

see to see —

TED BYRNE: Rhodopsin bop voluptuary: *Virtualis*, Christine Stewart and David Dowker (Bookthug 2013)

This book nearly sinks under the obscene weight of its cover, a celebration of simony depicting the apotheosis of the Barbarini family in the election of Pope Urban VIII. This spectacle, in which all the emblematic elements, by definition, claim readability,¹ nonetheless mimics inexhaustible complexity through the multiplicity of its intricate parts and the overabundance of adorable detail, through its spatial *tromperie*, “a simultaneity // of gravity...of bees / and light.” The bees of the visible—the emblematic bees of Barbarini industry—hover above its surface, apparently monstrous in size but in fact, once one adjusts for their proximity to the viewer, bee-size and on this side of the picture plane. Conversely, its greatest height is a pit or well—its “blue sky faience”² drawing our gaze past the allegorical tableaux and into the book.

If the cover is paratextual, then so is the equally weighty bibliography at the end of this short complex of poems. The bibliography informs us that the work is an intense co-reading of texts. Although it would engage the obsessive reader in an equally intense labour of reading, as writing *Virtualis* operates more beside these texts than within them. Thus the bibliography, incongruous in the context of what appears to be a small collection of lyrics, is made part of the work; and like the cover, it would seem to open onto a territory much larger than the text it abuts, were it not for the fact that the text is so much larger than it appears, operating within a kind of infinity aided by its quasi mathematical structure. There are many keys to this structure in the works cited: the bifurcations of Bentham, the folds and façades of Deleuze, Benjamin’s description of the passages, the *phantasmata* of Agamben’s Cavalcanti, the parade of authorities in Burton, Celan’s meridian, and so on.

1 Rosichino, in his *Dichiaratione*, says that without his guidance the “viewer would remain deprived of the pleasure of understanding its significance.”

2 “porcelain eternity,” “blue euphoria of ceilings.”

It opens under the sign of infinity, the infinity of selection signaled by the first footnote. It piles up such substitutions, moving forward in a kind of automatism, as if governed by the first rule of psychoanalysis, reveling in the treasury of signifiers. Substitution, or repetition, also governs the axis of combination, with its endless rhyming. The work seems compelled by its patterns, one might almost say patterns which begin and end in the body, or in the embodiment of the voice, as with Cavalcanti's sighs (*pneuma, spiriti*). "Truth bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas, resists being projected, by whatever means, into the realm of knowledge" (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*).

There is a danger that unreadable texts won't be read. But to say that this text is unreadable is to say that it is inexhaustible and resistant, slowing the act of reading to a crawl. "This is the record of our reverberations / in the soft impedance of time." Like Pietro da Cortona's ceiling, *Virtualis* is an allegorical machine, stamping out meanings at a terrible pace. Every time I read it, it's as if I'd never read it before. If this book only had two dimensions, one would be pleasure, the other pain. Pleasure is terrible, it releases us from obligation. It would be sinful to read this book in the time it takes to watch a comedy, but go ahead, frivolity is one of its strengths. Study is painful, gives rise to melancholy; its emblem is the bibliography. But if you can enjoy the pain that results from an inescapable labyrinth, like the concept of the baroque, then this book is also for you.

DORA SANDERS: Visiting Yeats

My uncle in England had given me a letter of introduction from a friend of his to the Editor of the Dublin Times. This resulted in an invitation to tea with the great Irish poet, W.B. Yeats.

I took a bus to the designated corner and checked my bearings at a small store on the corner. Sure I was right ivery [sic] way, the storekeeper said. Go against the stream around the corner and I would find the boy at home. He spoke as though Mr. Yeats were a member of his own family. I walked along a wide road with a stream about five feet wide and never more than three inches deep flowing over pebbles in the opposite direction below a stout stone wall. Very soon there was a gap in the wall showing a twin stream on the other side of the wall.

A wide flat wooden bridgeway crossed both streams to a curving driveway and a small grey stone house stood in a sweet space of grass and flowers. The front door was on the street side but the house faced into the afternoon sun over a gentle valley built up with houses to a far line of smudged blue hills.

