted me about Burroughs' work wasn't so much what he was telling me, in terms of his own fiction. It was to do with the way in which he displayed the cut-ups. It was the way in which the visual gave you messages and information that might have related to the text or might not have done. It was to do with damage, destruction, almost to do with multiple consciousness. Those ideas interested me more than reading it as a fiction. In fact, I preferred that to the fiction itself, which seemed a little tedious or unseemly.

I've recently gone back to that, because I gave a paper in Glasgow on Burroughs' use of the visual. It transpires that he used to make drawings. Those are his drawings on the cover of the original *Naked Lunch*. They're almost hieroglyphs, but not. Or marks made by a Zen master. But coming to the visuality, when he makes the cut-ups, the pages look damaged; they have thick black felt-tip pen or crossings out, retypings. That's the text that first gets published in various ersatz magazines. They then provide the manuscript for the novels that Olympia and Grove Press and so on publish. They tidy all that up; they don't include the crossings out, they put punctuation and it's all cleaned up. It seems to me you then have a different text. It's hard to articulate how the text has changed. Its visuality is a part of the meaning. I was interested in that as a process. *Sicily* comes out of a lack of research information about the mafia: lots of cut-ups stories of that sort of thing, using magazines. Although I can't remember what other sources were in there.

I still want to examine books A, B and C. Your notes to the microfiche files mention that you used these components as working materials for initiating

decisions. Did this work in a similar way to the theatre of memory you described earlier, or does it denote a different methodology?

What was going on in the art world might help to explain some of it, conceptual art really. That was also about showing the process of the making: Robert Smithson or someone like that would show these diagrams that led to something. That was a big influence on the kind of work I was doing then, and it certainly was a part of my proposal. I'm as, if not more, interested in the process as I am in the product. It's as crucial as anything that might be the work. It's not included for a didactic reason ...

Yes, it seems as if certain components of Blood Bone Brain articulate a hope that others would develop the work further. I'm thinking of statements like 'you are invited to perform' and so forth. Do you know if anyone else staged subsequent versions?

No. Not that I know of.

Conceptually, it's still quite interesting. It seems to work with this idea of process as well, in that your performances—or your notes—are not necessarily the conclusion ...

Yes. Nowadays, it could always be that somebody phoned you on a mobile to ask what they should do next, and you would be on the other side of the country suggesting things. But no, it didn't happen.

I had a question about the extractions from 39 Steps within 'London performance A' of Blood Bone Brain. Was there a particular procedure you had for selecting the pages?

I don't remember. But I am almost certain that I would have had some arbitrary mechanism, so that it wasn't to do with my own feelings. When I did *Milk in Bottles*, people would come into the room and they would drink from the bottle and they would measure how much milk was left. That would give them a number they could use as a device. They had a pile of newspapers to look at, and use those to find words. So the words were picked entirely based on the individual measurements. A system like that would interest me more than simply selecting the pages at random. I'm surprised I don't remember ...

Similarly, there's a methodological curiosity in Taken the days after we had beef curry between 28.7.72 & 28.10.72. *The introduction to the pamphlet says its process will feature in Blood Bone Brain. How do these works connect?*

I think the main link was geographical, because a lot of it was produced in the same building with Beau Geste in Devon. David Mayor produced the 'curry' book, and I used their equipment for a lot of work.

There's a related issue in the 'curry' book. In the introduction, you refer to Blood Bone Brain as a 'book'. Did you originally intend to produce it in this form?

Something in the back of my head says maybe that is true. But I think the book was meant to be a set of volumes. Maybe there was a moment where I thought it was [pauses] maybe there was an intention to have another book, which would use the material from the performances.

Maybe this idea of a 'book' eventually developed into the microfiche documents. Maybe the method of production had to change as more and more materials were generated.

To return to the performance in 1974, some of the readings were read to tape recorders, which were subsequently replayed to the audience later in the evening. On the one hand, this could involve ideas of memory. But it could also illustrate some leanings towards concepts like 'process' or 'event'.

