THREE-DIMENSIONAL POETIC NATURES

DISSERTATION + CREATIVE WORKS (DVD)

DVD comprises excerpts and documentation of: $H_2O$ an interactive installation; Liquid Stanzas, a suite of audio poems; Dive, a radio play

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis and accompanying creative product explore poetry as a multi-dimensional expression that is intrinsically inter-disciplinary. Poetry written for and practiced in media other than the page is surprisingly under-investigated. Such poetry has had difficulty establishing ‘legitimacy’ and currency in the world of practice, as traditional poetry spaces are rarely equipped, in terms of audience readiness or technological capacities, to appreciate such work.

For the purposes of this investigation, the term ‘Three-Dimensional Poetic Natures’ refers specifically to poetry beyond the page, particularly in relation to performance poetry; not the imaginative landscapes created by poetic texts. Research undertaken during the course of this PhD investigated the spatial and embodied aspects of poetry beyond the page and its relationship with space, time and ecology, through creative and discursive exchanges. I use the word ‘ecological’ throughout the thesis to represent poetry and its performance as profoundly interconnected with culture, people and the environment. The word ‘ecological’ enables me to discuss poetry as a living organism in exchange with the world. ‘Ecological’ or ‘ecology’ are not used to imply eco-friendly or environmentally sustainable. The exchange that takes place in relation to animals within this dissertation and creative product also stems from the idea of ecology as a site of living and vibrant exchanges.

Poetics that emerge from ecological thinking represent more than ideas, they also consider spatiality, acoustics, environments, subjectivities and texts. The poems infusing my research are technologically enabled and dependent. H₂O, Liquid Stanzas and Dive, the three creative products developed during the course of this research, represent forms of ecological poetry concerned with the marine environment. As water and its inhabitants, processes and spaces are the creative focus of this investigation, I have oriented the dissertation towards an engagement with water. Performance is integral to all of the creative works; as an enactment of subjectivity and as a way of expressing voice, presence, spacetime and text (in its broadest sense).
The experience of composing \textit{H}_2\textit{O}, \textit{Liquid Stanzas} and \textit{Dive} helped me witness the three-dimensional nature of poetry as it mutates conventional poetic form and migrates across ecological boundaries. I chose water in order to concentrate investigations into an ecological poetics on one environment; an environment with deeply personal resonances.
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the work itself.

Signature ____________________________________________

Date ________________________________________________
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INTRODUCTION: Beyond the Page

*Many people who write verse have never even considered the idea of reading it aloud* (Orwell, 1968: 240)

This research is a personal investigation that marks out some trails of enquiry into the newer poetries variously positioned as ‘new media’, ‘cyberpoetry’, ‘electronic poetry’, ‘sound poetry’, or hypertext. Also investigated, is the older practice of performance poetry and an exploration of the possibility of including the voices of the world within my work, to give it an ecological harmonic. My desire to do this stems from a noticing that most of the theory dedicated towards culture and communication within the arts is human centric, yet an investigation of the very concept of biospheres – which was my original research impetus – required a broader reflection on the nature of self, communication and culture. In the creative part of my PhD I wanted not only to write poems but to compose a world where poems and readers could converge in an ecologically charged space. Punctuating the dissertation are exegetical reflections on the creative works and the process of undertaking them. They are meant to contextualise some of the theory within my practice and vice versa. The exegetical reflections are represented in a different font to alert the reader to a change in the nature of the discussions.

In the performance poetry community, the dichotomy of the page vs stage is problematic as it creates another point of conflict in an already conflicted scene. This conflict has arisen as a result of people placing different values on texts and the act of publicly reading them. Poetry written for, or expressed on, the page appears to be considered more valuable than that written for, or expressed through, performance. I base this statement on the frequent remarks made in the public domain about performance poetry. For example, performance poetry is said to contain an ‘“anything goes” attitude [that lacks] the quality controls and internal definitions’ (Lansana 2004: 14). Following this theme is Martin Lenon, who says
that within the performance poetry world ‘[t]here are very few genuinely good performance poets around and plenty of dreadful ones’ (Lenon 2004). There is much in the public domain critical of ‘Slam’ poetry, a competitive form of performance poetry which has become emblematic of performance poetry, due to its large participation rates. For example Shirley Dent blames Slam poetry for eating away at the universal characteristics of poetry. Voice has become, not something that is welded into lines of language on a once-blank page, but a fetishised thing of personal ownership - my voice, with my accent and all I have to say with this voice is to do with me, me, me. That's why the only way you can experience this language is if I personally perform it for you. (Dent: 2005)

That Slam poetry represents only one form of performance poetry is often overlooked.

Another site of conflict appears in the online vs print debate. The editors of some poetry journals refuse online publishing, preferring instead to treat their online presence as a marketing tool for their print journals. Journals such as Quadrant, (http://quadrant.org.au/php/issue_view.php) Westerly (http://westerly.uwa.edu.au/) and Tinfish (http://www.tinfishpress.com/journals.html) represent such an approach. Samples from their past and current issues enable readers to dip into a few selected pieces which are used to demonstrate the quality of published texts and to tease people into buying the ‘real’ journal. Their editors give the impression that they are commercially focussed and may be dismissive of the ‘quality’ of poetry published on the internet. That online journals tend to underutilise the potential of the medium to present different sorts of poetry, is also true. John Tranter’s Jacket magazine may adopt a traditional focus on publication but it does so in the spirit of Tranter celebrating the positive aspects of online publication. Tranter says:

I think the Internet is the medium of the future … because it solves the most intractable problem that poetry magazines have always faced: distribution. With the Internet you get world-wide distribution, and you get it almost for
free.… English poets can read what their American cousins are up to: traditionalists can read experimentalists, cowboy poets can read computer-generated sonnets, New Zealanders and Canadians can mingle in its pages, and Australians and Alaskans can share the discovery of a new poem by a French writer, for example. And all for free. (Tranter quoted in Tower n.d.)

Although Tranter is committed to the publication of texts on the internet he is hostile towards a poetics stemming from html, believing it to be

just type. Movable type was invented over five hundred years ago. It had no effect on poetry, except to bring the Bible and the poems of Virgil to a wider audience, and I’m not sure that was a good thing. (Tranter quoted in Kinsella n.d.)

Even if one were to accept the ill considered opinion that moveable type had no effect on poetry, it is difficult to justify a closure of experimentation on the basis of Tranter’s other view, that ‘innovations can be a distraction.’ Tranter, who has a history of minor experimentation with text assemblages and animated gifs, dismisses ‘most hypertext artworks’ as ‘tedious’, thereby representing a common point of resistance to hypertext poetry (quoted in interview with Kinsella n.d.). Tranter is perhaps missing the point in his dismissal of recent technologically based idioms. Tranter contradicts himself when he associates html with a 500-year-old form of type that he goes on to reject as a tedious innovation, without a hint of irony. Contrast this with Komninos Zervos’ (2001) faith in Cyberpoetry as a genre that explores and defines poetry as a dimensional language in virtual space:

Cyberpoetry allows another physical dimension for words to exist in, move around in, and perform in, apart from the two-dimensional surface of the page and the linear arrangement of the sentences on a page. There are not the traditional devices of rhythm, metre, or even rhyme when words are suspended in a three-dimensional space; but there are new devices of motion, colour, depth, action, and weight of words that can be used by the cyberpoet. This literature exists in a space and not on a surface or landscape. This space is being explored, this is the area of the unknown,
this is a virtual space where thinking is required to solve new problems, actualise solutions, speak in new languages, new voices. (Zervos 2001)

These two contrasting opinions represent scenes of aesthetic difference that surround the larger classifications of poetry as print and electronic genres. As electronic poetry represents both an experiment with, and a performance of texts beyond the page, the page vs stage debate echoes within the discourse surrounding it.

To overcome the connotations and expectations of the label ‘performance poetry’ some performance poets use the phrase ‘poetry beyond the page’ to explain the practices that involve poetry which is not practiced on the page. In page poetry the object becomes the subject: the surrogate displaced body, the embodied idea, the body on the page. In performance poetry the subject becomes the object, in an acknowledgment of the commodification of human experience. Arguably then, what determines whether a poem is ‘beyond the page’ is not whether or not it is spoken or sounded, but whether the poem’s aesthetic, intent or expression resides outside of the page. If the medium of publication or expression remains aligned with the page it might be difficult to claim it is beyond the page, except for the fact that it is being spoken. How then does one differentiate between a straight reading and what is taking place in a poem that is ‘performed’? In the body of this dissertation I tease out some of the practices of performance poetry, and offer the following reading frameworks to consider some of the differences taking place: ‘readings’, ‘heightened or sounded texts’, ‘oratory’, and ‘embodied’, ‘enacted’, ‘improvised or manifested’ writing, as ways of discerning between different ways of reading.

In terms of writing processes, beyond the page includes the page, just as the page includes beyond the page. A poem often exists outside of its text: between lines 10 and 16 the poet may have gone overseas, hung out the washing, or whispered an incomplete poem into the ear of a lover. Between lines 7 and 9 how many hours were spent on the internet and how many pages of reference material were
consulted? Between lines 37 and 63 how many other lines titillated or tormented before being dropped into a Charybdian oblivion – where all the devoured lines spend eternity waiting to be trawled back to the surface through the watery realm of the poet’s subconscious? Can it not be said then, that a finished poem is an incomplete object in just the same way as a painting or a song rarely achieves the truly finalised vision of the painter or composer? A poem is often only a snapshot of the poem that surrounded itself with attempted words and was never written. Poems are always greater than our capacity to capture or represent them adequately. This may be one of the reasons why returning to favourite themes can be so compelling.

Books and poems encode destinations that are never fully attained but they thrill and satisfy because of the spaces they leave for interpretation. The challenge for poems beyond the page manifested through a speaking body, is that they tend to remove some of the mystery at the same time that they add the possibility of other mysteries and connectedness. This gaining of mystery and de-mystification can be the result of more literal texts, the poet’s public interpretation of their work within the speaking, or the addition of sound and image in the case of multi-media poetry. While the privileging of print media, intertwined with the advent of the printing press, helped define how we should write and read poetry, the internet and other relatively new media have demonstrated capacities for reinventing poetry publishing beyond the page, yet it is too early in their period of cultural influence to ascertain what enduring forms will emerge from the technology. Hypertext is an early new form that has gained some currency as a genre of poetry within e-poetry: the others being video poetry, flash poetry and audio poetry. Perhaps it is the very unstable nature of technologically situated works, and the redundancies that are implicit in them, that keeps the number of practitioners of cyber poetry (or as it is now commonly called, ‘new media poetry’) small. With a small number of practitioners, a diverse range of aesthetics, a demand for certain peripheral skills (software and conceptually related) and a dedication to a kind of poetic frontier that lacks the respectability of literary endeavour, it is perhaps not surprising that poets prefer to dedicate their
time to traditional notions of craft and publishing. Overall, the de-stabilising of the printed page as the governing poetic medium in the last three decades – through the rise of performance poetry and the internet – has allowed a window of opportunity for bodies, ‘the body’, and even virtual bodies, to take a greater possession of poetry’s presentational territory.

In naming my project ‘Three-Dimensional Poetic Natures’ I have the scope to consider the relationships between different types of poetry: their natures, their spatial and genre / media-specific idioms and the way they embody space and text. The title enables an interrogation of poetic practice and an exploration of the idea of a poem; a discursive gesture rather than a literal one. A poem beyond the page manifests multiple dimensions or characteristics, as it connects back to a body in spacetime. The title ‘Three-Dimensional Poetic Natures’ alludes to technologies required to support viewing and a fascination for viewing scenes out of the ordinary, such as 3D cinema’s ping-pong tricks and virtual reality games. It makes room for the co-inhabitants and co-creators of the space and time in and around the text. A poem is often much more than a scene or expression of language archived on a page. I am interested in accounting for the world from which the poem is emerging and which it occupies; essentially the poem’s ‘beingness’, to borrow from Heidegger (1997).

The sense of three-dimensionality that comes from thinking about relationships between the body, text, media, ecology, space, time and energy, is outside the literary definitions of poetic form but intrinsic to poetry as literary architecture. Poetry is an aesthetic sensibility, a language and a way of thinking / speaking, as much as it is a literary craft. I am interested in the way poetry supports a diversity of approaches to being in and engaging with culture. By thinking of poetry as a three-dimensional entity I open up possibilities for both writing and reading poetry that extend beyond the ramifications of ‘form’ as a particular kind of text. Poetry off the page
impacts listeners differently. They begin to notice sound patterns, tempo, the grain of the voice, its embodiment, its acoustic properties, as well as the complex iconicity of poetic language. (Marsh et al 2006: 65)

A critique of the spatial qualities of written texts is not the concern of my investigations. Though I love poetry books and never tire of the experience of reading poetry, there are limitations in their capacities to extend poetics in an ecological way. These are exposed during the ensuing discussion.

Philosophically I have emerged from the process of this research even more committed to a ‘deep ecology’, what Timothy Morton labels ‘an ecology that could assume that a politics of the environment must be coterminous with a change in the view of those who exist in / as that environment’ (Morton 2002). Having undergone many experiments with performance, collaboration and composition within the past five years, I have a sense that the embodiment of poetry cannot take place without an awareness of space and time and an appreciation for how both the text and the self articulate with built and natural environments. I like Morton’s idea that a person is, in a sense, an environment as much as she is anything else, and that a poetics and poetry that articulates a person ‘as environment would not invert anthropocentrism into "ecocentrism" but would thoroughly undo the very notion of a center’ (Morton 2002). It is perhaps unavoidable, though, that there is always a sense of centre that emerges from the material thinking of the self, as understood through phenomenology.

Ecological poetics considers the dimensionality of poetry in a world as well as literary sense, and in so doing is able to engage with poetry as a form that emerges from a body that lives in the world. My readings of embodiment and understanding about its implications for poetic practice, led me to converse with the poetics of space and introduce a poetics of water. As an integral part of human anatomy and the essential substrate for life, water revealed itself to be a great partner in this research and its accompanying creative undertakings.
Water is able to transmute between liquid and solid, visible and invisible, hard and soft forms. This echoes poetry’s identity as a visible form, displayed through writing, performance or technology, and an invisible form, understood as expressions in progress, unread books, utterances, etc. Water’s liquid and solid forms are also mirrored in poetry; realised through the solid nature of books and hardware, the liquid nature of breath coupled with language and the betweeness of the poet’s body. Betweeness is a core site of investigation in this research. Poetry shares the qualities of evaporation and osmosis; water’s way of moving between states and atmospheres. The qualities of hardness and softness present in water can be read in poetry through literary criticism and the form of the product. For example, a group of poets from Brisbane toured Melbourne in 2004 under the banner of ‘The Hard Poets.’ This was their way of expressing an aesthetic in opposition to the perceived gentility of the Australian poetry landscape. Softness is by implication the gentle line, the unasserted idea, the quiet reading, the background author. Softness and hardness are largely perceptual and somewhat resonant with ideas about objectivity and subjectivity. Being fluid and full of evaporations however, water is able to diffuse many of the binaries that occupy such discourse.

Water moves between ocean / river and cloud / rain in an ongoing cycle. In much the same way, a poem moves between thought / feeling, language / expression, product and reader. Water’s role in embodiment, communication space and time is a metaphor I have adopted to articulate a reconsideration of the nature of tissue and therefore the experience of embodiment. Moving on from modernism and phenomenology, Roland Barthes (1977) and Michel Foucault (1967) offered alternative ways of thinking about authorship and the nature of text. When Barthes suggested that

a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning [...] but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture … (Barthes 1977: 144)
he was extending Jacques Derrida’s and Ferdinand de Saussure’s imaginings about the trace. Such ideas stimulated my thinking about tissue as a cultural and textual mesh but did not offer sufficient engagement with the material body and phenomenological ways of being. Lefebvre and Husserl offered great insights into the relationship between the body and the world, which generated thinking about the embodiment of poetry. ‘Post-humanism’, a term associated with Katherine Hayles and cyber discourse, offered ways of thinking about the extended and altered body, composed through technological tissue. Through a dialogical engagement with their ideas I have toured my practice and discovered that water is central to current interests. Following Gaston Bachelard’s method of speculative engagement with water as one of the elements comprising the ‘hormones of the imagination’ (Bachelard 1983: xxxvii) I gain much from allowing the imaginative and metaphorical value of this element to inform the theory and practice of Three-Dimensional Poetic Natures. For Bachelard, water and its ponds, streams, rivers, and oceans, evokes dreams and stories within the material body. Water and the animals that inhabit it are not only the compositional materials for my \(H_2O, \text{Liquid Stanzas}\) and \(\text{Dive}\), they provide the conceptual and structural fathoms for the poetry’s realisation.

\(H_2O\) was an installation developed in partnership with Dr Steve Campbell from James Cook University (December 2005) to test the experience and implications of distributing a large poetic work spatially and to engage with the conceptual relationships between poetic structures, collaborations and the world in which they are expressed. \(H_2O\) was structurally informed by the marine environment, as components and compositions were catalogued into biospheres, oceans, starfish and shells, which were selected and navigated by choosing from coloured signifiers and moving in space. Some video footage, literature and audio samples from this work are included with and in the thesis.

As a spatially distributed poetic immersion, \(H_2O\) enabled me to explore curiosities about lyric, narrative, poetics and meaning in interactive environments. To grow
beyond a laboratory experiment $H_2O$ needs further development, though it achieved the goal of creating sets of acoustic biospheres in which poems lived, formed, gathered and dispersed; through acts of randomness and scripted narratives. As an experiment $H_2O$ yielded many research insights by enabling me to get inside some of the discursive moments in a creative and embodied way. These are reflected upon exegetically throughout the thesis. Some of the insights gained are best represented in the language of poetry and poetic thinking rather than the language of discourse, as poetic thinking enables the abstract and unsayable in understanding; something I find useful for allowing openness in texts and experiences. For $H_2O$ I worked with Campbell’s ‘Playspace’ program, which was developed to teach music to disabled students. Using the architecture of Playspace I was able to compose poems that relied on bodies walking through space to trigger spatially programmed components of a poem. This experiential engagement enabled theory and poetry to swirl about each other in a mutually informing way.

*Liquid Stanzas* is a suite of audio poems that explore the relationships between text / sound, animal / human, time / space and science / art. The poems are experiments in composition and represent episodes drawn from the materials of $H_2O$; demonstrating the different tones, rhythms, structures, theoretical engagements and intents that could be drawn from its fragmentary scripts and acoustic fields. The collection involves a greater sense of authorship as it is not an interactive suite. The central character of the collection is incarnated in the form of a mermaid, who is able to escape the limitations of binaries and who in her very form, breaches the separation between human and animal, land and sea. This collection has had excerpts published in an international anthology (*Fenton Keane* 2006), broadcast in a multimedia anti-whaling exhibition in Japan (*Fenton Keane* 2005) and at a spa based *Liquid Sound Festival* in Germany (*Fenton Keane* 2004d).

*Dive* is a radio play scheduled for broadcast by the ABC’s PoeticA program on November 3, 2007. *Dive* represents an experiment in composing an extended sound poem where I was able to design an acoustic experience that contained the
ecological qualities I was seeking. $H_2O$’s ecology was fragmented and unrepeatable. Liquid Stanzas is a collection, a set of experiences. I wanted to create an extended piece that facilitated an escape from the known everyday and that invited the world into the poem. I needed a longer piece to contain excerpts from some of the whale songs I worked with. For Dive I composed half an hour of uninterrupted poetic immersion. It resolved my desire to create an acoustic world made up of poetry, animal voices, people, environmental sounds, spacetime and technology. It also enabled me to continue treating the texts differently in terms of the acoustic environments composed for them.

Space and time are also key sites of reflection. There are many ways to think about space and time. Murad Akhundov (1986) represents the geographic point of view that conceives of space as a physical realm that can be translated into plots for mapping. Space is considered to be naturally linked with time: ‘the two are subjective and necessary conditions of sensory experience that are empirically defined only with respect to phenomena’ (Akhundov cited in Yattaw 1999). In her article ‘Time in Space: Narrative in Classical Art’, Penny Small (1999) outlines the different ways time is represented in classical art. Time in classical pictorial narratives is represented in ‘a non-linear, non chronological order’ with representations of sequential time stemming from the technology of writing (Small 1999: 562).

For this research, it is the artistic and cultural qualities of time and space that matter, not the definitions that emerge from mathematics and physics. Poetry is of space: it is around, within, through, by and in space. Part of space is time, and time itself is a space; as revealed by Einstein’s theory of relativity. I have adopted the conventional word ‘spacetime’ from physics to signify when I am discussing the two together. As this is not a physics thesis I have approached spacetime from a cultural, aesthetic and poetic perspective, and have engaged in a creative investigation of poetry and the sea in order to better understand the relationship between text and embodiment. I concur with Walter Ong’s (1988) notion that writing
is a technology, though for the purposes of my thesis I do not use technology in the manner of Ong, who believes that ‘technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word’ (Ong 1988: 82).

The creative products $H_2O$, Liquid Stanzas and Dive are consciously located outside any particular discipline; maintaining a commitment to interdisciplinarity and to flow. I am not interested in specialisation so much as an exploration of the multiplicity that inhabits my practice; which is multi-modal. As a result, this thesis is neither philosophical treatise, literary speculation, theatre study, or new media manifesto, yet it is partially all of these things: a true emergence from the spaces within and between genres. My goal is to engage with territories that inform my writing, performing, composing and production of poetry. A creative approach to writing and thinking has been adopted in the dissertation. It is part story, part poem, part analysis, part reflection, part conversation and it engages with the creative work on many levels. The dissertation represents the thinking taking place inside the creative works and enables me to reflect on and interrogate my practice.

A ‘Call for Papers' for the Leonardo Electronic Almanac on the Literary Calls for Papers Mailing List in 2005 invited discussions on replicating the wild in cyberspace (Thomas 2005). Since the premise of this call is that the real wild is on the verge of extinction, the question being posed is: ‘Can the virtual world somehow save the wild?’ The virtual world of the book does not pretend it has the capacity to save things in such a literal way, though of course by raising consciousness it is able to influence developments. Because the book lacks the capacity to simulate the look of real worlds it does not endeavour to replace them, either discursively or literally. I believe an error of judgment is taking place in cyber discourse’s confused and disappointing faith in simulations as reality, and this threatens not only ecological thinking, but also wild ecologies. It also traps and hampers the possibilities of cyberspace in a never-ending shuffle of deferred realities and identities, denying it other capacities. In a sense my project offers resistance to this kind of thinking by
insisting on the voices of animals as creative partners.

The motivation for creatively engaging with animal voices and environmental sounds is driven by concern for the ecological health of the wild and a desire to expand the theoretical and practical fields of poetry. This expansion emerges from a creative engagement with non-human and non-linguistic voices that are expressed acoustically and structurally in mysterious ways. Although the science of animal communication, sometimes referred to as zoosemiotics, has managed to map the tones, volumes, associated behaviours and structure of much animal communication, very little is understood about content. Zoosemiotics is a field that decries speculation about content but that is necessarily dependent on it. By including acts of animal communication within the submitted pieces here, I am not trying to be interpretive or to claim knowledge of meaning, but am drawing inspiration from the mysterious contained within the non-human sounds of the world, and intuitively working in another realm of the unsayable. My compositions express a desire to let the literary, acoustic, wild, scientific and creative, encounter one another inside a poem. I choose to open up my poems to animal voices that I have no hope of understanding: this represents a political choice as much as an aesthetic one. Poems become ecological because they contain the voices and sounds of the world outside of the traditional author’s voice engaged in acts of writing.
To overcome the complex array of linguistic separations within selfhood, while acknowledging the distinctions being made within them, and to resolve the ongoing difficulty of talking about embodiment and material thinking through the archaic signifiers of body and mind, I have adopted the acronym MIBOCU for this dissertation. MIBOCU substitutes for the triptych Mind-Body-Culture. Embodiment occurs to me as a relational and site specific comprehension and expression of selfhood through the position of MIBOCU. MIBOCU can be thought of as the extended space of a person. Extended space refers to the visible and invisible components of space that surround a localised identity, are manifested imaginatively by and through its subjectivity, and those external elements that influence its comprehension and expression. Cultural narratives form part of this extended space as do the (im)material realms of culture. Whilst acknowledging that boundaries are a common feature of material space, the space of MIBOCU is best thought of as an embodied situation in constant flux with the world. Situation in this context represents an expression and manifestation of subjectivity at a given point in spacetime in exchange with material presence. Composition, as the act of arranging the self and its expression, is a core feature of MIBOCU as it offers a process of becoming that is both self determining and governed by cultural scripts and society. In effect, composition represents the technique through which subjectivity is manifested and expressed through the MIBOCU within spacetime. Central to the minute-to-minute composition of MIBOCU is the process of exchange; the method via which composition manifests through the materially filtered processes of thinking-feeling-sensing-expressing. MIBOCU represents the processes and spaces present in the moniker ‘embodiment’ as it is variously represented in discourse. Representations of embodiment are discussed extensively in this thesis.

In arriving at the term MIBOCU I considered, amongst others, Shusaku Arakawa and Madeline Gins ‘organism that persons’ (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 1-2) and
‘organism-person-surround’. Gins and Arakawa’s investigations into the concept of an ‘architectural body’ were brought to my attention by Jondi Keane’s doctoral dissertation (2006). In discussing the position and nature of an artist engaged in the act of relating to the world, Arakawa and Gins adopted the term ‘organism-person-surround’ to theorise architecture tactically; as a ‘means of interacting with the production of a way of life, changing an “organism that persons” into an “architectural body”’ (cited in Keane 2006: 23). The terms ‘organism-person-surround’ or ‘organism that persons’ do not suit my thinking about poetics because they do not offer thinking outside of the human condition and still present a hyphenated sense of being rather than a fully integrated one. Drawing on the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1997) Keane’s term of choice to reconcile the position of selfhood is ‘embodied cognition’ which he says identifies a more precise site of bodily engagement that would address what is happening in the body, and most importantly, what is it that can be practised? Embodied cognition is a model of the nervous system that considers all cognition, conscious and unconscious, to be distributed throughout the body and extended through changes to action systems, cross-modal interaction, and haptic perception. (Keane 2006: 27)

Keane adopts the term ‘embodied cognition’ to address what he sees as a need to accommodate ‘representational processing’ in overcoming the historical argument for mind/body separation (Keane 2006: 27). This term’s focus on embedding understanding in limbic structures was too limiting for the investigation I wished to make.

Also investigated was Félix Guattari’s (2000) ‘ecosophy’ from Three Ecologies which advocates a component approach to subjectivity; in particular its social, mental and environmental fields. Although noticing convergence with some of Guattari’s thoughts on subjectivity as a condition that emerges from the influence of individuals, groups and organisations, problematic is Guattari’s choice of the word ‘mental’ and his splitting of social and environmental processes in the making of subjectivity (Guattari 2000: 27). In choosing mental over embodied thinking his
model succumbs to the flaw of locating the processes of knowing in a disembodied mindfield. In endeavouring to come to terms with his concept of transversality as a *modus operandi* for turning subjectivity away from an internalised and centralised material self towards a processual flux of signs and influences through which subjectivity is manifested, I found myself seeking a place somewhere in the middle of these two ideas. I needed to find a position from which I could speak, whilst acknowledging the locatedness and temporality of this position. As a triage strategy, MIBOCU helped me articulate the multiplicity informing my practice.

Technology and its posthumanist / cyber / robotic / prosthetic configurations, is intrinsic to MIBOCU in its human form, and like energy, breath or blood is part of our humanness: it is inseparable from culture. However, technology is a cultural component that may also be applied to the mind or body. For example, Ong (Ong 1988) argues that since language is a technology that emerges from and traverses minds, bodies and cultures, it exemplifies the need to consider technology in an enmeshed, rather than relational way. Because I wanted MIBOCU to be adaptable for animals I did not want to insist on technology’s presence in the foreground of this configuration of identity or its signifying acronym. MIBOCU is used to articulate the position of mind-body-culture often signified through the words ‘body’ or ‘mind’ and is interchangeable with a materially positioned individuality, subjectivity or identity. It also contains the material and immaterial elements – located and dislocated presences and degrees of virtuality – manifested through prostheticised subjectivity. Where body and mind are being discussed as separate entities in order to engage with Cartesian-style discourse, MIBOCU is not used.
The nature of a three-dimensional poem is expressed through a coalescence of three domains that I have called *Situation*, *Exchange* and *Composition*. I arrived at these domains after grappling with some problems implicit in discussions of dimensionality. One of these problems involved the scientific premises inherent in the use of the word ‘three-dimensional’. Whenever I spoke to people about my research there was an expectation that I would be creating and discussing virtual reality poems, or working on the old mathematical perpendiculars used to describe space. While this expectation was not unreasonable, I believed there was another way of describing spacetime that did not require this sort of approach. I needed a way to discuss the dimensionality of texts without being bound by the literalness of the conventional physics terms, or the literary treatments of space and time as dimensions in writing.

In the literature reviews undertaken as part of this research it became clear that several philosophers were dedicated to including considerations of space and time in their cultural discourse. The discussions of Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Lefebvre were particularly relevant, though I felt a need to develop a model that could account for an inter-disciplinary poetry practice rather than a strictly philosophical discourse. In trying to theoretically articulate and locate my practice I kept returning to the idea of dimensions and their capacity for potentiating a multi-modal poetics. The terms ‘Situation’, ‘Exchange’ and ‘Composition’ were adopted to facilitate a discussion of embodied texts, as it became clear that it was necessary to develop an appropriate language for considering texts as manifestations of spatiality and interdisciplinarity. These terms are discussed more fully in their chapters within this document.

Briefly, the dimension of *Situation* accommodates materiality, environment, culture, genre and embodiment. *Situation* accounts for materiality through its senses of location and manifestations of presence. It also reflects spacetime, duration and the
world beyond selfhood. Exchange accommodates the discourses relevant to relationships, movement and communication; localised embodiment, species specific experiences, creativity, notions of selfhood, the discourses of power, gender, disability, prosthetics, etc. Composition refers to the creative gestures of living, expressing or being. In this case Composition also refers to the processes used to develop my creative pieces – excerpts here attached – H₂O, Dive and Liquid Stanzas.

In advocating this discursive trilogy I am not proposing that the dimensions are pure, in the way they are thought about in Euclidean geometry, but am recommending that they be viewed as shifting, polluted concentrations that can inform a scene osmotically; with each scene bearing different innate concentrations that alter the drifts through the tenuous ‘membranes’ separating them. To represent this model diagrammatically would be inappropriate – like trying to draw a blur within a smudge within a seep within a saturated infinity. These dimensions are like poems in the sense that they may be variously understood but rarely pinned down to specifics.

The process for developing the creative component for this PhD included a residency at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Bioacoustics Research Facility, referred to as ‘the Lab’. At the Lab, scientists were archiving, researching, analysing and reporting on the songs and behaviours of birds, whales and elephants. During the residency I auditioned approximately 120,000 bird and marine animal sounds that were recorded over a 50-year time span. It was an experience in aural virtuality.

In the Lab at Cornell, I experienced life within the space of the headphones as a drama of multiplicity. I offer a diary entry from the time of the residency to share some elements of the experience:
My Australian body sits on a chair in New York State in the USA at Cornell’s hub of natural science. While conversations about hydrophones and field trips take place behind me, my head is full of hydrophone noise, the voices of scientists calibrating their tools and introducing the scene of their recording, as animals are recorded in both natural and unnatural settings. Fortunately for the large marine mammals, they were rarely "irritated and prodded", which is a term I encounter all too often as 1950s scientists are heard provoking the smaller sea animals into making sound.

Within the scene of the recordings and their archival, time flips about. Although materially positioned in 2004, one minute I am transported to being on deck on an ocean research vessel, watching “porpoises on the bow” in 1967, and the next I am peering into the deep sea off the coast of Argentina hearing the "greatest hits" of the 1977 Humpback Whale gathering. In between, I hear a fish with a severed spinal cord and amputated dorsal fin make grunting noises in response to electric shocks in the 1950s.

Recordings are stored on a computer in a cool room and the association between the dislocation of the voiceless bodies of gutted fish transported on ice for shipment to fish markets and the voices of the bodiless fish archived in a cool-roomed computer, bears an uncanny resemblance to the tensions between text and presence in my noticing about poetry and embodiment. (Fenton Keane 2004b)

While auditioning the archive I experienced time and subjectivity in an unusual way. Confronted by the sometimes cruel deployments of the scientific method and the general lack of faith in the consciousness of animals within the natural sciences field, I experienced a return to the original impulse of starting this postgraduate research, i.e. to acknowledge the imaginative capacities of animals (scientifically proven or not) and to create room for the world within my creative practice.

Phil Young’s work with elephants at the Knoxville Zoo, which is discussed below, points to these imaginative capacities. The fieldwork of renowned whale and elephant researcher Katy Payne, documented in her book *Silent Thunder, In the Presence of Elephants* (1998), also expresses a noticing of compassion and self-awareness in the wild elephant populations of Africa. Her conclusions about whale songs as acts of creativity with complex rhythmic and rhyming structures, is
supported by other marine field researchers. Payne and others such as Eduardo Arraut and Jacques Vielliard, discovered that individual male whales change their songs in ways that indicate they are providing each other with an audience that encourages improvisation (Payne 1985). In an open statement of protest against elephant culling, the research team of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project in Nairobi wrote the following declaration:

Our research and the work of many colleagues clearly show that elephants are intelligent, highly social animals with a complex system of communication and a sophisticated behavioral repertoire that includes strong affiliative bonds between family members. (Amboseli Trust 2006: 1)

With a combined ‘elephant experience’ of 200 years (Amboseli Trust 2006: 2), the Board of the Amboseli Trust’s noticing of an elephant’s ability to manipulate language and conceive of culture and self outside of dated models of instinct enriches my investigations into embodiment, subjectivity and poetry.

The analytical tools and methods of science are not objective or value-free, in spite of its much claimed objectivity. It is assumed, before experimenting on an animal, that:

a) it does not feel pain, or, it feels pain differently and in a lesser way than humans (Gorman 2003). This is an example of scientific assumptions relating to nervous systems and the psychological requirements allegedly necessary to experience pain;

b) its behaviour is more likely to emerge from instinct than consciousness, i.e. awareness of self as a discrete individual. B. F. Skinner’s (1958) work on conditioning was instrumental in attributing stimulus-response existences to animals, extending the behaviourism project of J. B. Watson (1930) who posited that all differences in animal behaviour could be attributed to environmental differences;
c) it has no culture. I use culture in this instance as that defined by Kinji Imanishi: ‘socially transmitted adjustable behaviour’ (cited in Nishida 1980: 118). See also Michael Tomasello et al’s discussion on the impossibility of animal culture in the absence of human observations of collaborative intentionality (Tomasello et al 2004).

The attitudes contained in these assumptions do not explain the artistic judgements of elephants at the Knoxville Zoo, whose painting skills result in canvasses ‘as distinctly different as a Mondrian placed beside a Monet’ (Young 2002: 629). At the end of each day zoo keepers at Knoxville are able to divide the paintings, as each elephant has its own distinct style. Patterns repeat; individual preferences emerge: lines, spirals, bold chaotic dots. The colors vary from day to day but, like many artists, the elephants endlessly mine their own creative niche, variations on a theme. Style develops slowly. (Young 2002: 629)

I worry that the style of the investigation applied to animal songs and observed behaviours is drawing conclusions about animal culture on the basis of limited information and that these conclusions are vested with such authority that it is difficult to offer alternative points of view. Scientific studies (see Clark & Gagnon 2004; Arraut & Vielliard 2004) in the animal communication field often focus on the pitch, rhythmic structure and frequency ranges of marine mammal communication. This kind of focus does not necessarily lead to increased human understanding of marine animal vulnerability to noise pollution, with ‘data’ in this area remaining ‘relatively sparse’ (Unknown 2006). Knowledge of the structure of vocalisations reveals little about what the songs mean to the whales. In my work I do not pretend to understand anything about the marine sounds I used, though I responded to them and considered the information surrounding them in the creation of each of the creative pieces submitted.

Time, as indicated earlier, was malleable in the virtual space of the Cornell Lab’s
headphones. Aside from the capacity to plug into different times and spaces via the commentary on the recordings, I was able to experience time as a space through them. It was my first palpable experience of spacetime. In composing my PhD installation’s environment using these recordings, spacetime was filled with rich historical significations that offered highly subjective readings. One of the ‘oceans’ in my $H_2O$ (see attached excerpt) was composed with announcements of dates and places, generating a list poem triggered randomly by a body moving through sensor fields in the space. With four triggers enabled at any one time, it was possible to be virtually in four different spacetimes at once. In addition there was the spacetime of the present fulfilled by the presence of the body in the space activating the sensors.

Spacetime was performed and realised through imaginary relationships with the spoken word. Spacetime is understood, both materially and ideologically, by means of archives, and the body’s relationship with the technologies used to realise the experience. Since many of the animal songs contained in the Cornell archive are structurally complex, I was given an opportunity to consider the idea of structure from an ecological point of view, as well as a literary one.

One of the most severe forms of criticism to be used against a natural scientist is that they are anthropomorphising animal behaviour. As a result, the discipline has a tendency to censor conclusions that attribute motivations to animals based upon hints of consciousness, as humans understand it. Yet it is unavoidable that such anthropomorphism will take place and that humans will always consider themselves superior, due to our capacity to take over space and invent. This results in animals frequently being ‘roboticised’, in the sense that most of their behaviours are attributed to instinct, genetics or rote. The narrowness of some of natural science’s disciplinary frame thus restricts speculations about animal culture, imagination, creativity, love, sexuality, familial bonds and communication. One of the problems with the scientific method is that, in much the same way that patriarchy has gendered the world male, science has additionally emoted and configured the world human. Emotion and consciousness are compared to a norm that is set by a
patriarchal human benchmark. This makes the practices and conclusions of some animal-focussed / -based research inherently inaccurate.

An interest in including ecological sensitivity in my poetry has been with me since the mid 1990s. This interest has changed during the course of this research, from being concerned strictly with acoustic biospheres towards an understanding of subjectivity and embodiment as biospheres in exchange with the world. Intuitively I had responded to the question, discovered in the final stages of my research, posed by Morton, ‘What if people were more like environments?’ (Morton 2002: paragraph 5). In addition, Morton highlights James Lovelock’s noticing that ‘weather worked like a person’, and asks us to imagine ‘a person as being like the weather? In other words, perhaps one might deconstruct personhood into ambience, atmosphere, surroundings, dwelling, environment’ (cited in Morton 2002: paragraph 5). While not investigating personhood as weather specifically, I explored this viewpoint as a strategy for investigating poetry’s dimensionality through the lens of MIBOCU and water. Using ecological principles I intuitively followed drifts of inquiry that address dwelling, space, communication, embodiment and habitation within three-dimensional poetic natures (originally I wrote here the word structures).

I have turned away from the word ‘structure’, which informed the original impulse of this research, as an explanation for the disciplinary frames of poetry beyond the page. Instead I choose the word ‘nature’ for its capacity to be alive, dynamic and organic within the realm of meaning and practice, and for its capacity for multiple positions; it also resists the language of industrialism and structuralism. Nature includes synthesis, process and intangibility whereas structure usually does not. Some poems have bird natures: they take flight, drop feathers and ruffle some. Others are like fish, darting around, unable to rest in stillness as they swim, float or drift in currents. Such poems have worldly and labile natures. Such poems are three-dimensional because they move through spacetime and occupy multiple perspectives.
SECTION 1: SITUATION

Situation refers to the context in which and through which poetry is expressed and positioned. The discussions in this section engage with embodiment and texts from the perspective of location and position, *vis-à-vis* materiality, environment, culture, genre, space and embodiment. Situation addresses the constitution of performance poetry through a critique of location and presence reflecting spacetime, duration and the world beyond selfhood.
Every genre positions those who participate in a text of that kind: as interviewer or interviewee, as listener or storyteller, as a reader or a writer, as a person interested in political matters, as someone to be instructed or as someone who instructs; each of these positionings implies different possibilities for response and for action. Each written text provides a “reading position” for readers, a position constructed by the writer for the “ideal reader” of the text. (Kress 1988: 107)

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‘Now’s End’ (excerpt)

It forces me to see my broken parts.
It is not interested in my cracks 
or the names I have buried in rehearsals of healing.

Inside cumulus, volatile filaments linger.
Afternoons thresh

with the flight of wild geese.
There is no doubt that western poetry’s nature is built upon a history of privileging topographical, lexical and syntactical compositional forms. Recent forays into concrete, multi-media and performative compositional forms have frayed the well-bounded ideas of poetry as a product of strictly written forms. Print rarely satisfies manifestations of spatiality or the influence of noise on the text. Poetry is not simply a noun, as the dictionary tells us, but a constellation of nouns blazing with written, spoken, sung, arranged and conceptualised relationships to language. It is capable of being extended beyond linguistic associations into sites of culture and dreaming through spatial, embodied and transcendental understandings of the world. As a genre, poetry enhances the possibilities for mutating a text’s copulative verb(al) qualities to facilitate syntactic rupture in pursuit of new methods for making sense and / or meaning out of language and its subjective attachments.

‘What, if not rhyme and meter, if not the sonnet or ballad, will shape the poem?’ asks Stephen Collis (Collis 2002: 143). Gradually, ‘the poem becomes a tissue of references, allusions, quotations, a surface bubbling with its pasts, bulging out into its possible futures, in search of a new history, a new architecture that it may dwell within’ (Collis 2002: 143). Performance represents one architectural possibility for a poem’s dwelling. As the main focus of this PhD, performance poetry is presented as a form that inherently bulges with histories and bubbles with discourses attached, though not limited to, orality. The label ‘performance poetry’ is problematic and I endeavour to unpack it while exploring the schools of practice within its shifty magnitude.

Spacetime is full of corporeality through the body inhabiting, imagining, moving and speaking. The dedication to abstraction inspired by an optically-induced detachment from the world, contextualised in a metaphorically-rendered body, is according to Lefebvre, due to the separation ‘from lived time, everyday time, and from bodies with their opacity and solidity, their warmth, their life and their death’
Duration helps configure embodiment by situating experience within movement which requires space. Destination is often privileged over duration in the experience of space. The space that is moved through is qualified as experienced, endured or invisible in order to reach a destination. The noise of duration is difficult to speak about.

Time is bound up in space and poetry. It is problematic to think about time without space and vice versa; though it is much easier to talk about space, superficially, as though it were an abstract timeless or all-encompassing thing. Time is currently critiqued as a spatial or progressive occurrence. For example, it can be rendered linear or cyclical, tunnel-like or worm-like, a space in which to travel backwards and forwards. Einstein proved that time is relative. Time is experienced as repetitive through the rhythms, measures and actions that make up everyday life and an individual’s lifetime. The experiential quality of time has often been remarked upon. Hal Borland reflects this sentiment: ‘The busy day can be brief, the suspenseful hour endless. Who can prove, by any clock ever devised, that time on occasion does not stand still?’ (Borland 1996). Time is accountable through apportionment in the same way that space is; through the iconographic and literal mechanisms of the clock.

Time creates redundancy in art and literature as consumption and the tastes of consumption turn over creativity as product in an increasingly rapidly-cycling way. An artist, hungry for and continually pursuing popularity or peer approval, is doomed to an increasingly masochistic existence; diving and climbing between the mania of acceptance and the despair of rejection, as the tides of public opinion toss and turn for or against them.

In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Debord, inspired by Hegel, writes, ‘time is a necessary alienation’ (Debord 1967: 161). Time is given as the medium
where the subject realizes himself by losing himself, becomes other in order to become truly himself. In total contrast, the current form of alienation is imposed on the producers of an estranged present. (Debord 1967: 161)

In literature, time is manifested through character, language, space and narrative. Descriptively motivated lyrical poetry sometimes attempts to defeat time by pursuing the timeless image which is allegedly devoid of period, for example a kind of verbal still life, however the language of the present will ultimately undermine such a project when the future glances backward towards it. Lyrical poetry does however pose a kind of resistance in and to the now by refusing mainstream value and the era of the message. Choosing to write in a lyrical style could also be motivated by notions of the haven. In discussing the works of French poet Michel Duguy, Jean-Michel Maulpoix highlights the desire of lyricism to manifest dwelling in language:

> It is therefore no longer neither the being (the subject) nor the world (nature) who serves as center, but language itself. The latter is the only one that can allow a new visibility of that which is. The world is what takes place in the poem. (Maulpoix 1999)

Certain kinds of lyrical poetry engender a celebration of a disembodied everyday, as opposed to a lived everyday. This manifests through a desire to represent the everyday in a de-contextualised manner through the ‘timeless’ voice of the lyric untainted by signifiers of the broader culture in which the everyday occurs.

To write poetry is to write noise; the noise of the text, the sonorous culture of utterance, the reverbs and swells of the body and the discourses seeping through its currents. Language is a kind of noise; an unremitting wave of elemental sound and energy that warps through spacetime and materiality like a strand of DNA vibrates and gathers its fragments of life. Language is a space of incubation. Before we can make sense of language its potential fills up our bodies with uninitiated speech. I experience the act of writing poetry as a kind of dwelling in a pre-lingual tapestry of noise, where my MIBOCU hums with its influences, desires and sounds
before it discovers the language necessary to write the poem. The same experience is felt in discovering a poem through the act of memorisation. Through the filter of language there is an experiential connection to the original noise and an enhancement of feelings through the specificity afforded by the language of the text. Poet Donald Hall also describes this coming into language as a sensation in the body:

Poems are pleasure first: bodily pleasure, a deliciousness of the senses. Mostly, poems end by saying something (even the unsayable) but they start as the body's joy, like making love. Sometimes a poem remains a small pleasing sensation. (Hall 1993: 3)

From the moment of first thinking in language, the transcription begins and elemental noise is gathered by subjectivity and translated into creativity, life and language. Poetry, like other gestures of creativity, attempts to reconcile immanent noise with subjectivity, beingness and the world. Noise precedes expression and expression is a manifestation of noise. During incubation a poem exists as a kind of noise within creativity before it progresses towards expression. Sometimes this noise cannot be heard, approached or understood and it is named silence. This is the nature of the unsayable as I experience it in the moment of trying to realise poetic sense in language. William Carlos Williams in Paterson (1946) also alludes to aspects of the unsayable expressed in poetry: 'you're listening to two things (…) you're listening to the sense, the common sense of what it says. But it says more. That is the difficulty' (cited in Bruns 2001). The noise in the period of incubation is full of the sound of language offering itself to materialise poetic sense.

Poetry is expressed as a literary phenomenon, a cultural grammar, an ideal language for multiple media and as a speech organ for fragmented subjectivities. Although poetry is dependent on language this dependency is not limited to the sounds of utterance or fields of printed text. It also extends to the various languages of culture as they spread through spacetime, are interrogated by noise and expressed through tissue; both material and immaterial. Immaterial tissue is used
here to indicate the spacetime, narrative flows and sounds residing in the matter
and spaces between, beyond and around matter. For the purpose of this inquiry the
language of poetry is viewed as lacking integrity, in the sense that it lacks self-
containment and is always dwelling in the periphery of mutation.

In considering poetry as an expression and creature of spatiality, I am prompted to
think about the many worlds in which it performs. Nietzsche claims the world is a
whole, ‘enclosed by "nothingness" ... set in a definite space as a definite force ... a
play of forces ... a sea of forces flowing and rushing together eternally changing,
eternally flooding back’ (Nietzsche 1968: 549). The world that Nietzsche holds up
as a mirror offers a ‘monster of energy, without beginning, without end,’ a ‘whole, of
unalterable size’ (Nietzsche 1968: 550).