White frills on cap and apron framed a pretty Irish girl who showed me into a study so littered with papers and piles of books it looked as though someone had put them all into a bottle and shaken them. A short, broad-shouldered man with whitey-grey hair stood in the middle looking at me with incredible intensity. The maid withdrew and I nearly followed her.

I had expected a gathering of the usual tea-party guests and a smiling hostess who would be Mrs. Yeats. Alone in the tumbled study with a man so famous as W.B. Yeats I was overwhelmed by my ignorance about him. At that time he was regarded as perhaps the major poet of the day. I knew he was a fervent Irish patriot who had written great epics in the Gaelic language, of which I knew not one word. He was a co-founder of the Irish Abbey Theatre but I had not yet seen even the outside of it, nor read any plays produced in it. I had always loved the lyric English poem that made him famous outside of Ireland, but could remember only the first line,

“I will arise and go now and go to Innisfree....”

then something about bean poles and linnets’ wings. I stood frozen, thinking, I am absolutely tongue-tied, but then he asked if I would like to see his garden and I assented eagerly.

There was a door between the wall-high bookshelves that led directly outside. The flower beds were very large and full of the same flowers that grew, as freely, in our own gardens. Hollyhocks, delphiniums blue pink and mauve, bright yellow marigolds, bronze and gold gaillardia and fleets of cosmos, pastel patches floating in a high green fog.

He walked in the flower beds as though they were part of the lawns, pulling a weed here and a weed there, but never stepping on a plant. We came to a band of flowers that ran straight across the lawn, dividing it in two, and, crossing it, he stepped high over a sort of tunnel of chicken wire built along the centre line. I saw a stout, complacent black and white hen following the tunnel at her own pace, cocking yellow eyes at this and that, like a self-satisfied matron window-shopping on the main street.

Mr. Yeats asked, "How do you like my hen walk?"

"I'd like to walk one."

He explained that the hen house was "up there" but he felt it good for the hens to be able to scratch in the orchard, and he didn't want them in the garden so he had built them the hen walk and concealed it with the wide flower band. In imagination I could see the hen in the hen house, having dutifully laid her egg, plopping to the floor, settling her feathers and cackling,

"I will arise and go now...."

I wanted to ask if the name of the orchard was Innisfree, but it seemed like joking with Sir Lancelot about the Holy Grail. We had been talking about flowers like old acquaintances gossiping about mutual friends. Instead of risking what might turn out to be a bad joke, I began telling him of a rare sight I had seen in Georgian Bay.

I was staying with friends at Honey Harbour and one day took a canoe and paddled by myself to nearby Beau Soleil Island which was Indian land and had no houses on it. From a small beach convenient for leaving the canoe I followed a trail across the height of land where a ten-foot wooden cross had been erected in a clearing in the woods. The trail led beyond and downwards to another beach, low and covered with round flat stones.

From springs somewhere on Beau Soleil water seeped across the beach to Lake Huron, glinting between the stones like the leading in a stained glass window. Near the lake's edge was a vivid carpet of fringed blue gentian, fragile flowers on slender stems with meagre leaves and on the stones beneath the flowers green snakes lay sunning themselves, dozens and dozens of snakes coiled on the rocks above the seeping water. When I appeared suddenly at the trail's end some snakes lifted their heads, and then all began to move, uncoiling from the stones and gliding towards the lake through the water. And as they moved among the stems the flowers swayed and rippled as though a breeze blew over them....

I looked across the flowers at Mr. Yeats and he was absolutely still, his eyes staring at me but not seeing me. I knew that he was seeing fringed blue gentian rippling as green snakes slid past them—and then he came back to the garden and we stood staring at each other. He said, "Let us find some scones."