Yes. Subsequently on two or three occasions, the most recent of which is *Volespin*, there's a whole range of things in the performance, but one of the things that happens is that I'm reading some texts into a tape recorder. During the second half, I've got earphones on, and I'm not using a text, I'm just listening to what I'm saying and trying to replicate it. Only it was impossible to keep up with myself, so I had to invent bits in between and improvise. That's not quite the same, but it's a development from it. It's memory and distortion at the same time.

I had another question about the details in the project, but forgot to ask it before we digressed to other things. Why did you choose to include the image of Genaro Vasquez Rojas in Ffacece?

That is a good question. I don't know. One of the people I was working with was Felipe Ehrenberg, who was Mexican. Maybe the image came from him.

But I don't have anything deeply historical in terms of the knowledge I have of this particular Mexican guy. So it's not out of support for his work. There's a romanticism I still have with revolutionary bandits—an affinity for them, to a certain extent. So I think it came out of an ambiance of agreement. But I don't remember it.

We're nearing the end, and I'd like to acknowledge the possibility of risk within the sorts of questions I have asked during this interview. The foreword to Ffacece reads: "All statements confuse the issue further." Do questions and answers in an interview produce a similar degree of confusion? Is there a danger in this method of reconstruction and analysis?

No, I don't think there's a problem—unless there's a need to expect a finite answer. But I can't see that happening. You could ask the same question in a year's time and you'd get different answers. Not entirely, which would be interesting. When Peter Barry interviewed me in the eighties, he asked me a question about whether I was depressed, and I said I'm angry. Then in the nineties he interviewed me again, and he asked me the same question, but I didn't recognize it, and I gave him the same answer. So things can be consistent [laughs].

An Interview with Denise Riley

JV: I would like to start with a little bit of context. The year of the Cambridge Poetry Festival (1977) coincides with the publication of your first collection, Marxism for Infants. But you had been writing poetry since the 1960s ...

DR: I had been writing poetry since I was quite young, since primary school. But I had been doing it quietly and discreetly and unobtrusively without any expectation that it would see the light. Really, without wanting it to see the light.

But the publication of Marxism for Infants took place after you returned to Cambridge. You had lived there once before, right?

That's right. I did Philosophy and Fine Art there, between 1968 and 1970 when I graduated. I had done a year before that in English Literature at Oxford.

Thank you. I am asking about these biographical details because I am trying to get a sense of how 'new' you were when you performed at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977.

Interviewed by Juha Virtanen. Recorded during a meeting at Riley's home in London. The meeting took place on 16 August 2010.

I was completely new. I can't emphasize strongly enough my horror at having to do any reading. That Cambridge Poetry Festival reading that you are talking about was the first poetry reading I had ever done in all my born days. If you really want to know [laughs]—I don't know if this is the sort of detail that you like—but I was so sick with fear and horror and loathing of having to stand up and make a spectacle of myself. It went against all my natural inclinations. For at least three weeks ahead of it, I didn't sleep and I got through the event propped up with Valium and a couple of shots of brandy. People will often say to me about readings that I don't appear to be nervous. Actually, I am sick with fright. One of the few good things about getting older and older is that you can disguise it better and better.

How strange. That doesn't come across on the tape, at all ...

I didn't even know there was a tape.

I think they must have recorded most of the readings, and eventually donated them to the British Library. There are quite a few recordings available at the Sound Archive there.

Oh, I see.

How did you end up taking part in the reading, given that you were so horrified?

The answer to that is very easy to tell you. Somewhere—not only through the poetry network, but also the informal Women's Liberation Network in Cambridge—I met Wendy Mulford. At that time, Wendy was living with John James, another poet whose work I like very much. John and Wendy's home functioned as an informal meeting place. Somebody else had told Wendy that I had done some writing. The person who told her might have been one of the Cambridge poets of my own immediate age. Wendy is perhaps seven or eight years older than I am, I'm not sure. All these distances that were significant in your twenties vanish absolutely later on [laughs]. Wendy—who is a very vivacious, very animated and very warm person—more or less prised the manuscript from me. I think this may even be a ghost memory, so don't rely on it, but I do have a memory of a handover scene in which papers were more or less tugged out of my grip. It may not be true, but the emotional truth of it is that *that* is how it *felt*. Then—very rapidly—Wendy, who was then running Street Editions, decided she wanted to make a pamphlet out of it, much to my surprise.