Poetry can be viewed as the language of this ‘monster’, expressing the
contradictions contained within itself and architectural theory’s difficulty with organic
forms and embodied experiences. Nietzsche epitomises the complexity of trying to
make sense of ‘the world’ at the same time as it is necessary to acknowledge the
impossibility of doing so. Nietzsche’s eventual breakdown and dissolution into tides
of past, future, dream and reality, enacts the leakage of multiplicity into the
subjectivity he tries to explain. In the end, the scene of the world as a play of forces
encroached upon by nothingness could not be sustained as distinct, with
nothingness and beingness becoming inextricably linked. The coalescence of
materiality and immateriality and its relationship with thought, language, text and
presence infuses ‘the world’ of poetry and its citizens.

Lefebvre’s mirror appears more bounded and less monstrous than Nietzsche’s. In
Lefebvre’s reflection the self is constituted and repeated, reflecting both its
presence and absence back to the material body and Ego. At the same time the
bodily situated self is produced in the space of the Other
my space – is not the context of which I constitute “textuality”: instead, it is first of all my body, and then it is my body's counterpart or "other," its mirror-image or shadow; it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other. (Lefebvre 1991: 184)

Such separations between a material person and their immanent worlds are problematic when trying to come to terms with embodiment. Lefebvre’s attempts to situate the body in space and account for space in the body, guides some of the philosophical currents flowing through this exposition. Importantly, when looking at three-dimensional poetic natures I am drawn into thinking about the relationships between art, ecology, performance, voice and subjectivity and how discourse can tend to be isolationist, separating people from the planet and its other inhabitants.
Since the advent of online communities and poetry activities, there has been an escalation of poetry in the public domain. Performance poetry’s example of connecting with the audience has a parallel stream in online environments which support the development of interactive writing strategies: e-zines, blogs, e-books and self-publishing activities. Online audiences have been witnessing a growth in performance opportunities for the printed word in much the same way as performance poetry’s audiences have watched the spoken word expand. Hypertext poems, flash animations, blogs, artificially-generated poems, distributed poems, communally-written and streamed poems are all ways in which the printed poem has been performing outside its traditional models.

These practices have generated different philosophies, strategies and typographical frameworks for the writing and publishing of poetry. Traditional models of printing poetry have also found a modus operandi online, resulting in more poetry being made available to more people, in a more responsive manner than was ever possible when poems were confined to paper and books. Online poetry has suffered the criticism that what it produces is inferior in quality to poetry published in journals or books. As previously mentioned, some of the major literary journals still refuse to have an online version because of this attitude, though they endeavour to use their online identity as a shopfront for their print publications. When they configure their online presence in such a way they are enacting a conservative idea that the internet is primarily a portal of distribution, rather than a site of poetic relevance. They are also confusing the media for the content.

Bulletin boards, blogs, wikis, instant messaging, video poems, video-conferencing, CD ROMs, podcasts, DVDs and SMS are just some of the sites of the burgeoning field of a technologically situated poetics. To remonstrate that they are not producing ‘good poetry’ is beside the point, even if one were to accept that point. More important than any qualitative judgements about cyberpoetry are the ways in
which this emergent genre challenges the idea of a poem and its expression of spatial and technological ecologies. As they master fragments, links, images and sounds, poetry’s online forms express a contemporary manifestation of the adaptability that has served it throughout its history. As Craig Dworkin writes in his article ‘Net Losses’: ‘decades of literary and communication theory have reiterated [that] media are not merely implicated in the meaning of a work … they are, in themselves, fully a part of that meaning’ (Dworkin 2000). To discuss the poetic value of cyberpoetry (i.e. poetry produced to be experienced online), and e-poetry (i.e. electronically situated poetry that can be consumed online or offline, e.g. DVDs, videos, SMS, podcasts, etc) without accounting for its relationship with its media, is an ill-considered, though popular critical strategy.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, who emerged in the early 1970s, constituted their mission as an attack on language; in particular its structures, narrative instincts, extra-textual and referential meanings. Their explorations of fragmented and denotative texts that celebrated unmeaning, changed not only the way poems were written but also, it is claimed, the way they were read. Bernadette Mayer advises poets seeking to follow the aesthetics and principles of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets to ‘eliminate all connotation from a piece of writing & vice versa’ (cited in McGann 1998: xii). In a sense, their experiments produced the kind of texts that were precursors to some of the strategies adopted by e-poets such as Komninos Zervos. In his CD-Rom piece Cyberpoetry Underground Zervos used animated gifs to create a ‘3d textual space, text animations, hot-spotted panoramas of text, and synthesized voice sound poetry’ (Zervos 2001a) to represent five stations in the London Underground rail system.

The early days of internet poetry mimicked, for the most part, the strategies used to create CD-ROMs of hypertext driven poetry. More recently there has been a shift towards cinematic, distributive and generative aesthetics within electronic forms of poetry as bandwidths increase and the tools to create alternative paradigms to the page are made more accessible. There is still great scope for exploring and
developing alternative forms of poetry in response to the possibilities of online publication. Cyberpoetry is distinct from poetry that is published as lines of text replicated within page aesthetics, as it is dimensional, situated in multiplicity, and as Loss Pequeño Glazier from the Electronic Poetry Center says, is full of ‘non-semantic’, ‘spatial’ and ‘polymedial’ qualities which ‘open new registers in possibility’ for texts (Glazier 2000). Glazier goes on to say that:

It is crucial to recognize that emergent forms of expression may not necessarily be recognizable as variants of previous forms. In addition, forms that are "live", that execute in the presence of the reader, offer experiences in textuality a world apart from the rigidity of fixed paths through a textual field. (Glazier 2000)
Poetry occupies and configures space in material and immaterial ways. Through its texts, images, books, media, performances and compositions, poetry contains and expresses the frames and experiences of contemporary life. However, it is not necessarily the function of poetry to portray everyday life, or to communicate with audiences. Like art, poetry ‘co-presents perception and communication at different speeds which makes them irreducible to one another’ (Wolfe cited in Cvéjic 2004).

In my work H$_2$O, spacetime is a kind of species of exchange that contains, produces and reproduces itself and its meaning. Spacetime is rarely fixed and inert, particularly ocean space, which contains both land and water; a tidal and foundational union alive with disruption. Water, in its ‘corporeal element … has this function of being medium,’ according to Hegel (Hegel 1969: 729). Following and extending this thinking, water represents an ambiguous yet essential poetic texture within H$_2$O.

Although the three-dimensional rubric is commonly investigated as a constituent of the narrative contained in a poem, or in x-y-z plots or 3D virtual space / objects, spatiality in the world beyond poetry offers much more potential for critical consideration. I offer water as a liminal communal spacetime; a substance rich with exchange in the cells of all life. Water is a medium that supports life in oceans, rivers, streams, and that changes the planet on a moment by moment basis. To reiterate Stephen Collis’ reflections upon the influences of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound on overturning traditional poetic structures: ‘What, if not rhyme and meter, if not the sonnet or ballad, will shape the poem?’ (Collis 2002) In working on H$_2$O I found that water offered a partial answer.
Given that there are such differing opinions about what constitutes poetry, it is almost impossible to say that poetry even exists, beyond a sense of ordering words in a precise and concise way. Originality, inspiration, imagination, mystery, form, rhyme, metre, rhythm and sense, are just some of the aspects of poetry that have lost their currency as definitive ingredients as a result of the philosophy and practice of various schools in the past 100 years. Traditions, forms, theoretical schools and literary criticism are often perpetuated by practitioners and academics drawn to a particular style. Enmeshed in the discourse about poetry is the belief that a well written / composed / spoken / broadcast or published poem has value. A poem is something worth investing time, skill and energy in accomplishing. What constitutes the well written / composed / spoken / broadcast or published poem is arguably the scene of the most carnage. Schools of poetry are often hostile to others, and very few are capable of embracing an aesthetic outside their own dogma. When poetry is thought of as a language rather than literature, however, it is possible to engage with a poetics that expands beyond the accents of the dialects contained in the schools. Poetic zealots of all persuasions can end up with a narrow commitment to the idea of a poem. Prior to the internet and open mikes, their opinions dictated how the community was to receive its poetry. Now the community has picked up poetry and run with it, into the badlands of hyperbole – where anybody who can string a cheesy rhyme scheme together is able to call themself poet.

Poetry’s roots as ballad, epic narrative, language art, royalty-pleasing bawdry, sacred utterance or prophetic gesture, expose the dialectical tensions that ensconce it as an intangible idea. The term ‘spoken word’ is often used to try to distinguish between poetry as something complex, exulting in the realm of the unsayable, and something that endeavours to match common speech in a rhythmic framework. However, spoken word always involves a speech act, a sounding of words. There is a constant blurring between the terms ‘spoken word’ and ‘performance poetry’, and a lack of consensus about the divisions between them.
Poetry holds several attractions for the technological age: it can slip between the lines of ordinary conversation in chat rooms, blogs, messages and emails; it supports symbolic expressions for the niche languages of subcultures; it can be transmitted in fragments that are developed over time, in partnership with others; its logic is not reality-dependent; its volumes of clichés can be used as time-saving devices in the construction of communications; it is established historically as an ideal medium for the expression of emotions.

People who write poetry purely for the page, and people who perform their poetry, have been drawn into oppositional corners as a result of different aesthetics, not only about how a poem is written, but also about what a poem should contain or do. Poets who experiment with the way they read their poems in public are often confronted with condescension and disdain from poets who have a strictly page-oriented passion. Aside from aesthetic arguments, some of the poets who write strictly for the page believe that a poet’s body should not be seen, heard or experienced anywhere:

Modern poems are like Victorian children: They should be seen and not heard. The essence lies on the page, not in the air, if only because so much of the authors’ effort goes into effects that can only be printed: line length, enjambment, stanza form—all these disappear when voice becomes the medium. (Lewis 2003)

This belief is in stark contrast to that held by poets and theorists who believe that it is difficult for a poem not to have a body, or who believe that a poem without a body is a diminished poem in some way. Feminist theory, in the vein of Hélène Cixous, particularly represents this point of view by enabling an expression of the corporeal within identity:

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you
censor breath and speech at the same time. (Cixous 1998: 1457)

If we expand Cixous’ idea, by substituting ‘speaking’ for ‘writing’, it is possible to see how bodies perform complex functions at the scene of public readings. Adrienne Rich is another feminist theorist and poet who expresses the intimacy and interdependency of poetry and bodies: ‘The reading of a poem, a poetry reading, is not a spectacle, nor can it be passively received. It’s an exchange of electrical currents through language’ (Rich 1993a: 83). Such embodiment is subtle and dependent on language though it is understood as a method of integrating external data through a body, as well as means by which the self can be projected into the surrounding ecology.

Speech articulates one level of exchange between the bodies of the world. It is a way of producing the self through action. There is a contrast between the rational socially-engaged body, the disturbed body, the secret body and the indescribable body, as they are situated in the space of the unsayable. These are terms co-opted and mutated from a diversity of theorists to articulate some of the feelings experienced inside the onstage space. For example, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) discusses ‘the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth’ as ‘metadiscourse[s]’ implicit in a grand narrative oriented towards a ‘dialectics of the Spirit’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiii). Isobel Armstrong (1992) succinctly articulates discussions about the social body as a cultural construction of identity that consists of ‘forms and beliefs, myths, narratives and images that are rooted in social relationships and institutions’ (Armstrong 1992: 86). Notions of the disturbed body were drawn from readings of diasporas in the anthology Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence and Oppositionality (Martin 1995) and noticing how the experience of performing involved displacement from the ‘ordinary’ self. In the disturbance rests hybridity and fluidity, in relation to identity and definition. For example, the introvert performs as extrovert, the intellectual as preacher, the victim as perpetrator. These are some of the conventions within the culture of persona that perform within Slam, a kind of
hyperactive version of performance poetry.

In contrast to the above ideas about performance as a site where bodies are exchanging ideas, essences, spirits and energy, are the ideas stemming from postmodernism, as interpreted by Arthur Kroker and David Cook (1988), where the body is viewed not as a biological organism, but as an assemblage that only exists in discourse through articulations with context that enable it to be conceptualized

the body is a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural access on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire, broken into at will by the ideological interpolation of the subject, and, all the while, held together as a fictive concrete unity by the illusion of misrecognition. (Kroker & Cook 1988: 26)

Kroker and Cook offer a process through which signification takes place. This kind of signification of the author and the text gives poetry another sense of body, one that is discursively enmeshed in the poem and the body speaking it.

Opponents of performance poetry criticise the quality of its texts and performance skills. Shirley Dent, from the journal Spiked Culture, reflects this point of view when she states that performance poetry elevates ‘energy and gusto over talent and judgement’, thereby ‘strangling the real thing’; the real thing being Allan Ginsberg’s Howl, according to Dent (Dent 2005). One of the reasons for this privileging of written works over performance, is that the literary model does not sit well with the text and the dramatic model does not sit comfortably with the performance. The complex and abstract language of much non-narrative poetry is difficult to comprehend in a performance setting. Critics such as Gerald Bruns have alleged that poetry ‘isn’t English’, and that modern poets sometimes ‘ignore sense completely…. The audience is confused by the shape of the words’ in such circumstances (Bruns 2001). The memory of the reader holds the poem, makes the poem, and dissolves the poem, constantly in a reading. There is nothing to refer back to in order to evaluate meaning. Everything is reduced to the words and the
body speaking them at a point in time. Experience with performing poetry leads me to believe that within the MIBOCU there resides an enigmatic resonance which expresses aspects of the known yet unspeakable or unuttered, within the conscious body. This resonance may surface during the embodiment of a poem, thereby manifesting what Peter Brooks calls the 'mythic substratum' where performance poets are able to satisfy the need for a 'communal partaking of the sacred body' (Brooks 1991: 61).

Dramatic models of performance are often resisted by poets who believe that a poetry reading does not require acting and does not resemble a stage play, where such skills are valued. While attending a performance poetry conference in Bath (Bath UK International Conference on Performance Poetry, Bath Spa University College, 10-13 July 2003) to deliver a paper in 2003, I went to an unscheduled plenary session on the role of acting in a performance poetry setting. The general consensus of this forum was that performance poetry, as a predominantly oral form, does not require the import of dramatic skills and devices into its genre. The rationale adopted was that while drama relies heavily on character development and the art of revealing through action, poetry relies on the content and sound of the words spoken. Durkin, cited in Ashbach and Schermer, reflects this when he says: 'Action structures are embodied physically and are made of matter/energy. Language structures are made of information' (Ashbach & Schermer 1987: 23-24). As a practitioner of performance poetry I'm not convinced about the certainty of Durkin's position, nor do I feel comforted by the consensus arrived at during the Bath session. I find Durkin's assertion that language structures are made strictly of information, whereas action structures are material, to be too convenient and unrealistic. His insistence on the purity of the divide between matter and information makes it difficult to account for the existence of a performance poet. There appears to be little room in his definition for a speaking body.

The consensus arrived at by the practitioners at the Bath conference would seem, perhaps unintentionally, to shun the discipline of drama as a useful site of
engagement with poetry. The perceived unnaturalness of dramatic devices was seen as a threat to the ‘authenticity’ of spoken word or performance poetry. Performance poets located themselves at the speaking end of public engagement, rather than the acting end, perhaps exposing a bias in their own arguments. ‘Acting’ was read as something that involved *acting out* rather than discovering from within. How acting differs from performing could not be satisfactorily articulated in the Bath discussion. Actors generally work with texts written by other people. This was seen as an essential difference between performance poetry and acting. The assumption is perhaps, that poets don’t need to discover the ‘motivation’ in a text because they wrote it. A poem might not need to reveal its motivation to its author, but an interesting poem could benefit from a certain rendering of its text through an embodied reading. Participants in the Bath discussion tended to ignore current thinking about performance, which considers performance as something undertaken simply to be – we perform our various subjectivities / selves / identities. My ambivalence about the anti-acting position stems from experiences with reading my works in public. When I’m ‘performing’ poetry I feel much more connected to embodiment as a method. Embodiment, as a technique, helps me experience the abstract qualities in my text, through a sensory realm punctuated by speech and gesture. What begins in rehearsal, through the act of memorisation, is a slow discovery of the poem's unsayable and hidden aspects. Deeper into the process, as the words and non-linguistic qualities of the poem become coalesced with my MIBOCU, the poem exposes some aspect of itself that is then rendered in the moment. My interest in ‘reading’ a poem through this process is sustained as long as the poem remains mysterious, to a certain degree. If I attempt to embody or render a poem beyond its capacity to challenge me I feel distanced from it. I resist the meaningless repetition of poems and the inevitable awkwardness that would ensue from being forced to perform as a kind of hackneyed golem, trapped in a scene of perpetual re-enactment. I am not compelled to ‘stage’ my poetry in this way but instead am drawn to the ‘impressionistic, allusive [and] elusive [where] meanings keep flying away’ (Anderson 2004).
Method acting uses sense memory as one of its techniques to transfer emotions, from an event an actor has experienced in the past, to a script that calls for similar emotions to be expressed in the present. In this way, the text is rendered by the body through an associative memory that is re-experienced, to some degree, in the present. This technique is rarely adopted by performance poets, though Michael Mack speaks of his performance of his poem *Hearing Voices (Speaking in Tongues)* in ways that evidence this strategy:

Sometimes I take on the character of myself as a kid, or my mother, or my dad ... it's two stories that run parallel. One is about our family, and the other is an inner story, where I try to capture the inner experience of psychosis. (Mack cited in McAleavy 2002)

Dramatic monologues based on speech are a form of drama that could be compared with a narrative poetry performance. Poetry readings, as opposed to poetry performances, rarely approximate the degree of drama shown in Mack's work. The difficulty of articulating poetry readings as drama, whilst acknowledging that a performance expectation resides within the scene of liveness inherent within it, is represented in the following discussion about performance studies. Northwestern University was one of the first two universities in the US to establish performance studies departments. What is interesting about this is that the department did not offshoot from drama studies, but from an old 19th-century department in the university's school of speech:

It was originally called the department of elocution, then the department of oral interpretation, then the department of interpretation, and finally, in 1984, it took its current name [the department of performance studies]. The department's commitment to the oral interpretation of literature has remained steadfast since the beginning, though the definition of "oral" has been broadened to include other performative modes such as song and movement, and the definition of "literature" has been broadened to include in Conquergood's words—"any human document." (Jacobson 1994: 21)

Conquergood was the founder of the department and the performance of poetry is a
common activity within it. Something aside from traditional theatre is taking place inside a performance poetry event, something that makes it difficult to place within a particular discipline. Performance studies departments, according to Jacobson, pride themselves on interdisciplinary activity. At Northwestern they consider literature and the speech act (implicit in orality) to be a core site of investigation (Jacobson 1994: 22).

This conflict is reminiscent of that which took place in Plato’s Republic when Plato argued that dialectical poetry was useful to citizens and therefore more worthy than other styles of poetry. In his discussion of the Republic, C. Hugh Holman highlights early Greek distinctions between lyric and choric poetry. Lyric poetry was meant to express ‘the emotion of a single singer accompanied by a lyre’, and the choric, ‘those verses which were the expression of a group and were sung by a chorus’ (Harmon & Holman 2000: 298). Subsequently lyric poets were banished from the Republic and left to wander around private gardens composing their verse (Harmon & Holman 2000: 298). The lyric, originally poetry for the lyre, was viewed as a subjective expression of emotions and the choric as an expression of social consensus. Another agitator of Plato was writing itself, which he calls ‘inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind’ (Ong 1988: 79).

In the contemporary rendition of the aforementioned conflicts, lyrical poetry is viewed as an expression of the literary, transcendental or figurative, and has become elevated as the form of the ‘artist’. Political or orally transmitted works have become vilified as the form of the amateur and smutted by poetic inquisitors as nauseating dogma. The persistence of the image of poet as romantic idealist, as intellectual of the language arts, as genius with words, or as sensitive intuitive being of isolated purity, denies openings for the politically motivated, socially performing and collective aspects of poetry. Performance poetry leaks in the gap between the polarities.
Mikhail Bakhtin, in his essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’ (c. 1935) argues that poetry is alien to the public world and its language, which is expressed through a style of discourse that is

by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse ... any sense of the boundedness, the historicity, the social determination and specificity of one’s own language [which] is alien to poetic style.’ (Bakhtin 1981: 285)

Bakhtin’s view transacts the language of the world as a discourse alien to the poetic genre, but central to prose. It must remain untainted by the infectious ideas of the world and its *glottis spuria*; the opening between the false vocal folds. Bakhtin’s view of language is that it is an ideological system constituted through the materiality of a speaking subject, dialoguing with another. ‘Discourse in the Novel’ positions Bakhtin’s focus on literary forms and genres as examples of the way language is deployed differently, depending on its purpose. In discussing the difference between poetry and prose, he argues that poetry was the privileged form because it was free from the need to be representational in its meaning.

Poetry is not expected to do anything, or to be embedded in social relations, but it is traditionally expected to be beautiful: ‘to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation’ (Shelley 1819, quoted in Halsall 1998). Fiction, according to Bakhtin, is required to perform a rhetorical function through a language that represents the everyday world. These distinctions between poetry and prose are becoming even more unworkable as poetry and prose increasingly approximate each other. The idea that poetry is an art form and fiction a story telling form is still prevalent in some circles of the literary industry: including booksellers, readers, critics and many authors / poets. Fiction writing is a multifarious commodity, as is poetry, and both increasingly resemble each other in the way they use language and tell stories. How are we to explain the differences
between the two genres, however, if some distinctions are not upheld? Another more important question springs to mind: ‘Who or what do these distinctions serve?’

The choric poet of old performs inside some forms of fiction and the lyric poet has become increasingly isolated, through what Bakhtin calls ‘monologic language’, which exemplifies the single speaker with the phantom lyre (Bakhtin 1984a: 270). It is resistance to precisely this idea that has generated so many different schools and styles of poetry in the last 100 years. Heteroglossia on the other hand, represents the multiplicity of languages that operate in culture as intimate, social or professional speech. Because, argues Bakhtin, poetry is monologic, its words represent sealed autonomous units that only have to relate to themselves as abstracted language. They do not have to socialise with other words outside the poem. This means that words become abstracted simply by being placed in a poem and being taken out of the world. To complicate things even further, the possibility of reading words outside a poem as ‘poetry’ is still enabled because it depends on the intent of the reading. If a reader wishes to create a poem and apply abstraction to a list of words, then all they have to do is frame the reading as a poetry reading. The ‘discourse lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context’ (Holquist 1990: 673).

Bakhtin’s ideas on poetic language seem unfulfilling in the light of current thinking about embodiment, texts and their interactions with subjectivity. The idea that poetry is by default an abstracted language insulated from the world is untenable, as it implies that the poem and its language reside in a hermetic world that bears no relation to the very systems of exchange that he advocates as being central to prose writing. Unable to clarify his motives for making such a case, I’m compelled to draw attention to Gilbert Ryle’s (1949) suggestion that:

In making sense of what you say, in appreciating your jokes, in unmasking your chess stratagems, in following your arguments and in having you pick holes in my arguments, I am not inferring the workings of your mind, I am following them. (Ryle 1949: 61)
In order to follow the inferences of language, even poetic language, it is therefore necessary to read it from the perspective of a MIBOCU that is not in or of an alien context but which is emergent from and expressive of a socially embedded one – where there is arguably no such thing as abstraction. Abstraction is favoured by Bakhtin, to argue for something that exists wholly in the mind as a disembodied logic. This is perhaps as impossible as the notion of silence, if we consider that there is always a MIBOCU filtering the language, which makes it impossible for poetic language to be received without the influence of subjectivity. Add to this Adorno’s thoughts on cultural production, and the possibility of an abstract poetic language looks even more remote: ‘There is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him’ (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979). The cultural aspect of the MIBOCU ensures that production is always present at the scene of reception.

The spoken poem is more than the sum of its sutured Cartesian splits: sensationalism vs cognition, materiality vs insubstantiality, the phenomenological vs the metaphysical. It is an ecology of unrepeatable gestalts. An ecological sensibility is beyond renditions of a body becoming text, or a text speaking through a ventriloquial body operated by culture. It is a dimensional occupation and expression of poetry, which constantly reconfigures in an indeterminate manner. A poem using figurative language and lyric intent operates as free-spirited abstraction within the world of everyday speech, making it a bilingual experience. Meaning is a product of multidimensional fusions between the language of simplicity, the everyday, and the signification stylised within poetic speech.

Contemporary poetry is a mutable creature that performs through and across a range of media. It is no longer possible to define it as a piece of writing bound by alliteration, rhyme, similes and metaphors, rhetoric or abstraction. Poetry represents an ecology of language that emerges from a MIBOCU who coalesces and illuminates creative impulses in a subjective exchange with the world.
notes from a disrupted genre

October 2004

In October 2004, when I had finished most of *Liquid Stanzas* and was beginning work on *Dive*, I saw Dr Steve Campbell (James Cook University) give a conference presentation on his Playspace software. I immediately saw the potential for realising my vision of an interactive installation and approached Steve to collaborate with me on developing *H₂O*. Fortunately he agreed, as he had not worked on a spatial poem before. Playspace was developed as an interactive music tool for disabled children. It involved setting up a grid of sensors that were triggered by bodies moving in space. Steve developed the software to manage the movement, interaction and broadcast of the sound web. Working with Steve helped me overcome the technical and resource issues that had prevented me from experimenting with 3D poetics. Our intention was to develop a portable piece for installation in art galleries.

Before experimenting with an interactive spatial poem I had to consider some of the issues raised in this section of the thesis, namely:

How can I accomplish the feeling of immersion in a spatially situated poem where the situation of the world being rendered has different qualities to that contained in the world in which the poem takes place?

How is narrative rendered, meaning made and sounds managed when random interactivity is the key premise in the work?

What is the role of random generation and is it something I wish to engage with?

How to distinguish between linguistically based poetry and sound based poetry and whether such a distinction needs to be made?

How to invoke poetic devices (such as rhyme, repetition, form, lyric, orality) in a frame of
randomly generated sounds and interactive pathways?

These questions hummed in both the scenes of my practice and the scenes of my research...
SITUATION 2: THE BODY

The body is our mode of dancing, that is, our mode of belonging to the world, fitting into it, being appropriate to it, owning up to it, acknowledging or accepting it. One could say: the body is our mode of belonging to Saying, "whose soundless voice" calls upon us to speak (or sing) aloud, as with the body. (Bruns 1996: 130)

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Message in the Mouth of a Fossil

Learning to breathe in water
is an important skill
to develop
before you drown.
The MIROC as a material object and expression of the phenomenal world is understood in terms of its physicality and relationship with its environment. Subjectivity is highly territorialized by regimes of surveillance and control, as well documented by Foucault in Discipline and Punish (1995). I would like to detour towards a noticing of the influence of some critical past fictions upon the machine-body-identity relations that inform the space, identity and materiality of a performance poet. I am interested in what contemporary performance poets can draw from cyber discourse to critique the nature of their embodiment and craft.

Artists such as Liz Baker and Keith Armstrong engage with what Baker calls an "ecological subjectivity"; a sense of self that is intimately relational, embodied and embedded (Baker 2003). This philosophy, according to Baker, attempts a reconciliation between 'human subjectivity (understanding of self) and agency (how we choose to act)' (Baker 2005) and subjectivity's terms of engagement with the world. Intimate Transactions (2005) was on exhibition at QUT in Brisbane where I was strapped, standing, into a device that went from head to toe. On screen was an avatar controlled by foot movements that engaged with five other 'creatures' in the space. At the same time, another person in Melbourne joined me remotely. The space of our meeting was called the 'Public Transaction Space'. Through our actions, the artwork changed, gradually blurring out well-defined regions of image or changing the shapes of some of the others. The images were predominantly non-representational manifestations of computation and light.

Engagement with Intimate Transactions was done via physical movements that established an 'indirect dialogue' between participants 'and the computational creatures that inhabit their parallel virtual environments'. One of Baker and Armstrong's later works on ecological subjectivity, done with the Transmute Collective, was inspired by the need to develop 'a sense of self that is intimately relational, embodied and embedded' (Armstrong 2003). Earlier works by Armstrong
were concerned with ‘shaping change by liquefying boundaries in ways that ultimately encourage and shape experiences, rather than providing a predetermined experience for consumption’ (Armstrong 2001). In Intimate Transactions Baker considered three interlocking ecologies. “me”, “us” and “others” both:

ME is.. that bit the participant identifies as them – as he or she.. US – for most people on the planet .. is other people like me! Other PEOPLE like me. US is a more inclusive term. OTHER.. is that stuff which is not like me, that stuff that is really other to me that I have no connection to. (Baker 2003)

This idea of interlocking ecologies mirrors strategically, though not compositionally, MIBOCU’s engagement with three-dimensional poetic natures. I am less interested in a systems approach, which I find unnecessarily cumbersome as a strategy for creativity, than I am in dialoguing with traditional and accepted concepts of genre, self and other. Having participated in Intimate Transactions, I can attest to the ecological nature of the experience. Unfortunately Baker, in spite of all her ecological speak, undermines her thinking with statements such as: ‘selfhood is a human construct, an understanding of ourselves’ (Baker 2003). What I found most interesting about this work was not the presence of the other person, or the structure of the interactive hardware, but the gorgeous array of interactive outcomes: the decay of the images, the noise of the environment that was generated by my activities in the space; the properties of light that became increasingly spectral. Intimate Transactions encouraged reflections on self and other, subjectivity and its borders, and how these are personally defined. It exceeded any of the virtual reality immersions I’ve previously experienced, in terms of its simulated organicism and poetic qualities.

MIBOCU moves between dimensions, literally and figuratively. My exploration of poetry and spacetime is driven by a need to consider poetry as an embodied and spatio-temporal practice, as well as a textual one. MIBOCU and embodiment
dialogue and produce spacetime. Identity does not have to be human to produce spacetime. Sally Munt suggests that 'space is historically associated with Being, implying a kind of fixity and stasis, as opposed to time which is conceived of as becoming, of active progress' (Munt 2002). Inside these concepts are understandings about space and place that inform responses to the ideas they contain and represent. Gaston Bachelard’s poetic spaces are situated in the imagination, where

the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct ontology ... it emerges into consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man, apprehended in his actuality. (Bachelard 1969: xiv)

Luce Irigaray’s (1985) spatiality is a place of gendered difference, situated in a body that can never experience the condition of the other. Man as male, his voice as primer of philosophical thought and language, are spaces that are already invested with meanings alien to the condition of women, according to Irigaray. MIBOCU’s poetic space, as has already been mentioned, expresses itself through Situation, Composition and Exchange. It is also an amalgamation of these; an ecological world within the MIBOCU’s lived spaces.

Merleau-Ponty believed that cognition required the presence of a living body and was dependent upon it: ‘Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of “I think that” but of “I can”’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 137). For him it was inconceivable that mental cognition could take place without the material presence of the body entering into physical relationships with the world: ‘the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962 137). Consciousness is experienced in and through the lived body, as living knowledge brought forth, in a becoming part of, and manifesting itself as, the flesh of the world. Foucault, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty, does not believe the body generates social space but that social space generates the body, through the application of power and surveillance: a ‘whole history remains to be
written of spaces – which would at the same time be the history of powers (both terms in the plural) – from the greatest strategies of geophysics to the little tactics of the habitat’ (Foucault 1986: 23).

While not inclined to write the whole history of space, I am interested in looking at the way space is spoken about, how it is thought of, and how this might be relevant to poetry and the bodies immersed in and creating it. It is an investigation that follows a tradition of enquiry that has been particularly concerned with beingness, power, subjectivity and urban space. Lefebvre, although a limited theorist of the body, is valuable for thinking about how the social and the phenomenological might find temporary harbour in the same body through the method of spatial practice – which enables a production of the body as both a perceived and conceived space. Spatial practice adds porosity to the membranes between the social and the personal, to enable the body to produce space; not just to be space or to have space act upon it. Through spatial practice, argues Lefebvre, subjectivity resists the forces of homogeneity: ‘in spatial practice, the reproduction of social relations is predominant’ (Lefebvre 1991: 50).

Extending this concept further, osmosis offers an interesting tool within spatial practice by facilitating exchange between the porous sites of difference through membranes that make up the dynamic system of MIBOCU-spacetime relations. Osmosis, as an underlying process of ‘making’ subjectivity, also supports Merleau-Ponty’s experiential view of the world as ‘not what I think, but what I live through’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xvii). Osmosis requires difference to generate flow, reaching equilibrium when homogeneity slows the exchange. Where homogeneity becomes status quo, the addition of small amounts of difference will promote a more vigorous exchange. Within social space and practice, the osmotic process enables both stability and mobility. In discussing the experience of musicians playing in an ensemble, Eleanor Stubley describes a process akin to that of osmosis: ‘While the musicians have their own individual spaces, the boundaries distinguishing those spaces appear to be blurred by an awareness of the activity of the ensemble as a
whole’ (Stubley 1998: 95). As the ensemble plays together it ultimately makes the sounds and the movements initiating them seem as one. The union, however, has an underlying tension … seemingly grounded in the fact that the space created by the field appears to be in a constant state of flux. … I initially find this flux difficult to assimilate in that I had assumed a common goal would imply a relatively fixed space characterized by a certain homogeneity of action. As I move around the field, though, I quickly begin to realize that the musicians’ awareness of this goal is itself subject to the tuning it drives. The field, in this sense, constantly seems to be regenerating itself; indeed, it is as if the space it creates has a temporal dimension that lets each moment circle back on itself and become an ever-developing present. (Stubley 1998: 95)

Amongst the MIBOCUs present in discourse are imaginary bodies and the bodies of ancestry contained in genetic and mythological expressions. These are less represented however than the material and textual bodies that pervade discussions of embodiment. (In addition to Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl’s extensive writings on embodiment, see Varela, Thompson and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* [1991]. Also, Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought* [1999]).
The word ‘embodiment’ encourages thinking about how the abstractions of a poem are given concrete form, in a phenomenological sense. Husserl’s phenomenology proposed that objective reality was a myth, and that reality was relative and subjective. Prior understandings of the body were based upon empiricism, that denoted the body as a material and measurable phenomenon; as muscle, nerve, bone and electrical impulse. Husserl (1981) offered lived experience as a sense structure that understood itself in relation to others, and as a structure that manifested the world through its actions. In other words, my capacity to experience humanness stems from my humanness. I cannot know your humanness the same way that I know mine. Such a body brings about the world through engagement. This is echoed later in the feminist theory of critics such as Diprose (1991) and Grosz (1994).

If the poem in performance is to be given life as a sensate organism it must be permitted to contain a sense of self as text, and a self designated by the body experienced through embodiment, or what Husserl names ‘Leib’, to describe the lived sensation of embodiment (Husserl 1981: 353). These selves are not differentiated so much as *gestalten*, a German word that means a complete pattern or configuration which contains the thing, its context and the relationship between them (Gainesville n.d.). The self and a poem are configurations in relationship with their environments. All at once a poem knows itself and is known through the operations of presence and absence, notation and trace, silence and speech, memory and amnesia, script and void. Every moment of the speaking is a reconfiguration of these and other structures implicit in the poem, the body speaking and the space in which it speaks. This is the experiential field of the three-dimensional poem. The poem through me is not the same as the poem through you, though architecturally it may be reproduced as a particular arrangement of strata, experienced in relation to time, presence, absence and co-presence. Such thinking appeals to certain logics but not others, because it positions the other’s
body and presence as object, denying the capacity of human sense structures to perceive beyond an awareness of the other person located in relation to separateness. Applied to the poem, this logic sustains the capacity for a non-communal version of the poem. The poem as writing, or as an object of art made of language, is in co-presence with the poem that co-evolves with the reader.

It is also important to acknowledge that the act of speaking poetry has implications for the text itself; it is not simply a transaction between a text translated into utterance and delivered to an audience, but also a method that informs the act of writing. Allen Fisher also speaks of the impact of poetry readings on the way poetry is written and produced. ‘It’s changed what it looks like on the page, it’s changed what is on the page, it’s changed what’s permissible, it’s changed the potential for the tones really, and the potential for non-words almost’ (Fisher cited in Marsh et al 2006: 57).
transmutation

If there is pleasure to be had in sharing in the somatic manifestation of poetry, part of this pleasure must emerge from the material presence of the body. As Maggie O’Sullivan is cited as saying:

There is something about hearing a poet read their work that you could never replicate, this astonishing kind of bodying forth of the sounds, the language. It’s bodying forth, it’s the body, for me, to experience that presence, that physicality, that whole being. That language, bringer of language to experience them in the flesh. (O’Sullivan in Marsh et al 2006: 54).

The subjectivity of the person speaking a poem influences the text and its ‘extra-semantic dimension’ (Marsh et al 2006: 54). This extra-semantic dimension involves not only the status and experience of the subject speaking but also qualities of the text that relate to the act of speaking it. For example, ‘what it feels like, what speed it’s at’ (Fisher cited in Marsh et al 2006: 54). The person reading or performing their poem is also able to derive pleasure from the sensations associated with giving voice to it. Within my own practice I feel this pleasure as the pleasure of an intense intimacy with a text that I have a deeply personal relationship with. I enjoy feeling the thickness of the poem in my blood, the nervous arcs of the poem as it croons along neurons and leaps across synaptic gaps in a fugue of endorphins, the way my throat dances with tension and occasionally opens up to allow a deep voice to break free. There are so many extra-textual ways to experience a poem from within the gesture of performance that the experience is often spoken of as being addictive: ‘… and presently it was over. It was wonderful. I decided then and there: I must find ways to make this happen again’ (Adair cited in Marsh et al 2006: 56).

Central to discussions on subjectivity are attempts to understand the role of genetics. In the scene of genetic code some of the most challenging operations of
commercialism are being manifested. This means the space of genetics is chasmal.
It is possible to collapse in a fold, a kink, a misplacement and be forever deviated
from the norm, while the environment snips, infuses, corrodes and enhances our
chains of code. Little has been done within subjectivity discourse to come to terms
with the role of genetics: discussions being stalled by accusations of determinism
and fears of a return to the eugenics thinking that styled the Nazi Holocaust. The
premise of the human genome project is located in such deterministic thinking
(Lewontin 2003), which views animals (humans included) as latent organisms
manufactured from their DNA code. Like a musical score represents the code for
potential music, and language the code for potential meaning, DNA represents the
code of life itself. This sort of thinking defers subjectivity by, in a sense, making the
DNA code the master organism and the ‘animal’ its cipher. But there is a way out of
determinism: the mutational and developmental influences of culture and the
unavoidable errors contained in the process of translation.

Subjectivity may be understated by dominant and recessive arrangements, by
quirky alleles. In the unstable map of the human genome we can look at our code’s
fine bands and seductive arrangements, and in mapping and patenting it, the
ultimate gesture of surveillance has been potentiated. In the code’s little bands
reside potential for fine, thick, curly or straight hair; blue, green, hazel or brown eyes
and myriads of features that make people unique. From what we only know as an
arrangement of stripes, eyes are formed that blink in lidless almond, or that gaze
out of deep black or pinkish white faces. Inside the smear of blood that is translated,
lies all the possible spaces of the expression of primordial humanity. Foucault
warns that the 20th century burgeons a period where ‘power is decreasingly the
power of the right to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make life’
(Foucault 2003: 248). By making life, the act of creation can be copyrighted and
assigned authorship, and the territory for profit making can be staked. In the future
parents may be required to pay corporations for the right to reproduce genes in
order to create a child, unless government legislation is enacted quickly enough to
insist upon genetic code as a basic human right. History has shown us however,
that simply because a right is coded into constitutional law, it does not mean that citizens are protected from violation.

Bodies emerge from translations of code in foster homes of environment and experience. It has been well established that as biological entities, we develop largely from the processes of DNA / RNA duplication and transcription. As a process this is only partially determinate because the elastic nature of the transcription constantly alters the integrity of the code, as does the malleable influence of human behaviour and technology. Hence the process sustains a generative quality in spite of its predetermined set of rules. Our MIBOCUs can therefore be read as performances of code in the same way that a reading represents the performance of a poem. In online space the text, as an alphabetic phenomenon, is translated to code that regenerates the text digitally. In the space of a public reading, the text as alphabetic phenomenon is translated into a verbal phenomenon through the code of the body’s chemical processes. Just as Beat poet William Burroughs cut up fragments of text to create cut-up poetry, Bill McKibben, former CEO of Advanced Cell Technology, believes that DNA will ultimately be editable in the same way a word processor document can be edited (McKibben 2003). Indeed, he states this is the ‘dream’ of biologists. It is not inconceivable that DNA poems will be brought into life in a radically literal way in the future. If the accidental insight of such bio-literature happens to create weapons of mass destruction or weapons of mass irritation / pleasure, it will realise a certain chaotic three-dimensional poetry.

Biological code is the ultimate expression of spacetime-MIBOCU relations, producing them in a continual process. DNA and its decoder RNA (ribonucleic acid) and amino acids express personal uniqueness in a universal scene. It is also where the greatest vulnerability lies, not only to our material and socio-political integrity, but also to the integrity of ecological systems – as the code of life becomes appropriated by the operations of extreme capitalism. Yet somehow this has managed to take place with very little resistance from the academic community.
The failure of humanities academics in general to engage with this more fully is rather astonishing. Could it be that at precisely the moment debate shunned materiality as a basis for subjectivity, the technology and political will for claiming that materiality proliferated, and the repercussions of this went largely unchallenged due to the prevailing conviction that text is the only real basis for subjectivity? Speculation about the status of the material body within literature is echoed by Michael Davidson:

> At the very moment when literary criticism attempts to displace the primacy of authorial presence once and for all, a new “oral impulse” in poetry situates the author in the forefront of its concerns. Where the idea of the text as a score for a prior verbal performance is being deconstructed, poetry readings and tape-recordings reestablish a ratio between graphic sign and voice. (Davidson 1981: 105)

However, as Foucault warns, ‘discourse is not life’ (Foucault 1972: 211) and some theorists have recently begun to critique the traditional feminist aversion to, what Manuela Rossini calls, essentialist materialism:

> The general refusal of scholars from [feminist] disciplines to engage with the materiality of bodies, with their physiological, biochemical or microbiological details, forms and formations, is indicative of an anti-essentialist stance which is very understandable from a historico-political perspective. When politicians and scientists have for centuries recurred to “natural” (… biological) differences to explain and legitimate social discrimination, oppression and inequality between the sexes and between human beings of different classes and ethnicities, it was more than necessary to counter, if not downright deny, biologistic argumentations. (Rossini 2006)

Rossini calls feminists to acknowledge the materialism of the body in order to subvert the appropriation of women’s bodies by imperialist versions of capitalism. I stand alongside those who believe that it’s not just women’s bodies that are at stake, but the bodies and lives of all living things. Aside from the biological breach, there is a transgression of sovereignty that has taken place without ‘our’ consent. Nicholas Ruiz III, who runs a parallel set of concerns, poses the following important
If the material that codes for our lives is not sovereign, how can an argument of sovereignty be made for any other entity? If there is no concept of sovereignty for the Code, how can there be a substantial of sovereignty for anything else? ... If one has no operational stake in the determination of the very substance of one's material being, what stake has he in his own governance? It would seem then, that we have lost our Basis, for polity, and for governance and self-determination, with one swift, technological blow ... the appropriation of the Code ... is precisely an infiltration on the order of the cell, upon its sovereignty, and on the order of personal sovereignty, by the device of Capital. (Ruiz III 2005)

Simultaneously, terrorism gave conservative governments an opportunity to exercise more discipline, punishment and surveillance on their citizens, and on people ‘othered’ by borders – political, racial, gendered, religious, geographical and economic. In Australia the code of our democracy’s speech and practice has recently been regulated through the tightening of old anti-sedition laws and introduction of anti-terrorist laws. Prime Minister John Howard condemned the ACT Government for publishing copies of the Commonwealth's controversial new anti-terrorism laws on the internet. When ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, pre-released a draft copy of the new laws that were tabled in federal parliament on October 31, 2005, Prime Minister Howard (as reported in the Sydney Morning Herald) accused him of being ‘irresponsible’. ‘It's important that governments, no matter what political stances you might take, should have the capacity to talk to each other in confidence. And that legislation was given in confidence' (Unknown 2005b). That a democratically elected government assumes the right to alter the liberty of its population in secrecy is a worrying development in Australian politics.

Also worrying is an implicit shift in the government’s view of itself, away from a service model, towards a control model. The introduction of such a restriction on the right of citizens to publicly criticise their government would have seemed impossible 10 years ago. It is almost inconceivable, yet entirely possible, that the author of a political poem deemed ‘reckless’ in Australia could legally be imprisoned. Protestors
can be imprisoned for up to seven years for ‘urging the overthrow of the Constitution or Government’, using ‘force or violence [that] would threaten the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth’ (Attorney-General 2005: 77). The ambiguity of the word ‘force’ makes these laws even more unsettling. Public rants and signs that urge people to take action against government policy are part of the code of social action through protest; they are not necessarily intended to be taken literally. Yet the lack of irony or satire within the law reduces the language of social exchange to its most literal level. It is ironic that the party introducing the laws is the only party in Australia’s political history to have overthrown a legally elected government by securing the dismissal of the country’s Prime Minister. Already shunned by the literati, the political poem is increasingly vagrant in 21st-century Australia. A person writing or speaking a poem that offends these laws risks their liberty.

In 2006, while on an Asialink residency in Malaysia, I witnessed the persecution of Malaysian poets and artists by their government for speaking about life in their country in an unfavourable way. While attending an international performance art festival in Kuala Lumpur I watched artists break plates, get tattoos while masturbating (in pants) and read poems about repression. Such activities were considered radical, deviant, and it was later discovered, politically sensitive. Earlier that year two young students were arrested for holding hands in a public garden in Kuala Lumpur. When I showed up for the second night of the festival I was told that the event was cancelled by the government and warrants were out for the arrest of some of the participants. There was no violence at the event, no declamatory anti-government rhetoric. What there was however, was a fundamentalist Islamic spy, who was offended and who made reports to the government. The fear of festival organisers, who were also in danger of arrest, was palpable and the experience unnerving, as Malaysia presents a moderate and prosperous front to the world. While this festival was going on, tourists were being encouraged to drink and dance the night away in local bars. This experience reminded me of the risks the writer, not their text, takes in presenting content and / or aesthetics that are not socially or
politically sanctioned. A banned text can always be reproduced and disseminated, but an imprisoned writer is forced into a regime of violence and repression.

Ruiz III, citing Foucault, demonstrates how the move to take over code perfectly conforms to the seizure of humanity. What I would add here is that it is not only the seizure of humanity but the ecological space of the planet that is being seized:

… after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have second seizure of power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species … the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a "biopolitics" of the human race. (Ruiz III 2005)

The multiple fictive subjectivities available to us, as a result of postmodernism’s dematerialised bodies, are now offered different kinds of material sites in which to perform. To avoid complete dissipation and co-option through the perpetual shuffling of persona and deferred experience that is postmodernism’s tender, it is necessary to accommodate a space of integration and power within the subject. Material sites offer experiential engagements and memories that facilitate a more personally located composition within MIBOCU-spacetime relations. I am not advocating materialism as the sole method through which this can be achieved, but for the purpose of critiquing interdisciplinary poetic practice, it is the one I am most interested in. In ecological terms it also offers a discursive space in which personal responsibility can be reclaimed. It is not my intention to turn a nostalgic gaze on the subject and its logics but to look at ways in which current thinking and social practices perform the idea and reality of the subject, in terms of its relationship to a multi-dimensional poetics.

As one of the possible exits from the endless mirror-hall styled deferrals inhabiting the cult of the image, MIBOCU enables mind, body and culture as a dynamic realm from which subjectivity can speak, act and think in exchange with the world.
MIBOCU is not confined to code but is able to contain, produce, reproduce and alter code – whether meme, language or DNA. MIBOCU is able to exist in the realm of a text but also within the realm of flesh and the world, thereby accommodating ‘networks of intentionalities’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 417). Husserl’s faith in consciousness, as the only method for bringing things into being, appears a bit rigid in the face of current acknowledgements of multiplicity and proliferation of media. Although MIBOCU offers consciousness, it is more flexible and mutable than Husserl’s concept of ‘pure immanence’ where consciousness exists as ‘one unitary “phenomenon” [that] permeates all the manifolds of phenomenal presentation’ (Husserl 1917).