Back in the study the scones were warm under a white cloth on a tray that had been placed on a low table in front of a fresh-lit fire. The poet sat forward in his

slim armchair and poured the tea asking question after question about Canada and I answered as well as I could. He knew that Toronto was on a big lake, and I tried to describe it, and talked about High Park and the Humber River in the winter, the brown Muskoka water and the orange light that shines on country roads when the maple trees that border them flame in autumn. I told him about Caledon Glen and the lines that run downhill and the thunderstorm that painted Japanese pictures in India ink and watercolour.

He said he had seen similar effects with storms that swept from the north Atlantic over the West coast of Ireland. He pointed out that he allowed no drapes on his windows to shut out anything of what lay outside them and he said the walls of grey stone that showed a foot thick in the wall openings were all the draperies needed. He also said that he would never have a gate hung in the wall opening by the drive's entrance for the same reasons.

When it was time to leave he walked with me to the end of the driveway and the flat bridge across the wide shallow water to the opening in the stone wall where there was no gate. I left him with the pleasant feeling of having shared some treasures with a friend who valued them as I did.

At the bus stop the bus was not in sight along the long tree-shaded Dublin suburban street and I walked to meet it at the next stop. And the next, and still the next, going over and over in my mind the memories of that enchanted visit....

In the strange way that our memories work mine now gave back to me very clearly every word of the poem I had forgotten in the Poet's study:

I will arise and go now and go to Innisfree
And a small cabin build there of lathe and wattles made, Nine bean
rows will I have there and a hive for the honey bee
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
And I will find some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow
Falling from the wings of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight is all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow
And the evening full of the linnets' wings.

I remembered the man who had written that, short and grey, gazing across his flower bed and seeing wild blue gentian growing on the shore of Beau Soleil Island; and he had said, "Let's find some scones," and the fat hen waddled down the hen walk on her way to Innisfree.

Filled with a sense of music and colour and the magical meaning of words, I waited at the next bus stop because the bus was moseying along the road behind me at an easy Irish pace, like a tracking dog following a scent.

When retired Senator Pat Carney was going through her late mother Dora Sanders Carney's papers, she came upon this unpublished article, written in 1932. Dora Sanders was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1903. Her family moved to Canada before World War One. On a ship to China in 1933, she met Canadian Jim Carney who worked for the Shanghai Municipal Council. They married and raised a family in Shanghai. When Japanese invaded China in 1939, they returned to Canada where she wrote freelance journalism for *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night*, and *Canadian Forum*, among others, and published *Foreign Devils Had Light Eyes: A Memoir of Shanghai 1933-1939* (Virgo 1980): "the simple record of simple people caught up in a great international experiment." She died in 1986 at her home on Saturna Island.

J.J. KEGAN MCFADDEN: Review of Cathy Busby's *Steve's Vinyl* (Pile Driver Editions / Visual AIDS 2013)

An artistbook is a curious thing. Like the best of contemporary art, it breaks the rules and defies limitation. It is not a catalogue though at times it stems from an exhibition or event. It is not a monograph though it has been known to include essays or other exploratory texts. It might reproduce artwork or become the artwork itself. In the case of Cathy Busby's latest artistbook, *Steve's Vinyl*, all of the above is true.

As a visual artist whose practice is fueled by research, Busby has always included printed matter as part of her installations, if not as stand-alone works. *Steve's Vinyl* documents a participatory art event at the Khyber Centre for the Arts in Halifax for World AIDS Day 2011, but it acts as more than a factual account of what transpired. Between the glossy full-colour pages, the reader encounters a history that echoes many other histories over the last thirty years of the survivors, those left to deal with the deaths of their lovers, friends, and family.

In 1993 Steve, Cathy's brother, died of AIDS-related illnesses. Beyond their familial ties, he and Cathy shared a friendship galvanized through music, and so it was fitting she inherited his collection of some 200 record albums. Having moved with them around Canada over eighteen years, the artist finally devised the perfect

way to say goodbye. Instead of simply giving the collection away, she orchestrated a full-scale art installation and performance giveaway where the entire collection of records installed within floor-to-ceiling vertical bands of colour was systematically dispensed throughout the evening to an eager crowd, who, upon claiming their vinyl would leave a sketch or message in its place. In 2013, while she was based in Vancouver, Busby's artistbook took shape and has now been co-published by Emily Carr University's Pile Driver Editions and by Visual AIDS in New York, a not-for-profit organization that uses art to enact knowledge about the illness.