In the small press world, as I am sure you know, because the channels of disseminating the written work were so slight, so fragile, so vulnerable, so restricted to a small group of people—I don't think by anyone's will, but simply because the number of readers was very small and it relied on the accidents of personal acquaintances in a small town in a rather parish pump-like manner, where the risks of parochialism were also strong. That meant that poetry and dissemination and readings all worked as a part of the package. I quickly found out that as a newly 'forced into print' writer, you did not have the liberty of appearing to be precious and saying "no, no, I can't possibly do it"—although of course I had several goes at saying "no, no, I can't possibly do it" [laughs]. But you realize that by sticking to that line, you would be letting down a row of people who had put time and effort into producing your work and who hoped to get a few copies around. So that is really why I had to go against my own grain, sick with nerves.

There must have been several poets within the audience, too. I have recognized some speakers on the tapes, but quite a few remain anonymous. Do you recall who was present at the reading?

I can tell you who I think might have been present, although I'm no longer sure if they were there. I'd imagine John James. Andrew Crozier would probably have been there. Possibly Nick Totton, possibly Ian Patterson. I would have been about 27 or 28, and I was painfully aware that there were several much older and infinitely distinguished poets swashing around in the background, but I'm sure they had better things to do than sit in the audience for pale and shaking twenty-somethings. I would not have invited friends I knew who were not involved in poetry already. In fact, I wouldn't have invited anyone. So, the audience was there possibly because they had read the programme and decided, for their own reasons, to be there. They would not have heard about it from me. I recall those early poetry festivals as being quite animated. I remember Robert Duncan being around at one of them. It was, in those days, quite a good tempered and decidedly an international event.

I remember reading the programmes for those festivals, and I agree; they feature an intriguing variety of names. One final question about these minute details: at one point during the discussion that followed the reading, you address one audience member as 'Mike'. Do you remember who that was?

It might well have been Michael Haslam, who I knew at the time. By then, he would have left Cambridge and was living in Yorkshire.

I would now like to turn to the reading itself. It was very much structured as a joint performance by Wendy and yourself. One of the things that really struck me while listening to the tapes is the opening: you both utter the phrase “am I going to make feminist scrambled eggs”, more or less in unison. What were the origins of this line?

[Laughs] That was a joke between us, and that had arisen from a remark made by the writer Fielding Dawson. He was around at the festival, and had been having a drink at a bar somewhere. Wendy and I had met him and he had said something about—something perfectly amiable, if baffled, about feminism, and somehow that developed into a joke that we took from his remarks. It was mild irony, of the kind I would approve of, about how far and how thoroughly one could extend the domain of feminism. So the joke came from that little accident of a conversation with Fielding Dawson maybe the night before we did the reading. It seemed somehow apropos. It is absolutely nothing to do with anything in the poetry that was being read.

Why did you choose to open with the phrase? Was it to play on the joke?

It was a continuation of the joke, and the joke had something to do with the audience’s expectations of what a reading by feminist poets might be. It was a cheerfully ironic address to possible expectations, where recognition might lie—or what such a stance of pre-recognition might miss.

It’s the kind of opening that makes it very surprising to hear you were anxious about the event. It comes across as a very confident stance. This impression is affirmed by the short speech you deliver immediately after this joint utterance, where you directly address certain orthodoxies within feminist poetics and politics at the time ...

I expect I was being rude and stupid, and that would have been the expression of my terror coming out. But the polemic—as I am sure you will know—is partly in my prose writing at the time, mostly in a book called *Am I That Name?* It’s really to do with the extent that feminist politics on the ground can be helped or hindered by a wholehearted embrace of a certain form of saturation in femininities and how that has worked historically. There was a version of that embodied in *Marxism for Infants*. Not too much, I hope, because self-consciously polemical poems can be pretty limp.