That bodies manifest the world through engagement, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Diprose, Grosz and other theorists of embodiment, is crucial to returning an author’s body to the scene of writing. Restoring the author’s body to the scene of writing is not a gesture of modernist elitism, intended to assert unity or authority over a text, but is an acknowledgement that the writer represents something in their text that stems from their subjectivity and its processes. In cases of government controls exercised over free speech, the author as a material presence is held publicly accountable for their texts. Even if the text is randomly generated by a computer, the program has an author whose subjectivity influences the nature of the text, via the exercise of choice over data and how data is managed. The same is true of the reader’s subjectivity. A reader can also render a text dangerous or politically sensitive, even if this was not the author’s intent.

Denis Donoghue adds the texture of authorship to the scene of writing from the perspective of orality:

If the poem has a center of gravity and attraction, it is the aura of that person, the force-of-presence acknowledged by the speaker’s voice. The conventions of reading allow us to imagine that someone said these words, and that they are delivered to us after the fact by the printing press. We may read them in such a manner as to restore the words to a voice and to
turn these transactions into an experience worth having. (Donoghue 1996: 150)

Perhaps this is carrying the body of the author a bit too far into the scene of reading, but the idea that text requires some kind of oral rendering to create a meaningful experience, nuances the oft cited ‘oral roots’ riff of some performance poets and commentators (Zeitlin n.d.). While acknowledging an empathy for the sense, though perhaps not the extremism of the opening citation of Derrida’s second chapter in *Of Grammatology* – ‘writing is nothing but the representation of speech’ (Derrida 1974: 36) – performance poets enact a doubling of this through the articulation of their speech in their writing. This doubling is both reproduced and displaced in the proliferation of CDs, DVDs, podcasts and streaming media. The once silent act of reading poetry has been supplemented with ever expanding scenes of speech.
Hayles’ critique of the cyborg corpus interrogates the relationship between information, the body and technology (Hayles 1999: 27). Earlier cyborg theory fetishised the prosthetically-enhanced body, which Stelarc (n.d.), Haraway (1985) and others such as Chris Hables Gray (1995) represented. Hayles’ view of the cyborg is that of a posthuman: a system of exchange between informational pathways; humans as carbon-based organic components and technologies as silicon-based components. It is a move away from the machine as mechanistic prosthetic towards technology as an information symbiont. The condition of being posthuman thus becomes a condition of being merged with, not conjoined by, interfaces and enhancements. Cyber discourse of the 1980s and 90s attempted to incorporate the poststructuralist and postmodernist narrative explanations of subjectivity in popular culture and literary theory, into the discourse of mind-body relations. Haraway’s cyborg manifesto (1985) and Stelarc’s Obsolete Body (Stelarc n.d.a.) were leading contributors to this.

I prefer to use the word cyberspace than any of its alternatives. The term ‘new media’ is often used to name works created or published in a digital format that use interactivity or multiple media. It is used most frequently in relation to work created as a result of communication or cinematic strategies, e.g. animation, film / video, games, etc and which are published on or created via the internet or other electronic media such as mobile phones, PDAs, etc. It is also used to represent the technologies of content publication and development, both on and offline. ‘Cyberspace’ as a term, on the other hand, represents the discourses of embodiment, spatiality, politics, culture, identity, spirituality, business and ecology, within online and offline worlds. As a metaphor and as a space it is of vital importance to contemporary poets.

In cyberspace everyone and everything can be canvassed as diasporic, as bearing the ‘mark of hyphenation’ (Mariano 2001: 7), a definitive feature of diasporic
subjects. The hyphenated branding of identity in cyberspace is amplified but transmuted to the point that it becomes a mark of addition:

name+nationality+poet+gender+sexuality+community++++

and the multiplicity of combinations that construct subject / object-ivity in a search engine’s logic. Thus the body, identity and narrative are all diasporic features that overturn the traditional notions of belongingness asserted by the gazing eye. Through cyberspace the offline containments represented by the hyphenation of selfhood are dispersed and negotiated across overlapping online diasporas. The tensions between original and destination cultures continue to arrogate the settlements of diasporic subjects, but cyberspace offers a degree of liberation from these within its social operations and structures. The isolation of diasporic existence is complicated by the pressure of assimilation:

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both

blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I

exist, we exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But

I haven't, we haven't. (Anzaldúa [1987] cited in Cruz 2002)

In cyberspace assimilation is hyphenated with affiliation, where homeland culture can be accessed 24 hours a day. Tom Teicholz speaks of this affiliated expression of the diaspora in a Jewish context:

At any given moment you can now read the press releases of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, learn the scores of Betar Jerusalem's recent matches and their standing in the league, get suggestions for cantorial music and engage in animated debate with Zionists and anti-Semites of various
persuasions and affiliations—all in the Internet's Usenet groups. (Teicholz 1995)

People can become who they expose or pretend themselves to be; though it is natural that they will continue to leak ink from the tattoo of the hyphen into their creativity.

Within the culture of poetry, performance and cyber poets are easily conceptualized as both a minority and a diasporic community. Separated from prevailing perceptions of literariness which, according to Giorgio Agamben,

is clearly divided between those who affirm the significance of poetry only on condition of altogether confusing it with life and those for whom the significance of poetry is instead exclusively a function of its isolation from life … (Agamben 1999: 93)

cyber poets are not free of either the hyphen or the ‘+’ sign, conferred by their emergence from literature; and hence reside, like a diasporic minority within virtual life – which is neither fully life nor isolated from it. Their visual rhetoric is complicated by ‘the laws of syntax, allusion, and association, which characterize written language’ (Desmet 2001: 63). Additionally, their practice relies on the configuration of the extended text that resides within a program’s code and a site’s metatags.

It is the lack of, rather than presence of, place that becomes an essential framing characteristic of a poet’s identities and definitions in cyberspace. Although poets can be ‘placed’ in terms of their location offline, online they and their texts have endless ‘places’ to inhabit. These places are mobile and temporary, expressing the quality of citation, tracing the streams and flows of the expressions, actions and presences of a poet’s avatars. Cyberspace, according to Marcos Novak, is a liquid space, an ‘animistic, animated, metamorphic’ one that crosses...
categorical boundaries, [thereby] applying the cognitively supercharged operations of poetic thinking... [A] liquid architecture in cyberspace is clearly a dematerialized architecture. (Novak 1995)

Novak’s thinking about cyberspace through the metaphor of liquidity resonates with the discussions presented in this thesis, however Novak’s thinking and methodology are framed algorithmically, whereas mine are framed osmotically.

Configuring cyberspace as a dematerialised space inspires further inquisitiveness about the role of the page in such a space. When I write for cyberspace I wrestle with the relationship between written and visual rhetoric, amongst other concerns. Questions that continue to reiterate through my recent Flash poems are concerned with the nature of the ‘page’. What does a page mean in cyberspace and how is it prostheticised or related to the post-human condition? In what ways is the page capable of enhancement, connection, mutation, integrity, performance, giving voice or expressing image? Whatever a poet’s aesthetic, the concept of the page in cyberspace needs to be considered, even if that consideration is founded on rejection of the page and the values associated with it.

I think of the electronic page as a kind of zone that intersects with many others in cyberspace, and where exchange between the zones is dynamic. This exchange takes place between the books and pages of the offline world that still inform my writing and the depths and surfaces, sounds and images, hidden and revealed, written and spoken, visual and linguistic capacities available online. These capacities create concentrations of interest. In addition there are tools available to help further agitate texts, e.g. cut-up engines, random generators, interactivity. Cyberspace presents a new (relatively speaking) space where writing can perform as both form and content. Inside cyberspace there are multiple spaces and forms available to exploit and invent, which creates alternative ways of thinking about writing. As Alan Davies comments in his discursive poem This Is Thinking (2003), cyberspace presents new forms that can lead to new writing strategies:
Sometimes when a new form appears to the writer (such as this one recently did) it's as if there's a lot of material that's been waiting to get out.

Then after a little time it's as if that's no longer so.

It's more like (Davies 2003)

I have argued for the metaphor of osmosis to prevail in thinking about interdisciplinary poetry as it provides a methodology to support the exchange between the aforementioned capacities. When I'm composing poems for cyberspace it feels like swimming in currents of unstable concentrations of ideologies, aesthetics, skills, texts and readers. I'm in constant flux with the page and my desire to embrace and dissolve it. If I want to move beyond the reproduction of a page-poem online, towards an engagement with the poetics of cyberspace, it is imperative to develop understandings about that space. These understandings will then inform a poetic response. It is important for me to consider my relationship to the canon of poetry and to make choices about how I wish to engage with offline and online poetics. Within the realm of the page lies a tension between ‘poetics’, as theory about the art of poetry and the nature of texts, and poetics as an extension of poetic theory into philosophical critiques of other disciplines, for example, architecture and music. The page is commonly interpreted as a two-dimensional space, yet if this logic is applied to the multi-dimensional realm of cyberspace, it denies other possibilities for poetry.

As we have been introduced to poetry through the page and the book, the poem beyond the page is in a sense hyphenated by the page, in the same way that racial identity is hyphenated. However, the poem also bears the mark of addition:

poem-page+body+spatiality+audience+++
When poetry is learned through alternative spatiality, the link of the hyphen will gradually erode, and poems will become more established in their citizenship within performance and new media. Diasporic identity will become a polyvalent agency rather than a product of a bifocal lens, through the mark of hyphenation, addition and manipulation. This is the future nature of the poet and the current nature of the performance and cyber poet. The definition of diasporic subjectivity is a product of embodied and cultural assertions, spatial relationships and personal engagements with the texts and scripts that perform there. Culture, self, story and space thus become the defining agents of the diasporic identity of the poet practising outside of traditional forms.

The mark of addition becomes an essential tool for situating a self, real or artificial, in an online community. Every '+' mark added, condenses the dispersion of this identity. Unlike the hyphenated identity, however, the identity of addition encourages a constructed, changeable approach to definitions. Everything becomes temporary and self determined. In this way being a product of addition rather than hyphenation results in different expressions of the operations of the diaspora. Like a water molecule shedding its oxygen, the + sign can be shed and reconnected within any part of the MIBOCU. A poet who migrates from the page forfeits a large part of the culture of the page, and though they may visit the page regularly, they will do so as diasporic MIBOCUs.

The poetics of cyberspace, which often include considerations of subjectivity, complicate established ideas about what constitutes a poem. These poetics are labile as they diffuse across the porous containments of online and offline space to change the nature of contemporary poetry. It is not only the online poems that are altered by considerations of cyberspace, as offline poetry is ‘contaminated’ by the poetics of cyberspace. See the works of Alan Sondheim, John Cayley and Komninos for examples of this.

In the renaissance of spoken word it is possible to see unusual texts that explore
the different poetics of books, new media and performance. In my poem ‘Pixel Chick’ I critiqued these in a performance piece that was written for the launch of my website (Fenton Keane 2002). In performance, the piece is enhanced by my body improvising on the syntagms ‘downloading please wait’ and ‘net congestion buffering’, which are new media’s refrains – particularly for those on relatively slow modems. Accompanied by noise-jazz fusions for flute by Fiona Bennet, the piece would not have existed prior to the emergence of the internet. Later published in *Stylus Poetry Journal*, ‘Pixel Chick’ manifests several of the ideas expressed above.

…net congestion

buffering

buffering

Eye || losing focus
downloading you

server error

file cannot be found

deleted cookie mama
smell of refresh grey

Eye || in pixelate pixelate pixelate
in fractured riffs of quality benchmarks

iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

eaten by similitude…

(Fenton Keane 2002)

In ‘Pixel Chick’ language breaches the poetics of formalism in its response to the experiences available through engaging with the internet. It also breaches the
‘street speak’ or narrative / rap basis of performance poetry’s dominant aesthetics, while maintaining some aspects of their conversational qualities. It was written to give voice to my website’s avatar in the offline world. The body downloads, is always dispersed yet has the diasporic capacity to inhabit many spaces and identities at once.
what is a body?

The scope of theory dedicated to the question ‘What is a body?’ is enormous, making it impossible to achieve anything approaching consensus. The position taken up in this discussion is well summarised by Deleuze’s expression of the idea of a body as ‘anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity’ (Deleuze 1988: 127). A body is a system of production as well as a material object. Deleuze’s ‘anything’ becomes poetry as it steeps the concoctions of MIBOCU’s collective of material and immaterial concentrations, before transmuting the unsayable into language. A poem never finishes, it is always in progress because it is reinvented through reading. A spoken poem exists as a physical and phenomenal text that is subject to continual transformation as it progresses through the world. Sound is an integral composer of the experience of subjectivity. Exercised through embodiment, sound ‘exists simultaneously outside and inside the body: it enters our interior without violation and creates a harmony with the outside’ (Ong 1988: 71). Although a published poem would appear to be a static and complete thing, its reading becomes dynamic and mutable through the flesh and senses of the reader. The body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason (Grosz 1993).

Embodiment is a method used by subjectivity to create and relate to its world. It uses the MIBOCU’s senses to create sensations and feelings, which become part of the phenomenal body, the body that is made through acts of incorporation (Fuehr 1996). The term ‘embodiment’ comes from Husserl’s phenomenology propositions, and expresses the incorporation and integration of external things through the MIBOCU, which also projects and disperses itself into its surroundings. In this way abstract concepts are transformed into concrete form through the MIBOCU’s processing of experience and knowledge. A famous example of this was provided by Merleau-Ponty in his explanation about the incorporation of a cane into a blind man’s phenomenological body (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 143). As the blind man
constructs his ‘sight’ by feeling the world through his cane, his cane becomes a sense organ that is no longer felt as a cane. Merleau-Ponty avers that the details of the cane as an independent material object are usurped by its becoming a sense organ. The cane thus becomes a prosthetic enhancement. After the cane’s incorporation into the sensory structures of the body, the man no longer begins his contact with the world through the handle of the cane, but rather through its tip. At the same time however, the sensory capacities of the blind man are dictated by the limited capacities of the cane’s technology; which is not able to sense colour, temperature or moisture.

In a different kind of phenomenological thinking that explores proximity and relations between things within language, Bakhtin's speculations do not require the incorporation of cane by man. Bakhtin sees the difference between the material reality and its location within separate entities, as creating the potential for dialogue, where the space between entities becomes important for making meaning. Bakhtin’s exchange does not involve the kind of incorporation expressed in the material example of Merleau-Ponty’s cane, but takes place within the language of heteroglossia representing the ‘dialogized’ – the

environment of an utterance … the environment in which it lives and takes shape, [as] dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance. (Bakhtin 1981: 271)

Bakhtin thinks mainly in terms of difference as being between humans, their texts, and communication between them, and is therefore limited for thinking outside the human to human exchange. Another character in the scene of embodiment is ‘consciousness’, Husserl's particular interest. Husserl believed that the nature of humanness is a phenomenological apprehension realised through consciousness and

how something perceived, something remembered, something phantasied,
something pictorially represented, something symbolized looks as such, [and] how it looks by virtue of that bestowal of sense and of characteristics which is carried out intrinsically by the perceiving, the remembering, the phantasying, the pictorial representing, etc, itself. (Husserl 1917: 15)

This idea extends his view of the body’s sensing capacities, its role as a structure of sensing, to embody knowledge, and how it makes knowledge in a dynamic moment-to-moment way. For Husserl:

… any subject whatever of true predications is an object. In this sense, therefore, every phenomenon is also an object. Within this widest concept of object, and specifically within the concept of individual object, Objects and phenomena stand in contrast with each other. Objects [Objekte], all natural Objects, for example, are objects foreign to consciousness. Consciousness does, indeed, objectivate them and posit them as actual, yet the consciousness that experiences them and takes cognizance of them is so singularly astonishing that it bestows upon its own phenomena the sense of being appearances of Objects foreign to consciousness and knows these "extrinsic" Objects through processes that take cognizance of their sense. (Husserl 1917: 17)

While Merleau-Ponty explores phenomenological experience as one grounded in perception based upon incorporation, and Bakhtin explores it as a dialogue based on exchange between things, Husserl approaches it from the point of view of unifying the sensory data emerging from things, the consciousness of things and their associations. 'Association,' he says, 'comes into question in this context exclusively as the purely immanent connection of the, "this recalls that," one calls attention to the other' (cited in Landgrebe 1973: 42).

Heidegger similarly composes the before and after of primordial beingness as an experiential realm he calls 'Dasein', which in German literally translates as da there + sein to be (Colman 2001). Heidegger adds place to the scene of Dasein, and thinks in terms of assisted wholes that contain things that are in and out of place with the world. Dasein ‘essentially sets itself against a possible comprehension of itself as a whole entity’ (Colman 2001). This kind of thinking places the subject at
the centre of space, and results in it being thought of as containing or lacking a
centre. Instead, the subject becomes a community of human egos in a field of
objective nature.

Husserl’s body witnesses itself in the making. The ego becomes an absolute
reference point:

… the human mind makes substantial contributions to the specific structure
of what appears before it, so that experience is construed to be a complex
of data given externally and organizational principles supplied internally.
(Husserl 1964: xxvii)

A paralysed body then, without capacity to feel or to confer an awareness of
sensing, becomes a problematic body under Husserl’s model. It becomes a dumb
body, a non-body, thereby rendering the individual’s subjectivity unviable. Paralysed
bodies speak of the space of deferral. Moving bodies speak of time and navigation.
All bodies maintain an archive. In Heidegger’s schematic, a paralysed body cannot
produce the world ahead and behind itself and therefore cannot know space or
time.

Sensory borders are expanded through the phenomenological extension of
clothing. The voice of a speaking poet vibrates accessories as well as tympanic
membranes and hair follicles. Clothing comes between the flesh of the audience
and the sound waves projected from a reader’s mouth into the room. Ears and eyes
experience sound and light without the barrier of clothing unless a headscarf or
glasses are worn. Like Merleau-Ponty’s cane, clothing has become, for urbanised
humans, a sense organ in the social realm. The phenomenological body is
predominantly a clothed body and is therefore already extended in the way
Merleau-Ponty suggests. The microphone and its amplifiers exist independently of
a reader’s voice but in the presence of utterance it becomes a prosthetic voice. The
microphone affords the voice a prosthetic realm that enhances its capacities and
helps the reader make their world, within the space of the reading, in ways that
manifest the theories of Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Hayles.

Our senses perform our phenomenological body by receiving and projecting us into the world. When memorisation is used in performance our bodies incorporate the text to create the experience of embodiment. When the audience receives the text it may also incorporate parts of it, leading to reactions like gooseflesh, hair standing up on the back of the neck, arousal, anger or other emotional reactions to the content and delivery. The effect of this is to diminish the illusion of spatial distance between audience and performer. In public mike space, poetry becomes a relation between bodies, texts, senses and external objects. A voice speaks from the microphone, while a hand feels the spoon that stirs a coffee and a poet’s voice merges with a cappuccino machine’s noise, while something the poet says triggers a memory that warps an audience member out of the scene of the reading into a different time and place. If there are 50 people in the room they are all interacting with the experience in different ways according to their own MIBOCUs, and constructing their own version of the experience. Space therefore becomes embodied with subjective possibility, as well as its complex physical structure as a manifestation of wave and particle.

Poetry readings describe how the boundaries between self and other are difficult to draw. Jackson’s monster in *Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl* (1998) describes the atmospheric nature of the body at the microscopic level, saying:

You are all clouds. There is no shrink-wrap preserving you from contamination: your skin is a permeable membrane ... if you touch me, your flesh is mixed with mine, and if you pull away, you may take some of me with you, and leave a token behind. (Jackson 1998: 527)

The poetry reading then becomes a storm of monstrous subjects engaged in a prolific fluctuation between presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, and as Hayles would say, ‘pattern and randomness’ (Hayles 1990: 72). Touch is a manifestation of materiality or programming, in the case of computers. In the case
of computer-controlled touch, the sensation is a summary of pressure, heat, texture and programmed responses. The body not only experiences touch in this biomechanical way, but also in an imaginative and extended way. Touch results in processes within the MiBOCU that manifest outcomes beyond the touch itself. This is one way embodied intelligence manifests. Humans can also imaginatively reproduce the sensation of touch through memory and speculation, at both the site being touched and the site of mental processing. Senses are a product of wave and particle, vapour and thickness, thought and feeling. Touch traverses the membranes between the self and the extended self, and between the self and the extended Other.

Theorists such as Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987) and Varela, Thompson & Rosch, (1991) look towards cognitive science to explain the quality of interactions between the mind, immateriality, spatiality and embodiment; an interaction that has preoccupied theorists from multiple disciplines since the Cartesian duality of the mind-body split was embraced in the 17th century. (See Eysenck [1969] for readings in support of Cartesian dualism.) This split maintains a sense of the dual and the duel. To replay scenes of otherness through unrewarding spiels of the mind-body schism does little to resolve the inadequacies of such a strategy. The trend towards interrogating the mysterious processes of art through scientific methods biased towards proving the schism, has however resulted in some interesting declarations about the organismic nature of knowledge – reaffirming early philosophical theories about the nature of ‘mind’ developed by Plato (1973) and Aristotle (Caston 2002). Other cognitive scientists approach their investigations in a more holistic manner, and their research is yielding interesting ideas about how the body and brain exist as a unified intelligence that thinks in unexpected ways (see Lakoff [1987] and Johnson [1987] for more on this). This coincides with feminist theory that considers corporeality as a key organising principle for experience. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology intertwines around action and perception. Bodily processes are experienced through ‘flesh’. It is the flesh that Merleau-Ponty says makes it possible to participate in the world, and have relations
with others in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

As Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Bakhtin allude, embodiment is a technique through which subjectivity comprehends, translates, communicates and manifests the world. Deleuze's 'anything' body is represented as an interdisciplinary one, full of sounds, ideas, materiality, etc. Like the MIBOCU, Deleuze's body represents the idea of a collective heeding potentiality. Potentiality through hybridity is a key part of cyber theory. As Donna Haraway earlier articulated, cyborgs are 'chimeras, mythic hybrids of machine and organism'. Further, Haraway suggests that 'identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic' (Haraway 1991: 149).

Unlike the coupled, interfaced or merged notions of subjectivity produced through the idea of collectivity, MIBOCU understands itself as always already multiple in exchange with itself and the world. This exchange is enabled by, and proceeds through, osmosis, evaporation, waveform, particle and vapour – to name a few. MIBOCU's multiplicity is represented not only through the condition of being an amalgamation or incorporation of conditions such as body, text, animal, but also through its constantly effusing palette of techniques via which presence, comprehension and expression are realised. Husserl's idea of embodiment offers a method for incorporating and interpreting external things within consciousness. MIBOCU's diffusive and osmotic processes accommodate Bakhtin's dialogic approach to representing embodied knowledge and Merleau-Ponty's incorporation as a method of sensing, while at the same time disrupting the separation of self and other that underpins their discourse.

As mentioned earlier, at the heart of the idea of MIBOCU are diffusions, emanations, membranes, fluids and exchanges. These features respond differently to environmental circumstances, communication modalities and concentrations of influence, to support multiple stuffs, differences, systems and exchanges, within the MIBOCU ecology that represents subjectivity. Thus embodiment is one method available to MIBOCU's knowing. Apprehension, the method of consciousness
advocated by Husserl, is another method available to the MIBOCU in order to orchestrate a dialysis of meaning.

In addressing the question ‘What is a body?’ I find the concept of MIBOCU increasingly useful for responding to the propositions of various theorists represented in this thesis. ‘The body’ as a thing or idea has become impossible to explain without clarifying its relation to the mind, thereby committing discussions to the very dualisms that are trying to be avoided. MIBOCU resolves this for me because it facilitates thinking about subjectivity without having to reopen the Cartesian wound of the split. Perhaps this idea of subjectivity is following on from Jackson’s *The Patchwork Girl* (1995) in the sense that MIBOCU stitches together concepts of mind, body and culture to allow interesting discussions about the relational aspects of subjectivity. In rethinking Mary Shelley's monster I feel a thrill of recognition in the MIBOCU, as it is teased to life from the bits and pieces of others. In the presence of electricity and water, MIBOCU, like the patchwork corpse of the monster, springs to life to offer an alternative view of subjectivity.
‘a body is what a body can do’ (Grosz cited in Munt 2002)

For Lefebvre the body situates and produces time as well as space:

For the body indeed unites the cyclical and the linear, combining the cycles of time, need and desire with the linearities of gesture, perambulation, prehension and the manipulation of things—the handling of both material and abstract tools. (Lefebvre 1991: 203)

It is important to open up space for materially situated or embodied thinking in narrative’s production and consumption, in order to reach alternative ways of thinking about subjectivity. Finding a way to facilitate the informing / expressing contributions of corporeality to subjectivity, without dictating that subjectivity is driven by it, is important. As Elizabeth Grosz cautions:

We must avoid the impasse of dichotomous accounts of the person which divide the subject into the mutually exclusive categories of mind and body. Although in our intellectual heritage there is no language in which to describe such concepts ... some kind of understanding of embodied subjectivity, of psychical corporeality, needs to be developed. We need an account which refuses reductionism, resists dualism, and remains suspicious of the holism and unity implied by monism. (Grosz 1994: 21-2)

I seek to explore the questions residing in my practice that originate from a similar noticing to Grosz’s, such as: ‘What is space?’ , ‘What is a body?’ , ‘What is poetry?’ , ‘And how are they related?’ Lefebvre’s spatial dialectics consider spatiality as an expression of embodiment and an outcome of it; demonstrating a commitment to reinstating the body in space:

Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body. The living body, being at once “subject” and “object”, cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the “sign of non-body”. (Lefebvre 1991: 407)
Also useful are the works of Judith Butler who in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) asks: ‘What qualifies as a viable body?’ (Butler 1993: 16). Shelley Jackson’s engagement with the monstrous fictional body in *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and the ‘+++’ of Donna Haraway’s (1991) cyborg and prosthetic theories, also contribute important insights. These works are useful for adding discursive dimensionality to the body. They offer vital clues to the nature of bodies and how they operate. Considering interdisciplinarity and multiplicity through the lens of the body helps me understand why I am compelled to practice in an equally multiple way. Just as the body has been split from the mind and materiality, poetry has been eviscerated and silenced by certain cultural privileging of forms in the Western Canon. Investigating the nature of bodies, through the diverse texts included in this thesis, helps me articulate some elements contained in the formally inexpressible parts of my practice.

The body, according to Gerald Bruns, ‘means historicality and the finitude of consciousness. It means belonging to horizons’ (Bruns 1996: 130). Merleau-Ponty’s body is not a sum of its properties, its physical legend, or an outcome of relations between its parts. It is a lived body, an experiential site of intentionality and meaning. It is not a thing that is in spacetime, nor a thing separate from it. It does not conceive spacetime but belongs to it: ‘[M]y body combines with them [space and time] and includes them. The scope of this inclusion is the measure of that of my existence’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 140).

Brian Massumi, echoing Heidegger’s sense of making (see Heidegger 1997), centres spatial discourse on the body and its movement. Posing the question, ‘Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?’ (Massumi 2002: 1), Massumi brings into focus embodied thinking. ‘When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving’ (Massumi 2002: 1).
In considering how notions of structure and function might be regarded within a three-dimensional poetics, I am drawn to the body’s organs, in particular the heart and its succinct rendition of discourse. When French physician Rene Laennec invented a primitive paper stethoscope in 1815, he brought the body’s rhythm into the foreground of Western culture through a technology that aurally turned the body inside out. This Mobius-style inversion of inside and outside occurred before what Jonathon Sterne calls the ‘sonic regime’ of the late 1800s, when speech was able to be captured in phonautographs, phonographs, telegraphs, telephones, radios and cinemas progressively (Sterne 2003). The early 1800s was a period rich with technologies for making visible that which was previously invisible. That it started with the heart, with the body’s core rhythmic sound, was an accident of modesty more than anything else. Douglas Kahn reports his reading of an ‘incredulous French physician in the 18th century’ who described the beating of the artery as the ‘movement of water sliding over a crack, a man undoing his belt, or someone wishing to wrap something up, but lacking the cloth to go all the way around’ (Kahn 2001).

Traditionally structure is viewed as something that supports function, while function is seen as an expression of structure. At a fundamental level this dualism, founded on separateness rather than mutuality, struggles to accommodate the co-dependencies and multiplicities expressed within, or emerging from, such an exchange. When the first successful heart transplant took place in 1967, the heart was once again central to marking and perhaps facilitating the move of science fiction discourse, of prosthetics and robotics, into the domain of the real. If the body is to be considered a structural frame that delivers the function of consciousness to the world, as is the case in various religious, scientific and cultural schools of thought, how is it involved in producing the stories of culture? The body, when thought of as merely containing the mind, is reduced to a structural entity that is denied an opportunity to produce or contribute to meaning or the story of being
alive through its own processes.

Take for example the story of the heart, which not only pumps blood but also provides a tidal rhythm for being. It comforts our sleep and wakefulness with its persistent acoustic dynasty. The heart offers a primal community of consensus – since heart cells are independent cells that join the collective of beats in the early stages of forming the heart organ. It also provides a meeting place for colours, as dark low-oxygen, venous blood, becomes brighter and redder as it prepares for its sojourn as arterial blood. Heartbeats converge in a dance of micro-tonic ebbs, as stranger passes stranger in an audience, or as lover leans into lover to kiss. The heart also expresses fear and excitement, and provides us with a multiplicity of cultural readings that signal life, love and commitment. Believers in body memory re-experience the heart’s memory and emotional scars as keenly as a fresh wound. Throughout human history, warriors from several parts of the world would eat the heart of their victims, animal and human, to acquire courage and bravery. As recently as 2001, active Indonesian head hunters in Kalimantan declared that those who eat their victims ‘will be very strong, stronger than before if they eat the blood, eat the hearts’ (Alfredson 2001).

Without a heart where is the poem? This degree of dependence of poetry upon embodiment is a key feature of my discussions about three-dimensional poetic natures. Almost every part of the body could be offered as a part of a three-dimensional poem. Although machine or computer ‘generated’ poetry does not necessarily require such a dependence on the body, it does when a poem involves a human. Through the lens of embodiment I observe this subterranean tissue called poetry, and its material and abstract dis/orders.

To look at things differently – to begin relationships from our common wetlands, our 70% water, where we have lost our sense of flow, our biorhythmic tides, our gushes and spillages, as served and guided by our hearts: our feet may be treading land but our hearts are splashing in a body comprised mainly of water. Osmosis
operates within the reception of poetry through an increasing flow towards specialisation. There are ever increasing specialist streams emerging from the controlled flows of the already crumbling soft banks of earth that conceal poetry from the public eye. Our relationship with water is complex and primal. To look at the muscle and water inside a poem as well as its linguistic, metrical and structural aspects, allows me to think about alternative sub-textual, cultural, physical and acoustic readings of a three-dimensional poem.

Where is the heart of a poem? Is it possible for it to have only one heart given its multiplicity and location within MIBOCU? When I learn my poem ‘by heart’, the poem slips through the membranes of the page into my bloodstream, where my heart circulates it through the brain and other organs; until it becomes a part of my MIBOCU. As I learn my poem by heart, the process of memorisation is rich with the echoes of feelings about choices made while writing a poem. Also contained in the flow of sensations, experienced during the act of memorisation, are gushes of the unsayable that spill into insights; emotional and intellectual ebbs that flood the text with embodied meaning; and the polyrhythmic languages and environments of my MIBOCU’s material and immaterial realms.

A love poem presents itself as another cell in the great heart of literature, where lovers’ hearts beat, faint, bud and chirp in all manner of associations with the natural and supernatural world. In ‘i carry your heart with me’, e.e. cummings writes of his love as:

... the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that’s keeping the stars apart

(cummings 1965: 156)

Poems are full of secrets and, I feel instinctively, full of hearts. The heart, shaped
like a nest or vase, is rumoured to be the size of our fist. It races in response to an exciting poem or thrilling performance. It slips and slurps, hardens and flutters. Between the heart of the author and the heart of the reader there is an exchange of heartlands that is felt in the moisture of flesh, breath and secretions, together with the poem and MIBOCU’s imperceptible rhythms, vibrating in the flow of spacetime. The rhythms of bodies and nature infuse, create and surround a poem.

For some, the heart of a good poem lies in its musicality. The texts and philosophies of jazz poets and the performances of beat poets were founded on this belief. Langston Hughes, a pioneering jazz and blues poet, was recognised for the musical style of his writing. In explaining his work, Hughes once wrote that the blues ‘are mostly very sad songs about being without love, without money, or without a home. And yet, almost always in the blues, some humorous twist of thought, in words that make people laugh’ (Feinstein1997: 48). An example follows that demonstrates Hughes’ musical approach to writing. From *The Dream Keepers*:

Homesick blues, Lawd,
‘S a terrible thing to have.
Home sick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin’
I opens ma mouth an’ laughs. (Feinstein 1997: 48)

The musical heart of these poems is expressed within a classic blues rhyme scheme and lingo. In 1995 Rita Dove reiterated the role of the musical heartbeat in ‘black’ poetry. ‘Black poetry tends to allude to spirituals, the blues, and jazz, often going so far as to mention specific jazz musicians or pop singers by name’ (cited in Keller 1997: 123). One of the methods common in ‘black poetry’ is testifying, a tradition drawn from religious spirituals, according to Dove.

For Mark Halliday the heart of a poem is arrogance expressed through the luxury of
white space:

The essential sign of poetry's arrogance is white space. ... A poem says, "I can drape myself in white space like a mink coat. I stand apart from the mundane tide of utilitarian utterance. I create and require a respectful silence around me." (Halliday 2003)

Halliday’s comments relate to page poetry, and its components of print and white space. The elegant use of white space excites Halliday in the same way that surface reflects the heart of poetry’s beauty for Alice Fulton: ‘[I]n poems, I think the surface is part of the subject or inner life. The surface is a depth in itself’ (Kuusisto & Weiss 1995: 58). For Language poets it is the structure of language, devoid of persona and subjectively centred voices, that gives poetry its heart. Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky were two early Language poets who worked to change the representation of language, away from that which attempted to reproduce reality. Language poetry, along with other forms of contemporary poetry, is full of the arrhythmia of experimentation, where poems
deliberately disrupt conventions of ordinary and poetic language—of grammar, syntax, punctuation, of representation and narrative, of lineation, persona, imagery, of intelligibility itself. Such works attempt to reinvent language structures, even to reinvent the silences within which speech sounds. (Keller 1997: 5-6)

For others such as poet Lisel Mueller it is not only the persona but the responsibility of the persona to speak of important things that forms the heart of a poem:

And if it's true, as Williams wrote, that people die from the lack of what is found in poems, then poetry must not be trivial, peripheral, ivory-towerish … we have a responsibility to speak to and for others. Certainly that means acknowledging suffering. But it also means to heal, to bring delight and hope. It implies consolation. How to console without being false, shallow or sentimental: I find that the hardest challenge. (Kuusisto & Weiss 1995: 215)

Yehudi Amichai extends this view when he ‘demands that every poem should be
the last poem, written as if it contained the last thing the poet would ever say, shaped to contain a condensation of all the messages of his or her life. It should be a virtual will’ (Kuusisto & Weiss: 1995: 215).

The heart of poetry is also an expression of culturally specific beliefs. In early Vietnamese poetry of the 11th and 12th centuries, the influence of Zen Buddhism led to the heart of poetry being conceived of as a spiritual zone that reflected Zen themes of ‘transience’ and ‘emptiness’ (Ngoc Binh 1985: 80):

Trust that Mind equals No-Mind, has no substance
Let it come and go, appear and vanish.
(Vien Chieu cited in Ngoc Binh 1985: 80)

Many Western poets writing today also believe that spirituality is at the heart of poetry. In Poetry After Modernism (McDowell 1998) Mark Jarman writes that:

Just as poetry persists in the face of widespread indifference, so has a sense of the religious in poetry continued to exist despite the indifference of most poets to religion … the religious impulse in poetry endures; many poems being written today show that urge to be tied to or united with or at one with a supernatural power that exists before, after, and throughout creation. (Jarman 1998a: 37)

Another element in the tissue of poetry that influences thinking about the heart of poetry is spacetime. What gives heart to a group of poets during one period, is not necessarily the same as that of a later period. What appeals to one poet during an epoch, does not appeal to all. The heart of a poem, as I have demonstrated, is a palimpsest of multiple, dispersed and polyvalent principles and experiences. It is impossible for it to be limited to one rhythm, one meaning, one subjectivity.

Our ongoing fascination for seeing the unknowable inside of the body has traversed
through cultural fascination with X-rays, cat scans and now Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), which continues to configure the body in a structure-function idiom. Although perhaps it is not unreasonable to attempt to understand specialisation within the body in this way, such techniques don’t move beyond a kind of aesthetic fixation on the architecture of the inside. Having been an admirer and follower of Justine Cooper’s artistic exploration of body aesthetics and embodiment – through glass body slices, bio-tech experiments and more recently in her MRI animation *Rapt* (1998) – I am struck by how un-corporeal and disembodied *Rapt* is; how little it helps me understand myself as MIBOCU. Interestingly, it tells me more about myself as ‘subject’ than it does about how the within informs or produces my experiences. It is an act of exposure that extends the photographic project more than anything else. Justine Cooper’s deliberate greying of images in *Rapt* demonstrates her desire to address how the spectral rendering taking place in such bodily investigations tends to embalm it in image-flesh: the flesh of the optically-privileged world.

This cultural optic nerve is prone to peering and translating, transforming the body into an echo of lost materiality. Materiality is rendered as image and information. Cooper writes: ‘Just as the body is recodified through medical technology, so its internal spaces and brute physicality are remapped and made accessible in these works. Living flesh is translated into malleable data’ (Cooper cited in Tofts et al 2002: 188). Tellingly the body’s physicality is labelled as ‘brute’, harkening back to Platonic times and Cartesian movements. Residing in the word ‘brute’ is a non-human animal, a beast. This privileges the body as a space ectopic to the brain, to information, to rationality. When confronted by this kind of thinking I wonder how it rationalises intelligence in the body. What is such a rational mind doing in such an irrational body in the first place?
Daniel Punday, author of *Narrative After Deconstruction* (2002) and *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003), believes that ‘[d]espite its signal importance to so many schools of contemporary criticism, the human body has largely failed to garner a significant place in narratology’ (Punday 2000: 227). Although focussed particularly on the role of the body in character development in fiction, Punday's observation could be extended to broader narratives, and the way signifying bodies perform in culture. The character of a person is generally thought to be a sum of their personality traits, psychological make up and spiritual beliefs. Rarely is it thought of in terms of corporeality. Belief itself is both a manifestation of virtuality and a method of producing it. It is interesting to note that the physicality of place, manifested through architectural configurations of space, is considered an important contributor to the personality of culture yet physicality is rarely comfortably discussed. Feminist authors such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Susan Bordot and Elizabeth Grosz offer perspectives on corporeality in culture. While not wishing to make any argument for a phrenological approach to reading character through corporeality, it is perhaps worth noting that the material qualities of a person most likely contribute to their development of character.

The body and its orientation in the world, attracts the interests of contemporary cognitive scientists who, supporting Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, see intelligence as a product of mind-body-world exchanges. Mark Johnson, author of *The Body in the Mind* (1987) concludes that

> consciousness and rationality are tied to our bodily orientations and interactions in and with our environment. Our embodiment is essential to who we are, to what meaning is, and to our ability to draw rational inferences and to be creative. (Johnson 1987: xxxviii)

Johnson articulates the way abstract reasoning is determined by a person’s embodiment in the world. Andrew Gibson uses the phrase ‘narratological imaginary’
to explain the deployment of narrative theory in discussions of spatiality (cited in Benson 2003: 297). Such a strategy inclines thinking towards ‘geometrization’, where texts are ‘neatly segmented, symmetrically mapped, closed in and closed down by a geometrical system of thought or representation (cited in Benson 2003: 294). Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony uses musical terms to describe narrative methodology in the absence of useful counterparts in literary theory. It attempts to overcome ‘geometrization’ and to use polyphony as a method for surmounting dualism. In his belief that meaning was constructed through relationships or ‘dialogues’ between physical, political and conceptual bodies (Bakhtin 1986: 20), Bakhtin paved the way for thinking about unity and wholeness in an open-gestured way. Bakhtin also erred towards a phenomenological view of the world, where exchanges between self (as unique entity in progress towards realisation) and world (scene of unrepeatabile unity of difference), although relative, were not bound by relativism (Bakhtin 1986: 20-21).

Aside from the media and cinema’s positioning of bodies as desirable or undesirable objects, little is discussed about how the body’s materiality informs the world and subjectivity. The athletic body, the racially-othered body, the gendered body and the disabled body are perhaps four archetypal exceptions to this, where a kind of reversal takes place. Relegated to the fields of performance, injury and disease, discussions of these kinds of bodies most often results in a lack of awareness of the person’s other processes: thoughts, feelings, etc. It is as though consciousness and physical materiality can’t be discussed evenly at the same time. In discussing one attribute the other is automatically relegated to the background. Immediately I am confronted by the already established duality in discussing this. Cinema manipulates the disabled body to perform dastardly revenge plots; cyber-enhancement motifs or victimhood plays within its stories. The athletic body is the gladiatorial body, the tough body, the body that protects against victimhood. Counterparts in poetry are the love object or sexually-desired body, usually broken down to semblances, eyes, skin, hips, limb, etc. It is impossible to understand a person all at once (if ever), which is why perhaps focus is shifted towards fragments
and their descriptions. The gaze and the processing of the contents of the gaze, requires information in small but regular doses. An eye fixed in one position too long may lose its capacity to see. The gaze contains both a vanishing point and a viewing point, which Norman Bryson believes are inseparable:

What we are really observing, in this first geological age of perspective, the epoch of the vanishing point, is the transformation of subject into object: like the camera, the painting of perspective clears away the diffuse, non-localised nebula of imaginary definitions and substitutes a definition from the outside. In its final form … the only position for the viewing subject proposed and assumed by the image will be that of the Gaze, a transcendent point of vision that has discarded the body … and exists only as a disembodied punctum. (Bryson 1983: 107)
In posthumanist discourse the rush to manoeuvre cyberspace as a dry, meatless territory full of virtual realities that satisfy ego-longings to extend beyond the limitations of our animalistic realities, has come under criticism. It exposes the hyperreality implicit in cyber fictions when simulations are confused with and transcend the real. When simulation becomes the real through the substitution of signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes ... (Baudrillard 1983a: 4)

then virtual space gets confused with ‘real’ space and bodies are made redundant by their own simulation.

It has been argued that it is difficult to take seriously any claims about the redundancy of the body in cyberspace or even to claim that cyberspace is a disembodied regime. Katherine Hayles and Vivian Sobchack are two theorists who resist the idea that cyberspace, and by implication the texts that are written and published there, are purely electronic entities. In the words of Hayles: ‘embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it’ (Hayles 1999: xiv).

Hayles, rejecting the idea of the body as a social and informational poltergeist, introduced a re-examination of the subject’s flesh into posthumanism. As a result of first-hand experience with amputation and learning to ‘incorporate’ a prosthetic leg, Vivian Sobchack declared that ‘we must counter the millennial discourses that would decontextualize our flesh into insensate sign or digitize it into cyberspace’ (Sobchack 1995: 209).
I would like to expand on this with a proposition that the most intimate cyberspace I know is the network of spatial relationships sustained by my MIBOCU – spaces that crave connections to help interpret and communicate with the world. Our MIBOCUs expand the definitions and territories of cyberspace because they are the experiential sites of it. Cyberspace gives us forms of poetry that operate through structures designed to provide immersed, interactive, concrete, cinematic and / or generative models of experience, and they are easy to locate online.

The virtuality of a poet's body in online territories challenges assumptions about what it means to have flesh. Texts, voices and words become surrogate bodies where seeing becomes ‘an instance of touching’ and you begin to ‘feel that it is also already an instance of copying, of mirroring and of reflecting’ (Behar 2004). The machinations of virtuality require a material housing however; whether that be bodies, hardware or software. For Lefebvre, virtuality is anticipated within his concerns for repetition and difference. He mentions the doubled spatiality of differentiated subjectivity, that fluctuates between origin and destination, thereby anticipating, without knowing it, the condition of cyborgs (Lefebvre 1991: 142-44).

Digital texts that use html, animation, gaming or generated strategies disperse the body at the same time that they isolate and evaporate it. The internet propagates identity as a vampiric avatar that feeds off the MIBOCU of the reader, who then resuscitates the text in partnership with technology, to create a fleeting rendition of the poem and poet. Poem, poet, reader and technology, converge and exchange electrons and corporeality. Reality and representation become secretive and elusive as they attempt to avoid the fingerprinting regimes of categorization.

Unlike the adipose, isolated television body that is positioned as passive consumer, the computer body is multifarious, corporeal and incorporeal, dispersed and reconfigured, through the interactive nature of the computer and the reception of its content. While the body on the chair may mirror the avoirdupois existence of the television body, the watching body’s non-material elements are in constant flux and
reconfiguration. When a performer’s body speaks in digital space it is therefore both doubled and erased in the same transmission. Its corporeality is transferred to the site of reconfiguration through the reader’s senses. The body that propelled the voice in the first instance is relegated to an historical artefact represented by the archival capacities of digital publication. The displaced body at the centre of telepresence is a multiple and time-independent body. It is capable of being on the Gold Coast and in New York simultaneously, resulting in an enactment of Hayles’ subjectivity proliferations and distributed cognitions (Hayles 1999: 27, 288). Online, performance poets are – to invoke a term cited by Haraway from the unpublished work of Zoe Sofoulis – ‘techno-digested’ (Sofoulis cited in Haraway 1991: 163), shattering their quintessential nature as poets practicing a form dependent upon the relationship of the poem to the Speaking Author’s body. In this gesture they manifest the mind-body split but extend it to become a mind-out-of-body experience, and represent a near death experience for texts, in their traditional print media forms, as they head towards the light of the electron to become resurrected in the multiplicity of online environments. ‘The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora’ (Haraway 1985: 170).
Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) affirms postmodernism’s project of removing corporeality from the scene of writing and constructing it as a scene of relational texts upon which identity is written in ‘exhibitions of fragmentation and multiplicity’ (Kaye 1994: 17). Bodies are transformed into virtual stories in a proposition that renders the contribution of biological presence meaningless beyond its life support functions, and this makes it easier to transfer the scene of existence and identity from terra firma to terra electra.

By disputing the significance of the body’s materiality, its matter does not have to be accounted for, except as an artefact interfacing with technologies that will free it from what Gibson calls its ‘meat prison’ (Gibson 1984: 84). This returns my thoughts to one of the earlier traces of this discussion; that our ‘meat’ could be read as original cyberspace. To expand on that I would like to make a case for acknowledging our ‘wetness’ as a sign of the superiority of the MIBOCU’s cyberspace, when compared with the current limited dry networks of *terra electra*. Scientists may fantasize about creating a computer or robot capable of reproducing biological systems of growth and sustainability, and posthumanists may crave an electronic utopian infinity where consciousness can drift eternally through multiple identities and incarnations, but in the end, the body through its lifespan already offers most of these possibilities, and much more efficiently than cyberspace.

The fields of possibilities lived during a lifetime are a product of a self-modelled cartography. According to Felix Guattari:

> ... every individual and social group conveys its own system of modelising subjectivity: that is, a certain cartography—composed of cognitive references—with which it positions itself in relation to its affects and anguishes, and attempts to manage its inhibitions and drives. (Guattari 1992: 11)
If, as Guattari advocates, we are all self-determined cartographies, how do we describe the potential fields of impossibilities that also occupy the spatial architecture discussed earlier, and to what extent are they also self-determining? There is as much of the unknown contained in the spaces inside the meat as there is in the imagineering of cyberspace. The flesh is full of ‘polyphonic’ subjectivities (Guattari 1992: 16) and full of water.
Stelarc and Haraway are besotted by the machine, its borders / interfaces and the possibilities that reside in taking seriously the imagery of cyborgs as other than our enemies. … Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. (Haraway 1991: 180)

Bodies became expendable in the late 20th century as a result of economic collapses and cultural implosions. Haraway’s cyborg, as rendered through her manifesto, attempts to counter mine beliefs in natural essence and biological determinism. Haraway views a machinic interface with an organism’s selfhood as a pleasure zone where gender borders are dissolved in a politically-hermaphroditic utopia. In her script, we as cyborgs are chimeric, theoretical and ‘fabricated hybrids of machine and organism’ (Haraway 1991: 151).