Steve's *Vinyl* transcends the pitfalls of so much "participatory art" because it is both event and book. I wasn't at the event, but I have the book. As it is a limited edition of 200 (the approximate number of albums in Steve's collection), there are dozens who participated in the event who won't ever see the book. (Of course, they have their vinyl and there were some real gems in Steve's collection!). Busby's project was "a tribute to Steve and his varied tastes in music, men, and identities, and a way of activating a collection as music and graphics. The collection became a time machine, a stimulant of memory and pleasure."

There are tender moments in Busby's recollections of her life growing up with Steve, as recounted in the personal essay that begins the book. In her own words, Busby saw her brother's selection of music as "autobiographical, a portrait made up his eclectic interests: Barbara Streisand and the divas; the Village People and gay celebration; music from France and Quebec and his francophone connection; Motown and his affinity with the civil rights movement; classical and his conservatory piano training." Just as we all share stories through music, the book includes firsthand accounts by revellers about the albums they scored that night and the thinking behind their selection. Funny, informative, and touching, these stories blend with those of Cathy and the brother she honours.

AMY KAZYMERCHYK: Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn

I have no need of your education. You have taught me less than I knew already, before I was born even. For this in future times you will be punished.

At the threshold of the gallery you approach three walls of glass. You know better, but you press my hands up against the cool surface

and lean into it. You slowly trace the perimeter of the flat shelf wedged wall to wall within the impenetrable cell. Its surface is obfuscated with newspaper clippings, paperback books, 8×10 headshots and film posters. A mausoleum of tyranny. You pause on an image of a woman with cropped hair tucked into a bell hat (perhaps the ugliest you've ever seen). Her gaze is crushed by a volcanic stone, but her crustacean eyes are not blinded. Dead but not dying. She watches you. *How do you locate intimacy between distant planes?*

You look towards the corridor behind the vitrine. At the wall on the left. The wall on the right. At the floor. The ceiling. Flat white is a prism. Fuchsia–indigo–tangerine–ruby. The pulsing light strikes at an angle. Corners are muted. You rest in the dulllest seam, and from this vantage point can see half an image. You trace an earlobe, a sinewy muscle and the neckline of an ivory garment. The figure's head turns abruptly and her obsidian stare meets yours. The light curdles (it's not blood, it's RED). The sacrifice of a golden fleece. Her gilded antiquity is slit by the dawn of your modern war. A tawny Hag whispers. *How do you look when the image is looking at you?*

How much time has passed? How airless is the glass seal on those photographs? The sunlight is aging the bronze. You invite her languid figure, bare chest splayed on the pyre, to watch you cross the gallery to the far wall. You've got an equally delicate orb of wetness in my throat. Cool modernism. Cold metal. You trace the lines of the futurist sculptures. Not as fast as the machines were supposed to propel us. The kick drum POUNDS. Not as fast as the fascists were supposed to propel us. My spine—underneath the speaker—is electric. *Arterial Venereal Immaterial Ethereal Sidereal Funereal*. This vascular system engorges molten genitalia. Two figures on all fours backs arched stare each other down. No one is looking at you. Even the recessive void is breathless. *How do you relinquish your desire to master?*

Ursula Mayer: Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn will be exhibited at Audain Gallery from June 12—August 2, 2014. The bold text is a quote from Mayer's film *Gonda* (2012), screenplay by Maria Fusco.