In the mid-seventies, a lot of the newly appearing feminist poetry was a wholehearted celebration of the essence of womanhood, as it were. I won’t

try to characterize it, but it seemed as if there was almost a new orthodoxy of what feminist poetry should be. That is, it had to be highly accessible, which is excellent. But this particular notion of accessibility was a limited notion, because it relied on the duplication and imitation of certain rather anti-modernist kinds of writing, or writing which hadn't taken into account a great deal of contemporary poetry and European poetry. In its way, it might've been a bit parochial even at the time. That was partly what the polemic was about.

During the reading itself, it almost feels as if your voice changes throughout. You begin together with Wendy, which is quickly followed by the polemic, and then you interject by saying "that stirred everyone up a bit". There's playfulness in this introduction. When you start reading, particularly during the first half, you go through the poems very quickly. These changes generate a degree of ambivalence, or ambiguity, within the event. Was this a conscious approach?

Not knowingly, at the time. There were various reasons for it. One was my feeling—which wasn't unique to me at the time—that chit-chat, or anecdotes, or biographical details and stories between poems only serve to make it difficult to whoever's listening to you to listen to the poem. Instead, they'll be thinking about your childhood and the death of your favourite spaniel when you were ten, or the boy who pulled your pigtails when you were at school, or whatever it was. I know that style of 'introduced' performance was, and is, dear to quite a lot of readers. What it does is, knowingly or unknowingly, draw out the sympathy of the audience to the persona of the poet. As a highly anxious reader, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to notice me. In time, as I went on having to do these readings over the years, I worked out a technique for myself—it happened intuitively and on the hoof—of reading quite loudly and quite calmly, without any intervening talk. The way that I described what I was doing to myself was that I was putting up a barrage of words behind which I, the 'biographical' person, could be quite invisible. It was an illusion of invisibility. I hoped that I could make a distancing effect by a loud and clear style of speaking.

On tape, you mention something quite similar. During the post-reading discussion, you suggest that the conventions of performance can often set up the poet on stage as the 'hero of their own text'. Could you just elaborate on this notion a little? What kind of a performance makes the poet 'a hero' in this sense?

I would take my remarks with a pinch of salt. Again, the emotion behind that was the emotion of self-annihilation. The intellectual justification for it, which I suppose holds good, is that if a poetry reading is done with a great deal of biographical filling—you know how some readers can make a great soap opera not only of details of their lives, but simply by riffing through their bits of paper, dropping their book, saying aloud to themselves “now what should I read next?”—the audience will laugh sympathetically and the poet could feel encouraged. I think what I meant by that is that it brings the figure of the performing poet into such a prominence that the words themselves become overshadowed, and it is the ‘charm’ of the persona which is being relied on to reach and communicate with the audience. But I am very aware that there are many modes of performance. Performance poets do that to a great effect, but it is a different genre, and different texts need that. The kind of writing that I was doing was occupied in a different enterprise and with a different set of objects.

What I like for myself, what I still like about poetry, is that there is a kind of democracy about it: it is cheap to produce, it is cheap to circulate, you can write it, as I often did, on the back of an envelope on the top of a bus on an old post-it note. You don’t need a big apparatus. Part of that ease of cheap democratic assimilation is that you did not necessarily need to have the temperament that enjoyed swirling like a glorious magnificent cloud away out of your text to shed its own bluster around the room.

But how about poets like Allen Ginsberg, whose poems and performances are often strongly imprinted with his physical presence?

I loved a lot of Allen Ginsberg’s work. In fact, the first time I ever went to America was in 1983 with a small group of poets, and we were put up at Allen and Peter Orlovsky’s flat on our first night over. So I did come across him then. Of course, he was a very kind and calm and sober and besuited and bespectacled lawyer by 1983. I would say that the power that is fabulous in recordings, is also fabulous on the page. I’m very glad those recordings are there ...