Performance poets are theoretically post human. They contain qualities of the cyborg rendered in a narrative that circulates through a biological system that writing does not have. It is not possible to talk about a performing poet’s MIBOCU without engaging with new writing technologies and the body’s cybernetic and cyborg identities. Techno-performers such as Stelarc, who has been working with robotics, augmentation and assimilation to disconnect skin as a viable interface for the human body, believe that the body is an obsolete and replaceable vehicle for life. Stelarc sought to roboticise the body through his Hexapod experiment (Stelarc n.d.b.) website which at first glance seemed radical, but on closer inspection, revealed itself as a deeply conservative replay of old 1950s sci-fi narratives – narratives that perfect the monster by crossing it with Derrida’s ‘other’. This is not to say that ‘bodies end at the skin’ (Stelarc n.d.b.) which is an unsupportable premise behind Haraway and Stelarc’s work. Another difficulty is the assumption that a
rejection of the cyborg myth is a manoeuvre to situate feminist opposition as the pursuit of ‘organic holism to give impermeable whole-ness, the total woman and her feminist variants (mutants?)’ (Haraway 1991: 179). These are the challenges in Haraway’s work that were taken up by Katherine Hayles. The body-as-machine motif becomes, in Haraway and Stelarc’s hands, the inferior machine that must be enhanced to perform its job or subjectivity better; though this production incentive has sinister implications for the human condition that are not, in the case of Stelarc’s work, explored beyond the scene of the machine-body fetish.

In her book How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics (1999) Katherine Hayles discusses the implications of mind-body dualism and the disappearance of selfhood through cyborg / robotics theory’s narratives and the cult of ‘bodiless information’. Hayles demonstrates how the duality is a scene where technological determinism competes with biological determinism for the rhetorical and material ground of subjectivity. Hayles contests the inevitability of bodiless information and proposes the condition of posthumanism to explain how human subjectivity can seamlessly articulate with intelligent machines, without a demarcation between biological, material, technological and informational realities. However, there is no such thing as seamless articulation, and a join or articulation is always a point of weakness, a point that marks difference; it is always there haunting the space, the world, the network, the word.

In her showcase of the fictional nature of some scientific discourse, Hayles points to the work of Hans Moravec, graduate of the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory and researcher at the Mobile Robot Laboratory of Carnegie Mellon University, as displaying the ultimate fantasy of this fetish – a robot offspring that will eventually take over the world:

… robots will displace humans from essential roles. Rather quickly, they could displace us from existence … I consider these future machines our progeny, "mind children" built in our image and likeness, ourselves in more potent form. Like biological children of previous generations, they will
embody humanity's best chance for a long-term future. It behooves us to
give them every advantage and to bow out when we can no longer
contribute. (Moravec 2000)

Thus what is at stake is not only theoretical. Natasha Vita-More, formerly Nancy
Clarke, subjected her 50-year-old body to alterations, in order to fulfil her
posthuman fantasy of becoming what she calls ‘Primo 3M Plus’. The Primo 3M+ is
a ‘body with more comfort, better performance, lower price ... More powerful, better
suspended, more flexible, [a] body offering extended performance and Italian style.’
The Primo’s interior body is described as ‘expansive’ giving ‘100 quadrillion plus
synapse capability with a wide range of optional features. Our nano-engineered
fluid chassis reconfigures under the guidance of networked AI’ (Walker 2001).
Below is a table from Vita-More’s website (2005) that summarises the ‘advantages’
of the Primo 3M+ over existing bodies. The list represents all the quaint sci-fi
metaphors that demonstrate little concern for the implications of the body becoming
a commodity of production.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20th Century Body</th>
<th>Primo 3M+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>limited life span</td>
<td>ageless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inherited genes</td>
<td>replaceable genes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wears out</td>
<td>upgradable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>random mistakes</td>
<td>error correction device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligence capacity 100 trillion synapses</td>
<td>intelligence capacity 100 quadrillion synapses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single tracks circuits</td>
<td>multiple viewpoints running on parallel [tracks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender restricted</td>
<td>gender changeability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prone to environmental damage</td>
<td>environmentally friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corrosion by irritability, envy, depression</td>
<td>turbocharged optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elimination messy and gaseous waste</td>
<td>recycles and purifies waste products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Primo 3M+

Following Moravec, Vita-More enacts the split in the already traumatised body; a split between ‘DNA and the moral code of the postbiological world’ (Moravec 2000) in order to pave the way for ‘superintelligences that manage day to day transformations of world, body and mind’. Moravec, Stelarc and Haraway’s
ideologies – together with Norbert Wiener’s ‘information as the essential code the body expresses’ (cited in Hayles 1999: 1), Marvin Minsky’s human memories transported on computer disk, and William Gibson’s ‘bodiless exultation’ – continue in the tradition of what Nietzsche calls ‘the Despisers of the Body’: ‘To the despisers of the body will I speak my word. I wish them neither to learn afresh, nor teach anew, but only to bid farewell to their own bodies – and thus be dumb’ (Nietzsche 1891: 4).

The despisers of the body, according to Nietzsche, want to escape life because they are ‘angry with life and the earth’ (Nietzsche 1891: 4) and as they deny the body they effectively reduce the capacity of the mind. While not wishing to speculate on the hidden psychological motives of Moravec and pioneering cyborg theorists Nathan Kline and Manfred Clynes, it is important to maintain scepticism about the impulses hiding behind their science or ‘thought experiments’ (Moravec n.d.). Moravec’s pursuit of immortality and bodily transcendence differs little from religious hankerings for the afterlife, except that his ‘God’ is the mind and his ‘heaven’ is a technologically rendered and enhanced body. The kind of engineered transcendence Moravec seeks, removes the mind from its body in a highly ritualised and religiously signified act. The sacrificial body is wheeled into the laboratory where the essence of the person, which in this case is vested in the mind, is sucked out of them and transported to an allegedly ‘higher realm’ where consciousness can achieve immortality (Moravec 2000). In the new era of transplantable consciousness ‘[p]atients are "single-dead," "double-dead," or "triple-dead" depending on if, or how, their organs can be harvested for transplantation’ (Clynes & Kline 1995: 33). Moravec’s fantastic looted body is copied and displayed for future cyberspace customers while its physical ‘remains’ are disposed of as contaminant. In his new world order, cyborgs (which Moravec calls Exes) – as in excommunicated human copies – will evolve into posthumans through the shedding of ‘their bounded bodies’, which will forgo physical activity in favour of transformation into
a web of increasingly pure thought, where every smallest action is a meaningful computation … and the inhabited portions of the universe will be rapidly transformed into a cyberspace. … Beings will cease to be defined by their physical geographic boundaries, but will establish, extend and defend identities as informational transactions in the cyberspace. The old bodies of individual Exes, refined into matrices for cyberspace, will interconnect, and the minds of Exes, as pure software, will migrate among them at will. As the cyberspace becomes more potent, its advantage over physical bodies will overwhelm even on the raw expansion frontier. The Ex wavefront of coarse physical transformation will be overtaken by a faster wave of cyberspace conversion, the whole becoming finally a bubble of Mind expanding at near lightspeed. (Moravec 2000)

What Moravec does is celebrate the excoriation of the physical and material realm from humanness. At the same time he transfers identity to the scene of text, a technology of information and knowledge, thereby tripling the Cartesian split. Information is given the status of spirit and ‘soul’, and since it does not require flesh, he names it ‘postbiological’. It is a space and a condition where hybridity manifests through a collapse of difference between sentient and non-sentient states, and through a splitting of the human state. The displacement of the human species, by designer robots made in the fantasy image of the ‘mad scientist’, has become a legitimate, well funded, under scrutinised area of technological research. Accusations of technophobia are levelled at critics of the cryogenically motivated technophiliac, in an effort to frame any interrogation of their research as superstitious and primitive.

Moravec is not alone in his thinking that the processes of human nature can be isolated, removed and reproduced in a technological realm. Manfred Clynes has dedicated a significant portion of his research towards ‘santics’, which attempts ‘to map the physiology of human emotion’ (Clynes 1978: 11) . Hayles states that ‘human memory, unlike computer memory, does not retain its contents indefinitely or even reliably. If human memory has gaps … then memory becomes like atoms full of empty space’ (Hayles 2000: 53). It is inaccurate to assert that the human memory is the only kind of memory capable of loss. The idea of computer memory as an indefinite, infinitely reliable vault that cannot be disputed, is not only pure
fiction, it is the source of much assertion of power. In a dispute between a computer's memory and a human memory, the latter would be hard pressed to win. Looking at it from the position where memory is founded on the potential for loss, how can the computer be both cognisant machine and corruptible archive? Intelligence involves a conversation with memory, which is founded on change and the capacity to absorb and amalgamate new with old. Rhetoric can't have it both ways. Memory as a space where atoms fill up the gap with vacancy, with no thoughts – an 'apparent continuity riddled with holes' – presumes that embodied material memory is comparable to a hard drive, a static object that absorbs either successfully or un成功fully (Hayles 2000: 53).

Evolution of the bodiless corpus datum is still predicted to take place along Darwinian lines, only this time it is transfer speed, styles of thought and capacity to overcome borders that are competitively selected according to Moravec. These evolutionary operatives are already naturally selecting the fittest cultures for the agencies of capitalism. Survival of the fittest information, trade agreement, software, currency, etc, are all fulfilling Moravec's evolutionary criteria for postbiological existence. Interest in technological advances and outer-space inspired by the space race, may have popularised prosthetics, robotics and artificial intelligence in the 1950s, and in current robotics theory little has changed in the desire to confer immortality by trying to slice up, suck out, download and transplant the brain / identity as done by a geriatric Dr Frankenstein. In Moravec's mind-transplant procedure, thought is scanned into a computer's hardware, which reconstructs it as transferable dataware for the robot:

You've just been wheeled into the operating room. A robot brain surgeon is in attendance, a computer waits nearby. Your skull, but not your brain, is anesthetized. You are fully conscious. The robot surgeon opens your brain case and places a hand on the brain's surface. This unusual hand bristles with microscopic machinery, and a cable connects it to the computer at your side. Instruments in the hand scan the first few millimeters of brain
The contents of the brain are then programmed into the computer by the surgeon, who correlates the topographical and informational data of the scanned brain tissue with an online simulation of a brain, effectively filling the template with personal data. The simulation is then activated to render the real brain layer’s signals impotent:

Microscopic manipulators on the hand’s surface excise this superfluous tissue and pass them to an aspirator, where they are drawn away. ... Layer after layer the brain is simulated, then excavated. Eventually your skull is empty, and the surgeon’s hand rests deep in your brainstem. Though you have not lost consciousness, or even your train of thought, your mind has been removed from the brain and transferred to a machine. In a final, disorienting step the surgeon lifts its hand. Your suddenly abandoned body dies. For a moment you experience only quiet and dark. Then, once again, you can open your eyes. Your perspective has shifted. The computer simulation has been disconnected from the cable leading to the surgeon’s hand and reconnected to a shiny new body of the style, color, and material of your choice. Your metamorphosis is complete. (Moravec 1991)

Another version of the vampire data story was told by Timothy Leary, as the immortal brain euthanizing the tragic body as it adapts to digital and transgenic opportunities. Leary’s motives are more philosophical than Moravec’s practice, however, with his final resting place being not the robotic, but the siliconised:

Through storage of one’s belief systems as online data structures, driven by selected control structures ... one’s neuronal apparatus will operate in silicon as it did on the wetware of the brain, although faster, more accurately, more self-mutably, and – if desired – forever. (Leary 1998: 149)

Thus the pursuit of immortality continues, by murdering the body in pursuit of the myth of an unencumbered mind which, despite the rhetoric, can only ever be an unencumbered archive. Thus the robot stores the human experience, though it cannot ever create it, condemning it to a lifelong haunting by the phantom body. What Leary calls, ‘the perishable human creature’ (Leary 1998: 202) is denied
capacity to play a role in the formation of knowledge. It is a suicidal gesture framed as a loving act of transference, a protest against the ‘involuntary deaths’ (Leary 1998: 195) of human existence.
In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) Hayles discusses how the circulation between science and culture expresses the posthuman condition as a merger of technology and culture narratives. She deploys narrative to explain virtual bodies as stories that resist generalisation and disembodiment. In so doing she disrupts the technological determinism which created the teleology of corpus datum, or what Hayles calls ‘bodiless information’. Hayles challenges the established convention of cyber discourse to position the human condition and its experiences as patterns of information, rather than embodied experiences. Posthumanism subtracts the embodied real from the substrate of life, to construct an habituated speaking position that embodies narratives from a particular point of view. It configures arguments and beliefs about the importance of informational patterns over material representation. Consciousness is problematized to make room for the prosthetic enhancements and substitutions proposed by robotics and software engineers, who believe that the condition of being human can be fulfilled through technological exchanges and simulated conditions. Hayles endeavours to return flesh to the scene of the corpus datum:

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles 1999: 5)

Hayles views embodiment as a contextualised enmeshment of ‘place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment’ (Hayles 1999: 196). Embodiment never coincides exactly with “‘the body,” however that normalized concept is understood’ (Hayles 1999: 196). Indeed, Hayles makes a distinction between the biological body and the cultural syntax / articulations that occupy it;
which is what she considers ‘embodiment’. The body therefore contains embodiment but is not embodiment itself. The information over flesh dialectic now adds to the continuum of philosophical divides about the human condition: soul over body, truth over opinion, divine over earthly, reason over intuition, proof over faith, etc. The MIBOCU becomes the technology that performs a poem in space.

Brian Massumi discusses the body as ‘immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential’ (Massumi 2002: 31). The reality of the incorporeal extensions of the body stem from the residues an artist’s body leaves in spaces that continue beyond the artist’s creation, as in new media spaces. Images, sounds, texts that either document performance or produce a performance double, are thus capable of becoming prosthetic representations of the material body of the artist, where they have been and what they have been doing. More than strictly archival, the technological aspects of new media facilitate ongoing performance. In the end, these incorporeal performances outlive the corporeality of the artist, resulting in them gaining authority over, and standing in for, the artist’s organic form. In this way embodiment is extended, but at the same time dematerialised, creating the ubiquitous narratives of the posthumous or post humus editing process. Virtuality as a construct of a posthumous and displaced narrative – e.g. the body in film, in portrait, epic oral poems, obituaries, séances, memories and in text – was well established before ‘new media’ and hence embodiment’s tense interplay between information and materiality articulated by Hayles, Massumi and Deleuze, has always oscillated inside the scenes of production.

Francisco Varela extends the posthumanist discourse through concerns for ‘embodied or enactive cognition’ (Varela n.d.). Rejecting the ‘computationalist doctrine’ because it ‘failed to account even for the most elementary coping with the world: walking, perceiving objects in a natural setting, imagination,’ Varela says:
Slowly the cards turned into considering that the basis of mind is the body in coupled action, that is, the sensory-motor circuits establish the organism as viable in situated contexts. From this perspective the brain appears as a dynamical process (and not a syntactic one) of real time variables with a rich self-organizing capacity (and not a representational machinery). So in this sense the mind is not in the head since its roots are in the body as a whole and also in the extended environment where the organism finds itself. (Varela n.d.)

Thus the body of the performance poet begins to gain some ground as a dynamic system rather than as host for a mind, a narrative or a prosthetic.

Continuing the story of performance poets as posthuman would therefore entail a discussion of the relationship between the body of the performing poet, the poem and the embodiment of the poem. To apply a robotic lens to the scene would render the poem as the ‘mind’ that is transferable from body to machine to book to speaker to… to… to…. The body becomes only one of the architectures used to perform a poem in space. The online interface of the poem currently operates in loose and fragmented approaches that offer great diversity. As a place where identity is fluid, the internet’s capacity to support deviance, hybridity and articulation in unrealistic ways, is one of its attractions. The MIBOCU of the contemporary poet is already split across many renditions. Online poets manifest post-human qualities to further disrupt the nature of a poem.
The ‘body’ and ‘subjectivity’ have been discursive concerns since the early 1900’s. Since then, there has been an ongoing effort to account for the biological, textual and cultural operatives that compose knowledge and experience, resulting in the filtrate referred to as ‘identity’. Central to the idea of embodiment is an understanding of its inclusion of the textual and the corporeal. Merleau-Ponty proposed that knowledge and understanding are embodied acts, acquired through the filter of our bodies. He proposed that meaning was not ‘pre-existent’ in the world, but brought into being through the operations and systems of the body.

Embodiment therefore becomes a system of perception rendered through the body. This contrasts with the school of theorists like Baudrillard who fetishised the body as ‘technem’ – ‘a cultural design even in the smallest biological cell, or in the singular atom in which history is itself presented and on which many people are working’ (cited in Fuehr 1996). Roland Barthes tried to neutralize the body’s organic matter by constructing it as a ‘tissue of signs’ (Barthes 1977). Merleau-Ponty tells us that ‘the idea of going straight to the essence of things is inconsistent … what is given is a route, an experience, which gradually clarifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and others’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 205). In performance poetry these routes, experiences and dialogues are mediated through a body – whether it is textual, material, technological, or a semblance of all of them. It involves a vibrant transience, a feeling, by both author and reader, for meaning that encompasses abstract and metaphorical acts of cognition that may not be translatable into language.

What are the qualities of poetry that live beyond the book surfaces we have come to know: the smell of their pages, their texture, font, colour, ink, the look of their covers, and the feel of tentatively opening their perfectly bound spines? What happens when we replace these with the weight of the body and the density of its form in space, the sweat and perfume and aftershave, the breath audible and
olfactory, the quality of skin and the posture, gesture and timbre of voice; in other words the presence of the poet's body?

There is tension in the act of breaking the smooth, typographical order of a poem with the organic graphic of a body scribing the poem in space. This is an act of translation that can be experienced as a violent disruption of the specular act. When text poems are read, the voices are heard in the voice of the reader. When we perform, our voices directly penetrate the sensory structures of the audience. Language is communicated through the emulsions of bodily processes in poems that may take the shape of animated dramas, inhabited language, coded utterances or the pouncing oral kinetics of sound poetry. Embodiment involves a haptic quality, a sense of touching the text from the inside in an unapologetic acknowledgment of its relationship to subjectivity.
I hum to you in wa(l)king

In the installation $H_2O$, human bodies make poems by walking in an array of sensors. Like a net dropped over the ocean, the grid of sensors clicks with ultrasonic pulses which hunt the body walking through their sensor fields. The bodies and subjectivities of animals haunt the acoustic realms of $H_2O$, as also with *Dive* and *Liquid Stanzas*. By giving voice to their subjectivities, I witness their presence and its passing in the ecology of my poetry. I engage with the world and my poetry as a MIBOCU in dynamic relationship with body water, world water and atmospheric moisture. In the site of my sound poems, ecologies surrounded by leaky membranes exchange material and immaterial qualities with each other.

As I write and compose poems for these collections I inhabit spacetimes flooded with technology, acoustics, compositions, narratives, dimensions, fictions, and subjectivities dappling with transience. Poetry swims through my body in sound waves, visual manifestations and sonic refractions, which ripple in my consciousness to effect change; in my MIBOCU’s concentrations; and my poetry’s slippery apprehensions. In this way phenomenological knowing sinks and imaginary knowing rises in the swells of my body’s water. I touch nothing except interfaces to create these poems and I do not live the experience of their scripts. These poems are a kind of social space, in which the flesh of the world is simulated in the noise and vapours of the world.

I have decided not to speak in these poems, which challenges the strict definitions of performance. By not speaking I hear other layers of voice in my works: the mermaid’s voice brought to life by Shelagh (marine archivist); the voice of my poetry expressed through my MIBOCU’s unique arrangement of elements such as language, sound, acoustics, compositions; the voices of the animals; the ‘voices’ of the ecological realm, e.g. splashes, hisses, wind, distortions, boats, etc. By choosing not to speak directly I am avoiding the trap of translating my text into utterance in my usual performance style. I am surrendering my intimacy with the text and authority as authorial voice. It offers a different kind of pleasure, one that is derived from the liberation of my body from its text and requirements of utterance. I encourage Shelagh to read my poetry as though it is not poetry, but a way of ecologically
situated speaking that includes the sounds of the worlds being created. The poems are more than poems, in the sense that I am forcing them to mutate beyond themselves as ink patterns on white paper, into spatial beings rampant with multiplicity. They are experienced in the somatic as well as textual realm, as their sounds are incorporated into, and arranged / manifested by the MIBOCU.

The manifestation of appropriation plays out in $H_2O$ in the scene of copyright law. Sound recordists are granted copyright ownership of the voices of animals they recorded. Sound recordists are able to lay claim to copyright on the basis that their labour was involved in securing the property of the animal’s voices. It is ironic that many of the animals did not give voice willingly but had to be given electric shocks or physical injuries to make sound. It would appear that the body of, say, the blue striped grunt fish, was able to be used as if it was a musical instrument, effectively enabling the recordist to be granted the status of musician and copyright owner of the recording. This was learned through conversations with the staff at Cornell Ornithology Laboratory around the time that I had to sign a copyright agreement for the use of the material and my thoughts on the whole situation. Consensus and legal opinion given the Lab in 2004 assumed that the material property of the recording, as captured on tape by the recordist, was where copyright resided. The animal whose voice was being solicited and captured was not considered to have a claim to copyright. While acknowledging that the idea of a fish having copyright over its voice might seem absurd, I think the possibility of it being entitled to moral rights is an important consideration, when reviewing the commercial status of historical works of this nature. As stated, these recordings were often secured under the animal’s duress. It would be interesting to see whether this status could be overturned, granting moral rights to the animals and free public access to the recordings. In the end though, if someone is making a profit from the sale or use of the recordings, a legitimate argument might be made for the recordist to be entitled to a share of the financial gain.

In public space voices are often recorded without the speaker’s permission, which makes it difficult to ascertain copyright ownership. The implications for my project are that in the absence of adequate resources to pay for licensing agreements with the Cornell Facility, I am required to seek permission to broadcast my own compositions – not from the fish or
mammals who own the voice but from the technicians who recorded them and the lawyers that protect them. The Director of the Bioacoustics Research Facility, Dr Chris Clarke, said to me one day in the corridor, ‘Use whatever you like, it’s the whales who own the copyright’. Unfortunately, the number of recordings available from him were limited. In reading the scientific literature on Humpback Whale songs and how they are most likely acts of creativity, containing poetic and musical talent, I am left wondering how their rights might be protected. It is difficult to see how a case for originality could be made for recordings solicited from animals. It is also impossible to secure permission from the animals being recorded. A case is made by more conservative scientists that the animals are not producing originality, merely reproducing a species specific code. Even so, what they are doing could be considered more creative than the act of recording another.

Any engagement with an ecologically focussed view of the world necessarily involves a movement towards a more integrated and powerful selfhood than that offered by postmodernism. Lyotard's assignation that "[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable’ (Lyotard 1984: xxv) expresses an important freedom that postmodernism offers to artists: the validity of the speculative. Some, such as Irigaray argue that this ‘freedom’ is merely an a priori validation of the specular or ocular: ‘everything outside remains forever a condition making possible the image and the reproduction of the self’ (Irigaray cited in Lutterbie 1997: 37) – in other words a freedom to look and make meaning through the gaze and the surfaces it recruits. However, postmodernism’s fragmented subjectivity sits perfectly with hegemony because it renders individuals as powerless, selfless, voiceless products that can be increasingly controlled through surveillance, consumerist desire and policy. While not disputing the realism of the portrait, I wish to move away from the gaze that follows me around the room, not towards the modernist retrospective taking place in the back hall, but towards the wet spaces of the unknown.
SITUATION 3: SPACE

I was absent at the moment I took up the most space. (Camus 1956: 87)

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Laws End

Sticky clumps
of ice crackle on salt encrusted wings. The song I sing
for the man who bites the world, is full of grass and ice
ground between the molars of a herd of musk oxen.

Around islands of squeals
seal pups suckle milk from new mothers and young
humpbacks slap and spyhop at the prow of a Norwegian
whale hunter's ship. A jet ski loaded with soft white pelts.

Tiny pools of blood drip from his insatiable mouth.
through the surface

Space is the invisible architecture that flesh has organized itself around to establish presence. As organic entities we are generally only aware of ourselves through our membranes, thoughts and feelings – a large percentage of which we don’t see, don’t realize or don’t understand – rendering our identity largely invisible. I do not know myself as water yet I am at least 70% water. Presence is a responsive system that is organized culturally and biologically, on a nanosecond to nanosecond basis. It is largely unknowable. As Bachelard points out, ‘[b]eing does not see itself’ (Bachelard 1969: 215). As such it co-creates many of the indescribable moments contained within the experience of writing, performing and reading. In discussing spacetime I have drawn from the work of theorists from many disciplines in order to canvas current and past thinking about space, embodiment, subjectivity, sound and creativity. These include the works of Foucault, Lefebvre, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Haraway and Hayles.

Space is considered one of the mediums of poetry, and parallel to Lefebvre’s account of Euclidean space, where homogeneity is used to reduce natural and social space to two dimensional representations, poetry has until recently, been reduced to the dimension of text on paper. This flattening of poetry into a representational plane of repressed utterance, effectively denatures its organic processes and social relationships. It disturbingly conforms to Lefebvre’s assertion that space has been reduced by Euclidean method to an abstracted illusion stemming from two dimensional representation. Poetry, like Euclidean styled space, became a thing of stanzas and lines, in pages that demarcated space like vacant blocks waiting to be developed. It became abstract, a thing to be consumed by the gaze, passively at a safe distance, a kind of precious object that did not need to be lived directly. In the oral forms that preceded print forms, poetry was expressed through the multiple dimensions of a speaking MIBOCU. Space is best known through limitation, where the tension between expansion and contraction, materiality and immateriality, are represented in both architecture and poetry.
One task of a poet is to understand the presence of a poem outside of its words, not to structurally snap the spine of a poem across line break after line break, but to expand and disperse the spaces within the poem. Poems are like auras, fields of resonance that are articulate and living beyond the page; not silent, decorous buildings. Some poems offer spaces to curl up in and rest, others places to meet and talk, but these meeting places are temporary; currents that support both flotation and diving. The poem doesn't need scaffolding, it needs moisture and exchange. Its impermanence cannot be nailed down or hammered into place; there is nothing secure or solid about it. It wriggles too much for such a gesture.
Performing poetry is a subversive act. Subversive simply for its occupation of a public space that annihilates the poetic through strategies of surveillance and commerce. When Plato banished poets from the Republic he banned them from public space, believing it to be dangerous for citizens to have their passions ignited by bards who practiced mimetic rather than dialectical poetry. In *Phaedrus*, the soul journeys through a city of prudent speech seeking ‘souls of the right type’ (Hamilton & Cairns 1973: 522). The reckless speech of poets had to be censured. Poets in public spaces can challenge government policy or social conditioning, and are often unwelcome as a result. A recent example of this was Laura Bush’s cancellation of a traditional White House library symposium, in February 2003, because she feared most of the invited poets would read poems that protested against the government’s plans to invade Iraq (Unknown 2003a). Public space is also the arena for race, class and gender conflicts, and as a result it is a terrain of both control and resistance. For these reasons the use of public space, to serve corrupt political and commercial regimes, is counter to its use as a site of poetry.

When poets step into public spaces to give live readings, they perform resistance to silence / absence. They refute one type of author’s death. They refute Deleuze and Guattari’s body without organs. They refute Barthes’ and Foucault’s construction of them as author-functions and they refute the anti-poets’ fantasy that poetry is dead. Live readings resist silence and absence through the gesture of embodied utterance. As a result there is a certain degree of subversion associated with taking up a microphone in a public space and feeding it poetry. This subversive capacity is tempered by awareness of Bakhtin’s observation that:

No utterance can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the product of the interaction of the interlocutors, and, broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred. (Bakhtin 1984b: 30)
Bakhtin explains that the utterance is a product of an intense conflict between one's own word and another's word; where words perform a 'clash' of 'social accents' in 'little arena[s]' where 'living social forces' interact in the 'word in the mouth of a particular individual [who] is a product of the living interaction of social forces' (Bakhtin 1984b: 30). Bakhtin's concern is the difference between the utterance and the sentence, where the sentence represents an individually located manifestation of language and the utterance a socially contextualised exchange full of the utterances of others in an 'extraverbal context of reality (situation, setting, prehistory)' (Bakhtin 1986: 73), where others are being addressed. Thus 'extraverbal context of reality' becomes the manifestation of play between the signifier and the signified, the social and the individualised, the sentence and the utterance, the author and the reader; making the act of speaking poetry important, aside from the value of the text; although the quality of the 'text' is central to the word poet. Poetry readings are theoretically and existentially disturbing because they reside in the pores of both analytical and experiential understandings.

Performance places the poet’s MIBOCU at the centre of the stage as a fictional, material presence, that resonates with the strange harmonic of an author's (as opposed to an actor's) MIBOCU, in a scene of readers who recreate the author's identity in front of their eyes. Performance poets are interrupted by appropriation and transformation as they autograph their texts and subjectivities loudly in public spaces. Voices, bodies and spaces, their interiors and exteriors, are more than technologies to produce and invigorate texts. In addition to the culturally inscribed texts that manifest the relational bodies of self and other, the body contains its own sonic and somatic language and text. Performance poetry is a form of corporeal literacy that includes the pre-lingual and pre-symbolic, therefore we have no means to describe it. It is an unsayable poetic that speaks in metaphor, energy and intuition. Resistance is not futile. Step into the space of culture and speak. Enter the dwelling of a poem and live.
Lefebvre, following Marx and the Situationists’ concept of *detournement*, discusses appropriation as an expression of spatial practice that modifies nature to suit human desires and activities. According to Lefebvre, appropriation operates through the assumption of vacancy that occurs when an existing space has outlived ‘its original purpose and the *raison d’etre* which determines its forms, functions, and structures’ (Lefebvre 1991: 73). When a space becomes ‘vacant’ it is susceptible to ‘being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one’ (Lefebvre 1991: 73). Lefebvre uses this concept of diversion and reuse, to develop ideas on appropriation as a gesture of spatial practice rather than artistic practice: ‘new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa’ (Lefebvre 1991: 59). To Lefebvre social space is turbulent and dynamic:

not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity, their (relative) order and / or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of simple object. (Lefebvre 1991: 59)

Deleuze and Guattari use the idea of appropriation to create resistance through deterritorialisation. The theoretical practice of deterritorialising space popularised by them inadvertently highlights a further paradox confronting cultural theorists: the appropriation of space through its deconstruction. Space appears to have become territorialised through criticism – criticism which has scripted the decentralisation and disempowerment of subjectivity, rendering material selfhood as an impossible idea, except through the condition of a fugue-like nomad travelling rhizomatically between identifications. Although Deleuze and Guattari situate the nomad as a cluster, as a ‘tribe in the desert instead of a universal subject within the horizon of all-encompassing Being’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1999: 379), the tribe is still in a desert, a long standing metaphor for disorientation and ‘nowhereness’. There is a tendency, when rejecting the idea of ‘being’, to pursue it as an expression of
something ‘all encompassing’, which is a totalising assumption in itself. Some authors such as Rosi Braidotti have argued that the nomad is a metaphor of subversion against a set of conventions surrounding the idea of the nomad (Braidotti 1994: 5) rather than a literal expression of the idea of travelling. Deleuze and Guattari articulate the cultural denial of home or place for an always-never selfhood. Donna Haraway rejected the privileged position of mobility embedded in the nomad metaphor and advocated habitation as a legitimate place from which to think: ‘the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular’ (Haraway 1998: 259).

In considering how power operates within the space of my practice, and how it affects the reception of creative product, I notice that it creates a field of expectations around authority and my right to talk about certain topics. I have encountered critical biases and expectations that were unsympathetic to criticism of scientific method or expressions of concern for animal welfare. Critical biases view all things artistic as ‘soft’ compared with the important knowledge acquired through quantitative research methods. Power asserted through the validation of economically valuable practices, or traditional models and subjects of inquiry within academia, appear suspicious of interdisciplinary and creatively derived knowledge.

Wendy Arons sees the interdisciplinary moment within academia as a promise that was not realised due to

the realities of disciplinary boundaries, which are often vigorously policed from within. Working in an interdisciplinary [way] involves negotiating through the often foggy foreign territory of other disciplines’ methodologies, theoretical approaches, and standards of evidence and proof. (Arons 2004: 275)

Within the field of literature I frequently encounter a reluctance to accept poetry, and research about poetry, that does not conform to the discipline’s norms. Already at a disadvantage within the new humanities due to the influence of market forces and
the rise of fiction and non-fiction over poetry, these norms privilege certain styles of written work, certain sets of experiments in relation to the written work, and certain kinds of publishers of written work. There is a dismissal of poetry that celebrates its capacity for interdisciplinarity. This operates through the showcasing of such poetry as a sort of carnival freak or monster that needs to be contained within the realm of the Other. Interdisciplinary method offers resistance to the project of conformity required to sustain the schools of ‘Enlightened’ Western discourse.

A female performance poet is politically disadvantaged by the well argued resistance that exists against authentic (as opposed to the currency of gossip, showbiz and politically correct speech that is privileged) female speech, particularly in public space. Patricia Smith, a leading American Slam poet, is notorious for screaming, spitting and stamping her way through poems on stage. Is this resistance? Or is it another scene of the ‘generic feminine subject’ mirroring masculine speech through what Wittig says is Je assuming ‘indifferently the masculine language’? (Wittig n.d.). How can we know when there is no history of unadulterated feminine speech? But then again, to deny females the capacity to pollute male speech would be naïve. Even the act of oppression requires an understanding of what is being repressed, and the idea of a pure male or unadulterated male voice is difficult to claim. The noise of female speech exists within patriarchal language, even if it is in the silences, the gaps, the flows. The same can be said for violated indigenous speech, slave speech, or any other kind of Other contained within a particular site.

Donna Haraway discusses the ‘embarrassed silence’ on behalf of ‘white radical and socialist feminists’ who allegedly did not account for race in their political taxonomies. ‘There was no structural room,’ says Haraway, ‘for race (or for much else) in theory claiming to reveal the construction of the category woman and social group women as a unified or totalizable whole’ (Haraway 1991: 160). She accuses American socialists and feminists of deepening the
dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism in the social practices, symbolic formulations, and physical artifacts associated with “high technology” and scientific culture … [that recall] us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance. Another of my premises is that the need for unity of people trying to resist world-wide intensification of domination has never been more acute. But a slightly perverse shift of perspective might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies. (Haraway 1991: 154).

While her criticisms of feminism may be valid, it is unclear whether she is interrogating her own relationship to ‘us’ or using ‘my own’ as a surrogate ‘us’ to position the debate against any potential for consensus. I suspect there is an aversion to the possibility of ‘us’ or ‘we’, a standard opposition to Modernism’s history of speaking on behalf of all. The clues reside in her lack of fine-lensing her own work in the sweeping claims, albeit satirical in many cases, she makes throughout the Manifesto: ‘And who counts as “us” in my own rhetoric?’ she asks. ‘Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called “us”, and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity?’ (Haraway 1991: 155).

While acknowledging the legacy of the ‘royal we’ embedded in the pronoun ‘we’, there is a need to create spaces for ‘we’ as an idea of collective consciousness, when the voice of the niche occupies the silence of the group consensus and resists the narcissism of the ‘I’. The silence of the ‘we’ space is also important to open up when considering more ecologically inclusive processes. For Adrienne Rich: ""I" can become "we" without extinguishing others’ (Rich 1993b: 85).

Erasing the ‘we’ in discourse silences the commonality experienced by sharing time with others and the knowledge that comes from getting to know them. It also disempowers community and artistic groups – which serves the isolationist and individuality motives of government and commerce, although both government and big business like to invoke the Modernist ‘we’ when endeavouring to coerce. There is an implicit alienation underlying the interrogation. The power of the group, though deserving resistance in many instances, also overcomes the ghosting of subjectivity.
which resides in taboo, disease, abject and forgotten silences. The group voice that gathers around the unity of ‘we’ effects political change, for good or bad, faster than any other process. It also evokes tyranny, terrorism and conformity.

In order to enact the violence imposed through metaphors of breakage, the poem is constructed as a material entity. The poem creates membranes between spaces that flow between each other, that wade in each other's places and splash around in meaning, dispersing molecules across to other pools / zones within the poem. The sun dehydrates them, the tide washes them away, they are anything but permanent. In a book they represent a kind of sedimentary archive of a ‘once upon a time’. Without a book, they are digital semblance within an archive of evaporation. In evaporation they are residual, concentrated and ephemeral.

To explain a poem as a villanelle, sonnet or sestina tells us the quantifiable aspects of a poem – it has so many lines, this kind of pattern, etc – but it does not reflect the quality of the experience we will have. How does a villanelle of 2005 distinguish itself from its 19-line version of the late 1500’s? If both poems were about love, how would they express their differences and is there anything about the time or space in which they were written that leaks into their structures and sensibilities? Some ways in which they would be influenced would result from language and speech themselves – new words, abandoned words, socially unacceptable expressions, the background tempo of the culture, an awareness of audience, the cultural and individual voice operating behind the scenes of the poem. If it is true that ‘audience is where the action is’ (Goodwin 2004: 317) then it is to be expected that changes in culture and audience taste would reflect changes in structure and content. When the audience for poetry is narrowed to other poets, it cannot be expected to expand, as the language and forms of poetry that poets hold dear may be different from those a wider audience would appreciate. This is an important reason to maintain awareness of the space of cultural forms and practices, and the way cultural communication is performed.
Munt alerts us to Foucault’s suggestion ‘that the “domain of the modern episteme should be represented rather as a volume of space open in three dimensions... [an] epistemological trihedron”’ (Foucault cited in Munt 2002) – which is a belief that informs this writing, in spite of my rejection of the trihedral model. The notion of three-dimensionality also invites philosophical discourse about spacetime into this discussion. The trihedral view of three-dimensionality manifests in the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Edward Soja (1996) through their discussions of spatial representation and practice; comprised of conceived, perceived, lived / produced spaces. These spaces have come to be regarded as First, Second and Thirdspace in spatial discourse. Soja (1996) investigated First, Second and Thirdspaces in order to comprehend and extend Lefebvre’s work and to consider the role of spatiality in cultural discourse. Firstspace is a ‘perspective that is focused on the “real” material world’ (Soja 1996: 6) and Secondspace a ‘perspective that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality’ (Soja 1996: 6). Soja coins the term Thirdspace to ‘capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings’ (Soja 1996: 2). Lefebvre and Soja’s work is invaluable for considering space from the perspective of human relationships with culture. I need to think a little differently from their dissections of space, appearances and meaning however. I don’t consider my investigations to be opposing theirs so much as interrogating spacetime from a slightly different perspective. I experience episteme and creative practice more as saturating realms, deluges of dispersal and ebbs and flows of immersions, more than the catchments witnessed in the spatial discourses of Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991).

When considering space one thinks of duration, hence the use of spacetime. Duration is best thought of as limited time associated with limited space, the essence of temporality. Time itself, as configured by physics, is not limited by duration – or what I think of as bounded time, or time situated alongside, within and
through a particular space. Duration can be understood as a flow stemming from consciousness, as perceptible time, as stemming from the senses but also as a natural rhythm: i.e., Earth. Seasons, the length of the day and night, rainstorms and heatwaves, the time it takes to swim from Argentina to Alaska, are all spaces intimately bound with duration; as is life itself. Embodiment and its awareness and production, are situated within the duration of a life, which is only a part of lived time, which in turn is only a small duration within infinite time.

Creativity, manifested through the creation of product, resists the sinker that weighs the body down in the sea of duration. Books, in this way, outlive the duration of the author’s life, as do paintings, musical scores, sculptures, etc. However, they generally have a socially imposed duration determined by relevance, fashion and aesthetics. The internet resists, but does not eliminate, the linear senses of duration by saturating the field with the always-present multiple, the one-click flattening of space, which in turn becomes subjected to the duration of the download and the attention of the surfer. Jean Baudrillard makes a case for a shift in spatial practice and thinking away from real physical space towards an appreciation of simulacra, where allusion to the real, through signs and significations, substitutes for the real, thereby enabling the copy to substitute for the real. ‘Hence the real is abolished’ (Baudrillard 1988: 145) and the hyperreal renders factual representation trivial. The real loses its meaning, relevance and claim to space, as the simulation is mistaken for it. Baudrillard’s arguments are strongly supported by the operations of culture, which potentiate the threat of extinction by replacing animals and plants with their simulations, images and genetic codes. Residual specimens in zoos and rumoured sightings of extinct specimens of animals effect a simulation of the vanished and endangered that enables the pretence of survival.

I would like to engage with Elizabeth Grosz’s question about ethics and what it would be like to seek

a mode of equivalence, a mode of reciprocity or calculation, sought to base
itself on absolute generosity, absolute gift, expenditure without return, a
pure propulsion into a future that does not rebound with echoes of an
exchange dictated by the past. (Grosz 1999: 11)

Morton, in his advocacy for an ‘ambient poetics’ believes that our consciousness is
due for some ‘nondual awareness that collapses the subject-object division, upon
which depends the aggressive territorialization that precipitates ecological
destruction’ (Morton 2002). It is through water – its ontological, poetic and physical
capacities – that I find a way of describing parts of the unsayable and its concern for
rupturing containment, in order to move closer to this kind of ambient poetics.
‘the perceived, the conceived, the lived’ (Lefebvre 1991: 6)

In this discussion, tissue, as one of the essences of embodiment, accommodates imaginary, material, produced and representational configurations of space. Space, like presence, is difficult to reconcile because of the many understandings that can be drawn from it. Lefebvre developed his concept of perceived, conceived and lived space to attempt a critical view into the idea of ‘space’. He gives ‘perceived space’ as the material, socially produced, verifiable space of surfaces, where production and reproduction manifest. It is the space of everyday social life. He suggests that ‘conceived space’ is produced through professional activities and discursive claims – through the activities of people such as scientists, planners, social engineers, etc – while ‘lived space’ denotes spaces of representation produced through imagination, creativity and self agency (Lefebvre 1991: 6).

When space is named it is limited by the signification, yet without naming we have difficulty making sense of it. If in the politicisation of space it is reduced to an artefact of production, driven by consumption and exchange, it loses its spaciousness and becomes an architectonic design of social relations. What existed as absolute space according to Lefebvre, resides in ‘the fragments of nature’ (Lefebvre 1991: 48). Absolute spaces end up being stripped ‘of their natural characteristics and uniqueness’, resulting in their being transformed into ‘relativized and historical space’ through the forces of history (Lefebvre 1991: 48). In a sense, space becomes another technological tool that is always inhabited, leaving scant room for a non-human account of, habitation in, or claim over space.

By centring theoretical speculation on the social, cultural, political and scientific relations of humans, humanity operates under the convenient permit to design, exploit, co-opt and sell space. Such spatial niche-making prohibits gaps, silences, flows, blurs, immersions and drifts. It prohibits consideration of the rights of animals and non-human ecologies, and inevitably scorns the value of non-productive activities and behaviours. Animals also produce physical, emotional and creative
space. Inanimate constituents of the environment such as earth, rocks, water, air, etc also produce a physical space. All of the operations and manifestations of space are interrelated, making it impossible to isolate a space and talk about it as a separate thing; yet there is a certain unavoidability about doing precisely this, as evidenced in the work of Lefebvre, Soja and others. Space may be dissected like a lab rat and its various entrails spread out and mapped into territories of structure, function and text, but like the rat, learning about its parts does not grant authority to claim knowledge of the whole rat. It does not even give an accurate picture of what it means to be a rat in a rat's world as opposed to being in a human world, with its built maze of experiments. As space becomes more conceived, traded, developed and occupied by the noise of the human everyday, corporate exploitation, military territorialising, political and social surveillance, self-interest and consumerism, the idea of self-hood as an expression of free will becomes even more intangible – for both humans and animals.

Lefebvre explains the importance of understanding how space is produced through social relations expressed via a projection of self into space. He notes how subsequently the self becomes inscribed in the space in such a way that it ends up producing the space itself:

Failing this, these relations would remain in the realm of "pure" abstraction – that is to say, in the realm of representations and hence of ideology: the realm of verbalism, verbiage and empty words. (Lefebvre 1999: 129)

That words should be labelled as having the capacity to be ‘empty’ is an interesting point of difference between Lefebvre and theoretical developments since the 1980s.

Lived space is experienced physically, emotionally, intellectually, ideologically, symbolically, etc. Presence, or the sense of something, is attributed to ‘the transformation of the static order of things into a structured running action differentiated into events and durations’ (Fuehr 1996). Lefebvre’s Marxist lens filters
spatiality through social practice, whereas geographer Edward Soja uses Bell Hooks’ idea of ‘radical postmodernism’ as the impulse behind his re-evaluation of Lefebvre (Hooks cited in Soja 1996: 85-6). Radical postmodernism performs as a kind of radical postponement, where deferral is privileged over positioning:

Radical postmodernism calls attention to those sensibilities which are shared across the boundaries of class, gender, and race, and which could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition. (Hooks cited in Soja 1996: 86)

A tactic of deferral is to keep dividing up space, to inspect and name its entrails, and hologram the implications. Yet there is no solution to the problem of how to consider space as something with a wholeness without reducing it to sums of missing parts, or totalising it as a thing of oneness that incorporates all in an authoritative manner. I am drawn to think of an aeroplane and its contrail, and how it splits at the same time as the whole is understood. The sound trails behind the missing image. The vapour marks and sounds trace where both the thing and its image have been. Perception amalgamates the experience into comprehension of a plane flying overhead.

Lefebvre’s spatial dialectics are important in considering how space is produced, as are Merleau-Ponty’s investigations into the situatedness of being-in-a-body-in-the-world and its corporeal and historical relations. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of embodiment explains embodied experience as a relationship between physiological, psychological, cultural, and historical affects, both conscious and unconscious. Soja’s critique of Lefebvre – his extension and mapping of Lefebvre’s difficult ideas – endeavoured to navigate through the disorder insisted upon by Lefebvre, to keep ideas of ‘First,’ and ‘Second’ space open ended and entropic. Thirdspace is understood as

a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace
perspective that is focused on the "real" material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations of spatiality. (Soja 1996: 5-6)

Soja introduces ‘Thirdspace’, but this is also a difficult space to comprehend. This categorisation of space renders it as produced and demarcated scenes that bear certain characteristics which stem from cultural production. Firstspace tends to be fixed and observable within the forms of physically oriented experiences of space. Materiality in Firstspace is considered a concrete form capable of being observed, comprehended and / or mapped (Soja 1996: 10). In other words, physical space. This is the space occupied by the MIBOCU in daily life. It is also the space manifested in the material world, a building and its rooms, for example.

As Firstspace is apprehended through sensory systems, its materiality is realised through perception, rendering it as a perceived space as well as a physical space. For example, a book of poetry exists as a physical object that is realised through perception. Secondspace is ‘conceived in ideas about space, in thoughtful representations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms’ (Soja 1996: 5-6) through which material space ‘interprets ... reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality’ (Soja 1996: 6). As conceived space, Secondspace can be represented through creative acts, such as stories that describe space, photographs, architectural drawings, or ideas of space realised imaginatively.