LORNA BROWN: *Pauline*, a new opera by Margaret Atwood and Tobin Stokes

If you had been a student in the Canadian school system at a particular moment in the post-war era, the spirit and rhythm of *The Song My Paddle Sings* would still be summoned up whenever Pauline Johnson's name was evoked. In my mid-1960s schooldays, however, Johnson's mixed race identity, her astonishing fame as a performer, and her remarkably independent life were missing from the curriculum. Indeed, the relationship of paddler to river in Johnson's interpretation—as a thrilling collaborator with the power of nature, rather than the more familiar conquest narrative—would have to wait for careful recognition until the beginning of this century. Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson in *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Life and Times of E. Pauline Johnson* reconsider the nationalistic, interracial, and erotic facets of Johnson's work and its importance to Canadian literary history.

At prestigious theatres in Toronto, London drawing rooms, and whistle-stops across Canada, decked out in an "Indian" costume of her own devising, Johnson presented her own poetry with great gusto, making her performances unique among "recitations" yet distinct from the popular entertainments of the day. Her fame and popular appeal stemmed from these performances as compared to her (ample) publications, and influenced, perhaps, the choice of opera as the best form for a new work about her life.

In the libretto for *Pauline*, Margaret Atwood reconstructs the scene of Pauline's final days in her adopted home, Vancouver, as she finally succumbs to breast cancer. The morphine administered for her pain by the compassionate Dr. Nelles creates a hallucinogenic lens through which she is visited by the apparition of her dead grandfather, the Six Nations chief Smoke Johnson. In waking dreams, her stage-partners and lovers swirl and combine as they reunite. Attended (somewhat competitively) by friends, supporters, and the complicated figure of her older sister Eva, Pauline's memories, regrets, and triumphs are layered and circular refrains as elaborated in Tobin Stokes' score. Haunting motifs draw us back to the Grand River of her birth. Visiting society ladies trill in a brittle comedy that punctuates Pauline's solitary ruminations and her somber dialogues with intimates. While the tonal, lyrical trademark style of Stokes is dominant, he also develops contemporary motifs for Pauline's convulsive efforts to understand her own life and defend her

right to live it. Using flute, clarinet, and bassoon plus a string trio (violin, viola, cello) with additional elements, the score, like Atwood's libretto, listens carefully to the past but addresses us, here and now.

In a collaborative design, visual artists Marianne Nicolson (Kwakwaka'wakw), Lindsey Delaronde (Mohawk), and lighting designer John Webber project images and Six Nations forms alongside set pieces from a Victorian interior, placing dual cultural influences in familial proximity. Such dualities thread through Johnson's life and work, and are traced in the competing appraisals of her work since her death.

She was a celebrity whose friends and supporters included leaders as diverse as Chief Joe Capilano (Su-a-pu-luck) and Sir Charles Tupper. In London, Lord Strathcona, whose marriage to a part-Cree woman, Bella, had created in him a sympathetic attitude to Mixed-race Canadians, took her under wing. An ardent supporter of the monarchy, she nevertheless "asserted the equality of Indian spirituality and Christianity" and "pointed out that Iroquois women enjoyed a political power denied to British women."¹ She could socialize with notables with the same confidence used to handle rowdy hecklers at the back of frontier halls. Her continuous touring, from the comfortable accommodations in Montreal's Winsor Hotel to the ramshackle frame hotels, drill halls and church basements of tiny Ontario towns, was an effect of her precarious financial circumstances, taking a great toll on her health and literary output. Yet it was her popular success that secured for Johnson a more lasting place in schoolrooms, anthologies, and now opera halls of Canada.

1 Charlotte Gray, *Flint and Feather: The Life and Times of E. Pauline Johnson* (Tekahionwake, Toronto: Harper Collins, 2002).

Performance May 23-31, 2014 at the York Theatre, 639 Commercial Drive, Vancouver. For further details see <<http://cityoperavancouver.com>>.