Absolutely, but is he a ‘hero’ of his own text, in the sense you mentioned earlier?

No. I don’t think I was even thinking of any particular performers at all. Some writing, like Allen’s—or Frank O’Hara’s—is such fabulous conversational work. Its conversational nature could demand that it be spoken with a certain warmth of leaning into the audience. Surprisingly, I have one or two

lightly conversational poems of my own that were written cautiously and experimentally to see if I could run with that, almost as an exercise [laughs]. There are blessedly few of those ones.

No, I'm thinking more of—again, I can't think of names—what I reductively call an English style of nostalgic, mildly confessional writing. In performance, you would often find the poet would be reliant on creating a confessional intimacy, which infuses the modest and domestic subject matter of the poems with the pathos of the person telling you his story. I think it's that mode that seemed to be seen as the 'correct' mode of performing.

The general topic of the post-reading discussion seems to be the role or purpose of poetry readings. Unfortunately, the tape at the British Library does not capture the beginning of the discussion, so I'm unsure of how you and Wendy introduced the conversation to the audience. Why did you instigate this particular debate?

Because—again, I can't remember precisely—clearly it was in the air. It was in the Cambridge air, and no doubt in many other airs across the country. But I can't remember the particulars.

On the recording, Wendy mentions that, as women, you have found a big barrier in actually 'doing' the performance. I know that, at the time, the circuit for these events could be quite masculine, or male-oriented. What was your experience of this?

It's certainly true that the overwhelming majority of performers were men, as was the overwhelming majority of the audience. The consequences of that are quite hard to explain. It would be misleading to say that ours was a simple experience of exclusion or some form of deliberate sexual apartheid. It was interesting, and certainly something that one thought about a lot at the time. I know that certain performers of feminist work would and did feel that the way forward was to make anthologies of women's poetry. Have you been able to look at some?

Do you mean anthologies like Lilian Mobin's One Foot on the Mountain?

Yes, exactly. You will have seen that certainly neither Wendy nor I—and Wendy was, rightly, far more established as a writer than I was—were contributors to those, maybe because our work was seen as difficult, or inaccessible, and therefore not really feminist. So, from the point of view of the

then writing collectives of women who were aiming to produce a platform in which more women's writing could be performed and disseminated, our work was just off the map.

There was a great deal of casual, cultural misogyny in the poetry circuits in Cambridge, London and everywhere. It didn't take the form—at least not to my awareness—of discouraging my work or, as far as I knew, Wendy's work. I suppose partly because that loose grouping of writers had the same interests in transatlantic literature, and a common background of interest in many poets, living and dead, acknowledged and less acknowledged. It would have done terrible violence to that commonality of reading interests if there'd have been any attempt to specifically say, "well we don't want to hear what this young woman has to say because she is a young woman". It wasn't crude in that way. But it was a very pub-based culture. There was a strong element of younger and middle-aged men's clubs, in effect—although not in a way that understood itself as hostile. It was only when I overheard my male fellow Cambridge poets, whom I will not name, talking about women in the room at a reading and saying "is she fuckable or not?" or "look at the big tits on that one", that I thought "oh come on guys, give us a break". There was also, I think, on the part of several male writers in that group, an interest—even if slightly nervous, or hesitant or sometimes hostile interest—in feminism.

Having said all that, I have never understood why Wendy's work was not included in the anthology of 'Cambridge-related' poets edited by Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville—*A Various Art*.

Yes, that is a very good question. This happened in other publications as well. I remember reading that during Mottram's editorship of Poetry Review, the percentage of women featured in the magazine was relatively miniscule. Most of the female contributors were from America, I believe. Of course, a similar observation has been made about Children of Albion.

I think one moment during the discussion in Cambridge also touches on this. Someone from the audience expresses confusion over whether you and Wendy are discussing issues in feminism or problems with poetry readings. As a response, you say the discussion is about the way 'the one produces the other'. Was this in reference to the difficulties you described just now?