A book of poetry understood through thinking of Secondspace is full of relativities and subjectively understood concepts. A book of poetry also contains a symbolic realm where ideas about ‘a book of poetry’ form the conceptual frame for receiving it. The book could be a necessary part of work or study, an object that inspires delight or creates fear, a compulsory text, something that challenges or consoles, something full of memories, etc. If it is my book, I am affected by other considerations, such as its value, its capacity to invite conversation, feelings of completion and satisfaction. My book also represents something I am expected to sell, which creates anxiety. These ideas represent the book as a constituent of
Secondspace. A book of poetry therefore represents both First and Secondspace, in its material and symbolic manifestations. Cyberspace is a manifestation of Secondspace, or what Lefebvre calls 'representational' space. In many ways it is full of under realised or unrealised experiences as it cannot communicate conceived space adequately. Cyberspace enables the capacity of conceived space to become a virtually lived space, though the MIBOCU is only ever able to partially inhabit it.

Thirdspace emerges when the material and symbolic come together in lived space. Thirdspace calls beyond conceived space towards lived space, and yet the division of space into these kinds of paradigms is already limited. Dissections can sometimes go too far, and when everything has to be named, somebody sets the margin and the centre. Margins and centres are not real or static. What does it mean to create or occupy a centre or margin? The contestation of centre and margin which is at the heart of postmodern investigation, has not managed to eliminate the territories or borders, nor to resolve the problem of the privileges required to ask the question in the first place. The spatial, conceptual, spiritual and psychological territories that foam within identity, community and creativity, flow in the spaces of three dimensional poetry.

Soja’s Thirdspace is an attempt to reconcile the need for more hybridity – one that can accommodate Firstspace and Secondspace, or the spaces of the physical and the linguistic:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and concrete, the real and imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (Soja 1996: 56-57)

Thirdspace represents a synthesis of perceived (Firstspace) and conceived (Secondspace) spaces and contains an experiential aspect. It is a space where
perception and conception result in a subjective response, for example, feeling cosy in a room, feeling immersed in the ocean, experiencing memories when looking at a photograph. Thirdspace is where Soja advocates that spatial practices, manifested through the exercise of power, may be resisted. The challenge of discussing space is to do so in a manner that can account for difference without relegating such difference to the field of the account. Soja’s Thirdspace is a space where everything fuses from every angle. ‘Anything,’ he says, ‘which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains – even on the pretext to handling its infinite complexity – destroys its meaning and openness’ (Soja 1996: 56-57).

Soja’s language of fusion stems from the sensibility of fragmentation that he incurs from Lefebvre’s produced spaces of lived experience. I am not sure whether he intends to be totalising in his unification of all the fragmented spaces, or cosmological – in the sense of returning spaces to a sense of original wholeness, concordant with big bang theories of the universe. Soja’s claim that Thirdspace is a place of ‘all places’ that are ‘capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear’ (Soja 1996: 56) smudges a spiritual reading into his discourse, as its sense of ‘all’ is similar to that rendered and experienced in the intonation ‘OM’ in spiritual practice.

OM or AUM, like the ‘Thirdspace’ of both Soja and Bhabha (Bhabha 1994), represents both the manifest and the unmanifest aspects of life. Contained within OM are the First, Second and Third Spaces of the sounds – A U M – which contain the four quarters of existence. Thus OM and AUM are used interchangeably to represent the eternal syllable that contains ‘[w]hat has become, what is becoming, what will become … and all that exists beyond the three forms of time is also implied in it’ (Soja 1996: 57). Compare Soja’s Thirdspace explanation above with the Mandukya Upanishad’s explanation of the fourth quarter contained in OM:

That is known as the fourth quarter: neither inward-turned nor outward-
turned consciousness, nor the two together; not an indifferented mass of consciousness; neither knowing, nor unknowing; invisible, ineffable, intangible, devoid of characteristics, inconceivable, indefinable, its sole essence being the consciousness of its own Self; the coming to rest of all relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful; blissful; without a second: this is the Atman, the Self; this is to be realised. (Krishnananda n.d.)

The *OM* intonation and Soja and Bhabha’s discussions on Thirdspace are, in a sense, concerned with trying to articulate the holistic nature of perception, lived experience and consciousness. What is interesting about the claims of universality contained in the *OM* intonation, is that the articulation of duality does not imply separateness. This is expressed through a comparison of dream and non-dream states that make up four quarters of the self. Swami Krishnananda describes how the *Mandukya Upanishad* contains sections called quarters that articulate the consciousness and dream mind’s grotesque, impossible body, and the deep unknown sleep of absent dreams that feeds on bliss. The mouth is assigned consciousness through the act of consuming bliss:

The first quarter is Vaisvanara. Its field is the waking state. Its consciousness is outward-turned. It is seven-limbed and nineteen-mouthed. It enjoys gross objects. … The second quarter is Taijasa. Its field is the dream state. Its consciousness is inward-turned. It is seven-limbed and nineteen-mouthed. It enjoys subtle objects. The third quarter is Prajna, where one asleep neither desires anything nor beholds any dream: that is deep sleep. In this field of dreamless sleep, one becomes undivided, an undifferentiated mass of consciousness, consisting of bliss and feeding on bliss. His mouth is consciousness. (Krishnananda n.d.)

The fourth quarter is a liminal space between sleep and wakefulness that cannot be experienced as either, only as itself.

This enables me to think about space and subjectivity in a multiple way without insisting that the very idea of multiplicity implies separateness, and without fusing difference into a thickened cambium of singularity. It overcomes the difficulty of speaking about the elements of space in ways that don’t carve it up into displaced...
scenes of otherness. Drew Leder’s (1990) challenge to Merleau-Ponty’s consciousness perception bias, in his theories of embodiment, also stems from an observation of sleep and its unconscious visceral components, such as digestion. Leder posits the visceral processes as another dimension related to Husserl’s *Leib* or ‘lived body’. In sleep, according to Leder, the ‘sensible / sentient surface cannot be equated with the body as a whole. It rests upon a deeper and visceral foundation’ (Leder 1990: 203). In the unconscious processes of sleep, Leder finds that the flesh informs subjectivity as substantially as Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s daytime activities of conscious perception:

Nightly, I give my life over to those vegetative processes that form but a circumscribed region of my day-body. Surface functions all but abandoned, I become a creature of depth, lost in respiration, digestion, and circulation. My experiential world rests upon the restorative powers of this unconscious being. I can surface for only a limited time before requiring resubmergence in the impersonal. (Leder 1990: 59)

Thus spatiality is configured as a product of affect. A limitation I find in Soja’s, Lefebvre’s, Husserl’s, Merleau-Ponty’s, Leder’s and the *Upanishad*s renditions of spatiality, and for that matter most other accounts, is their human centricity and closure around human consciousness, production, perception and lived social spaces. Spatial practice, according to Lefebvre, ‘embraces production and reproduction’ to ensure ‘continuity and some degree of cohesion’ (Lefebvre 1991: 33). The ‘secretion’ of ‘society’s space’ is said to be propounded and presupposed by spatial practice (read human endeavour) ‘in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it’ (Lefebvre 1991: 38).

I prefer to avoid a further splitting or accounting of space, in favour of an expansion – an opening up and an acknowledgement of its ecological and temporal nature. This is in harmony with Soja’s desire for a ‘cumulative trialectics that is radically open to additional othernesses, to a continued expansion of spatial knowledge’ (Soja 1996: 61). However, I am also interested in interrogating the role of ‘otherness’ within the discourse of space. Otherness contains both the sense of the
other, its difference and its expression of alterity. Creating room for the Other does not necessarily involve a negation of self, though it contextualises selfhood in a field of multiplicity, which inevitably disrupts its integrity.

Deleuze and Guattari’s significant contributions to the idea of space as a system of networked, textured, rhizomatic scenes, disrupt the sensibility of city planners and architects that apportions space into geometries that express a preference for Euclidian understandings of built environments. However, Deleuze and Guattari maintain a sense of otherness through the very sensibility of hubs of multiplicity that spread, map and striate space through rhizomatic movement. Intrinsic to such thinking about space, as a scene of rhizomatic proliferations, is the idea that the space that is moving is different from the space that is being altered by the movement. It also retains a strong sense of linearity. I wish to look at the value of such thinking through creative expression.

Lefebvre’s sympathies with Marxism and its rejection of the commodification of everyday life encourage him to criticise capitalism’s exploitation of the space of the individual’s lived experience. The desire to isolate people in order to re-amalgamate them into consumer groups is a core feature of capitalist practice, which paints a view of the world as an increasingly homogenous market. However, globalisation premises itself on manufacturing desire, reducing competition, and protecting the interests of the corporate drive to excess. The sense of motility contained in the rhizome is quite useful for accommodating kinaesthesia as one of the mechanisms for producing spacetime.

Although Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on embodiment provide rich insights into the centrality of the body in producing individual subjectivity, it is difficult to support his claims that ‘there would be no space at all for me if I had no body’, or his notion of ‘objective space’ that is only brought into existence through its translation by human sense organs. Another tripwire, given current knowledge, is his idea that ‘movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them’.

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Whether it is a rhizomatic sensibility of penetration, a kinaesthetic appropriation through movement, or a system of built and operational power relations, there is a sense that attempts to reconcile our relationships with space have not been adequately satisfied. The rhizome may satisfy the need to account for movement through space in time, as a means of producing knowledge, but its signal of difference does not satisfy poetry beyond the page’s vaporous nature. The rhizome punctures spacetime through linear networks of growth. It must attach itself to something and remain attached. It is insistently progressive.

Lefebvre accuses modernity of stripping time from lived experience and social space. Time, he says, ‘is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are isolated and functionally specialized. ... Lived time loses its form and its social interest’. An exception to this, he says, is ‘time spent working’ (Lefebvre 1991: 95). This view of time, as an economically appropriated part of experience, echoes Debord’s accusation, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, that '[t]he modernization that has eliminated the time involved in travel has simultaneously eliminated any real space from it' (Debord 1967: 170). Time on the mobile phone network is standardised in the US, but not in Australia – as yet. While in the USA, every time I tried to resist the consensus of clock time by resetting the time on my phone, it would automatically revert to network time within a few minutes (depending on reception). I had no way of resisting enforced time, of being out of time; no way of resisting the program and project of accuracy, to dwell in imaginary or dream time, or even the time of my homeland. The requirement of capitalism that is met by urbanism, in the form of a freezing of life, might be described, in Hegelian terms, as an absolute predominance of ‘a peaceful coexistence within space ... over "restless becoming that takes place in the progression of time"’ (Debord 1967: 170).

Spatial practice is the method through which presence is realised. Lefebvre was strongly attracted, due to his earlier relationship with the Situationists and to Nietzsche’s ideas, to view spatial practice through a lens of artistic endeavours (art, poetry, music). In contrast to Nietzsche however, Lefebvre opted for a socially-
driven practice rather than an individualistic one. Turning away from the home towards the city, he adapted the concept of poesis to connect bodily activity with everyday experience: an experience that was driven by creative acts manifested in space and time. In order to account for the creation of space through the actions of living bodies, Lefebvre deployed production as his method for explaining lived experience – a method that required ‘a practical and fleshy body conceived of as a totality complete with spatial qualities (symmetries, asymmetries) and energetic properties (discharges, economics, waste)’ (Lefebvre 1991: 61). I share Lefebvre’s ideas that living bodies, in addition to containing space, are spaces themselves – spaces that are in constant production in spacetime as they engage in the production of space and time. A body so conceived ‘is immediately subject to the determinants of that space … the spatial body’s material character derives from space, from the energy that is deployed and put to use there’ (Lefebvre 1991: 195).

Poetry readings fulfil Lefebvre’s desire for

“escape-hatches” from the alienated condition of everyday life which can be experienced unexpectedly, anywhere and at any time. ... Lefebvre can be said to have a form of temporal theory of authenticity based in the “timelessness” and instantaneity of Moments. (Shields 2001)
Cartographic history represents an ongoing concern to understand the world and to display it in a relief of representation. As an illustrated language of place, cartography seems to have difficulty accounting for the space inside it. In ‘Maps, Knowledge and Power’ (1988), J. B. Harley critiqued the role of culture in the evolution of map making, and suggested that maps only represented a ‘way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world’ (cited in Edwards 2003: 278). For Harley maps are innately social and cultural, being, amongst other things, works of art, historical texts, navigational aids and displays of wealth and power – in other words, distortions of reality undertaken for a variety of purposes. According to Harley pictorial maps, are historically Eurocentric, ‘reflecting the desire of European scholars to see the world in their image’ (Harley 1991: 11). He considered them to be products of creativity disguised as accurate and scientific, in an endeavour to assert control over spatiality. The maps of non-Western cultures were disregarded because they did not conform to Western systems of measurement and representation. Harley spoke of the cognitive maps produced in ‘individual consciousness’ long before map making became a part of human endeavour (Harley 1991: 10) and saw maps as important tools of culturally specific comprehensions of space.

... each society has had its own ways of seeing and producing images of space [...] we came to define maps simply as "graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world." ... [So] a new shape is starting to emerge for the history of cartography, one in which cultures speak for themselves. (Harley 1991: 13)

In reading Harley’s views on cognitive mapping I’m reminded of Merleau-Ponty’s relief of a similar idea: ‘Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 203).
Where the sea has been mapped, the major focus of the mapping has been the ocean floor. Beautiful hand-relief painted maps of ocean floors, with their mysterious underwater mountains, canyons, faults and cleavages, look like old furniture draped in delicate blue silk. There is a sense of the ‘map’ being concerned with the earth and how far away it is from the surface, since endeavouring to map the more intangible elements of the ocean would prove difficult. Much like trying to map the sky, which being more observable, has been plotted with stratospheres, constellations, galaxies, astrological configurations, weather manifestations, eclipses, etc. The birds are absent from such maps, as are the planes, kites, hot air balloons, dust, litter, smoke, rain and barking of neighbourhood dogs. Maps of the ground of earth do not reflect the infrasonic conversations of elephants roaming underground through the African landscape, the creaks of the roots of a tree planted in a local park in memory of a loved one, or the cry of a baby in an upstairs room. Maps of the ocean are also missing the songs of whales, the drifts of jellyfish, the urine of snorkelling tourists, the effluent of ships, the abandoned outgrown shells of hermit crabs. The security the map gives us when we unfold it to help us locate ourselves in the world at a given time and place, is as full of lack as it is of information.

While not wanting to get too involved with the discourse of cartography from an historicist point of view, it is important to consider the role of maps in determining and translating social space. Thinking about maps as tools of power that can be used for economic, political, religious and cultural gain, enables an observation of the ecological consequences of the discipline of cartography – e.g. in the work of William Boelhower who, according to Jess Edwards, critiqued the ‘scale map’ as a "panopticon," which through its totalising spatial logic of Michel Foucault's "disciplinary society," [established] "calculated distributions," arrest[ed] movement and dissipate[ed] particularity. (Boelhower cited in Edwards 2003)

A key outcome of this noticing, according to Edwards, is Boelhower’s observation
that: "the line's regime cast[ing] its geometrical scheme over more and more of the new continent" [is] like an ominous shadow, "fixing," and thereby obliterating native movement and locality in its wake' (Edwards 2003). This cooption of space via the enclosure of the map, and its associated theoretical web has important implications for social and ecological practice; particularly in relation to understanding how power and knowledge are represented, traded and fought for.

In \( H_2O \), Liquid Stanzas and Dive I am confronted by the need to supply a semblance of a cartographic text through the material condensation of the poems. Inside this I am drawn to thinking of spectrograms as audio maps that enact the strains of the cartographic discourse discussed above, through the assertion of monitoring, measuring, capturing and representation of voice. In addition, the analogy of text as cartographic rendering of idea has been drawn by concrete poets and the visual librettos of sound poets such as Mainetti, an Italian Futurist of the early 20th century (see McCaffery 1978). A question echoing through the gaps noticed in this thinking, is how can the negative aspects of the cartographic be avoided while still contributing towards a coherent experience of creativity, manifested through poly media?

Cartographic treatments of territory concern themselves with representing, enclosing, defining, and viewing. Cultural readings of territory are concerned with interrogating the divisions, operations, power relations and movements that compose culture’s spatiality. Conceptual territories operate through disciplinary absorptions and specialisations, while artistic / literary territories are understood in terms of creative product. Territory is innately hybrid. Territory is surrounded by borders and margins with the marginal being enclosed within territory.

Several writers have endeavoured to occupy and make explicit some of the territories contained within literary texts. For example, Michel-Eyquen de Montaigne, in the final copy of his collected writings often referred to as the Bordeaux Copy (1588), is rich with annotations, adjustments and editorial speech in
the margins surrounding the main text and within the text itself. Montaigne later extended these ideas in his work *Essais*, a collection of assorted pieces of text punctuated by intervals and disruptions, where he used the margins for compositional purposes. Shelley is said to have surrounded his writing with drawings, notes and quotations. Shakespeare heavily annotated his acting folios. Blake's books were full of illustrations and Pound's cantos were smothered in graphemes; indicating a long standing relationship between writing and its 'surroundings'. The history of writing is full of examples of the world of the writer being represented on the page. In concrete poetry, this desire to represent the form of the world within the poem resulted in a visual organizing of the text. ‘Concrete poetry,’ according to Max Bense, a key figure of the Stuttgart School's rational aesthetics (1950s-60s), ‘does not separate languages; it unites them; it combines them. It is this part of its linguistic intention that makes concrete poetry the first international poetical movement’ (UbuWeb n.d.). Although this is a sweeping claim, there is no denying that concrete poetry’s ideogrammatic approaches to text provided an aesthetic precursor to some flash and hypertext poetry. The lineage of much online multimedia poetry can be drawn from here, as well as from the cinematic corpus.

Derrida, continuing the tradition (see Glas, 1990), commits himself to the margin through his extensive writings in the spaces outside those demarcated by traditional texts. Whether it is through a seven page footnote, a borderline inhabiting the space of the text, or writing within the margins, Derrida concerns himself with systems of meaning and how they can be deconstructed and subverted from the space of the margin. Though Derrida endeavours to deconstruct the page and how information is organised within and through its structures of discourse, he is confronted by the difficulty of the cartographic paradox. By deconstructing the page and privileging the margin as the main space of the text, he effectively maps out another territory of power. By avoiding the centre it is possible to reinforce it. By claiming the margin as subversive it is possible to render it mainstream. By articulating an observation it is possible to undermine it. The more space is mapped, the more controlled it is, the
more at risk of appropriation.
Place is made inside space. Place, one of the produced spaces, according to Lefebvre’s discourse, alerts us to capitalism’s assertion of control over lived and conceived space; which is always mobile and impermanent. Felix Guattari pointedly reminds us of new capitalism’s ‘other’ agenda: ‘What better technique is there to capture subjectivities than to produce them oneself?’ (cited in Stivale 1985). Husserl’s notion of kinaesthetic sensation, where the body moving is aware of itself as a moving body, perceiving the world through senses, contains spatiality as it produces place. Elizabeth Grosz adds to this by declaring, ‘a body is what a body can do’ (Grosz cited in Munt), in other words, the body’s moving corporeality constitutes space. This contrasts with the view that the world is understood predominantly through the translation of visual information into cognitive maps. Considering place as an event within space, enables thinking about individuality as one place, one site for experiencing and making ‘humanness’ via movement through unique ecologies. Another space-place-time field concerning poetry, is that produced or conceived through language, for example description, narrative, metaphor, semiotic and semantic localities.

The non-human is another place capable of individuality for precisely the same reasons. Consciousness becomes a place within space as much as unconsciousness, though they are not places bounded by cartographic borders or materiality. They can be thought of as places that exist within processes which have both material and non-material elements, and which can only be experienced, for the most part, within the subjectivity managing the processes. Thinking of it this way helps me embrace the difficult aspects of spacetime: hallucination, disability, presence, spirituality, non-verbal communication, creativity, difference. Being an instrument of process, MIBOCU is vulnerable to noise and other environmental effects, as well as the moist organically situated processes of being. Embodiment can be understood as a method of integrating external experiences, via and within a MIBOCU, as well as a means by which the self manifests in the surrounding
environment. Non-living objects also embody spacetime but through a different process, one that does not involve thought, unless mediated through another mechanism.

The way urban space is thought of, and the way virtuality is constructed, mirror each other in important ways, e.g. through plots / domains, the sense of location / hosting / positioning, language, significations (highways, travel, throughness and thoroughfares), etc. They are also very different from each other. Cyberspace lacks the materiality of urban space, though it is framed around the material entities of hardware and bodies. It also lacks bondage to the very place / location it signifies, except again, through the hardware and technological architecture of the place where the MIBOCU is located. If it is positioned in an underprivileged site it is more constrained through access. Mind space, like urban space, is attributed – historically, culturally, politically and artistically – as human. It is only one aspect of a larger volume of mind (e)space available at a planetary level.
In any discussion of spatiality and poetics it is necessary to account for the metaphorical. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson conceptualised the idea of ‘protometaphors’ to explain the way metaphor functions, as a conceptual framework for interpreting the world, rather than simply performing rhetorical or imagistic functions (Underhill 2002). The Lakoff-Johnson hypothesis, according to James W. Underhill, considers the ‘blending’ hypothesis of Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, where metaphor forms part of a process of conceptual mapping in which one mental space is thought of in terms of another and which results in a new emerging structure (the blend) after certain aspects of the two mental spaces have been selected. (Underhill 2002)

The example given by Lakoff and Johnson, tabled by Underhill, is that the sentence:

"That's an indefensible argument", can only be understood in metaphoric terms by referring to the underlying proto-metaphor: ARGUMENT IS WAR, which implies that there are attackers and defenders, territories to be defended and castles to be assailed, etc. (Underhill 2002)

Metaphor works in the realm of the mental biosphere, the space that accommodates amalgamating and divergent temporalities. Mapping implies sets, positioned in certain geographies/environments and doesn’t resolve the need for exchange, evaporation loss, etc. The act of mapping seems to come from an argument of in factness. The urge to locate things spatially through cartographic strategies, harks back to one expressed earlier that questions the value of dissecting space like an organism in a biology laboratory. Metaphor, according to Turner, is a product of both mind and language (Underhill 2002): a conceptual phenomenon invoking a blend of the two. Metaphor is spatial in the sense that it
contains both mind and language, but also space and time. Metaphor contains juxtapositions which enable the creation of new ways of thinking about known relations e.g. boat, horse and sea as offered by Geoffrey Leech, in his work *Semantics* (1981). Leech, according to Underhill

considered metaphor not as a peripheral issue, but rather as a fundamental form of semantic transfer ... that can allow us to make what he calls a "conceptual fusion," as in his example from an Anglo-Saxon poem, meer-hengest (sea-steed), in which a boat is considered metaphorically in terms of a horse. (Underhill 2002)

This speculative quality is part of metaphor’s attraction for many poets. Its capacity to be misread, from the point of view of an author’s intent, produces fields of translation and meaning that are individually specific.

Associations contained in metaphor manifest Leech’s ‘conceptual fusions’ that may or may not foster an understanding of things, processes, and events. Metaphor is not necessarily an ideal vehicle for promoting understanding. From a poetic, rather than psychoanalytic point of view, metaphor is a method of rendering imaginative scenes through both rational and irrational associations. Through the offering of surreal or mundane conceptualisations metaphor is able to prompt alternative ways of thinking about the world. Metaphor, as cartographic device, can be read as a map of reciprocal relationships. It offers an impressionistic representation rather than a realistic description. It enables phenomenological thinking within everyday activities. A complex representational space is produced through the fusion of conceptual mechanisms that embody personal symbolic systems in imaginative space. These may or may not have the capacity to be translated into the linguistic realm and hence metaphorical ways of thinking may inform part of the unsayable. The unsayable is used here in the vicinity of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of ‘quodlibet’, latin for ‘whatever’, in *The Coming Community* (Agamben 1993: 1). Agamben’s reference to ‘whatever’, according to Ulmer, refers to a conceptual literacy, a method and discourse, ‘which is native to the pictorial, and which falls
outside the reach of concepts and conceptualization (the cognitive mode of literacy). … What "meaning" is to words, "whatever" is to photographs. "No whatever without a lens" …’ (Ulmer & Memmott 2000: 3). The ‘whatever’ stems from embodiment rather than photography. It is of the tissue, not the visual.
Metaphor, as a method of thinking, works outside the realm of the rational and offers, through its ambiguity, a way of communicating the surprising. Metaphor is often necessary in my thinking to help me imagine aspects of the unsayable as they wriggle their way towards articulation and cognisance. One example of this is the innately metaphorical response I have to the difficult task of trying to articulate the potentials in the blend between creativity, MIBOCU, rhetoric and spacetime enacted within the primary ‘tissue’ of my project: water.

If I draw attention away from urban space towards the space of the ocean I am able to enter the mysterious realm of my body’s water through poetic thinking. As my creative product emerged from the watery spaces of bodies (remembering that they are 70-80% water) and oceans, I am inspired to think and express myself in a language different from that of the lived everyday and the realm of ‘in factness’. I resist the pressures to assume that insight is best extricated through rationality and logic or that metaphor is only a semblance of an original image, a comparison of horse with boat, for example. This is not how I experience metaphor. I think of metaphor as a deviant logic drawing together symbol, texture, sound, image and ideas to manifest ways of conceiving within the MIBOCU that do not rely on explication, or other acts of translation to illuminate thinking.

The remaining pages of this section represent metaphorical thinking through an engagement with an imaginative virtuality, where the readings on urban space presented earlier are thought about in terms of ecological space, of which oceans form a major part. I do not wish to conduct this translation literally, preferring instead the formative speculations of creativity that precede ‘sense-making’ or apprehension in my thinking.
Unofficial history of a poem’s spacetime

Subject: Poem, ‘Capricious Mermaid,’ © Jayne Fenton Keane, 2004

Consciousness

After the poem ‘Capricious Mermaid’ was captured and translated into consciousness, it was handwritten on a blank page in blue ink. Later it was typed into a word document and edited. A version of the poem was emailed to Shelagh Smith, a Marine Archivist at the Cornell Ornithology Laboratory. Shelagh printed the poem, slipped it into her shoulder bag and took it home with her. Later, curled up in bed she began to read the words in an effort to find a way of speaking them. A week later we met in her dark archiving booth and began to rehearse and record the poem. When I was satisfied with the way the words sounded, we recorded them on her system. The spoken poem was then burned onto CD and transferred to my laptop. I began searching for sounds that would reflect the dimensions and layers of the poem that had formed while immersed in the marine audio archive. I was thinking about my central avatar, a mermaid, a hybrid human-animal, a mythical female who could contain and navigate surfaces and depths, land and water, speech and vocalisation, past and future.
a) Text

Capricious Mermaid

you tease me this understated day
singing ‘below, below, how sweet it is,’
down there, how unfortunate the sway
singing of my unsteady steps

how cunning your fishy mind
displays its arctic reason.
Fighting you, these incoherent doctors
inflict a deeper torture.

Below, below, your water kingdom
calls in chilled light with watchful insistence.

The ghosts of your depths lack the urgent tunes
of near death, flying higher, above
above the limitations of form.

Among all these ghosts
your haunting
is merely another shriek.
As I write these lines I hear sounds, layers and concepts in my acoustic imagination. I am apprehensive about how I will compose the narrative of the poem within the allegedly non-narrative space of sound. I feel some of these animal voices and environmental sounds as stories and search for ways to enter the mermaid’s subjectivity with the sounds that partially compose her. I imagine her strapped in a laboratory and alive in the ocean, as she endeavours to understand her difference, her multiplicity, her loneliness. In the poem, she inhabits the past, present and future simultaneously. She inhabits multiple times, perspectives, personalities. Her speech is multiple and full of the subjectivities of her MIBOCU (human, animal, world, self, other) as it flows, gushes and swims around her. The mermaid repeats the words of her lover and mixes them up with her own grammar and perspectives that feel wild and irreconcilable, coming as they do from the throats, bladders and mouths of marine animals. Capricious Mermaid fins in the company of $H_2O$’s other poems. The poem is not an isolated expression. The mermaid personifies the condition and voices of the animals and people who share her world. I want to create an acoustic world for her that conjures the anxiety of being hunted and images of swimming through surfaces and depths. Wrapped around her I sense an ocean of voices and environmental sounds that present a challenge for thinking about the poem. Although immersed, the mermaid is bound by her consciousness, as are the others who swim around her.
b) Aural sculptures: script from the poem’s acoustic realms; waveform view (Poem included on DVD)

Figure 2: Aural sculpture, ‘Capricious Mermaid’

Here the scene of the word and its linguistic necessities is reconfigured into a scene of kilohertz, millisecond and amplitude. ‘Capricious Mermaid’ is captured in duration and transformed into a kind of a retrospective portrait, where the shapes of words are seen in a new light. The portrait signifies the poem’s sonic dimensions but these cannot be experienced as a result of staring at the waveform. Through its image, the waveform becomes a new media form of concrete poetry. Concrete poetry’s traditional relationship with the shapes of words is continued in the visually rendered waveform’s shapes that contain movement. Though the poem’s image contains language, this language cannot be understood in this form, without the intervention of technology. Surveyed into a plot of X and Y axes, it is impossible to discern any understanding of the poem from its cartography. The poem’s map does not lead to the
poem. Such concrete poetry represents an antidote to hyperreality because although it comes from the real, it is not possible to simulate the real from it. It resists Baudrillard’s ‘hallucinatory resemblance of the real’ (Baudrillard 1983b: 142).
Spectral view of line, ‘how cunning your fishy mind’

![Spectral view of line, ‘how cunning your fishy mind’](image)

Figure 3: Spectral view, ‘how cunning your fishy mind’

In spectral view I begin to see a different kind of non-linguistic subtext operating. In the transmutation of ‘Capricious Mermaid’ into the realm of the image, a new layer of poetics is revealed, through the architecture of the sound wave, as drafted in the Raven software program. I chose to use Raven because it was developed by the Bioacoustics Research Laboratory at Cornell and was the standard tool for capturing, measuring and reporting on the voices of animals. In the concrete form of the spectral image I notice an alternative poetics. In the calligraphic markings my eyes are comforted by rhythm, pattern and repetition. I am thrilled to notice that the poem is transformed into something resembling an ancient script
where human and animal voices co-exist in the scene of the artefact. Patterns perform, as though sketched deliberately. I witness the noise surrounding the phonemes of voices, like graffiti, and imagine the picture to be a pixelated rendition of the breath clouds exhaled during utterance. I also notice how much the spectrum reminds me of images I’ve seen of the human genome. In the picture of ‘Capricious Mermaid’ I notice how the code of the body, as witnessed in amplified images of genes, and the code of the poem, as rendered through the eyes of Raven, resemble each other.

The spectral map becomes a visual signification of the poem that can never be known through the device of the map. On the other hand the map offers a poetic view of some of the structures underpinning the aural realm of the poem: for example, its duration, concentrations of kilohertz, drift of sounds, noise and the harmonies between species that share the poem’s spatial realms.
Spectral zoom of another space in the poem

In this close up of music I composed as part of the poem in conjunction with Humpback Whale and seal voices from within the poem – the waveform has difficulty representing the space and MIBOCUs inside it; yet they are there, illustrated in the energetic bands, spirals, dots, smudges and squiggles. The illustrative nature of the rendition speaks for the concretisation of virtuality that stems from the poem’s nature beyond the page. Capricious Mermaid’s waveform represents cartography of aurality, yet this seems like an impossible idea, as maps are supposed to guide, to lead somewhere real. This waveform leads nowhere except to a computer, which has the code (language) to reproduce the sounds. Without technology the poem cannot exist and perhaps it is appropriate that only the machine can reproduce the poem from such aural cartography.
‘Capricious Mermaid’, in full sound, fills up the ocean map’s longitudes and latitudes, reliefs, charts and seismic contours with the intangible voices, heartbeats and breaths of those who live inside its vast wet atmosphere. Maps of the ocean cannot account for the songs of whales, the crackle of plankton or the high-pitched creak of a turning iceberg. ‘Capricious Mermaid’, like other poems in the collection, seeks to address the problem of manifesting its ecological point of view by allowing it to be partially determined by the sounds of the mysterious world of the ocean. In so doing I am redressing the ‘totalising spatial logic’ (Boelhower 1998: 496) of cartography and denying the authority of the new totalising regime of the visual waveform, that is manifested through the authority vested in scientific uses of the tool. I reject some of the premises made on behalf of animals presumed to be understood through this method of mapping. Given that most of the recordings have to be sped up or slowed down in order for humans to hear them, it is intriguing why scientific papers written on the basis of waveform cartography are presumed to be authoritative.

Part of the pleasure of these spectral representations is encountering the poem in new ways and seeing how deeply the poetics operate through the many layers of the poem’s spatial realm.
... we “write a room,” “read a room,” or “read a house.” Thus, very quickly, at the very first word, at the first poetic overture, the reader who is “reading a room” leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past. You would like to tell everything about your room. You would like to interest the reader in yourself, whereas you have unlocked a door to daydreaming. (Bachelard 1969: 14)

Creak

The love boat’s creaking maple is full of quiet scars. There’s blood on a window frame scuffed with the brittle surfaces of little books. Imagine the slope of icebergs and their canyons of impossible blue, not the sacred ground painted to imitate sacred ground. Anything but that.
Architecture and literature have a well documented history of shared concerns. Literature, through its portrayal of space and the things that take place in it, and architecture, through its management of the built structures of lived experience. Both poetry and architecture concern themselves with a range of discursive and material elements such as interiors / exteriors, environments / situations, time, memory, public / private, etc. Architecture and poetry share a capacity to narrate, design, create and represent the spaces emergent from place, for example urban and rural built environments and the niche spaces they contain. In addition, they both share a capacity to produce imaginative space and to realise Lefebvre’s abstract space (Lefebvre 1991) through the readings of their audiences and the material manifestation of their ideas.

The sites of lived experience are primarily narrated within literature and drafted within the visual medium of architecture. Implicit in each of these art forms is the role of time within space and noise within spacetime; in particular the noise of human proliferation, our technological growth, our increased conveyance across land, air and sea. Our removal of ecosystems and other life forms and the sound of military enforcement is increasing the background sonority of our own voices, while diminishing the natural sounds of the world. Architecture attempts to close out this noise through the development of insulation techniques that usually fail to trap silence in little sonic bubbles of respite. Equally, poetry has failed to stay within the confines and security of its crisp white pages.

The line, the stanza, the page, and the verse have dominated the practice and discourse of poetry. In the beginning was the word, then the page, now there’s the web and the stage. Digital poetics, video poetry, animation, streaming, performance and an array of online non-textual possibilities are opening up ways of re-thinking poetry and poems. Although it is possible to view poetry as having been liberated from the politics and assertions of the line and the forms upon which the majority of
literary criticism has been built, it is equally possible to consider that poetry is
intimately involved with the line and all it has given the craft. From breath, to border,
to cut up, to click, the line is always present. Yet strict adherence to the line and its
order is no longer a requirement for poetry. Even spatial practices founded upon
locative media such as GIS (Geographic Information System), virtual reality and
gaming, tend to navigate or map through the line’s various incarnations: striation,
axis, path, crossbar, legend. Rather than insist on a dismantling of the formal
qualities of the line, I suggest that the line be fattened, dispersed, blown up into
nebulous scatterings of dots or footprints where the beginnings and ends of lines
can be alluded to. It is time for the line to be dusted off and held up in a new light:
one filled with time, space and wonder.

The aesthetic values attributed to poetry responded to the book by progressively
privileging its production as a text to be read and re-read, to dissect ideas and undo
the puzzle of metaphorical expressions or lyrical decoration. It became possible to
liberate the experience of poetry as a thing derived from the bodies of poets,
enabling it to disperse beyond its material locale and expand its consumption. The
price of this movement was, however, the confinement of the text to geometrical
forms such as the rectangle, the square and the line. Etiquette and reason,
harmony and order, have dominated the aesthetic ever since. Experiments in
Dadaism, Surrealism, Language poetry, Concrete poetry, Sound poetry, etc
endeavoured to overcome this but they have not been able to overcome the forces
of homogeneity that are served by sustaining the decorous lyric, the frozen image
or the epic narrative, particularly in Australia.

Much as the development of urban space has promoted acquiescence to the
proportion of $ / m^2$, so too has the book become a victim of the market forces of $ / 
bookshelf centimetre^2$. The rise of the McMansion and Bestseller market niches
results in the disruption of a sense of proportion in the lived everyday. Proportion
distorts in spacetime. The high speed nature of consumption and experience results
in a lost capacity to linger, unless it is in front of shop windows or the television.
Even there, the flashing red light ‘sale’ beacons and multi-channel on-screen viewing diminish the capacity for lingering. The development of digital television’s capacity to pause makes it possible to add further striations of activity into the space of media consumption. Spacetime expands, opens up with enhanced capacities, as it dilates, diffuses and agitates faster, filling up the lived everyday with an unsettled and ambitious restlessness. Desire for more control, more purchasing power and more time is manufactured and frustrated at the same time. Poetry can offer a refuge from this; a place where lingering is constructed, witnessed and articulated.

The possibilities for other forms of poetic architecture can be found in traditionally non-industrialised civilisations, those that did not have access to the methods of production available to Western industrialism. One such place is Vanuatu, which managed to preserve its tradition of sand drawing. Sand drawing is considered a type of writing that expresses a complex array of social, information, ritualistic and meditative communications. Only trained specialists produce drawings which are scribed directly onto the ground using sand, volcanic ash or clay. Using one finger, the specialist ‘traces a continuous meandering line on an invisible grid to produce a graceful, often symmetrical, composition of geometric patterns’ (UNESCO 2004). As a form of concrete literature, the sand drawings are able to facilitate communication across the 80 different languages used in Vanuatu. The poetics of sand drawings stems from their hybridity, since they function as ‘mnemonic devices to record and transmit rituals, mythological lore and a wealth of oral information about local histories, cosmologies, kinship systems, song cycles, farming techniques, architectural and craft design, and choreographic patterns’ (UNESCO 2004). Although vulnerable to be read in purely aesthetic or artistic terms, as is the threat posed by tourist consumption of the reproduced images of the practice, most sand drawings perform multiple meanings and functions, in spite of also being contained within the line:

Since sand drawings are not merely “pictures”, but delicate webs of
interconnected songs, stories, and knowledge with sacred and profane meanings, a master sand drawer must possess not only an intimate knowledge of graphic patterns but also a deep understanding of their significance. In addition, he must be capable of interpreting the drawings for spectators. (UNESCO 2004)

Page poetry has, more often than not, sustained an architectural sensibility derived from ancient Greece, where architecture’s components of Order (taxis), Arrangement (diathesis), Proportion / Symmetry and Decor and Distribution (oeconomia) (Fuehr 1996) laid the foundations for built spaces. According to Fuehr, whose discussion on architectural aesthetics reveals the sensibilities hidden behind so much of the thinking informing poetic formalism and new formalism, this poetic sense of form mirrors the aforementioned architectural sets. Fuehr describes proportion as containing an implication of ‘graceful semblance’, which is given as ‘the suitable display of details in their context ... when everything has a symmetrical correspondence’ (Fuehr 1996). In this way it is possible to see the rationale for most poetic forms. Symmetry – or ‘the appropriate harmony arising out of the work itself; the correspondence of each given detail among the separate details to the form of the design as a whole’ (Fuehr 1996) – becomes, in poetry, written into the forms of poetic structures such as sonnets, villanelles, sestinas. Such Vitruvian thinking, when transferred to the scene of poetry, results in poems becoming things of order rather than substance. This kind of poetry builds itself through an assemblage of parts that create ways of telling. Take for example the New Formalist poet Mark Jarmon’s ‘Unholy Sonnet’:

    Breath like a house fly batters the shut mouth.
    The dream begins, turns over, and goes flat.
    The virus cleans the attic and heads south.
    Somebody asks, "What did you mean by that?"
    The body turns a last cell into cancer.
    The ghost abandons all of his old haunts.
Silence becomes the question and the answer.
And then—banal epiphany—and then,
Time kick starts and the deaf brain hears a voice.
The eyes like orphans find the world again.
Day washes down the city streets with noise.
And oxygen repaints the blood bright red.
How good it is to come back from the dead! (Jarman 1998b)

Order, tradition and formal language are used to remain disconnected from any sense of the poem emerging from the late 20th century. In the dishevelled cities and disproportionate skyscrapers, in the graceless housing developments and poorly distributed transport systems, there is little that resembles classical aesthetics, yet the classical ideal persists, as do the endless reproductions of its dictums. Alice Notley does not only respond to the world around her directly in the text of her poems, she also invents forms to accommodate her experiments with language, sense and politics. In this excerpt from ‘Story’, Notley crafts the disorder of urban preoccupations through a careful breakage of logical syntax and extreme enjambment. The contemporary quality of this work does not come from its description of the environment, but through its enactment of the way spacetime is experienced by the people within the poem.

“Gossip quotient,” he says,
“This world is for stars.”

“Empty the value value value,
he know,”
I say in baby-talk.

“Too much pointing at...civilizations,”
he says, "See the past
trying to frighten us. This film is funnier than that."
"It...terror," I say, "not funny."
"We don't listen to baby; baby is childish.
But we love you, the little 'un."
Magic lake, black, gold lights,
that was that. That was probably my past.
"Other great intellectual houses will have more to offer: Baby emotes too much."
I don't think I'll talk again. (Notley 2007)

Notley’s writing demonstrates that whether real or representational, architectural space is never empty, never free of power relations. As Foucault and others have pointed out, it is also never neutral.
Architecture, along with cartography, has recently been critiqued through a literary lens that draws parallels between imaginative and material forms. I share Stephen Collis’ (2002) view that neither discipline is restricted to the materiality that defines it: in the case of architecture, its built structures, and in the case of poetry, its page forms and books. In the material world of both poetry and architecture, ‘form and structure become political and have possible (utopian) social implications’ (Collis 2002). Collis’ belief that architectural discourse expresses poetry’s social and utopian desires and ‘that the architectural paradigm is crucial to the understanding of twentieth-century avant-garde poetics’ (Collis 2002) does seem rather extreme however, as architecture’s sense of spatiality is quite different to literature’s, given that its concerns are mainly expressed within built environments. Although a book is a built environment of sorts, its paradigm is less about residency in the architectural sense, than the built environments of urban space. In both literature and architecture ‘worlds are always in progress, they never finish. Dwelling in the physical and phenomenal world is always a transformation, a rearrangement and a reorganisation’ (Fuehr 1996).

Poets of the architectural turn, according to Collis, attempt ‘to incorporate or create a "space" / locus for the social / communal in the apparently anti-social realm of the poem. The poem as city, or as public architecture, seeks to become a poem of the polis’ (Collis 2002). While not sharing his view of the poem as an anti-social place, nor accepting that ‘the poem’ (a somewhat totalising schemata) seeks to become a polis (which undermines the alleged anti-sociality of the poem), it is possible to share a view that many poems create meeting places for social and political aspirations, through their form, content and readership.

Other cultures practice poetry using methods and rituals that not only create a social realm within the text, but also in the poem’s structure and operations. In the case of the Hudhud chants of the Ifugao people of the Philippines, the locus of the
poem is the social realm. The Hudhud is a form of poetry that is usually recited and chanted by older women during the rice paddy sowing season, the rice harvest and at funeral wakes (UNESCO n.d.a). Estimates date the Hudhud as emerging prior to the 7th century. Each Hudhud is made up of 200 or more chants containing 40 episodes which take approximately three to four hours to recite. Hudhud poems are full of stories, figurative expressions and repetitions that use metonymy, metaphor and onomatopoeia. Using a single melody common to the whole Philippine Archipelago for all the verses, the epics are chanted alternately between a single narrator and a choir (UNESCO n.d.a). As a result of Catholicism, the ageing of narrators and the mechanisation of rice harvesting, the tradition of Hudhud is close to extinction.

Another example of the social realm of poetry as it is practiced in other cultures is the Hilali epic, which since the 14th century has recounted the Bani Hilal Bedouin tribe’s migration to North Africa from the Arabian Peninsula in the 10th century. As the only remaining form of epic poetry still performed in its inherently musical form (UNESCO n.d.b) the Hilali epic is now only practised in Egypt. The epic which was once widespread throughout the Arab Middle East, is performed in song form at weddings, circumcision ceremonies and private gatherings by master poets who accompany their narration with either a rabab (two-string spike fiddle) or a percussion instrument. Performances can last anywhere between 50-100 hours and are conducted by professional poets who have undertaken a minimum ten-year apprenticeship from the age of five. Today, student poets ‘still undergo special training to develop memory skills and to perfect their instrument playing, but they must also learn to inject improvisational commentary in order to render plots more relevant for contemporary audiences’ (UNESCO n.d.b).

The structures of the Hilali epics and Hudhud chants temper Collis’ claims, and the Modernist ideas that underpin them. Modernism is credited with being a significant force in the separation of poetry from the social realm (Holcombe 2004). Collis’ position that the poem was already anti-social before the architectural turn is
suspicious. Amongst the qualities of Modernist poetry said to have shifted thinking about the nature of poetry towards the ‘promotion of the artist's viewpoint, at the expense of the communal’, are beliefs that the world is perceived ‘through the artist's inner feelings and mental states’ – and the ‘sacralisation of art (which must represent itself, not something beyond)’ promotes the ‘cultivation of an individual consciousness’, which leads to an estrangement from religion, nature, science, economy or social mechanisms’ (Holcombe 2004). In addition, says Holcombe, ‘artists and not society should judge the arts’ (Holcombe 2004).

The very architectures of the Hudhud and Hilali poems are social, as are the functions they serve within their cultures. They also remind that the idea of an architectural turn is perhaps only relevant to Western thinking. Epic forms of poetry, including the oral literatures of the African continent (griots, praise poets, etc) and the Indian Upanishads (800-400 BC), may stem from pre-literate phases of a culture’s evolution. Homeric and Balkan scholar, Milman Parry, considered the presence of poetic devices in Homer’s works an indication that they were based upon pre-existing structures contained in epic oral poetry (Parry 1971). Oral forms of poetry that are still practiced today, such as the Hudhud and Hilali, are conceived and transmitted verbally in the context of gatherings and celebrations that result in a poetics that expresses MIBOCU relations directly. Where literacy enters the frame, and poetry is removed from the scene of gesture and gathering in favour of isolated reading and writing, the situation, composition and exchange of texts generated by the MIBOCU may shift from an overtly social realm towards a more subtle relationship between individuals and their culture, but this does not mean they are ‘anti-social’.

Within the content of a poem another interesting spatial quality resides. When an image or metaphor is so succintly rendered that it parts the sea around it to expose something greater than both its image and language, the text asserts its spatial capacities. I table Li-Young Lee’s portrait in ‘Praise Them’ as an example of this:
These lines express coherently what Robert Duncan in his introduction to *Bending the Bow*, expressed as his goal to reveal 'passages of a poem larger than the book in which they appear' (cited in Collis 2002). Duncan allegedly sees his poetic vision as containing a 'sense of a spatial poetry the poet "enters" but never contains / exhausts, where ideas, images, and personae intersect and interact in "The Commune of Poetry"' (Collis 2002). Such a space is naturally 'coloured by duration' (Collis 2002) through the enterprise of collage that Duncan suggests involves the chronology embedded in the text, the inner and outer time of the reader surrounding the text, and a play of echoes operating inside the reading. As limits must be drawn within this project however, I have excluded literary criticism from this dissertation, in order to explore the extra-textual capacities of poetry’s nature.
Poetic vision is coloured by the MIBOCUs that write and read spaces. Poetic forms situated in alternative media to the book, expand the impulse of the architectural through their built environments. Virtual space offers authors and texts systems of spatial navigation, expression and reception that differ from the book. One of the virtual spaces relevant to my practice is music / sound. The virtual space of sound is rendered through an acoustic imaginative as well as an aural acoustic field. There has been an attempt by some theorists (e.g. Jerrold Levinson 2004) to apply narrative theory to music, though this has not been particularly successful, except perhaps as an offering of methods of reading stories constructed within listening. But listening is only part of the audio experience, receiving is another part. Receiving is linked to osmotic processes, where concentrations of sensory information shift and exchange with each other to create an experience within the MIBOCU. Music / sound, like virtual reality, provides an engagement with simulation. The sounds of the real, in absence of the real, stand in for the real and recreate the real; in effect fulfilling Baudrillard’s prophecy of hyperreality: ‘[t]he unreal is no longer that of a dream or a fantasy, of a beyond or a within, it is that of a hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself’ (Baudrillard 1983a: 142). Nothing in sound is real except its qualities of pitch, tempo, frequency, etc. The emotional reactions so well attributed to music, stem from the simulated spaces of embodiment. Sound, noise and music immerse our lived subjectivities and those of other species. Increasingly the adaptability and reach of sound is being used to exercise control over others, e.g. acoustic fences, muzak, jingles, etc.