MITCH SPEED: Wade Guyton's inkjets, Liz Magor's Marks

It sometimes happens that just as you've got two things in your field of vision, a common denominator appears and hooks them up. On the last morning of a recent trip to New York, I made an early exit from the Queens apartment where I was

staying to have coffee with an art historian whose writing I like. As luck would have it, the trip coincided with an exhibition of new work by Wade Guyton, who this art historian had written about in his best known essay, which had to do with the way that paintings can mimic and engage the structures surrounding them. The show at the Petzel Gallery—a sanctuary of rectilinear whiteness—comprised several immense, horizontally-oriented canvasses, made perfectly to measure for the gallery's walls. These canvasses held black monochromes produced with a huge inkjet printer, and riven with fissures from folding and rough handling. Following our coffee meeting, I fell victim to a momentary short circuit of self-consciousness, and made the decision to email the art historian, in order to say that

I liked the show's immersive quality, and the way it played with scale. Somehow, the folds and creases and imperfections seemed like they should be from a world of smaller objects. They felt uncanny in that overwhelming format. I suppose that's because I'm not used to encountering the machinery of printing on such a large scale. The paintings seemed to mimic the ribbon on a typewriter, or some analogue to it, and that set in motion a weird circuit between the very apparent contemporaneity of Guyton's process, and a group of anachronistic forces: painting, the monochrome, the timelessness of ink, as a medium.

I really did think those things. Although I had recent experiences to thank. On the way to the gallery, for example, I had made an unplanned but fortuitous stop at Printed Matter, the storied art-book store, which doubles as an immersive palimpsest of the relationship between small scale printing and art. Additionally, a couple of weeks earlier, I had been to the Surrey Public Library to see the new building (inspired by another modernist sanctuary in New York, The Guggenheim) and Liz Magor's *Marks* (2011) within it: four three dimensional punctuation marks (ambiguously apostrophes, quotations, or commas) made of black silicone, each about the size of a barca-lounger, and squat, with billowy profiles. Pictured from the side, in a photograph on the library's website, they look like Oldenburgian drops of crude. They aren't smooth but have surfaces marked up by cutting and scraping tools, and human bodies: imprints from hands, zippers, and sewn seams. In this way, classically modern factures, reminiscent of Rodin, are transposed over small bits of hardware from the quiet colossus of word processing, here made large and receptive to the bodies that carry the eyes, which are the necessary collaborators with that technology.

Wade Guyton's paintings and Liz Magor's *Marks* are of a piece. One has ink, prior to the coalescence of characters, behaving as dumb entity waiting to be encountered, rather than interpreted. The other mimics ink, and then proceeds to amplify the character into a haptic dimension. It follows that the works are counterparts on multiple planes. Both move in an idea world whose ether is the correspondence between the technological reproducibility of thought, and bodies, which are always, though not always obviously, much more than armatures or attendants to that process.

JULIAN HOU: Lisa Robertson's *Thinking Space* (Organism for Poetic Research 2013)

Robertson begins *Thinking Space* by discussing several rooms: Tycho Brahe's observatory, Johannes Kepler's room for optical experiments, Thomas Carlyle's fictive study, Aby Warburg's elliptical reading room—each with an aperture, a table, and a book—various configurations to form an instrument for research and to guide the shape of research. She then introduces her own room, a place where she describes having arrived at this body of research through an elliptical path.

Thinking Space is about the ellipse as a geometry that produces sites of thinking by way of its irregular focus. The text embodies this exploration, showing how research and thinking can be expressed without proceeding toward unification or closure. The ellipse holds for her the “charge of a distance, a tension.” Robertson's text could be thought of as a provocation of geometrical structure as a producer of affect. Geometry is undoubtedly one of the most utilitarian forms of mathematics, specifically as it relates to the development and modeling of physical systems and optics. But this is not to say that a specific geometry like the ellipse cannot produce different configurations of possibilities in multiple fields of thought. Rather than digging up an ignored historical lineage, Robertson focuses on a geometry that has historically produced a scattered affect across numerous fields of research. Intoxicating in structure, *Thinking Space* is a constant elliptical movement through the research of various figures of history that she connects to the ellipse. At times the text seems to echo itself by returning to similar ideas through different forms, or through the *mis-en-abyme*, as if the reader and writer are both implicated in this structure of imperfect reflections.