What would I have meant by 'the one produces the other'? [pauses]

There's an essay I am really fond of by von Kleist, which is called "On The Production of Thought While Speaking". I hadn't read that at the time, but

what Kleist said in that very good essay is that having to stand up on your feet and be forced into speech by the dynamics of the occasion will generate this effect, to your own astonishment—that your thought is formed not a priori in your mind, but in the accident of uttering. It's also Tristan Tzara's "thought is made in the mouth". I believe profoundly in both of those notions as phenomena, which can hit you while you are reading poetry and while you are in that exposed state that, in my case, you dread. But then, once you are there and there is no possibility of physically taking flight, a certain inventiveness—which you cannot take credit for, because it is not the inventiveness of thought, but of the occasion of utterance—takes over, and that might suddenly produce a kind of aphoristic remark, which wouldn't have been the result of a premeditated thought. But when I hear you say it now, 40 years later, I think "yes, that's probably right". The two were bound up with each other, and mutually generative. I'm not sure if I can answer it now in any other way.

Let's return to the idea of the author as a hero of their own text. I was very interested to hear you and Wendy read other authors as well. For instance, during the second half, you read a poem by H.D. What was the motivation for reading works by other poets?

Those writers would have been interesting modernist or para-modernist women writers. That would have been one motivation. The further motivation was the idea that instead of simply cornering the airspace for your own poems, you would take some time to introduce something that the audience might enjoy, something they might recognize, and which would give their strained ears a break. Or, if they didn't recognize it and they liked it, they could go away and look up the author. Maybe find something that would bring them some pleasure.

I think you and Wendy both even mention the bibliographical information for the poems you read, as if to disseminate that information further. How well known was H.D. at the time? On the recording, you say she isn't anthologized enough.

It's a very good question. H.D. was certainly known and read by anyone who had an interest in the less familiar shores of early twentieth century writing. Pound, of course, was infinitely better known. There was a 1917 collection called *Sea Garden*, where I had found some bits of H.D. that I loved. It was before the revival of interest in her work, and that did indeed come about

through the general surging interest in poetry written by women in the very late seventies and early eighties.

One thing that struck me as interesting about this decision was that it seemed to pose questions regarding authorial ownership. For instance, Peter Middleton's recent book on the subject talks about a 'spectre' haunting poetry, as if Barthes' dead author had risen to claim their presence again. Your reading seems to do something different. In fact, you conclude by reading one of Wendy's poems. Yet before the audience leaves, someone comments that they would have liked to hear the poem in Wendy's voice, because it is written to 'her measure'. How representative was that response?

I don't know how representative that voice would have been. But there was, at the time, a strong adherence to the notion of the author's voice as very intimately bound up with the listener's comprehension of the text. That was something that, from many points of view, seemed, to me at least, questionable. One of the other reasons I don't like doing readings is that moment at the end of a reading when somebody appears from the audience and kindly says, "I'm so pleased to hear you read, because I could never understand any of your work before, and now that I finally heard you read it, I think I can begin to get what it was about". All I can say is "thank you very much", but I am thinking "then I've completely failed in that poem". I desperately want the work to be intelligible without me.

Finally, during the discussion, Wendy mentions, and I quote, "what particularly strikes me, as a feminist, who—politically—is accustomed to doing things in collective ways, is that there is no practical, possible network for the making of poetry". Obviously, she must be talking about the actual production of the poem itself. How far do you think a performance serves as a form of this collectivity?

I think there are two answers. One is that the performance of a poem is helpful in creating a sense of collectivity for the audience, whether it is a critical or a receptive collectivity. From the point of view of the performing writer—and I can only speak for myself—the one advantage I have found from the otherwise unmitigated horror is that it lets me hear, as if for the first time, my own work. And I can hear what I have done wrong, can hear where a phrase is not working. It comes back to what I was saying about Kleist and

the production of thought as an utterance that materializes as a new idea. You can hear your own work afresh, as if for the first time. Your text is there and it is speaking your own errors. And also the potential truth of it could then fall on your ear.

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