In other relatively recent spatially composed poetry, cities of text have been built and navigated through, as in Australian poet Komninos’ piece ‘Underground’ (1995), a virtual London subway system. Texts can be split across time and logic, as in the groundbreaking hypertext of Shelley Jackson’s ‘Patchwork Girl’ (1995) which mutates the Frankenstein story and reconfigures the scene of the stitch as a scene of the link. Canadian poet Christian Bök works with sound poetry, ‘artificial
language’, and has built poetry books out of Rubik’s Cubes and Lego for gallery exhibition (Bök n.d.). Poems can contain movement and spatiality, to offer kinetics to the concrete poetry idiom, as in my own flash poetry (1997-) and performance work (1994-). In the sound poetry of Amanda Stewart (Australia), Jaap Blonk (Netherlands), Michael Lentz (Germany) and Henri Chopin (France), the poem’s freedom to perform its sonic dimension is mastered in sound-text fields. Poems can also contain spatial fields as part of their composition, as in the flash poetry of Jason Nelson, the 3D projects of Aya Karpinska, the ‘Visual Thesaurus’ of Plumb Design and Wilfried Agricola de Cologne’s NewMediaArtProjectNetwork (which is a cluster of network-based art projects). Another example of poetic community is provided by UbuWeb’s ‘gift economy’ which describes poetry as ‘the perfect space to practice utopian politics’ – since it is free from ‘profit-making constraints or cumbersome fabrication considerations, information can literally “be free”’ (UbuWeb n.d.).

Poetry can be hooked up to computers and machines, generated through random calculations, televised, performed for television and competed against in bars. National Poetry Week, a festival I founded in Australia in 2002, expresses the dimensionality of poetry within culture. The festival has no ‘site’ and spontaneously amalgamates around the bodies, sites and preoccupations of participants, to create its own decentralised multi-polis hubs. Each year it changes: in response to who takes up the call to participate, and who engages with the themes. During National Poetry Week poems have been chalked on pavements, spoken through megaphones, stapled over parking meters, projected on walls, planted beneath saplings, transmitted via mobile phones, worn on clothes, broadcast on radio and have been incarnated in various other ways. Another festival I founded called Notes to a Stranger (2003-04) involved poets writing notes in poetry books and then leaving them in pre-ordained public spaces for strangers to find and read. Jackie Sheeler, a New York poet, left her book Off the Cuffs (2003) – an anthology of police poetry – under the windscreen wiper of a police car. National Poetry Week is a carnival of anarchy that amalgamates in a temporary production, occupation and
representation of space. National Poetry Week, like America’s National Poetry Month, becomes a temporary city, like Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio’s ‘Blur Building’.

The Blur Building, through its atomised structure, becomes ‘an inhabitable cloud whirling above a lake’ (Diller & Scofidio 2002a).

Figure 5: The Blur Building, Diller & Scofidio (2002b)

National Poetry Week’s atomised structures can be said to be manifested through breath clouds, inhabited by language and bodily residues, that disperse through the discharges of daily life. Poems, like the mist of the Blur Building, also simultaneously perform as vagrants, seeking shelter in the ears and eyes of readers. Inside the ears they become enhanced and prostheticised by the body. Festivals such as Australia’s National Poetry Week and America’s National Poetry Month, incorporate the architecture of culture to fulfil their spatiality, extending Collis’ noticing about language as space. All of these contemporary manifestations
of the poetic enact architectural sensibilities in ways that extend beyond what the text is saying. I will limit further discussions of spatiality to these kinds of activities rather than the spatiality contained in the text through description and literary composition, as that would require a separate treatise.
The idea of dwelling takes a technological turn for poets whose texts have sheltered in the printing and production moment of the industrial revolution, where words were pressed like lurid, dangerous flowers, between the manufactured covers of commodity. Printed words had endurance and, like old colonial buildings, are now valued for their heritage, craftsmanship and beauty. A poet reading at a microphone liberates their words into the aural fields of culture, where they cannot sustain themselves. The words are homeless, constantly begging for a set of ears into which they might curl up and rest. The microphone is an evanescent lodging, where words head for a night on the town, but can’t account for themselves in the morning. Digital space offers new types of dwelling for them – dwellings that range from the commune style hippie love-fest of boutique communities that pass poems around like ganja, to the amphetamine jacked hallucinogenic rush of hypertext, flash animation, print on demand, blogged in one ear SMSed out the other, mp3ed, MTVed, and internationally projected writing.

Although at the moment poets in digital space are generally represented by their texts and not themselves, it is easy to predict that it will not be long before the ambiguous and dispersed nature of their works will seek representation or ‘covers’ for themselves. The pseudonym will become the avatar of authorship (collective or individual), a logotype that claims the space occupied by ‘author’ in a multiple and media specific way. Persona will no longer be enough.
impossible maps

Impossible map 1

To the left is a diagram of the sensor array created for $H_2O$’s ‘ocean.’ A body walks through this oceanic space, intersecting with an ultrasonic signal that is disrupted to trigger a sound. It is ironic that such a fluid concept ends up demarcated in this Euclidean way. Unfortunately the sensors are not capable of understanding anything except their world of grids.

Figure 6: Sensor array of $H_2O$’s ‘ocean’

Impossible map 2

Here is a map of the starfish’s points, where narratives attach themselves to grid points like seaweed clinging to a sunken, barnacled hull.

Represented this way, my poems look like the stiff artificially coloured starfish sold in tourist shops.

Figure 7: Map of the starfish’s points
Back to the question at hand – how to invoke randomness and converse with poetry’s rhyme, repetition, form, choral and aural qualities – how do these play out in this spatially distributed poetics? Steve said he used to be anti-repetition and that he could compose music for 4 days that contained no repetition but that he had ‘softened’ on the idea as he grew to accept the fundamental pleasure of repetition for the majority of people. I enjoy rhythm immensely and an effective way to develop rhythm in a poem is repetition. I love the way repetition can be used to mirror the heartbeat in a text; how it can speed up, slurp, skip beats and break up. A text with too much repetition can turn into a scene of arrhythmia where the poem dies from a lack of space, the oxygen of a poem. Marine animals use repetition as a fundamental part of their communication patterns. I imagine that the animals use their repetitions in a similar way to our hellos, goodbyes, how are yous and quirky little generational lilts such as cool, bogus, like you know, etc.

Does randomness disturb in a sense because it resists repetition? Is that even true? The repetition that occurs in a random system is not controllable and perhaps it is this loss of control over repetition that becomes a
source of stress. How does randomness relate to the conceptual relationships between poetic structures and the world in which they are expressed? In terms of how $H_2O$ is composed as an installation I have managed to represent at least some of the ways the world makes itself and is made through a consideration of the way each of its spatial layers expresses itself and operates.
SITUATION 5: WATER

The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us. ... No, wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, as vital to our lives as water and good bread. (Edward Paul Abbey cited by Unknown 1970: 6-7)

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Excerpt from a Letter Written with Bones and Blood

Weeks later
the sea was still thrashing and bleeding
when a ship called the Nisshin Maru,
carrying 439 Minke carcasses
arrived in Kushiro, 890km northwest of Tokyo.

My daughter held her stethoscope to the sea.
Wailing kidnapped her mind. White skin.
Unfathomable belly. Myth.

Swallowed her whole.
‘obscure with fog’ (Dickinson 1924: 5)

Water is more intimate than air because its molecules are closer. When sound begins in air it has to move further to collide with an adjacent molecule than it does in water. The lag between agitation and manifestation is greater, with sound in air travelling 330 meters per second, and in water 1500. A body entering water encounters a warp in its sound field as wavelengths stretch to about five times their length. But all water is not the same, nor is all air. Higher altitudes with thinning atmospheres are less dense, taking longer for communication. On a hot, dry day, sound might move faster because the atmosphere is moving faster and is richer in random collisions. In the high salinity of the Dead Sea underwater sounds move faster. In this way presence, within organic media, influences and asserts itself through and within any sound based poetry. When a whale song reaches the stippled surface, or the deep sandy bottom of the ocean, or rises in a wave to crash on the shoreline, some of its energy is reflected, some transmitted across the membrane of ocean / air, ocean / land, and some of it converts to heat. It is as though the song converts to a breath of warm air as it makes contact with difference. It is this lovely malleability and exchange that creates potential in Liquid Stanzas, my collection (attached) of aural poetry, when broadcast in water and in air.

Water offers a chance to think alternatively about terms such as inside and outside, self and other. Water is the ink, coloured and thickened, that has wet the pages and evaporated to the dot and line throughout the history of writing. Its osmotic nature and liquid architecture challenges the integrity of membranes used to prop up boundaries and containments, while facilitating, at a metabolic level, the chemical exchange that produces the body’s materiality. The regular creation and decay of cells in our body constitutes it at different rates, so there are always parts suffering from old age, parts in pre-birth and parts between the two. It is reported that about ‘every seven years, your body replaces the equivalent of an entirely new skeleton’ (Unknown 2005a).
Katherine Hayles is inspired by the metaphorical value of rivers to describe the way time is realised through the consumption of electronic texts. In discussing computer memory in Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles sees ‘all addresses [as] equidistant (within near and far memory, respectively)’ and suggests that lexias are ‘quick to respond to the click of the mouse’ (Hayles 2000: 48). The result of navigating a text through clicking on a mouse transforms the experience of ‘time-passing’ (as it is understood within traditional book readings, according to Hayles) into

a river that always already exists in its entirety, and we create sequence and chronology by choosing which portions of the river to sample [creating] a tension between the sequence of lexias chosen by the reader, and the simultaneity of memory space in which all the lexias always already exist. (Hayles 2000: 48)

Hayles’ view of the passage of information as riverine in electronic media does not resonate well with me as the idea of dividing a river into portions is inherently unstable. I would describe my experience of engaging with electronic texts more in terms of osmosis, as it enables passages between and mergers with the always unstable MIBOCU in exchange with the world and information. Imagination, as I experienced it in the creation of *H₂O and Dive*, is an act of permeability that is not limited to human experience. Water is immersive, as is sound: qualities that are not shared by sight. Permeability becomes a method of communicating across material integrity at the level of metabolism and metabolic exchange with the environment. The osmotic potential of water operates through difference but a difference that is dynamically altered through exchange. The specificity of the MIBOCU is in constant decay and rebirth due to its material and immaterial processes and its systems of exchange. Permeability leads to changes in integrity and this operates on the level of the creative product as much as it does on the MIBOCU. Whereas Hayles suggests that *Patchwork Girl* is bound by lexicons which ‘always already exist’ (Hayles 2000: 48) through the operations of memory, I consider *H₂O, Liquid Stanzas* and *Dive* to offer dappled concentrations and evaporations of content that
engage in multiple ways: linguistically, aurally and viscerally. It is the space of the poem that is experienced, rather than just its narrative.
I love the sea and its wet heart full of wild things. I love the way it invites me to let go, to sink into the landscape of the imaginary and the way it wraps its immensity around my body’s water. Organelles wrapped in tiny oceans of cellular fluid swim to the borders of their existence to peer at coral’s uncanny resemblance to themselves, as they traffic proteins and lipids through intricate channels of membranes. Between the sea and the cells of living things, there flows a current of exchange that links all – time, space, energy, memory, imagination and identity. As inhabitants of this planet we share a common ancestry with the sea, from which terrestrial life stepped approximately 345 million years ago. There is a trace of this primal experience swimming through our bodies but we can’t communicate with it any more than we can communicate with the star speech that hums as background noise throughout our lived experience.

Mirroring Lefebvre’s interrogation of the words ‘urban space’, I ask: ‘What is the sea?’ It is not a vastness to be governed, a space of social exchange, a place to live or just a collection of fishing zones. Nor is it a summary of its fathoms, a shipping route or a place of mining and production. It is at once all of these and more, in much the same way that ‘urban space’ represents an amalgamation of claims and definitions. The sea has at least one essential quality – it is wet. Yet even this quality is open to interrogation, if we adopt a non-human point of view; wetness being a term used as a relative description against an experience of living dryly. Like any other product of cultural and social manufacture the sea’s qualities are rarely fixed, though it does canvas an identity as both an above and below space. Unlike the urban world of Lefebvre’s discourse, oceanic space is not so much understood as ‘lots’ of co-modified social space as it is a vast communal causeway made up of land masses surrounded by borders. Its sense of above and below, inside and outside, ordains liminality as one of its core features.

The sea and poetry, like urban space, are full of spatiality. Lefebvre’s concerns
extended beyond the material or ‘concrete’ into the symbolic realm, particularly as it was represented in the works of René Magritte. In the work of Magritte in particular, he found an expression of the subversive and the non-verbal as a means to accommodate the experiential aspects of space – a space that ‘overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said ... to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs’ (Lefebvre 1991: 39).

The sea and poetry share a sense of multiplicity, fragmentation and mystery, with the ocean offering a fresh perspective: a sense of flow and blur, immersion and drift. The ocean is a place that, until relatively recently, escaped many of the environmental activities that have disrupted the integrity of the land. Sea space is full of noise much like everyday social life. It is largely an unknown and unknowable space that is fully occupied by animals, plants and creatures of the between, such as sponges and diatoms. It is also subject to technological and social interrogation by humans. Textual, social and acoustic debris forms part of the imaginary and material expression of the space and its pollution – a pollution that is in continual exchange with subjectivity. This pollution is akin to the ‘spoilage’ sensed by Nietzsche in his warnings about the ‘all-too-many’ contained in the superfluity of ‘man’ (Nietzsche 1891: 44-5).

Through its capacity to conduct, vapourise and recycle, water is able to facilitate communication and exchange beyond verbal and information transactions. It seeps through the story of identity as script or phenomenology and features prominently in the scene of the unsayable. Performance poetry is as much an experience of osmosis as it is an act of utterance, which is not to say that utterance and osmosis are mutually exclusive, but rather that they enact different spatial architectures within their operations. For example, the utterance emerges from embodied thinking which is translated into speech and gesture to be received as embodied listening / reading through the cognitive structures of language processing. In the space that speech crosses is an ecological field where the planet is always present: in the
breath and in the room's atmosphere. Osmotic communication crosses all membranes, mediums and levels of MIBOCU consciousness to influence reception at a metabolic and sub metabolic level, as well as the spaces in between. Water dilutes the definition of poetry written in ink and disperses it across natural and technologically produced ecologies. Understanding how space organises human perception and its understanding of time, place and social operations, offers a deep foundation for creative practice.
In creating $H_2O$, *Liquid Stanzas* and *Dive* I was confronted by the vastness of the ocean and its aesthetic possibilities. This vastness made it possible to develop three different poetic works. While auditioning over 120,000 marine animal sounds recorded over a 50-year time span my imagination splashed wildly through images, sensations, feelings, words, memories and stories. Although I knew I was going to Cornell to create new works of poetry in response to the archive, I had only a vague idea of how I was going to realise this goal. Having written, composed and recorded a collection of audio poems for CD in 1998, I had a sense of how difficult the task ahead was – in terms of its technical/aesthetic issues and the size of the task of writing and composing such a challenging collection. Fortunately my love of the sea and proximity to it while growing up, gave me years of imaginative and physical engagement with it.

My MIBOCU is full of wet memories. As a child I nearly drowned while snorkelling off the coast of Capri. Later I photographed dolphins from the prow of my father’s boat. I taught children how to swim and how to recognise the warning signals of deadly blue-ringed octopi that favoured some local rock pools. I panicked as sharks swam around me while I was trying to pass the ocean swimming tests necessary for me to get my bronze medallion. As I marooned myself in the world of the archive, cut off from ordinary existence, these and other memories schooled in me.

I went to Cornell with a long-standing interest in biology; particularly the structure, function and genetic processes of cells. It was natural for me to see the relationship between the body’s water and the world’s water, though much more difficult to develop it as a basis for an alternative poetics.

In the structures of $H_2O$ I use the qualities of the ocean that are most useful in the installation’s aesthetics. I endeavour to create a semblance of an ocean ecology in which poems live and through which the world is created. In order to recreate the sense of immersion experienced when entering the sea, for $H_2O$ I developed six different sets of
biosphere elements. Biosphere elements are the acoustic environments in which the poems and environmental events ‘live’. From the throat of a whale to the spiralling sound of a bearded seal calling under arctic ice, to the relentless noise pollution … the sound-world of each biosphere created the sonic realm and ‘water’ for the sets of random interactions that formed the simulated ocean environment.

The biospheres are long – to the point they will extend beyond the life of the activities in ocean space. They are like the atmosphere, the earth and the ocean – the big systems that support all life. Humans can influence these quite markedly through mass consumption and production activity. The weather comes and goes. We are part of this weather. The biospheres offer limited choice. There are 6 sets to choose from: you get what’s inside the mix based upon the aesthetic decisions that I made. Each biosphere contains at least an hour of sound that creates the acoustic world for the poems to come. More than that however, they are themselves poems in many cases – the poems of whales that fulfil the scientific and formalist credentials of poetry. They have structure, rhyme, rhythm and one could assume (scientifically proven or not) content from a complex compositional intelligence that communicates social and cultural information.

In addition to six biospheres I composed six oceans, each of which were designed to offer a different idea, voice and acoustic experience. Within each set there were 31 themed sound bytes that varied in length between 2-10 seconds. They formed the space in which participants ‘swam’ to create a sense of being in the ocean’s ecology. Linked to the biospheres were video edits I completed of footage provided by Dave Brown at the Cornell Ornithology Laboratory. Footage included loops of the sway of kelp forests, the rippling belly of a blue whale, vignettes of fish nibbling on coral and ghostly scenes from a sunken warship. Each of them was rendered to enhance the colour under which it was catalogued. Dr Campbell and I chose colour as our preferred control panel option because it signified mood, culture and tone.

In the centre of the space I marked out a starfish and each of its points represented a narrative / poetic fragment that could be triggered by standing on it. There were six sets of 10 fragments that included recordings of experiments being conducted, poems, fragments of
poems, environmental reports and longer animal phrases. They varied in length from four seconds to two minutes.

In addition to the aural seas in which participants traced their own experiences, meanings and stories I wanted to include works that I’d composed in order to offer another way of engaging with poetry. It was difficult to work out how to do this, though I had in mind a set of shells that were wirelessly set up so that people could hold a poem from *Liquid Stanzas* up to their ear for as long as they liked. This proved to be too technically difficult, though it is something I’d like to pursue in the future.

The structure of biosphere, ocean, starfish and shell did create an ecologically situated poetics and emulated the experience of drifting in currents, surrounded by the deep noise of the world. By blending elements of randomness with selectability, themed immersions and a consistency of tone, content and voice, it was possible to script the space to a certain extent. As *H2O* was an experiment I was uncertain about how successful it would be. As a spatially situated poem *H2O* concentrated around hypertext narrative theory, sound installation theory and new media theory as much as it did around poetics. It was important to avoid fetishising randomness and interactivity for its own sake, as I agree with Robert Kendall when he says

> the frequently made claim that the reader of hypertext becomes a “co-author” of the text can lead to disappointment at how little real control one may often seem to have over shaping a reading. “Reader empowerment” can often consist of little more than being allowed to choose more or less randomly from a set of cryptic links to move to the next section of text. (Kendall n.d.)

The strength of *H2O* lay in the array of experiences it made available. I particularly enjoyed experiencing the way physical movements translated into complex sonic textures, the way connections and narratives were made, how physical and psychological relationships emerged and the way lyrics were experienced. In spite of my efforts to avoid creating chaos, however, the piece did suffer from interactivity overload, making it difficult for participants to draw a coherent experience from the engagement. If I was not seeking coherence, this would not matter, but I think that scripting streams of coherence in complex interactive spaces is a
challenging authorial goal I’d like to continue pursuing.
SITUATION 6: CREATIVITY

Be brave enough to live life creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can't get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you're doing. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover will be yourself. (Alan Alda n.d.)

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(x) man with a comb and mirror

Naked at the end of the world in October

I pick up

a man with one testicle, 12 toes, 4 breasts and 3 rows of tiny teeth.
I puncture his nipples with 4 rusty hooks and slice 7 fresh arches at the sides of his neck. My body is covered in a rash of voices

detours.
animal collaborators

Artistic space generally celebrates the human, its everyday, and its relationship to the world; ‘Art is one of the most unusual aspects of human behavior and a key distinguishing feature of humans from other species’ (Wikipedia 2007). In the worlds of artistic and fictional space there is potential to allow for the imaginative possibilities of animals to express their own fictions. It is possible to resist the model that attributes everything to display, territory and unconscious behaviour. Gisela Kaplan, giving a paper at the Art and the Animal Symposium held by Griffith University (November 2006) represents a cautious observation amongst some scientists that animals may be capable of more complex systems of thinking than previously thought. Kaplan highlights that:

… the Australian magpie possesses vocal skills that not only make it one of the foremost songbirds in the world but also that not all of its song is explicable by function. It may be an expression of higher cognition and, possibly, creativity. (Kaplan 2006)

Part of the reason many scientists resist attributing creativity to cetacean consciousness is that it is difficult to prove. As an artist I am not bound by such limitations.

Whale songs bathe the planet in deep frequencies that echo in fault lines, travel in sonic channels and envelop the world with ultrasonic calls for sex and company (Payne 1985: 3). These naturally occurring acts of creativity deserve notice, and an acknowledgement of human capacity to replace this with cries of pain, the sonics of slaughter and war, the destruction of another species’ stories. If whales could or do tell stories about humans, they may not be stories we wish to hear about ourselves. If whales have the capacity for invention, they must also have the capacity for memory. If they have the capacity for memory it is possible they have developed a
way of communicating about slaughter times and whale watchers. Acknowledging
the creativity of animals requires an acknowledgment of other capacities that may
conflict with the current modus operandi of human culture.

As the DVD created for this project relied heavily on the voices of animals, I would
like to spend some time acknowledging and reflecting upon the concept of animal
creativity; in particular that of the Humpback Whales, and the implications of their
singing practices for thinking about space and imagination. In her article ‘Singing In
Humpback Whales’ written in 1985, Katherine Payne noted that humpback songs,
‘constantly and progressively change’ (Payne 1985: 3). This seemingly
unprovocative statement challenges conventional scientific thinking about animal
songs as pre-programmed and invariable markers. This conclusion was later
supported by the work of Eduardo Arraut and Jacques Vielliard in their paper on the
songs of Brazilian Humpback Whales, where they ‘detected individual variation in
the way singers performed certain complex note types. As songs are transmitted
culturally, it is likely that singers have different abilities to compose and / or learn
new notes’ (Arraut & Vielliard 2004: 373).

Payne highlights the work of Peter Tyack and James Darling, whose investigations
into song function in the breeding grounds of humpbacks suggest that they serve to
maintain ‘floating territories’ and establish ‘dominance hierarchies’ in the mating
season. When I spoke with Payne however, she admitted this was largely intelligent
speculation, based upon the observation of animal behaviours during feeding and
breeding seasons, but that in reality nobody really knows why Humpback Whales
sing the way they do and with such population specificity (Conversation held in

As they sing outside of the mating season, the idea that they perform strictly as part
of mating rituals cannot be substantiated. Although at ‘any given time, all the whales
in an area – which may be as large as the whole North Pacific Ocean basin – sing
the same song’ over time, ‘the whale song changes in many ways, so that the
average song heard at the end of the singing season is quite different from the average song of six months earlier’ (Payne 1985: 3). Furthermore, ‘Humpback Whale populations in all oceans of the world, [possess their] own characteristic song’. As time passes they become increasingly differentiated and Payne reports that ‘old song forms never come back’. Noad et al reported that:

… novelty drives song change—which implies that novel songs are more attractive to other whales than “old” ones—individuals that compose and / or learn faster send out information about their differential learning abilities that could be used by other whales to decide whether or not to interact with them. (cited in Arraut & Vielliard 2004: 378)

Within a few years the songs will be so different from the original that their ‘relation to the early forms is hard to recognize’ (Noad et al cited in Arraut & Vielliard 2004: 378).

What is particularly exciting about the conclusion drawn by Payne and others is the discovery that each male whale ‘changes his song in the same ways as do the other singers, indicating that they are all listening to, imitating, and learning from each other’ (Payne 1985: 3). This points to group exchange, to a culture where dynamic communication occurs. Add to this the well-established noticing that Humpback Whales improvise and that one repertoire of song may last longer than an epic human poem, up to 21 hours without pause, and it is difficult not to think that creativity is present in whale consciousness. I acknowledge both their creativity and culture in my current project, in a sense inviting them in as guest artists without trying to analyse content or lay claim to comprehending meaning. Their songs have helped me think about new compositional forms for both poetry and music – helping me create ecologically emergent forms.

There is reluctance on the part of animal scientists in general to attribute creativity to animal consciousness on the grounds that expression and thinking may stem from unconscious processes. Payne notes:
We do not know why the whales change their songs. The process resembles fashion, or vogue or style. Our general understanding of the biological forces that drive stylistic changes is that the individual who introduces an innovation gains some advantage from being different. However, if his innovation is too different from the norm, it is not likely to be attractive. ... For a novelty to be introduced into a cultural trend, it must have a perfect balance of conformity and originality. (Payne 1985: 4)

If such choices are driven by cultural norms, as speculated by Payne, what is taking place in the oceans of the world is far more sophisticated than once thought, and much more akin to some aspects of human culture than was believed possible by ‘enlightened’ Western thought. That Humpback Whale songs ‘have many qualities in common with our music and poetry’ due to the kinds of patterns that whales select for their ever changing phrases – the ways they organize tones and rhythm, the pacing, the inclusion of rhymes and refrains and many other devices in their songs that remind us of our own … (Payne 1985: 6)

does not protect them from exploitation by us, and questions the value of research into the tonal structures of animal songs.
When I wrote and composed my poems for \( H_2O \) I did so in partnership with the computer, with animals and their active cognition performed in a sophisticated array of communication networks. Exchanges flit between presence and absence, between animal and animal, animal and machine, machine and human, human and human. What is missing is the human to animal exchange in acts of creative sharing; one of the missions of Jim Nollman’s projects (see [www.interspecies.com](http://www.interspecies.com)). This is something I also hope to address by sharing my creativity with marine animals at a future date. At the moment my only non-human audience is the bird that sits on my shoulder and the wild birds that perch outside the window waiting for me to feed them. I have witnessed my bird develop acute anxiety (expressed through bouts of extreme shivering) in response to one of my compositions while in others he sings along with gusto. In the case of broadcasting my compositions with whale and fish voices to an underwater marine environment, it is not possible that they will recognise the sound of their own voices because the whale and fish voices have been manufactured by humans to facilitate our hearing.

The animal voices have manipulated frequencies and speeds which upon playback would be alien to their hearing. In the case of some animals, particularly the fish, the sounds were only produced through inflicting physical damage and cannot be said to be their true voice. To some reef fish, the sound of their reefs and the shrimp and other fish that live there is critical for helping them find their way home after spending months at sea. Even as larvae they understand the sound of home and the shape of home is to a certain extent designed through this sonic imprint (see Meekhan cited in Barker 2002). The sound of the snapping shrimp in some of my compositions resounds with the sound of many homes, ‘even tiny fish like ... snapping shrimps are surprisingly talkative. And if we had fish ears, the ocean would in fact sound like the marine equivalent of a busy subway’ (Barker 2002). To dwell in a specific location of sound, in the wet homes of sound waves, to curl up in a warm current, is to meet the poetics of space and water.

As a collaborative decision between Steve and I working on \( H_2O \), colours were chosen as
simple menu items to enable personal yet highly ambiguous and culturally specific access to content. Access needed to be quick, non textual and memorable. Although the pilot version of H₂O is not aesthetically ideal, it functions within the limitations of the program – to offer selectivity based upon the knowledge participants would be expected to bring to the colour palette.

Colour supports the spectrum of light, the colours of the world, diversity of rendering and transitions. The rainbow is a structure of light refracting across atmospheric water. It reminds me of the presence of water in the invisible substrate that embraces things in the terrestrial world and that becomes a part of them.

True to the osmotic exchange argued within this thesis, the colours offer multiple readings, due to the instability of their signification and their relevance to the poetics of water that I have explored in my research. They are also species specific in ways that are completely mysterious. Most organisms in the world have mechanisms for responding to light. Light is a shared sensory realm as much as water. In the absence of big budgets where we could develop a touchable rainbow menu system (another dream of colour manifesting through light in water), colours simply represented as selectable squares could go into touch panels on computer screens.

Content for the black menu key was chosen on the basis of how deep the sounds sounded, how traditionally melancholic they felt or whether they mentioned the word black or made reference to black things such as night, etc. This subjective logic is used in all the biospheres to create different moods, tones and sonic grounds behind the interactive palettes of ‘ocean’ and ‘starfish’ content. ‘Oceans’ were also selectable in this way, creating a large range of experiences for users. For example, selecting a black ocean palette would result in mentions of black fish, or contain recordings from evenings. The black starfish palette contains narrative fragments where scientists talk about being on the research vessel during a full moon, or the process of electrically stimulating a black fish, etc. Deploying classification in this way mirrors the scientific method of classification underpinning the archive with which I was working.
SITUATION 7: LANGUAGE

It's no coincidence that in no known language does the phrase "As pretty as an airport" appear. (Douglas Adams cited by Rob Caron 2004)

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Arriving at the edge of the last ice

skinned, my veins and arteries
gaudy and thin, his lids shockingly pink.

Easy to swallow the hook.
His dandelion skin full of wet muscles,
shirt torn to the waist as he clambered
up the mast…

The shadow of that great hull deceiving
with promises of huge songs and safe refuge.
Up close so small, flattering me with light fishy
breath, serenading the human half of me to dread.
Language occupies the space of a metastatic tumour, the proliferating deviant of corpuscular origins that translates itself within vibrations of lack. It performs as a wound in the ear of the other, a wound that can never express itself adequately as its identity is alien; a spatial aberration that exists within a constitution of impermanence. Language is a being that is always mute, unable to transfer its symbology into the comprehension of the other. Haunted by enzymatic mutants, monsters and psychopaths, where conscious and unconscious, material and textual, social and individual, sacred and profane, libidinal and anti-libidinal processes, of identity formation, are translated inside transitions between desire and manifestation. Language is porous and cannot hold onto its content or intent while transmuting to utterance. Poetry invites the mutants to take part in the text and when spoken aloud, poetry becomes the voice of the monster, the voice spoken from the space of alterity. In the act of rendition, whether written, read or spoken, language becomes an apparition of betweenness.

Language is expressed through a mouth which marks the exit of speech from the body in a facially situated opening. A text spoken is situated in a face expressing. Some theorists and artists have made interesting suggestions about the importance of this. John Tonkin's exhibition work, Personal Eugenics (1999-2000), suggests, through a series of morphed transitions, that the phenotypical body is genetically determined through acts of generation. Personal Eugenics consists of a computer interactive and wall pieces. The interactive allows the user to capture / upload an image of their face together with a description of the type of person they would like to become. The user (and other users) can then evolve the face to fit the description. … Over time different traits can be exaggerated or diminished according to the user's breeding choices. The resulting faces can be the result of many individual tamperings. (Tonkin 1999-2000)
The image (below) from the exhibition shows some of the ways faces are made, manipulated and read through subjective responses and needs.

![Personal Eugenics](image)

Figure 10: Personal Eugenics

*Personal Eugenics* explores the idea of a breeding farm for faces. Implicit in the work is the belief that certain emotions look like certain expressions that are created on the face. *Personal Eugenics* explores determinism and the politics of the eugenics project made infamous by Hitler; though it never speaks of this directly.

I believe that a face is able to become more than what its genetics and environment can account for. Personality, behaviour, age and mood all inscribe themselves on the face in both a fleeting and lasting manner, demonstrating an ongoing capacity for modification. Mutation becomes an act of the somatic as well as an act of the genetic. The act of performing poetry therefore becomes an act of constitutional enrichment, as well as a voyeuristic display of departure from the genetic. Poetry
shapes the mouth around uncommon ways of speaking and facilitates the expression of uncommon signs. To witness a performance poem is to witness the human face and body in the act of expressing a rare somatic field.

Languages of the glottis spuria are dialects of social groupings that compromise universality and the poetic, but that fertilise speaking:

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word ... but also—and for us this is the essential point—into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth. From this point of view, literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages—and in its turn is also stratified into languages. (Bakhtin 1986: 668)

Poetic language also supports the openness and generosity required by ecological thinking. I offer Morton’s suggestion that we preserve poetry and the environment, not in the name of nostalgia or religious sincerity, but ‘in the name of delight and passion’, where we make room for more writing, more songs and more care for our world. We are on fire not through some religious guilty zeal to preserve or change the world, but because we have let go of our identity-mission, to the extent that we are aware of our world as it is. Which is without identity. For the soil is made of not-soil, by definition. Soil is not soul but writing. (Morton 2002)

In Sanskrit poetics and the language theory developed by Bhartrhari in the 5th century and explored by Harold Coward in 1980

ordinary waking or historical consciousness and transcendental consciousness provide the experience of different levels of language ... spoken language belongs to historical reality bound by space, time and causality, it involves temporal sequence and a gap between sound and meaning. (Coward cited in Haney 1995)

The violence of language, and the violent acts it contains, is a site of intense
interest in feminist discourse. In *The Lesbian Body* (1975) Monique Wittig attempts to represent the violent split written into feminine subjectivity by writing the feminine pronoun *je* as *j/e*: ‘To recite one’s own body, to recite the body of the other, is to recite the words of which the book is made up’ (Wittig n.d.). The slash between the ‘j’ and the ‘e’ echoes Lacan’s adulterated and divided subject signifier (S) (Lacan 1977: 1-7). Neither of the gestures accommodates space or silence. In Wittig’s case, the re-presented feminine reflects the scar, the slash, the wound inflicted by patriarchal language, as Lacan’s (S) does for subjectivity. Wittig states:

The “I” [Je] who writes is alien to her own writing at every word because this “I” [Je] uses a language alien to her; this “I” [Je] experiences what is alien to her since this “I” [Je] cannot be “un ecrivain”. If, in writing je, I adopt this language, this je cannot do so. J/e is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/e writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject. J/e poses the ideological and historic question of feminine subjects. (Wittig n.d.)

In performing my poetry I have adopted the following strategies to overcome the oppressions situated in textuality and speech acts by women. By inserting non-linguistic noise into the scene of writing and speaking, by smothering words with silence so they struggle to be heard, by operating the mouth in scenes of semblances of speech where nothing is uttered, by writing on the body and allowing the skin and beyond skin to move the text, by taking noisy breaths that disrupt the etiquette of silent bodily processes, by exposing bodily processes in public performances, by making visible the struggle to speak and the pain of speaking, by creating space for accent and unknown foreign languages, by stuttering and by speaking when hegemony enforces silence. These are contained in the scene of my practice but now I am also interested in accommodating the other profoundly silenced group, those that live in the marginal and penumbral space labelled non-human or animal.
Bakhtin locates ‘voice’ within his polyphonic construction of subjectivity, as an embodied speech/song act, as ‘the living voice of an integral person’ (Bakhtin 1981: 239). Further, he goes so far as to suggest that ‘the semantic orientations of whole human beings’ resides in their being voices (Bakhtin 1981: 239). In other words, what we know of character in literary settings, in this case Dostoevsky’s archetype of hero, is learned more through hearing than seeing them: ‘Dostoevsky’s hero is not an objectified image but an autonomous discourse, pure voice; we do not see him, we hear him’ (Bakhtin 1984: 53).

In a printed text, all voices are heard through the mediation of the reader’s inner voice. Language and music are distinct in the sense that language as a translation of a printed text is not polyphorous in the way Bakhtin describes, but monophonic. All multiplicity in the stream of language converges in the single voice of the reader. When the text is performed however, it opens up the potential for polyphony. The performer’s voice mixes with the acoustics and interpretations of the reader’s or listener’s ear to create a uniquely sounded poem. Music as pure sound is innately polyphorous, even more so when the voice of the listener enters the scene of listening; whether via incidental drifts of self talk or through story making cognitions. This gap between polyphony as an idea, and its troubled theoretical viability, could be said to stem from this resistance of a printed text to polyphorous mediation, via readers. Where the texts perform in a polyphonic way is in the liminal space of consciousness. Though we might not be able to hear the characters differently we can certainly appreciate their differences, multiplicities and mutuality from the perspective of a polyphonic rendering. Bakhtin calls this the plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature full of event potential and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses. (Bakhtin 1984: 81)
The unsayable haunts the vulnerability of spoken language, a vulnerability that stems from its inability to express the physicality of emotion in ways other than dissociated speech. Speech is expressed through skin and bone, noise and silence, presence and absence, pattern and randomness. A poem in performance contains physical language resonating in the scenes of the utterance, where somatic presence demands its breath, sonic and life force be accepted as part of the reading.
**speaking the extra-linguistic body**

In choosing a non figurative language, many performance poets upset the relationship of signifier to signified, as poetic language contains its own sets of affects that would add too much weight to the team of significations already playing in a performance poetry event. Figurative language in open mike spaces may become unbearable if it placed too many demands on overloaded readers. Part of the reason for this difficulty would be the incongruity between the poet speaking and the language being spoken. In plain speech it is possible to use deciphers learned from the practice of ordinary conversations, embedded in the presence of the MIBOCU’s ciphers, to help draw meaning from a communication. In figurative language it becomes more difficult to determine meaning or to interpret the sound-sense because it is not part of common experience. Reuven Tsur explains the disorder of the signified / signifier relationship in visual poetry as follows:

In poetic language we tend to attend to the signifiers more than in ordinary, nonpoetic language, where sometimes we remember the information but not the exact words that conveyed it. Poetic language compels us "to attend back" to the signifier or to ever higher signifiers in a hierarchy of signs. ... The phonetic patterning of poetry (rhyme, meter, alliteration) typically directs some of the attention away from the semantic to the phonological component of language, whereas figurative language (and many other semantic devices) directs attention from the extralinguistic referent to the verbal sign. (Tsur 2000: 751)

It is difficult to ‘attend back’ in performance poetry because attention is usually focussed on what is being said at any given moment, although the accumulation of what has already been said feeds into the present moment of attention. Listening and the making of meaning in a performance poetry context is permeated with attention lapses, disruptions, diversions, mishearing and a possible inability to process information adequately in the moment, which contributes to unintended readings and outcomes. There is no time to reflect upon the experience. Sense may arrive too late or not at all. Contained within the reading are the extra-linguistics: the anticipation of what the poet is going to say and the waiting for it to
be said; the prediction of how the poem will turn out and the waiting for it to end; the subconscious or conscious response process that accompanies the reading and the waiting for expectation to be fulfilled. In effect the plays of anticipation fuzz the scene of the reading.

The extra-linguistic referents are ethereal in the sense that they are enacted over time and cannot be referred back to. Reading performance poetry requires receptivity on the part of the reader to phonic, semantic and graphemic content, in ways that render the linguistic as a stream of holographic allusions to what has been, what is, and what will come. The act of speaking creates a ‘fusion of sounds at the back of one’s mind’. … So in poetic language the duality of signs is more prevalent than it is in nonpoetic language’ (Tsur 2000: 751). If attention and focus are products of the ‘relative naturalness or unnaturalness of a poetic device’ (Tsur 2000: 752), it is logical that plain speech would be the most widely adopted poetic device as it is most likely to be understood more quickly in the moment.

David Williams notices that every time he opens his mouth

a decision is made, and this decision is not always mine. The act of speaking catches me by surprise, grabs me and shakes up what I think I know. Words rolls [sic] out, and come into life in the world. And words also bring themselves into the world, into life. Words carry me away, as much as they are carried by me. (Williams n.d.)

A poetry reading is different to speaking as the text is usually pre-existent, however what I think Williams alludes to here, is the unpredictability of how the words will be received. Once released, words become:

… unpredictable, uncertain ... Suddenly I am speaking, suddenly I am moving. And I don’t know why. I can’t even guess. But I’ve landed somewhere. And I can always find my feet. I can always close my mouth. (Williams n.d.)
To complicate the linguistic and semantic gestalts with the highly signified language of figurative speech would disrupt the capacity for a reader to reconcile discordance: ‘the greater the emphasis on the discordance, the less natural … the device; the greater the emphasis on the reconcilement, the more natural it is’ (Williams n.d.). Performance in poetry is a discordant element that must be accounted for in an extremely subjective way. Aside from the text is the MIBOCU alive in the scene deriving pleasure from the text, and making mischief with its ideas: ‘The pleasure of the text [from the reader’s point of view] is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas as I do’ (Barthes 1975: 17).

Inside textual-ness a poet sounding their text in front of an audience steps into a space of altered identity. Identity affirms itself as a dynamic system of locations in constant ebb and flux with the ‘stage’ and surrounding environment, which includes the audience. The identity of ‘author’ becomes enmeshed in scenes of tensions enacted through the exposure of a text by its author in a public space. Although these frames are also present in the case of the actor, or poetry reader reading someone else’s poetry, there is something about the presence of the author that alters the nature of these well established viewpoints. In addition there are what Bernstein calls

[the] purely extrinsic meanings that adhere to sounds and dynamic features of sounds, either based on historical associations, which over time get hard-wired into some words or sounds; or, more intricately, based on the oral range made possible by a specific dietary pattern that alters the body’s sounding board (dentation, palette, vocal chords, breath). (Bernstein 1998: 17)

These sounds are outside meaning but form part of the acoustic field of a poem being read aloud. Whether we notice them or not, they form part of the aural network encompassed by hearing a poem.
Walter Ong also viewed spoken words as modifiers of the ‘total, existential situation’, which is further framed by the use of ‘gestures and movement’ (Ong 1988: 67). Ong explored differences between cultures which operated through ‘primary orality’ (e.g. Homeric Greece) rather than written forms of communication, and those that relied on writing (chirographic) practices. Drawing from Eric Havelock’s (1963) research into the Homeric period, Ong concluded that differences between oral and chirographic methods led to changes in the way humans thought and communicated: ‘the beginnings of Greek philosophy were tied in with the restructuring of thought brought about by writing’ (Ong 1988: 28). Ong also suggested that the West was entering a phase he dubbed ‘second orality’, manifested through electronic modes of communication such as television, phones, mass media, radio, cinema and the computer. Incorporated within second orality are chirographic and oral modes. Second orality cannot understand primary orality, suggests Ong, who admonishes terms such ‘oral literature’ (Ong 1988: 11) for exposing ‘our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organized materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all’ (Ong 1988: 11). Roy Harris challenges the idea that writing is speech written down, when he raises the interesting point that: ‘the development of the alphabet is a comparatively late event in the evolution of writing. Various civilisations with a long history of writing never developed systems comparable to the alphabet’ (Harris 1986: 27).

In his third chapter of Orality and Literacy (1988) Ong asserts that memory in oral cultures is only made possible through the use of mnemonics to organise and think memorable thoughts (Ong 1988: 35). In his section on homeostasis (Ong 1988: 46) he suggests that oral cultures keep themselves in a kind of storage equilibrium by disposing of irrelevant memories and removing them from ritualistic recitations. It does seem unlikely that literate societies would not also possess such a homeostatic process, which is the premise behind Ong’s statements. What is interesting about Ong’s homeostasis idea is considering how it would work in the age of second orality when information is increasingly less determined by
centralised sources. There is no single person, or single group of elevated persons, who decides what will or won’t be granted cultural privilege. The expectation of perpetual availability, coupled with ever increasing amounts of information, means that information management and ‘information literacy’ (Anderson et al 1996) are important new developments in the evolution of communication and perhaps human consciousness.

Information literacy is, according to the American Library Association (ALA), the ability to ‘locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information’ (Anderson et al 1996). Richard Wurman (1989) reports that ‘a weekday edition of The New York Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in seventeenth-century England’ (Wurman 1989: 20). Will our consciousness be altered significantly by awareness of the constantly ready field of information surrounding us? The literacy of writing could reasonably be expected to be influenced dramatically by ever increasing amounts of information that demand our immediate attention.

In 1998 Pitney Bowes Inc commissioned the Institute for the Future to undertake the study Messaging Practices in the Knowledge Economy. Even during these early internet days, ‘38% of UK workers were said to be “very distracted” by interruptions from emails and other electronic communications such as cellular phones, voicemail and fax’ (Amis 1999). UK workers reported that ‘they had to deal with an average of 171 electronic communications per day, while their American counterparts were apparently dealing with over 200 a day’ (Amis 1999).

Storage space, technology and affordability currently influence what is present in the culture at any given point in time. In 2003 the world’s population of 6.3 billion people produced ‘almost 800 MB of recorded information … per person. It would take about 30 feet of books to store the equivalent of 800 MB of information on paper’ (Berkeley School of Management 2003: 1). 40% of this information was being produced by the USA in 2003 (Berkeley School of Management 2003: 1).
Though the 800 MB statistic is skewed as it spreads the information across every person in every country, the trend towards information generation can be expected to rise. Ong’s noticing of the return to the importance of orality as a result of the telephone is supported by research: ‘Telephone calls worldwide on both landlines and mobile phones contained 17.3 exabytes [one exabyte = 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes] of new information if stored in digital form; this represents 98% of the total of all information transmitted in electronic information flows, most of it person to person’ (Berkeley School of Management 2003: 2).

Is it appropriate to use the chirographic label for electronically situated writing given that it is difficult to escape the consciousness of the written word, as represented through printing since Gutenberg? I notice a similar kind of shift taking place to that which occurred when orality gave way to chirography, as described by Ong. Ong’s idea about the influence of a verbal heritage on the organisation of our writing minds echoes in my noticing that electronic languages are also organised along principles of the printed word, even though they have nothing ‘to do with writing at all’ (Ong 1988: 11). Electronic writing is a language full of hybridity: word, image, sound, code, broadcast. Oftentimes image can stand in for word, broadcast stand in for presence; code stand in for alphabet, sound stand in for image, text stand in for presence, fragment stand in for narrative, etc. The deferrals of language expressed through visual, kinaesthetic or aural perceptions perhaps challenge orality as a suitable metaphor. Ong says that ‘second orality cannot understand primary orality’ (Ong 1988: 11) – and I would extend this by saying electronic writing cannot understand chirography.

Considering Ong’s homeostatic process whereby old memories were alleged to have been erased when they no longer served a cultural purpose in oral societies (Ong 1988: 46), I notice that traditional grammar, spelling, words and writing structures are often abandoned in electronic writing environments. The break from traditional writing is not so much radical, however, as evolutionary. Writing strategies developed for mobile phones and email have a great impact on the way
people write and increase in communication transactions. It has become necessary to spend less time typing and speaking from a landline and more time networking, locating and staying in touch. Perhaps, with increasing numbers of mobile phones in use with multimedia capacities the percentage of speech information transmitted may decrease as messages, photos and video substitute for talking. Then again it is possible that photos, text messages, audio sharing and video will enrich conversations rather than replace them. Increasing use of VOIP (Voice Over Internet Phones) and free peer to peer conversations facilitated through technologies and networks such as Skype, contribute even higher percentages of digital data being dedicated to talking. At the same time there has been an increase in the exchange of cultural product such as video and audio. The operations of culture are changed by its communication strategies. Perhaps these communication strategies also change the consciousness of individuals, who sense the world differently as a result of knowing the world through multi-media communication rather than speech or chirography.