Johannes Kepler's original discovery and shift, from Tycho Brahe's circular orbit to the elliptical orbit, is here thought to be a cognitive transformation toward irregularity as a site for thinking. Robertson investigates the profound impact that this movement had on the research concepts of art historian Aby Warburg and on the production of a mythology of the romantic hero by Thomas Carlyle. Warburg produces a literal manifestation of this site of thinking in his "traffic island of the thoughtful," which is an elliptical reading room constructed in Hamburg, 1926. Within this library, Warburg constructed his *Mnemosyne Atlas*—a series of panels upon which a montage of various art-historical images, maps, and charts are affixed. The improvisational staging of these images in proximity produces a charge rather than a smooth connection, what Robertson calls "a proposition of knowledge in flux." For Carlyle, Kepler's ellipse holds a symbolic political potential if governance is thought as a practice which "is always approaching and never arrived." These are among the many ideas of the text that show how Kepler's original discovery was expanded upon in multiple permutations throughout history. Robertson's text proposes the possibility of geometry as not only structuring thought, but also directing it toward a looseness—a hanging together of thoughts in an irregular movement around multiple foci.

DEANNA FONG: Audio-visual Translation: Seeing Voice and Hearing Space in SpokenWeb's PoetryLab App

I'm in the process of re-reading passages of Slavoj Žižek's *Less Than Nothing* and I keep circling around the supplementary relationship he develops between voice and gaze—those two Lacanian partial objects *par excellence*. Žižek insists that this relationship is properly antagonistic, each object filling in the other's lack or "blind spot." In his words, "the voice does not simply persist at a different level with regard to what we see, it rather points towards a gap in the field of the visible, towards the dimension of what eludes our gaze.... [T]heir relationship is mediated by an impossibility: ultimately we hear things because we cannot see everything."¹ In my work with audio recordings, that question of the relationship between the

1 Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2013), 670.

audio and the visual comes up frequently, and in various formulations: What do we look at when we listen? What gaps or silences are inherent in different auditory media? How might visual content be used to mitigate the silences of audio artifacts and vice versa? If, as Žižek posits, registration *brings an event into being* through the act of retroactive self-positing, then what types of events are respectively enabled by audio and visual documentation?

Concordia's SpokenWeb team is tackling these questions by translating speech into image, space into sound, with its new PoetryLab mobile app: a suite of ludic close listening games. Using code from their recently shipped *Jarbes* game, project director Jason Camlot, designer Christine Mitchell, and programmer Ian Arawjo are bringing the archive to the streets, taking advantage the situational and haptic dimensions that mobile technology affords. PoetryLab draws its source material from recordings of the Sir George Williams University (SGWU) Poetry Reading Series, which ran from 1966 to 1974 in Montreal. The series paired local poets with touring members of the American avant-garde and experimental circles, creating generative sites of cultural exchange. The game will serve as an introduction to the archive by offering three kinds of interactions with its artifacts: 1) Semantic puzzles, in which the user must order strings of audio into complete phrases to match lines in a recorded poem; 2) Prosodic puzzles, in which distorted clips must be matched to their comprehensible counterparts; and 3) Sound Visualization puzzles, in which the user must match visualizations—extrapolations of the wave form—to its original sound clip. Here, the visualizations (pitch curves, spectrographs, amplitude swells, etc.) help supply the missing information in an auditory riddle. The app may also include an audio tour of the Concordia campus (formerly SGWU) to engage locative listening practices. This feature would map archival artifacts onto the spaces in which they were produced, allowing the user to simulate the visual and spatial dimensions of the event that are latent or absent in the recordings. Importantly, PoetryLab embraces the frustration of the partial object by transforming it into ludic potential; while the artifacts themselves will always be incomplete, finding new ways to circle around their silences generates new, playful encounters with the event.

PoetryLab will launch in the fall of 2014. For more information, check out the app's Tumblr <<http://poetrylab.tumblr.com>> and Twitter feed <[@1966to1974](#)>, and the SpokenWeb site <<http://spokenweb.concordia.ca>>.