The expense of mobile phone calls, the relative cheapness of SMS communications, the mobility of people and the availability of email were the most likely catalysts for the adoption of text based communication strategies. Ever since the ancient Egyptians devised the ‘Hieratic and Demotic scripts [as alternatives] to their complex Hieroglyphic script’ (Ager n.d.) humans have been trying to further encode the code of language in order to save time. A shorthand system developed with icons, abbreviations and sounds can be expected to evolve in response to the continued growth of mobile phones. Some of these codes may be specifically designed to help overcome international language barriers, just as the 50 international symbols were ‘designed for use at the crossroads of modern life: in airports and other transportation hubs and at large international events’ (AIGA 2007). I'm not sure that a smiley face would mean the same thing in Palestine or Africa as it does here, or that even if an international code were developed, it could plausibly be expected to remain static and devoid of specific cultural meanings for long.
Mobile phones extend the space of writing, and looking as much as they do the space of speaking and listening, therefore they don’t serve the metaphor of orality or chirography neatly. When considered through the metaphor of osmosis however, electronic media’s capacities to sustain categorical pollutions and constantly shifting concentrations of information works well, when I think about the potential shifts in consciousness that may occur. Writing for mobile phones is punctuated with icons standing in for words, which themselves stand in for what they signify. The sliding gesture of chirography has been replaced by button presses, screen touches and dictation to text-to-speech engines, voice recognition prompts, etc. Language escapes the membranes of speech and writing that historicise us into Ong’s categories of orality and chirography and I suspect that David Porush may be correct in his prediction: ‘We will know we have succeeded in reducing language to formulae when we can teach the computer to chat with us’ (Porush 1985: 6). Artificial intelligence and artificial speech help draw language closer to the realm of formulae.

Hypertext contains the written word and yet, just as writing does not stand in for the word, hypertext does not stand in for writing. There is no materiality in the words of hypertext, which is expressed through a code of numbers that create words as electronic illusions of themselves. Uptake of hypertext fictions, by comparison, has been slow in both readers and authors. Perhaps the skills and specialist software required to produce hypertexts and the lack of developed ways of reading them are to blame. Since the accessibility of blog writing tools, hypertext logics and techniques have been widely embraced in community spaces such as MySpace and YouTube. Such communities attest to the temporary nature of current electronic writing strategies, where traditional ways of thinking about and conducting writing are slowly washed away to reveal the codes, discontinuous narratives, fragmentary texts, iconography, broadcasts and links lying beneath and substituting for them. In a few generations writing can be expected to change significantly, and with it consciousness, if we are to aver to Ong’s speculations.
Michael Joyce, co-creator of Storyspace, the hypertext authoring software he used to write Afternoon, A Story (1990) and used by Shelley Jackson to write Patchwork Girl (1995), discusses the impact on his consciousness of shifting his writing practice from the page to the screen:

…despite my claims that this perspectivalizing machine was only a tool, a way of knowing—the computer began to change me. Possessed of two minds, my own and its augmented silicon, I began the slow process of learning to see this not so newly doubled self as one; to see, as Carolyn Guyer has put it, that "dualities must be in tensional opposition to each other in order for the central paradox of existence to work." (Joyce 1995: 1)

The dualisms to which Joyce refers are the ‘[p]reviously stable horizons across my psychic landscape’ (Joyce 1995: 2). Joyce cites Donna Haraway’s cyborg as a tool to undo the dualisms of 'self / other, mind / body, culture / nature, male / female, civilized / primitive, reality / appearance, whole / part, agent / resource, maker / made...’ (Haraway cited in Joyce 1995: 2). For Joyce, consciousness is altered by accommodating thoughts to the system which in turn ‘accommodates our thought; we interact’ (Joyce 1995:136).

Classical scholar Rosalind Thomas rejects Ong’s binary approach to orality / literacy and suggests instead that societies are not either literate or oral but in flux between the two, since speech and writing are not incompatible (Thomas 1992: 44-52). Unlike Ong, Thomas considers that oral societies are likely to use private reflection and individual style in their speech acts and that these performances are not stifled by the presence of written texts (Thomas 1992: 49). This last point is relevant to performance poetry which traverses the space of orality, chirography and hypertextuality in the 20th-21st centuries. Tendering Eskimo poetry as an example of an oral form that does not use a formulaic approach, Thomas reminds that all literate or oral societies are not the same and therefore totalising statements about primary or secondary orality are mostly unhelpful, except for signposting some broad cultural shifts (Thomas 1992: 43, 106).
The complexity of language and the impact it has on consciousness is a difficult topic to represent fully here. Ong's ideas, and those of scholars who disagree with him, reveal how intimately the cultural component of MIBOCU is bound up in the whole person. Perception, communication, tools that facilitate them and expectations about how they are used, represent key aspects of my MIBOCU's writing practices, poetics and consciousness. These aspects reside in physical, psychological, social, language and political exchanges that are constantly changing in spacetime, and which manifest a fluid architecture within and around the MIBOCU. The situation of language is not just about words, it’s about how we think, translate and make the world in both linguistic and non-linguistic ways.
Notes from an atomised practice

July 23, 2004
Language is beginning to leak from me. At my feet are puddles of ideas waiting for a space and a method in which to be heard. Around my head are the unusual sounds and gory images of the Cornell archive. I have to design words, signs, sounds and spaces for them to inhabit and express themselves. I’m immersed in technology for the production and arrangement of my poems. I have become vapour, as my writing consciousness heats up in the CPU (Central Processing Unit) and diffuses into the night. Fireflies flicker around the bulb in my room and I wonder why they match the colour of my sound waves. Am I hallucinating as I stare into depths of sound waves swimming across my virtual mixing desk?

I am not trying to organise my thoughts. Words do not necessarily come first. I don’t always seek convergence between them and their acoustic environments, but if they seem attracted to one another and I notice concentrations building up, I will write and compose a way for them to meet. Sometimes a poem is a war zone. I use the technology that hurts fish to entertain myself. My technology is human life.

I’m interrogating myself by holding my breath as long as it takes the bearded seal to detonate its call against a wall of ice. Everything blue seeps in. I fail to hold my breath that long, but decide to make a poem as long as the bearded seal’s call, at unnatural speed. These poems surface and evaporate, elusive in their multi-dimensional natures. Some are ‘squeaky,’ and I’m not sure what that means but I know it means ‘this is how they sound.’ It didn’t occur to me to think of them as ‘clean’ until the litter of clichés frothed in the wake of a ship full of scientists discussing the moonlight. In a thread of unrealised hypertext I think of the links – ship, fish, scalpel, death, science, song, ghost, siren, lure, past. Later I put them all in a poem that cannot be stroked, cut, poked or selected by any more hands.

An impression I have of the way writing is shifting consciousness is that it is not so much a second orality as it is a literacy based upon an atomised proprioception; where language becomes the speech, gesture, image, knowledge, thought and spatial entity necessary to speak
and represent the MIBOCU – the always changing subject in constant exchange with the world. Literacy needs to become atomised in order to disperse effectively across media, spacetimes, technologies and logics. Literacy also needs to become proprioceptive in order to sense the position, location, orientation and movement of communication in the atomised proximities of the MIBOCU. When I experimented with \( H_2O \) the poem was as atomised as I could make it under the circumstances. I conceived the space as oceanic and dense, full of ‘molecular’ arrangements of text, sounds and images that collide, merge and break up in the acoustic aura of the poem’s wet ecological signification.
SITUATION 8: IDENTITY

Sex is power. Identity is power. In western culture, there are no nonexploitative relationships. Everyone has killed in order to live. (Camille Paglia 2004)

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Deep Noise in Oceanarium

He looks at me – eyes flippin ‘n flappin
  glazed over in tissuey threads.

Wounds surface

    bone me to causeway
  and sandbank, my answer an impossible
  wreck.
Identity as an expression, act and culturally determined position, is an intimate consort of our lived embodiment. Identity’s role in performance poetry is more variegated than its relationship to a poem encountered through an act of reading. Identity, as an idea located inside an immaterial body and constructed as a system of cultural infringements, significations and texts, is a well established reading; as is the discourse that maintains that identity is an expression of otherness from a materially determined locus. Neither of these extremes, however, accounts for the subjectivity transactions involved in the experience of an author reading their poem to an audience. Lacan’s retaliation against earlier renditions of identity as a biologically determined outcome, created room for reading identity as a scene of repetitions, independent of biological origins, where “discourse... is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father, for example, insofar as my father has committed faults that I am absolutely condemned to reproduce” (Lacan 1991: 89). By reconfiguring the words ‘language’ and ‘subject’, Derrida and Lacan erased the holographic rumour of the self-made ‘man’ self-making the world (Zizek 1991). Additionally, feminist theory has been pivotal in examining not only the outcome of such erasures, but also the porous nature of the trace of that which has been erased. The performance of a poem by the author, as opposed to an actor performing it, is framed by ethnicity, gender, nationality, accent, wealth, education as well as a material locus. Such framings represent immaterial and corporeal states of identity.

I am particularly interested in the facets of identity discourse that flash light across the face of a poet reading their poetry in public. Adorno’s aesthetics leaves poets at the microphone sweating in terror of the dialectical nightmare they have entered by claiming the categories of ‘performer’ and ‘poet’ – ‘art can realize its universal humanity only working within the framework of specialization. All else is false consciousness’ (Adorno 1970: 334). Self-consciousness, a familiar sub-routine in the ground of many poets entering the heightened subject-object relations of the
stage space, can become a kind of fugue entity that haunts the interstices of the phobic space between desire and experience. In the trance of the utterance poets can experience dissociation from ordinary identities as they enter a transcendental shiver. This shiver, or rupture of identity, is fleeting and aberrant, and offers insight into the inarticulate self at precisely the moment the person is engaged in a heightened act of articulation. It can become a space of hysteria and addiction. In the tomes of the skin, poets who experience their texts inside a fugue are able to learn a new identity for themselves. An identity and language that remains unsayable, yet is recognised and pursued with love and curiosity. Such an experience is rare and mystical and those who have not experienced it may critique it as hallucination. The act of writing poetry can also take place in the fugue, as creativity is recognised as another dialectic between exchanges of consciousness that disrupt identity.

The gaze of an audience is unavoidably hegemonic. The audience is as much a part of the poem as the poetry: both in live poetry and its virtual cousin. Inside the peering is the mutation of the mirror’s image. The external world is received, then turned upside down and back to front. Through the activity of the lens, which localizes its response and transforms it into sensations via the nervous system, the image is reversed again, thereby transmuting the gestalt into a sensory response. The gaze is prestigious. Our senses are said to be hierarchical, according to Stephen Ullmann, with sight being the 'most differentiated and most rational' (Ullmann cited in Tsur 2000). In discussing visual poetry Tsur credits the visual sense with being the most stable because its systems of constraint, in relation to size, position and continuity, are alleged to be more cohesive. In the setting of a performance poem however, form is not maintained; it is dishevelled and full of alterity, because the body cannot be read strictly as a physical or material object. The body, aside from its well established subjectivity, is physically mutable during the reading of a performance poem. It is even less stable than the text, which means that the gaze of the reader cannot rest itself as it would on an object. The reader’s gaze must process the gestalt of the author’s body in a continuous fusion,
and in concession with other senses. The eye may wish to turn the performer’s body into an identikit of shapes and features that design individuality against a cultural relief, but the ear hears the voice of the Other and inflates its subjectivity with resistance – a resistance to the primacy of the gaze and the hegemonic aftermaths contained in it. Performance poetry is a volatile and unsettling site for the gaze.

In performance poetry we witness the idea of a fetishistic image (poet as sacred wisdom object) – a mirror pool (poets speaking communal truths or the narcissistic gaze) of representation and illusion. Audience members are dispersed across engagement and ambivalence in a surface of fragmentary codes that depend on everything they, and the poets, bring to the dialogue embedded in the invisible particulars of the gaze. The gaze becomes a space of relative histories: illusory Freudian, Oedipal, phantasmagoric memories; Lacanian developmental mirrors. The stage offers a tableau of gestures and poses. A craft written in tissue where one might find enjambment in the movement of an eye, rhyme in a pattern of footsteps and rhythm in the drawn-in breath.
The idea of identity as a classification regime predominantly serves the dominant power structures. I also speak up for the silent or secret self, the self of the animal that can only be known from its own point of view. The self that speaks in the unclear language of the hybrid condition of the cyborg, which struggles ‘against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism’ (Haraway 1991: 175). Moving beyond this, I see poetry as a struggle not so much against perfect communication, but a struggle for it. At the same time it embraces this ideal, it most successfully fails to accomplish it. In the end poetry embodies the rejection of perfect meaning, perfect image, perfect idea at the same time it attempts to render it.
a touch of el Niño

The situations in my subjectivity as poet are manifested and expressed through a MIBOCU in constant exchange with spacetime, language, creativity, water, order, structures, technologies, materials, vapours and ecologies. I have not lost my mind in this amalgamation, but have extended it into technological cultures and embodied knowledge / awareness.

My lines have been crossed, erased, re-drawn and ultimately dissolved as I enter the charms of spatially oriented texts: which seep from the unsayable into mutant consciousness (influenced by the limitations of signified language), into the presence of words and their vaporous utterances, into the consciousness of readers, into the technologies of communication and reception, and into the atmospheres of history, archive and documentation.

H₂O, Dive and Liquid Stanzas are offerings of speculation, where I enter the imaginary tissue of my poems to embark on experiments in creation. The men who collected the recordings used in the pieces, have been stripped of their hegemonic authority by history, which evanesces the portraits of most people, and by situating their voices as characters, KHz, grain and narration. In the ecology of the poem they struggle against noise, poetry and animal communication to be heard. This seems to be a contemporary condition of subjectivity, shared by creative writers, as the struggle to be heard, beyond intimate communities, is overwhelmed by the proliferation (and hence dissipation) of information, communication, reality TV, homogeneity, and other consumer-slicked situations that work against the creative voice.

MIBOCU language contains spacetime, water, technology and genre specific idioms, but as it is in constant exchange with a volatile world, it is itself prone to instability.
SECTION II: EXCHANGE

Exchange includes and expresses the discourses relevant to relationships, movement and communication; localised embodiment, species specific experiences, creativity, notions of selfhood, the discourses of power, gender, disability, prosthetics, etc.
EXCHANGE 1: SILENCE & NOISE

In the last week of February 1984 Joey Morgan exhibited a project called Fugue in Vancouver. For this piece Morgan placed microphones in two houses on Pacific Street that were to be demolished and, during the demolition of the houses, transmitted the live sound to an abandoned warehouse on Hamilton Street where it functioned as an element in the installation Morgan had constructed there. House numbers, which were recuperated from the houses on Pacific Street by Morgan, were embedded in wax, placed within wire cages and arranged on a work table. Morgan played back the sound of the houses’ destruction over loudspeakers. (Landon 1995).

The house at the end of the world

Life’s
curléd up in a corner. Distinct but anonymous.
Somebody should discover it, them, the love they had.

The land
of 1999 bore too much snow. Caved in, snowed under.
In the absence of green in the space between winter and autumn, a scurry of mouse and spider.

Footsteps
in the snow, without bounds, now out of bounds.
‘liquid movement in the cochlea’ (Bernal 2001)

Sound and noise and their oscillations are part of the story of space and poetry that are under-examined. The environment translated through sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing, in other words the phenomenological world, produces a certain physical field that becomes understood as ‘world’, which is filtered through relationships between inner and outer experience and expression. Phenomenology provides a useful account for thinking about embodiment and the way the environment is produced. In the ear the noise of space is treated, entered, ignored or privileged. Sound, as an expression of wave, as a disturbance borne of materiality as it transports energy from one location to another, is a fundamentally ecological experience. There is no sound in outer space where particles are lacking (Snyder 2000). Sound is the noise of the medium of the world and its media. To utter is to manifest an ecologically situated existence.

Sound is both impressionistic and perforating, a virtual and an actual experience that is appreciated through subjectivity. Animals hear different frequencies to which humans and other species are deaf. Children hear differently than adults, and the elderly different again. Deafness is variable. Just as sight is individually specific, so is hearing. Sound impacts upon cognition, gives poetry an alternative voice, provides a medium for communication, offers culture a history of sound-based art and offers cinema its potent capacities. Noise is the experience of agitation, on material, personal and social levels. It is the constant hum of technology, consumption and communication. As Torben Sangild says: ‘Noise can blow your head out. Noise is rage. Noise is ecstatic. Noise is psychedelic. Noise is often on the edge between annoyance and bliss. Noises are many things. Noise is a difficult concept to deal with’ (Sangild 2002: 2). Noise splashes in bodies, splashes in waves on shorelines and in the planetary whirr and crackle. It drones in the hum of eardrum bounce, where sound wobbles through the moist canals of the head and body. Energy has a noise; the noise of extraction, conversion, emission and consumption.
Traditionally noise is viewed as a polluting interference at the level of recording and culture. This renders it as something separate and impure within the world of sound. Noise artists view noise as the ground of sound, a fertile and nourishing substrate from which sound emerges: ‘Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. The noise, therefore, is familiar to our ear, and has the power to conjure up life itself’ (Russolo 1997). To such artists, noise is an environment full of musical constructs, e.g. pitch, frequency, rhythm.

Environments are situated within the noise of culture. The noise of our bodies contributes to our awareness of ourselves as noisy beings and tones our lifelong personal soundtrack. Silence and noise are in constant exchange with each other and are sites where power, conflict, aesthetics, politics and acoustic rights are played out. One person’s playful barking dog is another person’s nightmare. One person’s music is another person’s din. Human noise invades the habitats of other species without a second thought being given to the disruptions that may occur. When does sound become noise and who controls the soundscape in any given situation? Sangild suggests that:

> it is no longer meaningful to talk about noise as something special, since we have finally reached a state in which all sounds are equal. … Noises are the sounds which used to be denounced as non-musical. To include noise in music thus still has an effect and bears a certain aesthetic power. (Sangild 2002: 2)

Copyright law polices some aspects of sound but who protects us from the wilful commercial exploitation of social space to persuade us to buy product? Humans can hear in the womb months before they see (Chamberlain 1995). It is not possible for a person or animal to live without the influence of sound / noise. Sound stands in for and accommodates noise except where it is demarcated. Consciousness and unconscious are immersed in sound. Muzak, created by George Squier and patented in the 1920s to manifest and manipulate subliminal desire, has changed our experience of social space by providing a soundtrack for
many routine daily activities: for example, shopping, riding elevators, waiting in queues (Owen 2006). To shop without Muzak in the 21st century could be an anxiety-provoking experience as its role in the ‘realm of retail theatre’ (Owen 2006) has become part of our background expectation – a psychically unattended part of public space that is noticed more for its absence than its presence. This noticing may take place beyond conscious thought, at the scene of muscles clenching around uncertainty and absence: ‘The goal of Muzak for work areas is to maintain or increase productivity. It does this by maintaining arousal without attracting attention’ (Ohio State University 2007).
pregnant pauses

[I]t only takes one person to produce speech, but it requires the cooperation of all to produce silence. (Pittinger et al cited in Davis 1995: 888)

Silence exists as a perceptual rather than an actual space. It is thought of as something that occurs within and between speech sounds and the noise of the world. As silence is not possible except as a manifestation through the subjectivity of hearing, it can only ever be personal. Silence is endowed with enzymatic powers to promote deeper listening, cover up, render invisible, empower, erase, restore, incubate, resist, oppress. Foucault explains it as ‘the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers’ (Foucault 1978: 27).

For MIBOCU silence cannot really exist. Silence is a condition of apprehension due to the noise surrounding us that threatens to breach the perceptual barrier at any time. There is a difference between silence manifested textually or philosophically and silence that emerges in relation to sound or noise. Broadly, silence may surround and precede the sounded, the expressed and the conceived and is always in relationship with listening, hearing and comprehension processes. The MIBOCU not only generates sound, it is situated in it. The sounds of the body and the world are part of the MIBOCU’s situation and it is therefore incapable of knowing silence, only the illusion of silence. The illusion of silence is easily breached by the simple gesture of plugging up your ears with your fingers. The illusion of silence comes from the background sound of the MIBOCU being assimilated into it, in such a way that it rarely hears it:

Absolute silence does not exist for us; in an anechonic chamber—which absorbs all sound—we can hear our blood circulating and even our nervous system running. Some can even hear the bones of their fingers rubbing as they move their hands. (Rivenburg 1997: 1)
Silence is Yin Yang, contains shadow and light, active and passive, male and female and it cannot be appropriated to serve one function without acknowledging the proximity and perhaps undesirability of its own oppositional forces: ‘sound has silence within it, just as light has darkness within’ (Fox & Sheldrake 1996: 132).

Silence appalls. If the margins of a book become too large and loom over the text there is an experience akin to claustrophobia, just as there is if the text is not spacious enough and the margins are too narrow. Silence is proportionate, architectural, subjective, fleeting, imaginative. The silence of an empty house can be suffocating and demanding. The TV is our friend, is ‘The Drug of the Nation’ according to Michael Franti (Franti 1992). It operates by assuaging anxiety through the inoculation of noise. Silence is:

… an essential material, an essential ingredient. And yet everywhere I look, I see a culture that’s willing to deny that essential truth ... [W]e seem to be backing away from our own silence, that we seem to be moving faster and faster, filling up, as I said, the sort of aural landscape with noise. (Slouka 2003)

Silence is sometimes considered: a leftover space; an originary or beginning space; a space of emptiness ready to be filled; a place replete with the absence of speech; a scene of repression; a space of death; and ironically, a place attributed to the myth of the silent male. Although John Lutterbie remains suspicious of the myth,

despite a reputation for silence, men talk. When they do, instead of establishing a relationship of mutual reflections, they frequently rely on an already constructed self-image that demands a particular mode of response; and when they listen, they often listen only to the words relevant to that autorepresentation. (Lutterbie 1997: 36)

‘Speak silence,’ says Cixous, ‘crush the music under the millstone of words, lie by swearing to tell only their truth, plead guilty to a lack of absence’ (cited in Shiach 1991: 33).
Silence is also a threat that some avoid by filling the air with verbiage: ‘loquaciousness and silence reveal the symptomatic nature of meaning and therefore are constant reminders of the deconstructive threat hovering around the text’ (Davis 1995: 893). A poem or novel begins with an interruption of the silence enfolding it. For Merleau-Ponty speech contains silence and sound, which arise out of a sense of voluminousness and vacuity, distance and intimacy. The interplay between these things constitutes the world as relations of ‘intercorporeality’ or ‘kinship’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 168). To musicians such as John Cage, silence exists as a ‘sonorous rest [that] marks the absolute state of movement’ (Cage 1961: 3). To Peter Stallybrass, historical Renaissance silence was enforced upon women by men who allegedly feared their production of speech: in silence is found ‘the closed mouth ... a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house’ (Stallybrass cited in Davis 1995: 891).

Gerald Bruns thinks of speech as an event of saying that ‘appropriates man in the sense that man now enters into the event of saying and gives voice to it’ (Bruns 1996: 132). Bachelard expresses faith in a poem’s capacity to manifest silence: ‘It lets the attentive silence, beneath the images, remain alive. It builds the poem on silent time, a time upon which no rhythmic beat, no hastened tempo, no order is imposed’ (Bachelard 1969: 25). This reiterates the role, in silence, of creating the space for a text to emerge: ‘Poetry then is truly the first manifestation of silence’ (Bachelard 1969: 25).

How can silence be turned up or broken then? Sometimes silence should not be broken because it is strategic or formative, necessary in a way. Audre Lorde (1984) who identifies and names herself as a black, female, lesbian poet, believes that poetry is an important method for ‘breaking silence’. Lorde maintains that ‘poetry is not a luxury’ (Lorde 1984: 37). As both the title of one of her essays and a political position, *Poetry is Not a Luxury* is an assertion that women, in particular, need poetry since it is
a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. (Lorde 1984: 37)

Setting aside the fact that she is speaking on behalf of all women, it is at least true in my case, that poetry is not an aesthetic gesture but a way of thinking and engaging with the world that is not separate from the requirements that I be in the world in a particular commercialised way. Poetry is not a place I go to to retreat from the world, a sacred world of pristine pages where I can meditate a reconnection with the non-worldly self; it is a way of being in the world. In What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics, Adrienne Rich concurs: '[I]n the act of writing, to feel our own "questions" meeting the world's "questions," to recognize how we are in the world and the world is in us’ (Rich 1993b: 26) is a vital quality of poetry.

Silence operates visually, kinaesthetically, environmentally, orally and aurally. It surrounds the technological, environmental and in situ noises of composition. Though it is impossible to hear, silence exists as an aspect of sense. To the body, paralysis is a kind of silence. Silence is heard literally only as allegation, because if there were such a thing as silence, our hearing is filtered through bodies that imbue it with background noise. Even the universe is saturated with the humming sounds of stars caught in fragments of dust. Pythagoras (~ 500 BC) had an instinct about this. His consideration on the interval and the cosmos lead him to believe in the possibility of celestial music created by the vibrations and movements of planets and stars. He called this the ‘music of the spheres’ (in Clark 1969: 131).

Silence is impossible as a literal space, existing primarily as a relative space and a spacetime of imagination that is durational – containing periods, lengths and species-specific qualities. According to Mark Slouka, silence offers a buffer zone to the rich who don’t have to share the intimate noises of living with neighbours. This
renders silence a privilege of the wealthy, who are able to screen out the noise of the world by accessing expensive technologies:

[If] you go into the apartment of someone who's truly wealthy, I think the first thing you're struck by ... is how unbelievably silent it is ... the walls seem to be five feet thick and ... you don't hear the sirens outside, you don't hear the neighbours, you don't hear the hallway, it's just you. (Slouka 2003)

Silence is most often constructed in relation to speech and music, ‘since the spoken is doubled by what remains silent, undoing the spoken gives voice to the inherent silence which itself helps stabilise what the spoken is meant to mean’ (Budick & Iser 1987: pxvii). The deep sources of words can be found within silence and its detached experience of syllables; the way they reverberate through consciousness.

When doing any sort of compositional work with music, silence becomes a spatial partner. Composers like John Cage and Brian Eno explored the use of silence as resistance to the technological developments of the 1970s, which was the period where multi-track machines proliferated and some people

began to think that the act of making music consisted of the act of making more and more sound, and filling up more and more space with sound. ... I started to find myself listening to things that actually had very long spaces in them. (Eno 1995)

Soundscapes, as Cage so well demonstrated in 4’33" (1952), can be composed of silence thereby exposing their contents as thought-spaces, as personal reflections on self-presence within listening.

In music the score is an aurally silent field that musicians translate into music. When a score-literate person reads a musical score they hear it in their own way. To a person who does not know how to read music the visual qualities of the score may play on their eyes but they are not able to translate the piece through an act of musical imagination with any ‘integrity’. Tossing and turning between the silent folds
of musical notation is most of the music of history that western civilisation privileges. The same process exists in the silent pages of literature which fill up the imagination with stories through the code of language. Silence invigorates the text. It adds movement and meaning within and between words, thereby framing articulation. As Lennard Davis says:

> On an auditory level, each utterance erupts from silence. On a graphic level, those silences are represented by space, the space between letters and between words. Here the palimpsest of space and silence comes together in the interstices of textual language. (Davis 1995: 893)

One of our developmental tasks is to interpret the silences of the world as much as the language. We have to learn how to read them in the spaces between the said, the heard and the done. In the 10th century, Abhinavgupta explored language and space through the lens of Hindu culture. Abhinavgupta is credited with developing the principle of dhvani, which engages with the role of the unsaid in silence. Dhvani meaning is said to lie ‘beyond spoken words. It is the meaning that is constituted by silences in the midst of speech; its location is the borderland of what is said and what is left unsaid’ (Pandit 1996: 144). Central to the dhvani principle is poetry and its language, which through dhvani is said to reach ‘the condition of silence’, functioning ‘like a meta-language, generating many meanings by deploying collective and individual memory banks, latent impressions, mental associations’ (Pandit 1996: 145). Realms of meaning are produced everywhere: in a particular glance, an open window, a locked closet door, the ostracisms of the peer group. Lennard Davis proposes that ‘silence is of the body ... an immanent state of the body in which the body can be present, but verbal communication is absent’ (Davis 1995: 889). But it is also beyond the body: a state where culture is present but information is absent except for its atomic ghosts. There is a contradictory nature in the spatiality of silence read as emptiness; according to Davis, ‘emptiness bans the body; and the body bans emptiness’ (Davis 1995: 890). Davis reminds of Hélène Cixous’ demand that women attempt to ‘write though their bodies ... get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of
pronouncing the word “silence” (Cixous cited in Davis 1995: 889).

Speaking of speaking, the voice must also train for silence and for oppression. Voices are able to attest, announce, assure, break, echo, stutter, shout or sing. They must also learn to hesitate, interrupt, censure; how to be lost or infected, amplified and reproduced. Inside the stutter resides the tension and fear of losing control. Silence becomes a profound space of projection for others who may finish a stutterer’s sentences and embarrass them by speculating on the missing words, turning life into one long game of charades. The face gets stuck around the stutter which paints the stutterer as different, as other, as full of lack. Intimacy is another space that moulds around silence. If silence takes hold as a corrosive rather than a respectful space, relationships break down.

American Architect Louis Kahn saw silence as form, a way of depicting order – ‘silence to light, light to silence’ (Kahn cited in Burton 1998) – a perpetual substrate for the scene of creation-decay-creation. We honour our dead through the respectful portal of silence. According to Budick and Iser, William Blake uses the term ‘speak silence’ as ‘a gesture to humanise the inhuman void, intimating presence, not absence’ (Budick & Iser 1987: pxviii). Silence is as much a part of rhythm as beat in language and music. Dance is one way of manifesting silence through the body. When dancing to a song, hips sashay between beats in sensuous curves. In the sway lies the silent space of desire, the desire of the body to celebrate its existence and for intimacy. Even where dance avoids constructing itself in relation to music the body cannot help but find a rhythm in the silence, whether it expresses the personal rhythmic style of the choreographer or the dancer’s own body speech in relation to body-sound-movement. Composers also use this articulation between sound and silence. ‘Movement operates from the middle of things,’ says critic Bojana Cvéjic, ‘makes us step outside the pre-determination of points and positions. Expresses the potential of moving relations’ (Cvéjic 2004). Radio operators on ships in the early 1900s finger-danced in tapped out sequences of Morse code’s dots, dashes and silences to communicate with the
outside world. Others on the decks turned and bobbed lamps, or sent heliographic
signals in codes of light. Meaning in Morse code, as in all communication, is only
made possible through silence.

Davis asks: ‘What is the deafened moment in the text?’ Davis, who grew up with
deaf parents, ‘remembers lying awake at night, every muscle rigidly alert, listening
for intruders’ (Davis 1995: 896). This statement demonstrates how potentiated
silence is, how rich with anxiety it can be. When Davis recalls ‘frantically hammering
on the door while his mother’s oblivious footsteps passed back and forth inside’
(Davis 1995: 896), there is an understanding that the world’s silence is sub textual.
The operations of the world are not designed with disability or silence in mind.
Silence is downtime to inhabitants of the information age. Davis, who had to act as
a go-between between his parents and the world, describes it as ‘a liaison between
sound and silence’ (Davis 2000). In discussing deafness and blindness, the sites of
aural and textual alterity, Davis wishes to use these alternative states of being as
critical discourse and to ‘distinguish among the Deaf, the deaf, and the deafened
moment’ (Davis 2000). He describes the blind moment as an inability to decipher

a readable, scriptable object (with its attendant graphic presentation,
typography, verticality, horizontality, and visual encoding) but also [an
inability] to consume the cultural product, the circulating, technological
commodity with exchange and use value – the text. (Davis 1995: 886)

In contrast, the deafened moment represents an ‘inability to follow the text's sonic
presence, silence, duration in time, breath, voice, and ideologically ratified forms of
conversation…’ (Davis 1995: 886). He summarises the implications of the two as ‘a
difference between the blind moment’s overt barring of technology in the modern
sense of “textuality”,’ and the deafened moment’s overt barring of

the sonic residues of the body moving through time [and] narrative as
defined in an oral / aural culture. In this sense, deafness is set up in
opposition to the oral culture of pre-eighteenth century Europe, and
blindness would appear to create an opposition to print culture. (Davis
While appreciating what he’s trying to do, already I see weaknesses that stem from Davis situating his definitions in a strict sensory field. These distinctions between hearing and seeing are neat; perhaps too neat. That textuality, or technology for that matter, would only enter through vision and sonics / hearing, seems simplistic, and doesn't allow for the possibility that vision can affect hearing and vice versa.

Synaesthesia is ‘a phenomenon in which a person experiences a sensation in one of the five senses when another of the senses is stimulated’ (Root-Bernstein 2001: 65). The condition of synaesthesia demonstrates how vision and hearing can be polluted. Additionally, limiting senses of vision and hearing to eyes and ears does not account for the body’s capacity to hear or see in different ways. The body can hear and see even if blind and deaf. At the very least it can hear through rhythm and see through touch, even though these experiences are qualitatively different. Surprisingly, Davis does not think about the ‘sonic residues of the body’ as beyond language or appear to make a case for the language of the non-linguistic, except the gestures of sign language. Positing blindness and deafness as oppositional to print and oral / aural culture disappoints because it constructs blindness and deafness as closed conditions.

Rather than seeing blindness and deafness as oppositional forces, I appreciate their potential for reading culture in alternative and useful ways. The fields of silence contained in blindness or deafness could perform subversively, in the sense of resistance, but also pedagogically, through what they contain that hasn’t been discovered. I’m not denying sensory disability or refusing the oppositional impulse but feel that there is much that can be learned about silence from within these conditions. The work of New Zealand poet Michelle Leggott is particularly useful in articulating this. As she gradually loses her sight Leggott is able to explore the space of decay and impending visual silence from a unique perspective. The space she sees initially is absence: ‘[W]e’re in a gallery bathed in cold white silence. All the shoes are there, scattered under cover of darkness ...’ (Leggott 2004). In
another piece vision becomes a more embodied experience:

... but one body I not my eyes
reading day in day out the little distance (Leggott n.d.)

Leggott helps us see the betweeness of it all. Here silence is inchoative, full of precursors forming alliances with the senses to produce comprehension and expression. In the blur just prior to focus there exists an awareness that is pre-lingual, though rich with meaning. This is one of the languages of the unsayable, an active realm: though neither clear nor umbra, light nor dark; a place of liminal dwelling where nothing is what it seems. What is seemed cannot be relied upon and things are dwelled in from a position of powerlessness.

On the page, silence is blank space, is fundamental to poetry and the meaning of words. Poetry in particular creates, through hesitations and leaps off stanza breaks, the graphology of punctuation and its relation to form. In printed media the blank space is most frequently equated with white space, the space that isn’t touched; but online, blank space has difficulty asserting itself, as it is frequently invested with colour – with desktop display colour at the very least. White is the clichéd signifier of blankness and by default silence; though there is actually nothing silent about it. White contains and reflects all colours and is more a space of echo than silence, an active compositional partner in the visual and aural fields of a poem. When writers talk of blank space they mean it contains no text. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it unprinted space as the term ‘blank’ is haunted by the noise of the unsaid, the noise of culture and the ghosts in the machine of industrialisation. Writer’s block is a kind of paralysis that seizes the MIBOCU in response to confrontation with such blankness.
my noisy practice

One of the first things that struck me about the recordings of marine animals in the Cornell archive was the noise that drowned them. I spent a large amount of time filtering noise out of the recordings in order to hear the animals. Sometimes the noise filtration I had to undertake was so extreme that the animal voices took on a strange metallic distortion, which I decided to use in some of the pieces to signify the captured condition of the animal – literally and technologically. Some of the noise was an artefact of recording and playback technologies. More surprising was the actual noise of the ocean. Whenever I go snorkelling I often hear a strange crackling sound that I assumed was a result of hearing my ears under water. The idea that I was hearing my ears turned out not to be quite so farfetched.

In 1995 an article appeared in the magazine *Nature* that revealed how the ‘inner ear sometimes acts as a robust sound generator, continuously broadcasting sounds (spontaneous otoacoustic emissions) which can be intense enough to be heard by other individuals standing nearby. Paradoxically, most individuals are unaware of the sounds generated within their ears’ (Powers et al 1995: 587). To discover that the sound of snapping shrimp and plankton resembled my inner noise was surprising and I experimented with the amplification and speed of these sounds as a way of engaging with noise, as an ambient tissue within sound poems. At the end of each day my ears rang faintly, in the way they do after being exposed to loud sounds. I wondered if I was beginning to give off some of this noise in the way that Powers et al suggested: ‘Apparently, some humans with intense spontaneous emissions owe their hearing loss to internal “noise” which they are unable to perceive’ (Powers et al 1995: 587). The vibrancies of multiplicity excited my hearing and imagination.

Inside the interactive space of $H_2O$ it was necessary to tune in to the body’s movements and develop sensitivity to the spatial positioning of sound. A lag between the sensor’s detection and the program’s responsiveness to its signal made it necessary for users to move through the space slowly and attentively. The lag equated to physical and acoustic silence. Even though the 4x4 sensor array limited the number of sounds that could be plotted in space, it soon became evident that there was enough content in the space to facilitate sensory overload in the
user. The lag offered a refuge, albeit a frustrating one. Although I aimed to create a sonic architecture that enveloped the body in an immediately responsive and dynamic sound poem, the sensor-induced lag common to ultrasonic based systems, undermined this goal. The lag itself added an interesting surreal effect to the composition experience, making it difficult sometimes to attribute sounds to particular spatial locations. Walking in the lag made me revisit thinking about gaps and silences and it added another spatial dimension to the piece that I had not anticipated.
Fifteen referees. I want fifteen referees to be at this fight because there ain't no one man who can keep up with the pace I'm gonna set except me. There's not a man alive who can whup me. I'm too fast. I'm too smart. I'm too pretty. I should be a postage stamp. That's the only way I'll ever get licked. (Muhammad Ali 1971)

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His body a séance
    calling him in maps.
A poetry reading is a live event. Like music it can be recorded and listened to later, creating transference of a live event into an archive of the once live. Following a tip from Philip Auslander (2002), author of several books on performance, the first use of the word ‘live’, in relation to performance, is cited by the Oxford English Dictionary as coming from 1934, long after the advent of gramophone recording technologies which emerged in the 1890s, but just some ten years after the first radio broadcasts. Auslander suggests therefore that the word ‘live’ did not stem simply from the capacity of culture to produce recordings, but instead more likely came from the advent of radio. ‘Radio,’ he says,

represented a challenge to the complementary relationship of live and recorded performances that went beyond its role in enabling recordings to replace live performances. ... Radio’s characteristic form of sensory deprivation crucially undermined the clear-cut distinction between recorded and live sound. It would seem, then, that the concept of the live was brought into being not just when it became possible to think in those terms ... but only when it became urgent to do so. (Auslander 2002: 17)

This represents another important benchmark in popular culture, the dislocation and disembodiment of the voice from the site of utterance, building upon the former disembodiment of the text from the site of the author through print technology. While these advancements helped form culture through the spread of rhetoric, ideas, music, literature and democratisation of information, they did not come without a cost. The cost was the eventual, and to a certain extent inevitable, narrativisation of subjectivity, but also the curve towards increasing specialisation. These advancements also created an artificial tension between a poetry reading and a poetry book.

A performance poetry event engages a range of critical potentials that parallel those involved in a reader reading a text silently. However, there are different and perhaps greater fields of analysis available to criticism aimed at a live reading. This
stems from the entourage of discourse attached to the body speaking. Performance and text need not be in competition with each other but because value has been placed more emphatically on one, the other has in turn been devalued. The reasons for this are worth investigating. Inspired by the internet and the poets who have maintained their commitment to the art of speaking the poem, poetry is in a state of evolution.

Is the quality of liveness enough to make a poetry reading interesting? Theorists such as Bernstein have argued from a point of view that would indicate they believe it is (see e.g. Louis Zukofsky, Nick Piombino, Dennis Tedlock, Peter Quartermain, Peter Middleton for different perspectives on readings). The US hip hop / slam poet Saul Williams, the performance poet / musician Laurie Anderson (USA) and performance poets John Cooper Clarke (UK), Amiri Baraka (USA), Bob Holman (USA), Liz Hall-Downs and Komninos from Australia, demonstrate through their practice that they believe liveness is not enough on its own. For griots or African storytellers, these kinds of distinctions are not even possible, as poetry, song and life are all already fused within their practice. In discussing spoken word remembrances with Gambian griot Alhaji Papa Bunka Susso at a conference, Bob Holman learned the interesting point: that ‘books are measured in pages; griot poems are measured in time’ (Holman 1998). Western poets indicate, through their performances, that the performative aspect of liveness is an important component of the genre, moving beyond the textual expositions and ‘anti-expressivist’ readings advocated by Bernstein. The word ‘live’, suggests Auslander, was adopted as part of a vocabulary contrived to contain the ‘crisis’ between the live and the recorded, by describing and ‘reinstating’ it as an unsustainable discursive distinction that was ‘reconceived as one of binary opposition rather than complementarity’ (Auslander 2002: 17). A cursory look at current popular culture would tag it as privileging liveness over other forms of content. It would appear that we have entered the moment of the ‘live’.
Take for example, reality television. Given the general lack of content on such shows, what is being showcased, it would appear, is people being live – doing live things in response to certain premises that are also rolled out in a temporal frame that simulates liveness. Like recorded music, the bodies of the ‘everybody’ are displaced into the consumption space of television, where the illusion of liveness is sold as entertainment. Makeover shows also perform liveness, but with a different subtext – one that subverts the past and rolls it over into a future condition or state, in a half to one hour time slot. What is privileged about liveness here is its capacity to change the look and feel of spacetime, a privileging of modification. It is also a call to the now, a call for presence. Old patterns, relationships, environments and looks are placed under duress. Pasts and presents are handed over to the control of future engineers or ‘experts’. In some cases, such as the show Changing Rooms, pasts and presents are handed over to the whimsical actions of strangers.

What is common among all these shows is the selling of potential and the strange relationships they have with senses of power. They also offer a kind of revenge voyeurism, where those under surveillance turn the surveillance gaze back onto the ‘everybody’ in a simulation of power relations that in turn resist the power relations being simulated. Big Brother is perhaps the most coherent model of this idea, with its panoptical structure, its authoritarian Big Brother voice, its incarceration. The fact that it puns these things at the same time that it simulates and enacts them creates a complex reading scene that undeniably rates – particularly among adolescents, who are in a phase of their life where power, sexuality and popularity (not mutually exclusive) are at the top of their developmental agenda.

In addition to the reality television binge we are currently confronted with, runs the parallel fetishising of liveness through the internet and mobile phones. With their ‘chat live now’ sales pitches, their ‘change narrative now’ interactivity, and their lurking information bots spying on, infecting and guiding online searches, they closely parallel the rapture of potentiation exhibited on television and talk-back radio through simulated liveness.
It makes sense that in such an environment, performance poetry, particularly Slam poetry, would find both audiences and participants. The motivations for participating in and consuming such poetry, it must be acknowledged, may in some instances have little to do with poetry, and much more to do with the interplay of liveness, presence and the social scene of the reading. This does not devalue the live reading, as poetry books can also be used as devices for creating social intimacy, but it does invite an understanding that poetry in the ‘live’ is offering a multi-dimensional experience that is relevant to this current preoccupation of popular culture. Where the ‘What if?’ drives everything, curiosity cannot ever be satisfied, but the search for resolution of the question keeps returning audiences to the premise. Herbert Blau says: ‘In a very strict sense, it is the actor’s mortality which is the actual subject [of any performance], for he is right there dying in front of your eyes’ (Blau 1982: 134). Dying in a poetry reading is not only mortal but also shameful, as the possibility for a kind of entertainment death exists, particularly in Slam, where the voting and audience interaction that is encouraged places performers at great risk of ‘dying on their arses’, to turn a colloquial phrase!
Dive, Liquid Stanzas and H2O reflect the concentrations of liveness infusing them. In H2O the disembodied voices of fish and human are resurrected in the flesh of the MIBOCU walking through the sensor array. Dive is also haunted by, and laced with, technology. From a hydrophone dropped into the middle of a school of squirrel fish in Whalebone Bay, Bermuda, to the reel to reel tape on board a boat (Catalogue number 116622); from the mouth of a South American Catfish, into a microphone held 5 cm away (Catalogue number 116604), to the muscles of a porichthys notatus (midshipman fish) being ‘irritated’ with 1 volt of electricity, to the tracings of an oscilloscope attached to its swim bladder (Catalogue number 11613); the live is where acts of creation take place.

In deferrals of the live, the voice of Shelagh announces catalogue numbers into her computer. These announcements attach to the original recordings and in using them, my compositions are haunted by the past and its ghostly voices. The poems are concentrated around technology and are filled with the spatiality and narratives of their histories. At the site of the gathered utterance there is always liveness that immediately becomes a ‘once-upon-a-time’ echo of itself.

Although liveness and its initial capture take place in the swell of the live, where living MIBOCUs make sounds that are captured, the subsequent broadcast mainly represents a signification of the live through resurrection. The poems and their pools are haunted by dead fish, dead scientists, outmoded ideas, the passing of eras, closed facilities, de-funded programs, completed compositions, etc. In this, and so many other ways, 3D poetry is of and by the world: its ecologies emerging from and created by the world’s infinite capabilities and constant erosions.
EXCHANGE 3: PERFORMANCE

We attend to his later performances as a dramatic actor with respect, but watching the nondancing, nonsinging Astaire is like watching a grounded skylark. (Vincent Canby 1987: 31)

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The wreck is an answer too shattered to speak.

Memoir of a house
cracking its beams. In early spring

after the thaw of spring’s heavy snow,
“"I have to know" he says, “I have to know.”
In offering a rationale for the rise in the ‘significance’ of poetry readings since the post-war period, Bernstein suggests that ‘more and more poets have used forms whose sound patterns are made up – that is, their poems do not follow received or prefabricated forms’ (Bernstein 1998: 6). Adding further to this is the possibility that the nature of the poem and the act of creating it, changed as a result of the dispersal of appropriate technologies for recording and distributing the voice. Perhaps the aural conditioning of Western cultures was perpetuated by close listening to the telephone and radio in the first half of the 20th century. Before television the voice was a privileged locus in the production and dispersal of cultural product. Not only did this create an environment where people were accustomed and attuned to listening to the human voice, it also, by way of the technology, created different sound environments that fuelled experimentation.

Between the advent of radio drama in the early 1920s and its heyday in the 1940-50s, the human voice became a significant spatial vector of culture, inspiring technological and dramatic experimentation. The fades in and out of reception, the cut-offs, hissing, buzzing and practice of tuning in and out of multiple stations over a short time – created disruptions that may have inspired new ways of vocalisation. Simultaneously the rapidly proliferating telephone networks resulted in streams of muffled claustrophobic voices hanging above the streets of major cities. At the same time, the popularity of jazz and a greater freedom of expression, meant that new techniques, rhythms and ways of perceiving sound informed the consciousness of writers and artists. In the USA the voice of African-Americans raged through the Anglo suburban scene and began to fracture the aural aesthetic of a racist environment. No longer were repressed cultures willing to be seen and not heard. The voice of protest became the new cultural force, and with it came the styles commonly adopted by politically motivated performance poets today. The storming tongue, the covert semantics embedded in Ebonics, the wreckage of silence and illegitimate peace through shout and protest, the imploring,
sermonising, angry, grief-stricken voice of lack, all emerged to infiltrate the acoustic biosphere of the time. Against this acoustic background and enactment of the ‘collective sounding board’ (Bernstein 1998: 6) sound poetry and the poetry reading as a phenomenon, found an audience because it demonstrated capacity to include the voice of the other in a way that the petite salons of earlier literary scenes did not.

The proliferation of vocal activity within culture facilitated by technology, helped people grow familiar with the sound of a wide range of voices, styles, speech, music and songs. As songs increased in popularity, song lyrics became a site of poetic activity and a few poets used jazz and blues rhythms and techniques in their texts. In the 1950’s rock ‘n roll added another realm of fusion and exchange between literary and musical disciplines. Recently their has been an increasing trend towards fusion of song and speech within some quarters of performance poetry. This fusion is being particularly played out within the slam, hip hop and rap scene. The relationship between poetry and song is not a recent phenomenon as ballad and lyric stem from ancient Greece in the Western Canon, while other forms of song-poetry fusions can be found in the literary histories of African, Middle Eastern and Asian civilisations.

Today poets may dip in and out of song during the reading of their poem. Song is often used as an introductory method to transit to the first stanza. Often the song bears little relation to the ensuing text, but where it does, it is assumed that the song element somehow enhances the meaning of the poem. Such singing is irritating to those members of the ‘scene’ who criticise the song voice for chafing against the pristine sonic of the spoken poem. Louis Zukofsky’s poetics raised the idea of ‘lower limit speech / upper limit music’ (Zukofsky 1981: 19) which sought to articulate the kinked arm of poetry’s difficult juggle of speech meanings and verse music. In spoken word, which generally adopts plain speech as its mode of language, there is a tendency to shift attention away from the words as linguistic spells towards their field of meanings, sounds and experiences. ‘In a primary oral
culture where the word has its existence only in sound,' suggests Ong, ‘the phenomenology of sound enters deeply into human beings’ feel for existence, as processed by the spoken word’ (Ong 1988: 72). We don’t hear the words as much as their meanings and sounds. The blurring of distinctions between poetry and song, by the use of song inside a poem, upsets the theoretical distinctions imposed upon the poem as a construct.

strictly within the range of speech-mode perception. It is the transformation of language to sound, rather than the setting of language in sound, that distinguishes song from recitation. (Bernstein 1998: 18)

In the more experimental quarters of performance poetry there is a deliberate interrogation of this distinction.

On the other hand, poetic language is expressed as a compulsion to hear the sounds of words and to see the appearance of words that are naturally full of significations. In performance poetry we cannot see the words but when we hear the poetry, extending Zukofsky’s argument, we cannot help but see their shape in the background of our reception of them. This is what makes it interesting to hear work aloud that you are familiar with on the page. The shapes of the typography are invested with sound translations, just as a sounding by the poet fills the acoustic biosphere with pictographic shapes – shapes formed by utterance and the body’s interrogation of print’s grapheme through gestural signification. The features of poetic language common to performance poetry that express it as phoneme, are rhyme, rhythm, assonance, alliteration and extra-linguistic articulates such as breath, stutter, twitch and other non-verbal expressions.

This creates multiplicity and dissonance, as verbal structures mutate texts by stripping them of their page (if the poem comes from that origin) and inserting them into a MIBOCU capable of expressing and eliciting emotion. Emotional shock can arise if this relationship exceeds the reader’s ability to integrate it (Tsur 2000). In
performance poetry the words are multidimensional because they are spoken, linguistic, semantic sounds that arrive inside the reader’s cochlea with the voice of the poet, while at the same time they stream towards cognition through the optical system’s manufacture of the word’s pictorial sign, comprehending intertextuality through multiple sites of simultaneous reception. Wittgenstein alluded to this in his idea that visualisation of words, thoughts and propositions created reality through the picture: ‘the picture is a model of reality’ (Wittgenstein 1922: 2.12).

Pictorialization, as a method of reception, is one way for intertextual convergence to occur; it is not necessarily the only way. Add to this the ambivalent signification taking place through gesture and it becomes easy to see why performance poetry has a three-dimensional poetic nature.
uncanny cavum

Performance positions the MIBOCU as a visual device that performs its ‘phonological string’ (Tsur 2000), or site of meaning, through a ‘graphemic string’ – which in the reading of visual poems articulates the look of the sign, but in performed poems, articulates the signage of emotions, through signalling gestures and vocalisations. In performance the visual signification resides in the MIBOCU’s relationship to space, extra-linguistic features and the facial expressions that signify the text. On the page, the text and its visual representation are performed in relationship to the unused space. Authenticity becomes a reading that depends upon the fit between what is being signified and how it is recognised as an accurate and empathetic signification.

Whether the return to spoken poetry represents another episodic notation in the canon of poetry, or whether it signifies an emergent strand of a new canon, it is too soon to say. Tsur argues that ‘speech sounds are special in our cognitive economy, and visual patterning cannot achieve the naturalness of their patterning’ (Tsur 2000) and although he is referring to the distinctions between a visual poetry text and a plain text, the idea can be applied to performance poetry. If visual patterning cannot accurately represent the smoothness of speech sounds, then speech sounds also cannot be used to coherently represent bodily experiences associated with the text. As a visual text contains an organised typography that attempts to signify beyond its words and meanings, so too a performance text contains what I call an ‘expressography’ – an equivalent to the signification implicit in the typeface. Only expressography contains systems of expressive elements, rather than typographic ones.

An expressography is a system that signifies the emotional imports and cues of a performance poetry text. It contains a certain culturally specific vocabulary to support readings. An expressography manifests the unique expressive vocabulary and presence of the MIBOCU and as such adds another dimension to the ‘voice’ of
a poet. Just as clichés infiltrate all forms of cultural expression, they can enter the expressography. I have witnessed this in the performance of Slam poems by individuals who recognise that certain gestures or movements can accompany certain words to gain audience approval, which translates to higher scores. In turn, the audience responds to the expressography in the way expected of them, in much the same way that they would respond to a theatre or music performance. It is not surprising that performance poetry would generate a certain set of expressive signifiers, as any discipline performed in front of the public seems to generate particular postures and intonations specific to it. For example, business and marketing disciplines discuss body language as a way to ‘read’ people and therefore manipulate them. Television news readers have a set of poses and eye movements that are media specific, as do popular music bands. Hopefully, performance poetry won’t fall into the trap of binding its texts in clichéd expressographies.

Even without a major uptake of ‘performance’ in poetry, renewed interest in live readings has resulted in more writers becoming aware of the way they deliver their poems. Trying to draw a line between performance poetry and a reading will become quite difficult if the only distinction between the two is the presence of movement and / or a book. The presence of sound inside the text can be either meaningful or meaningless and the degree to which sound contributes to sense categorises the poem somewhere on the continuum between reading and manifestation. The cognisance of the poem is challenged when the page is missing. Everything depends upon the sound and meaning that is heard on the first listen. It cannot be re-read then and there, which grants performance poets a case for repeating their work several times, even with the same audience, at later performances. This allows readers to at least consider the text, even if the awareness of the poet’s reading influences the nature of the read. In the more ‘manifested’ varieties of a performance poem there is more room for judgement based upon the audible structures of the linguistic rather than the semantic endeavour of the poem. Reading is disrupted, and so is understanding. Memory
becomes a unique reading requirement for the performance poetry consumer.

In this way, a performed poem is both durational and spatial. It resides in the perturbed present. Poets speaking a text disturb the present because although their bodies move to occupy the space of the stage, once there, the bodies may move very little – disturbing not only space, but time as well. The more the poet’s body moves in space, the more it shifts towards becoming unmeasurable time in unplottable space. Anne Game’s reading of Henri Bergson’s *Time and Free Will* discusses movement as a way to compose time:

A moving body occupies successive positions in space, but the process by which it moves from one position to another is one of duration which eludes space. ... Motion itself, the act, is not divisible, only an object is; space which is motionless can be measured but the motion of bodies cannot. Movements cannot occupy space, they are duration. ... To think of a body occupying points in space is to do so from a perspective outside the body, not from the perspective of the moving body. To be in the body is to be in time. (Game 1995: 200)

What happens when you remove the text and are left with a rhythmic occupation of space? How does that fit into the model of a performance poem? How do you describe the experience of watching a person imitate a drum machine, DJ or drum kit? Within the hip-hop community, performance, beat boxing and drum kit personification is promoted as vocal percussion. Practitioners, who may spend less than five minutes speaking in a 20-minute piece, have no qualms about calling themselves poets or musicians and they are not ostracised by their poetry community for their unusual approach. These practitioners are interesting, not so much for what they do necessarily, as much as for what they represent – a non-linguistic, albeit musical sensibility, within the realm of the performance poem.

Helpful here is a reading of a poetry event as an expression of Lefebvre’s desire to see a rebellion against banality. Lefebvre, according to Rob Shields, proposes that we should take advantage of any moment that contains a potential for
revelation, emotional clarity and self-presence as the basis for becoming more self-fulfilled. This concept of “Moments” reappears throughout [Lefebvre’s] work as a theory of presence and the foundation of a practice of emancipation. Experiences of revelation, déjà-vu sensations, but especially love and committed struggle are examples of Moments. (Shields 2001)

Lefebvre’s Moments offer resistance to what he considers the negative political and ideological effects of capitalism’s desire for systemic order. Poets performing experimental texts in public spaces manifest a capacity for disorder through their language, lifestyles and ideologies, thereby resisting government and corporate desires for order and social control.
In his introduction to the anthology *Close Listening*, Charles Bernstein says:

To speak of the poem in performance is, then, to overthrow the idea of the poem as a fixed, stable, finite linguistic object; it is to deny the poem its self-presence and its unity. Thus, while performance emphasizes the material presence of the poem, and of the performer, it at the same time denies the unitary presence of the poem, which is to say its metaphysical unity. (Bernstein 1998: 9)

This idea of the poem as a manifestation, rather than an object of static representation, resonates powerfully with my project. Performance poetry could be seen as a form of poetry that privileges performance over written texts. As I will discuss shortly however, this definition strains to be useful when considering the range of poetry that is currently labelled as performance poetry.

Spoken or enacted poems are the most obvious candidates for the nomenclature of ‘performance poetry’, however quite a number of critics and writers (for example, the Black Mountain School poets Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, and Charles Olson (1933-56) who practiced ‘Projective Verse’) have made a case for writing as an act of performance in itself, making it difficult to argue distinctions based upon pure vocalisation. While accepting that this indeed may be true, for the purpose of this critique I am limiting the definition of performance poetry to the creation, activation, enactment or engineering of a poem in a spacetime outside of a traditionally printed page. It is an arbitrary distinction but one that serves the investigation of a poetry practice situated beyond the page and its polyrhythmic, verbally oriented, physically emboldened mesh of poetic topologies.

Criticisms levelled against performance poetry are similar to those Tsur articulates as common amongst critics and theoreticians of visual poetry:
… first, that it is "artificial," "eccentric," "extravagant," "manneristic"; and second, that its appearance in the history of literature is discontinuous: it tends to occur in certain historical-social-cultural contexts and is absent from others. (Tsur 2000)

Performance poetry as a genre has a discontinuous history since its earliest oral traditions. Perhaps interest in it has re-emerged because culture affirms expression on a stage space: the space of culture where almost everything is understood as a construction, an artifice – including identity. Inside the performance of poetry resides a critique of the space of the stage: whether that stage is in physical or virtual space. Performing poetry also reclaims orality, which in turn resists usurpation by the typographic lexicon. The typographic lexicon, which is so immensely valuable to society, has a weakness in its capacity for sound. Its range is far vaster than anything orality could hope to achieve, yet it is restricted to documenting only the things that can be said, and codes for how they might be articulated, sung or acted upon.

The term 'performance poetry' is applied in most discussions that endeavour to explain the difference between a 'straight' poetry reading and a reading that expresses additional attributes. It may be superficially appropriate but it encompasses too many fields of practice to be critically viable. ‘Performance poetry’ is most commonly used to indicate that poetry is being acted out in some way: through the use of voice, dramatic styles (e.g. comedy, cabaret) and a familiarised text, i.e. one that may or may not be memorised but one with which the poet is familiar enough to engage the audience. Further, performance poetry is non-specific, in terms of authorship, and is culturally indoctrinated; being expressed differently in different cultures. Performance poetry is a multifarious interplay between poet, culture, text, space and audience – one that establishes embodied subjectivity as a core research position for critical discourse concerned with the spoken word.

Performance is not something bestowed upon poetry to create the phenomenon
known as a performance poem. It is intrinsic to the creation of the work through the editorial process of reading a poem aloud. Poems perform with or without the presence of the poets who write them and this awareness influences how and why poems are written. Texts also shape the choices that are made about where to place the poems: on the page, in a multimedia environment or on a ‘stage’ – which may simply be a corner in a coffee shop. Tsur claims that poetic language naturally performs through its ‘hierarchy of signs: grapheme – phoneme – word – meaning (each later item being the signified of the preceding one)’ (Tsur 2000). However, when translated by the authoring poet in a live reading, the label ‘performance poet’ is given to some poets but not others. The term fails to accurately represent the range of practice taking place within it.

In Close Listening, Bernstein invokes an excellent compass for mapping and discussing the inscriptions of informants practicing and critiquing performance poetry. Bernstein approaches the term ‘performance poetry’ from the point of view of a reading. Inside this expansive view of performance poetry lie key sites for critiquing the sonic aspect of the form. The sonic aspect relates to the ‘total sound of the work’, ‘the relation of sound to semantics’, the material and immaterial qualities of the voice and its production, the mutability of the style of the utterance, the acoustic context, the ‘expressivism’ of the reading, the embodied field, its lexical, iconic and prosodic features (Bernstein 1998: 10). For utterance is not centred on the literary tease of the tissue of speech so much as the social dialogue and consciousness operating at its site.

In writing about poetry beyond the page I am prompted to address some of the wider issues surrounding poetry readings, both competitive and non-competitive. Poetry readings in the last hundred years have segued through various formats: salon, cabaret, theatre, open mike, festival, feature, audio, film, hypertext, flash, machine generation and an infinite number of expressions of these within aesthetic demarcations and ideologies. Poetry has become the perfect vector for conversing and experimenting with conceptual, language and technological developments in
the 20th and 21st centuries. Through Slam poetry – a performance poetry competition – and other styles of public reading, it has also become a place of gathering and distributing poetry in a more localised fashion. Poetry readings bring poets into contact with the public and with each other, and they help the formation of generational and cross generational, cultural and cross-cultural, links, affinities, alliances, communities, scenes, networks, exchanges, and the like. … The reading is the site in which the audience of poetry constitutes and reconstitutes itself. It makes itself visible to itself. (Bernstein 1998: 22)

Poetry audiences are difficult to circumscribe. Live-poetry consumers even more so. In poetry readings we encounter the socially produced space of artistic endeavour discussed by Lefebvre. The space of the reading mediates the roles produced by the MIBOCU reading and / or playing. Audience members consume the MIBOCU of the poet, with their optical bias, but also apprehend the Other as viable material body operating under the illusion of transparency. The world shines through a reverberation of constantly shifting and produced reflections in poets’ bodies. Social space joins in for the framing and silver-backing of the reflected prosthetic of multiplicity that extends the body in semblances of disclosure.

An audience could be thought of as a cast of extended bodies forming a group in active production of social space. The gestural systems discussed by Lefebvre become, in a poetry reading, performances that articulate subjectivity within the group body through a coded set of compositions: ideology, language, associations, flesh, etc: ‘To belong to a given society is to know and use its codes for politeness, courtesy, affection, parley, negotiation, trading, and so on – as also for the declaration of hostilities’ (Lefebvre 1991: 215). Poetry requires different codes and capacities within its different practices. Audiences require different literacies and different modes of speaking for each of these practices, i.e. electronic, performance, page, sound. Transposing Lefebvre, these different schools of poetry are each bound to a practice that performs within a niche of ideology, history,
spacetime and that produces a discrete range of gestural systems to both represent itself and the space of the genre.
**reading mimes**

A ‘reading’ could be thought of as an expression of a printed text without regard for dramatic devices; more a saying than a reading – a sounding of a text that does little more than give voice to it. Bernstein calls these ‘anti-performative’, due to their ‘lack of spectacle, drama, and dynamic range, as exemplified especially in a certain minimal – anti-expressivist – mode of reading’ (Bernstein 1998: 10). Such a reading may be chosen by poets opposed to any dramatic imports into the text – poets who place explicit value ‘almost exclusively on the acoustic production of a single unaccompanied speaking voice with all other theatrical elements being placed, in most cases, out of frame’ (Bernstein 1998: 10). Although I doubt it is possible to place theatrical elements out of frame given that a) audiences are acculturated to the theatrical, and b) even the quietest, stillest bodies form a theatrical frame, this is a style of reading that either willingly or unknowingly attempts to disembodied its voice in a parody of, or reverence for, the typographic field of the poem.

Bernstein’s ideas about performance poetry continue the tradition established by Charles Olson (who adopted the ideologies of the eminent Objectivist poets of the 1930s: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen Carl Rakosi and Basil Bunting [Unknown 1997]) of attempting to neutralise the poet’s subjectivity through what he calls ‘objectivism’:

Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the “subject” and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. (Olson 1950)

The subjectivity or ‘ego’ of an individual poet in performance is, according to followers of the objectivist and projective impulses, allegedly negated through an emphasis on the sounds, breath and language contained in the text. The poem is viewed as a self contained object. A reading which privileges the spare articulation
or sounding of words over forms of enhanced expression would thereby resist the subjectivity of the poet (ego) in the scene of the public reading. To be true to such a goal, the traditional accoutrements of readings, such as asides, introductions, audience engagements, etc would be sacrificed in order to represent the objectiveness of both poet and poem. In reality a poem read from a printed text is rarely done without the accompaniment of introductions, asides or other styles of commentary, so even without the markers of theatricality (e.g. costumes, gestures, characterisation, movements, etc), a reading can upset the text and become a performing relation to it. Such readings enhance the performance capacities of the poet’s MIBOCU and undermine the anti-expressivist or objectivist’s projects.

Bernstein and other Language poets drawing from the philosophies of the Black Mountain School (such as Olson), focused primarily on the processes involved in the creation of text rather than its delivery. Olson’s ‘Projective Verse’ essay (1950) suggested that poetry’s goal was to contain the natural rhythms of breathing, speech and thinking during its creation. Resisting the closed forms of pre-ordained structures, Olson insisted that poetry should emerge from spontaneous writing that followed its own logic:

Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of essential use, must, I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings. (Olson 1950)

Readings that follow such impulses inflect the poem with the sound and grain of the author’s voice, adding a certain tonal jouissance to the experience. An ‘anti-expressivist’ or ‘anti-performative’ reading, as Bernstein calls it, may also reflect a poet’s lack of skill, commitment, self-consciousness and / or unwillingness to invest in the delivery of their text or to reveal anything about themselves. For those who have suffered through the stumbling, mumbled almost apologetic readings of some poets, the experience may be as Bernstein calls it, ‘hypnotic’, or consciousness altering, but it is also more often experienced as soporific for its capacity to induce
sleep. In the intimacy of a hushed room, Bernstein proposes that a poet reading in such an anti-expressivist mode ‘physically connects the speaker and listener, moving to overcome the self-consciousness of the performance context’ (Bernstein 1998: 11). Furthermore, he argues that:

… the anti-expressivist mode of reading works to defeat the theatricality of the performance situation, to allow the listener to enter into a concave acoustic space rather than be pushed back from it, as in a more propulsive reading mode (which creates a convex acoustic space). (Bernstein 1998: 11)

The allegation that such a reading defeats theatricality cannot be substantiated if one considers that anti-expressivism is in itself a theatrical device. A canvassing of just a few poetry readings would alert to the highly self-conscious nature of such proceedings. The concavity of the acoustic warp taking place in such a reading is an intimate and inviting experience only if the audience is able to appreciate the text, appreciate the poet and has excellent sustained listening skills. Otherwise, the acoustic field’s convexity is invoked through the audience pulling the plug, so to speak, on their attention and energetic participation, thereby distancing themselves from the reader. It is also difficult to sustain an argument that this anti-expressivist mode is more aurally oriented than a reading with ‘propulsion’. If an audience member is rendered somnolent as a result of the monotonic wash of an anti-expressivist performance, how much are they hearing of the poem? Are they hearing the poem and its semantic / linguistic purrs and sputters, or are they thinking about sex, shopping or the coffee they will need in order to jolt themselves awake when the poet has finished?

What moves to the foreground in such an experience is precisely the frame that Bernstein is advocating against, the role of the author’s body: the nervous twitches, repetitious behaviours or sways, inadvertent foot tapping or hand wringing. These sorts of extraneous visual and extra-linguistic ‘noises’ have their volume turned up and what fades to the background, in my experience, is attention to, and
comprehension of, what the poet is saying. This experience is also true of more animated poetic deliveries. I would like to suggest that Bernstein’s anti-expressivist ideal is no more auditory than any other reading and that it does not even deny the visual because, in the absence of engagement with a text, the poet’s face will become the site of the most intense reading activity by audience members – as demonstrated by brain imaging research (see Bruce & Young [1986] for more on this). Therefore the anti-performative is capable of becoming a highly visual experience. The mission of this style of reading seeks to ‘find the sound in the words’ in a ‘more monovalent, minimally inflected … unaugmented, mode as touching on the essence of the medium’ (Bernstein 1998: 11). To the audience this can feel like eavesdropping on a poet reading aloud to themselves in a kind of aural form of masturbation.

*heightened, or sounded*

In heightened or sounded styles of reading, tone, intonation and other dramatic devices are used but with subtlety and with emphasis remaining on an author’s rendition of their text. Texts from a diversity of styles are used and are usually read from the page.

The heightened reading supports the development of ideas by sounding out the text. It is also a goal unto itself. The difference between this and an ordinary reading is that the acoustic potential of the linguistic and semantic qualities of a poem are highlighted by an account of the text that explores the expressive quality of sounding. This style of reading supports diversity and flux as the qualities of sounding are more potentiated than the visual reliefs of the scriptures of a page poem (e.g. fonts). Discrepancies between the original text and the text of the performance are driven by ‘interpretations based on the text versus interpretations based on the performance’ (Bernstein 1998: 7) although the texts themselves may be fluid and recombinant in nature, belying their status as objects of immovable
type. A text is a scene of editorial palimpsests and is therefore also a staged event, to a certain and controversial degree. Emotional and textual translations are expanded at this level of reading, satisfying a need to hear the sonic field of a poem through an author’s voice. The rendition of the poem by the poet ‘is secondary and fundamentally inconsequential to the “poem itself”’ (Bernstein 1998: 8). A heightened poetry reading addresses the homelessness of the author’s MIBOCU by providing temporary shelter in an existence ‘uniquely tied to the reading aloud of the text’ (Bernstein 1998: 7). Look at the poet’s feet and see the toes tapping.

**oratory**

Oratory readings use memory, tone, intonation and other dramatic devices for dramatic signification of content and text, where the text is entirely language based and predominantly narrative driven. This style could be said to draw from the oral traditions of the bard. In considering Tsur’s discussion of the three meanings contained in the word ‘mannerism’ as used by art historians ‘to refer to artistic and literary phenomena that focus the reader’s (or the audience’s) attention on the individual figures rather than on the composition of the whole’ (Tsur 1997), it is easy to see how the discourse sits comfortably here. Repetition, rhythm and rhyme are used to support memorisation and to create an aural cadence for the poetry. Slam and hip-hop poetry characterize some key features of mannerist discourse, i.e. excessive ornamentation, ‘frequent repetition of a limited number of stylistic devices’ (Tsur 1997), technically recognisable methods for ‘agitating the form and the phrase’ (Sypher in Tsur 1997), and trendiness.

**embodied**

A reading could be defined as embodied when the MIBOCU investment in a poem’s delivery is unscripted and subconscious, while remaining integral to the piece. Although Hegel and Merleau-Ponty have given us an understanding of the
importance of embodiment in determining our experience and translation of the world, the distinction I wish to make here is that the poem classified as ‘embodied’ is one where the poet experiences a degree of textual possession. The poem is more than experienced through the MIBOCU, it is represented by it. An embodied poem is the result of a merger between text and presence which may best be understood through a consideration of Chi energy, which under the Chinese systems of Tai Chi and Fung Shui represents the flow of energy within and between things.

An embodied poem might differ from a performed poem as a result of its strategies and motivations. An embodied poem is more vulnerable to transparencies in the poet’s ‘beingness’ inside the text, than it would be in the rehearsed and choreographed moment of the stylised performance of a poem. Inevitably however, the definition can only ever be loose due to the porosity of the experiences. It would be impossible to hold embodiment in one corner and performance in another, as the two conditions intrinsically bear the condition of the other within them. There is a need to articulate a sensibility of difference without enclosing the differences within the definitions.

Embodiment could be considered to be a style of performance that is dedicated more to self-generation, discovery and focus than it is to satisfying audiences. Its motivations are to seek out the energetics of a poem’s unsayable features and represent them through the MIBOCU’s actions, voice or ‘aura’. For this reason I choose the word ‘embodiment’ to account for the activities of poets who are living their texts as opposed to acting them out. Poets who simply read their texts do not foreground their energetics, while those embodying texts do. I believe this is what distinguishes them. Embodiment has a quality of searching attached to it and a poet who repeats the same poem 100 times a year, year in year out, is unlikely to be searching for the multiplicity of the voices inside the poem-body merger. Consequently there is no apprehension or rupturing of normal consciousness to do
that. The rehearsed gesture, inflection and so on, is not necessarily embodiment, unless the poet brings consciousness to the MIBOCU in the process of delivery.

*enacted*

When poets perform an enactment of a text, they are acting it out rather than experiencing the text in an improvised manner. Again I notice the tenuous nature of the distinction but see the value of sustaining it for the purposes of this inquiry – even if only temporarily.

Here the ‘material’ and ‘materializing dimension’ of sound in the poetry ‘calls into play such developments as sound poetry, performance poetry, radio plays and radio “space,” movie soundtracks, poetry / music collaborations, and other audioworks’ (Tsur 2000). Texts may include scriptwriting devices. Performance appears to dominate the text in a sense that the expression of the text is often given more weight than the text itself. Performances tend to approximate each other as they are repeated, although they are never exact copies.

*improvised, sound or manifested*

Poems written to be performed and not for the page, whether or not they are later translated for the page, could be classified as improvised, sound or manifested, depending upon the style of each piece.

In describing Amiri Baraka’s work, Bernstein elegantly represents the sensibility of this style of text as one that ‘works to spur the (silent, atomized) reader into performance – it insists on action; the page’s apparent textual “lack” is the motor of its form’ (Bernstein 1998: 7-8). Whenever represented in text form this style is likely to require ‘inventive typography’ that provides ‘a score for the performance’ (Bernstein 1998: 7). Pieces are volatile and transient and if associated with a text,
they demonstrate infidelity to it. Thus the poetry reading becomes a ‘happening’, to adopt John Cage’s term, an experience that cannot be replicated outside a signified framework of being: ‘The poem, viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual intertranslatability, has a fundamentally plural existence’ and lacks unity (Bernstein 1998: 9). The equivalent in Lefebvre’s work is the ‘Moment’. Moments, like Happenings, are oriented towards composing and acknowledging potential. Moments are sites where creativity can intersect self and Other through spatial practice.

Poetry written for the page that is read aloud, with or without the printed matter, is only beyond the page in the sense that it is extended. It is an invigorated text. There is a difference between a poem embellished by presence and a performed poem. Although there is widespread acknowledgment that performance poetry requires a sense of poetic integrity, i.e. a poem’s ability to work on the page, this essentialist view of a poem does not encourage experimentation with the possibilities created by the performance aspect of the genre. When I am preparing for the performance of a poem, I am struck by its potential to incarnate its unsayable qualities through the device of my body. It may do this in ways I did not anticipate while I was writing it, and in ways that are difficult to represent within its text. For example, a textual stuttering is experientially different to witnessing or embodying a stutter.

Performance poets’ bodies can be justified, in the sense that they represent an occupation of the betweenness existing between the mike, the environment and the audience. This justification is however a multi-dimensional one; being neither strictly typographic nor textual. Online and performance poets’ texts are both immaterial and experiential. They are manifested through spoken and written words, acoustic and visual fields and in relation to bodies and technology. The online text, through its ‘magical’ materiality, is an illusion as well as an illumination. The performed text cannot be justified in the traditional margins of print because it cannot be understood as a material object. All that is graspable is a semantic residue. The calligraphic is witnessed through the gestures of performance and the construction
of screen space, which afford a three-dimensional calligraphic field in comparison to the book. Every text is a code of:

Derridian / Foucauldian differance; codework is exemplary of the process of deferral and rewrite. Codework, like wryting, is an embodiment within virtual ontologies; wryting disturbs towards the body, desire, language - that language of codework, ruptured by codework. Inner speech as well is self-referential, a decoding of every text spoken within it, before the reader, or among the readers. And nothing fulfills utterly every Absolute itself is codework, a deferral - … Therefore consumption, the ravenous, is at the heart of things to the extent there is any meaning at all. (Sondheim 2004)

Consumption begins with separation. The microphone accepts the voice separated from the body and channels it through sound systems into the ears of listeners. When I occasionally use voice-recognition software to write, I am drawn to considering what is taking place there. The voice-recognition software does not distinguish between my voice, my dog's voice, my bird's voice or environmental sounds. I can't help think that what is taking place is a mirror of the performance of relationships between noise and self, text and subjectivity, space and place; through the scribing of the voice-recognition software. Such software codes and interprets the disembodied voice and resurrects it as a creature of texts that usually don't make sense and that lack integrity. Voice recognition software debauches the word, runs around with the cross-cultural code of the dictionary. It seduces the code of the caged training voice to translate linguistic perishables into the connective tissue of the typeface – the breath made visible between the sheets (screens). Voice-recognition software spies on you, it captures your movements and turns them into limericks. It is a transgenic libertine because it will accept the bark of your dog, the mimicry of your parrot or the chirping of your gecko as freely as it accepts your conversation. The dragon speaks unnaturally on the desktop. (Dragon Naturally Speaking is the name of my voice recognition software.)

A poetry reading can split the dragon into its drag on aspect. Voice recognition becomes an imperative for the audience which, like the software, filtrates the voice
through codes of resonance, comprehension and articulation, and reconfigures the
listening into a subjectively translated experience. Poet, MIBOCU, poem and
medium are all kin of the code. A performance poem in a public space and an audio
poem distributed via the internet, share identities as units of sound and language,
packaged in a web of code, that exists in a spacetime continuum determined by
mutuality; the mutuality of author and reader.
The transmutation of written texts into embodied poetic moments, the exploration of parallels between virtual bodies and real bodies, and the role of production on the nature of a poem, are all interests that can be reached via an engagement with performance poetry. In cyberspace and live reading space, the poet’s MIBOCU becomes an exhibition of histories – genetic, cultural and experiential knowings. Yet in cyberspace the performance poem becomes captured in a publishing medium that lends authority to the version that is captured. For example recordings of performance poems published on my website *The Stalking Tongue Book II; Slamming the Sonnet* (2002) stand in for the performances that were captured, and represent the performance style of each of the poets; even if the recordings are a departure from normal style. Authority is given to the documentation because it is difficult to be live on demand for an extended period of time. Even if giving live performances on demand was sustainable, the fact that the broadcast would be mediated through technology and separated from the MIBOCU makes it always only ever a deferred simulation of liveness – deferred through the lags in technology, the pixelated breakdown of the image and by the image standing in for the poet performing. Although it may be an aberration, an ephemeral manifestation, or a rigorously produced version, the performance poem rarely becomes reconfigured for digital space, rendering it with a largely archival presence online. Such performances rely on broadcast as their main method, with mp3 downloads being the most proliferate of these. However, as bandwidths open up and digital communities such as ‘Facebook’, ‘MySpace’ and ‘YouTube’ help overcome technical issues, an increasing number of poetry performance broadcasts can be expected in cyberspace.

One of the catalogues of performance poetry currently available online that features videos of performances is ‘Live Poets’. A visit to livepoets.com will demonstrate how the watching of live performances does not create the same experience as being present at a live performance. A performance poem is being spoken of differently
here to a poem performed, as poems performed in cyberspace have their own canon and disciplinary frameworks within electronic environments. The space between performer, poem and audience is embodied differently in cyberspace and public reading spaces.
plastic maps and core connectivities

I hesitate with Bernstein's assertion that:

… the poetry reading enacts the poem not the poet; it materializes the text not the author; it performs the work, not the one who composed it. In short, the significant fact of the poetry reading is less the presence of the poet than the presence of the poem. (Bernstein 1998: 13)

However, his view countenances Tsur's 'cognitive poetics', which privileges the substitution of the poem for the poet, which although appropriate in the grain of a printed text, is problematic in a performance poetry setting. In addition, Bakhtin helps us look at some of the exchanges taking place in a live reading as a result of its responsiveness – ‘any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker’ (Bakhtin 1986: 68). In the creation and utterance of the text, suggests Bakhtin, the poet enacts more than the text and more than themselves, as do the audience. A live poetry reading, like a play, manifests a living genre perhaps more than other kinds of readings, e.g. readings from novels at writers’ festivals, as it is possible to offer complete texts and semantic units to the scene. Bakhtin discusses the need for completion of an utterance within a scene of dialogue in order for a meaningful response to be configured. Without a finalised utterance, i.e. one that has a 'specific quality of completion' (Bakhtin 1986: 73), the reader is only capable of re-enacting the postmodern reading nightmare; of constantly refracting back to the self who is no self. Bakhtin offers a way to make meaning in response to others, although it has its limitations, particularly in relation to its lack of account of open-endedness. ‘A unitary language,’ according to Bakhtin, ‘gives expression to forces working toward concrete and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization’ (Bakhtin 1981: 271). An important quality of performance poetry, or other forms of expression stemming from the MIBOCU, is a lack of unity and cultural centralisation. The MIBOCU is incapable of such a fixed sense of unity as its
osmotic processes are dependent on diffusions and concentrations that are in constant exchange within and around itself.

Tsur’s ideas on cognitive poetics that are supported by Bernstein, involve substitution, which in the situation of a performance poetry event is a metaphorical device for removing the poet from the poem. I find myself at right angles to Bernstein on this and would like to make a case for noticing that the ‘significant fact of the poetry reading’ (Bernstein 1998: 13) is precisely the presence of the poet. The poet’s liveness is inseparable from the poem’s liveness. Bernstein’s own argument about the inappropriateness of actors reading a poet’s text can be brought into play here. The poetry reading is enacting far more than the text, it is enacting identity and materialising culture, and the work it performs is inseparable from the one who composed it. If the author’s presence was not critical or compositional to the experience of a poetry reading, what difference would it make if an actor carried out the work of reading?

Performance poetry exists in an inter-subjective environment and therefore it increases opportunities for faceted moments of thought, action, voice, text, consciousness, etc in a way that extends meaning or experience beyond an individual’s reconciliation with it. When a group of people in a room listen to a poetry reading or performance there is a sense that the poem is being rendered across multiple sites of consciousness, offering an invisible feedback loop that creates another disembodied poem – the poem created by the group that drifts in and out of an individual’s experience as a kind of poetic spectre. This intimate mysterious moment is possible in a live reading because the energy fields of multiple bodies are added: their nervousness, tension, self confidence, etc. Does poetry have any responsibility towards its audience or does the Platonic idea persist whereby, as Ong speculates after reading Eric Havelock (1963):

Plato’s exclusion of the poets from his Republic was in fact Plato’s rejection of the pristine aggregative, paratactic, oral-style thinking perpetuated in
Homer in favor of the keen analysis or dissection of the world and of thought itself made possible by the interiorization of the alphabet in the Greek psyche. (Ong 1998: 28)

Plato puts it more simply when he opposes the technology of writing in *Phaedrus*: ‘those who acquire [writing] will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources’ (Plato 1973: 96). These sentiments mark the beginning of a long history of criticism against technological advancements. Behind such criticisms lies a suspicion that the value of what is lost is perhaps higher than what is gained in the adoption of innovations. Of greatest concern is the loss of knowledge that new technologies are accused of facilitating. In criticising hypertext, Michael Heim echoes Plato’s fear when he says: ‘Total information is the illusion of knowledge, and hypertext favors this illusion by letting the user hop around at the speed of thought’ (Heim 1993: 38). Myron Tuman pointedly draws our attention to the implications to literacy of hypertext transcending printed information. Tuman says that ‘literacy [will be pushed] in the direction of information management’ (Tuman 1992: 78) under the duress of hypertext.

Following this logic, it can be speculated that consideration of an audience ultimately results in a pre-occupation with entertainment and an extravagant gratification of the senses.
The potential for orality to engage with language, sonic and performance, combines with the textual features of form, rhythm, image, tone, lyric and rhyme to make performance poetry an exciting site of experimentation. Orality is a medium of sound and body. The power of the voice to speak is coupled with a moving body to add dimensionality to a written poem, or to construct a poem independently of the page. Orality adds time to the space of speech as it is voiced in the moment and full of the echoes of what has just passed, together with predictions of what is to come. This temporal quality, according to Ong, offers a mode for redundancy in orality: ‘the oral utterance has vanished as soon as it is uttered. ... Redundancy, repetition of the just-said, keeps both speaker and hearer surely on track’ (Ong 1988: 40). Orality in spoken poetry at this point in time is influenced not only by the past and the literary epics of history, but also by the technology of writing, mass communication, music and the visual templates for performance that saturate culture.

Learning to read involves sounding words. Sounding offers a pathway to constructing the sounds required to enhance semiotic understanding in early development. Ong discusses the psychodynamics of orality in his book Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1988) where he attempts to situate orality’s performance, psychological, social and literary functions. Ong claims that orality manifests a situational rather than abstract method of communication. Ways in which this manifests include: an acknowledgment of its qualities of exchange, requiring both a listener and a speaker, and the need for poets, performance poets in this case, to 'sink into their own store of themes and formulas' in order to set or 'memorize' it for retelling' (Ong 1988: 60). This reference to the need for the oral text to be filtered through embodiment in order to be remembered, offers a view of memory making that departs from the method of rote learning. It is a highly introspective idea that underpins, perhaps even contradicts, Ong’s view of primary orality as something that 'fosters personality structures that in certain ways are
more communal and externalized, and less introspective ... oral communication unites people in groups’ (Ong 1988: 68).

There are two different forces at work in the space of primary orality that seem to contradict each other’s operations within Ong’s theory of primary orality. One is the space of the performer undergoing memorisation of the text, through an embodied method that connects the text to the speaker’s MIBOCU, and the other is the space of the performance – a social space that Ong sees as being innately conservative due to the older age of experienced poets and storytellers. Ong believes that new ideas can only come from the young, which is itself a conservative idea, but more importantly configures oral texts as static logs that are transmitted through generations in ways that are not open to meaningful change. If this were true, it makes it difficult for Ong to argue that the age of the performer is what confers conservatism or innovation to a text. If oral texts are voiced from generation to generation, and ‘oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings’ (Ong 1988: 42), then how can they not be subject to constant change?

Ong says that the technology of writing, which enabled long poems to be recorded on paper, shifted culture from an oral-aural focus towards vision, which promoted interior thinking and facilitated the development of an expanding vocabulary. Print technologies, increasing literacy, and the growth in reading and writing skills brought about through print, facilitated a growing vocabulary within the literacy culture. Ironically, print finalised and closed the texts, according to Ong, which resulted in them gaining a discursive force and authority that was not present in oral texts. Books facilitated a knowledge economy that was not possible within oral cultures, due to the dispersal and dissemination of knowledge that printing made possible. The advent of writing introduced space between an idea and its reception, thereby altering consciousness.
The emergence of telephones, radios and televisions resulted in what Ong calls secondary orality, an essentially ‘more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print’ (Ong 1988: 136) resulting in larger groups than those produced by primary orality. As new media such as speech-recognition software, voicemail, mobile phones, audio-books, etc emerge to support greater orality within culture, a third kind of literacy is growing, based upon an integration of visual, kinaesthetic, aural and orally situated consciousness and knowledge formation. Poetry’s capacity to incorporate multiple literacies within varied media and its capacity for partnership with other art forms makes it one of the ideal languages for expressing and learning in this spacetime of hybrid orality.
H₂O’s moving bodies express duration as the step in plotted space warps into dissociated spacetime. The MIBOCU is simultaneous and multiple: inhabiting and making poems, spacetimes and meanings. The MIBOCU of the ‘reader’ tilts their head towards the red plastic bucket containing a fish that is being recorded. The red plastic bucket outperforms the fish in the moment because the former’s image is more solidified than the later. As the next step is taken, the MIBOCU transitions into an experience of entombed liveness, as it follows scientists chasing porpoises on the bow, 40 years ago. This is an example of another dimension within H₂O as unmeasurable time is performed in unplottable space. The rhythms contained in the spatio-temporal realms of H₂O are enhanced or disrupted by the MIBOCU’s patterns of movement and durational choices. H₂O’s moments or happenings are performative in the sense that they must be apprehended in the now. Moments are transitory. Presence is enacted through the voices inside the work and the space of the work. Presence is experienced through the reader.

I consider H₂O, Liquid Stanzas and Dive to be performing a deviant orality through their spatial configurations and performances of ecological elements. Ong’s requirement that orality reside in speech acts makes it difficult to know where to position the voices of animals. As it is difficult to prove that the soundings of animals are representative of some kind of speech, it is assumed they don’t engage in oral communication in this way. Moving away from the need to judge animal intelligence or consciousness on the basis of whether they are producing the equivalent of speech, I wish to broaden the view of orality in my work to accommodate the other possible ways in which animals are making meaning through the production of sound. By composing their voices in relation to the sounds of the world and human speech, I am performing voice beyond my comprehension of meaning, and engaging with the sonics of the unsayable: where sounds evoke a physiological response that cannot be articulated so much as apprehended. This quality expands the dimensions of a poem’s reach and performs extra-textual elements within its ambience. Inside Dive and Liquid Stanzas, hidden languages surface and recede to perform alterity in proximity with the MIBOCU. This proximity encourages pollution, assimilation and dispersal concurrently. The mult-
dimensionality of the mermaid is performed within the situations of these poems at the same time that human voice, animal voice, linguistic, tone and ambient sound, mix together in the spacetimes of the poem and the reception of the listener, to vibrate MIBOCUs with impure orality.
EXCHANGE 4: TECHNOLOGY

*circa* 1991

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. ... Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality. ... I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings. (Haraway 1991: 150)

*circa* 2001

Code is a powerful new form of text informing technology, which in turn informs culture. I see code as the categorical rationalization of language, no longer the tool for lyricism but means to command technology. (Herbst 2001: 18)

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*circa* 2004

A hand, surrounded by an aura

of tiny bubbles, pushes aside

a giant squirming clump of kelp.

A jellyfish lights up like Tokyo

then vanishes.
My goal in this section is to explore cyberspace and its associated discourse from the perspective of a poet interested in embodiment and space. Bodies, as the first sites of technologia – the expression of techne, art or skill – used the technologia of vocal structures to help transform air into utterance, in acts of oral communication that early speakers had to make sense of in systems of rapidly developing neural and subjectivity substrates. Technologia enabled humans to grip objects and transform them into different objects. Around the campfire’s originary – a word used to signify ideas about scenes of origin that is common in anthropoetic discourse – cyberspace was born, i.e. cyberspace as an expression of dispersal existing in a world beyond the body, in what William Gibson defined as a site of ‘disembodied consciousness’ and ‘consensual hallucinations’ (Gibson 1984: 5). How is cyberspace different from the ‘matrix’ contained within human bodies that ‘jack into’ REM sleep to disembody consciousness in virtual realities called dreams?

With cyber discourse being given a ‘new media’ nuance, it is shifting away from notions of selfhood as a textually constructed idea, towards a visually oriented ecological view of selfhood, where methods of engraving or marking identity in cyberspace become increasingly iconographic. Such iconography draws from a well of visual literacy that has developed through the historical use of signage in advertising; a signage that has evolved through its use in film and television to such an extent that viewing has become a highly codified and signified experience. While experience in cyberspace was predominantly expressed through the textual idiom in its early days, it is now becoming increasingly visual in its modus operandi, scripts, interfaces and data. As a result, it is possible to imagine that unanticipated forms of internet poetry will emerge from cultures where language is pictorially based, or where there are strong traditions in the concrete form.

The aesthetic of cyberspace as a virtual disembodied utopia buzzing with muzak from the click tracks of hypertext communications, has prevailed as an aesthetic fait
accompli as much as the bleak world of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984). Poetry may have demonstrated its pioneering spirit and enjoyed resurgence in popularity through its engagement with the internet, but how does it reinvent itself? What are poetry’s ecologies in cyberspace? What is the relationship between performance poetry and cyberpoetry? One difference resides in the role of the MIBOCU in engagement with texts. Online space is replicative and full of ‘simsational’ (i.e. the sensational aspect of simulation or simulation of sensation) experience and rhetoric. There is something of the ‘Crossing Over’ or the séance about it, where questions are typed into space and the ghosts of information scatter links for the glass mouse to push between. Every archetype plays and plays up on all sides of the screen.

You peer into a computer screen and enter another space which spreads the capacity of your body’s presence across virtual and material space. A webcam and its software captures, duplicates and manipulates your body’s time, space and motion, presence and location. Augmented across two bodies, one in the screen and one in front of it, your identity bears itself as immaterial image, as boneless surface, as organless reflection, as ghost in the machine. On the other side your material body pulses and vibrates with the exchanges between electricity, chemicals and water to create an incomplete awareness where thinking takes place and the outcomes of the process are more tangible than the process itself. The words of e-poetry can be situated in scenes of embodiment and where people, in photographs, blogs, chatrooms, guestbooks, webcams, video, etc are rendered via pixels and code, towards representation of presence.

Between the sites lies the prosthetic of the screen, the thing that mediates and punctuates bodies and texts with intervals. The screen and its contents make process transparent with enough technical capacity. Mostly it mirrors the mystery of thinking, the surface nature of results in thought or actions that occur in response to the material thinking of the self. Where do the pages go when they cannot be found? The superficial outcomes of equation, electricity and inorganic matter, in coupled exchange with a self, do not necessarily enhance knowledge of the how.
The how is the secret contained in creativity, in embodied thinking, and for those who lack the expertise, the world of the machine. Cyberspace enacts multiplicity within embodiment in different ways than performance does. It is within the discourse of cyberspace that some of the more interesting discussions about materiality, dispersal and embodiment take place. Hypertexts fragment and recombine content in a three-dimensional exchange between code, medium and content. They offer spaces to be navigated as part of their content and process and are naturally complicated by the need for mapping, navigation and technology. These imports are conceptual and structural, soliciting the computer as a companion in the creation, distribution and cognition of the text.

Virtual communication has been extended to oceanic space. Described as ‘Instant Messaging for dolphins and humans’, Seadragon software simulates cetacean communication by emitting underwater whistles, with a frequency between 1-20 kHz, from hydrophones placed in the ocean. After emitting whistles underwater, the text names of whistles emitted by cetaceans in response to them are shown. As an aside to the projected audience of communication scientists or whale watchers, the software comes with the caveat: ‘Note that in the U.S., doing something that changes the behavior of a wild marine mammal is considered Level B Harassment under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.’ (Mellinger, D. 2005) Military Sonar managed exemption under the same act, even though its disruption to marine environments has been consistently evidenced.

In discussing VR technology, Johannes Birringer joins the list of theorists who notice that simulated worlds, though full of allegations of fantastic freedoms, hide the fact that participating bodies, wired to an apparatus, ‘cannot be eliminated. ... A virtual body does not exist, and cognitive disorientation in cyberspace thus becomes a calculated effect of the apparatus’ (Birringer 1998: 63). While not sharing his lack of belief in a virtual body, it is tempting for me to insist that corporeality be present to produce virtuality. I lean more towards accepting corporeality as a space that both contains and produces the virtual, but not
necessarily simultaneously. Virtual bodies contain an infinite palimpsest of other virtual bodies but they require corporeality to translate into sensory experience. This sensory experience does not require the erasure of the virtual or vice versa, an insistence that seems at the heart of the polarisation of the discourse of exchange between information and materiality. As Stuart Moulthrop highlights: ‘Digital convergence is one thing, digital conversion quite another’ (Moulthrop 1995).
Part of the way contemporary environments are conceived and produced is through the manifestations of cybernetics, where the space-place of the MIBOCU is disrupted, enhanced, polluted and redefined by textual, social, informational and technological exchanges. Virtual reality, the internet and robotics are regarded as key endeavours that will shift human evolution towards an age of what VR pioneer, Jaron Lanier, calls: ‘post symbolic communication, communication without language or any other symbols’ (Lanier cited in Manovich 2001: 58). Current VR art shifts perception by reduction and translocation. The user’s body is signified in some way and this signification is immersed in a virtual place where it responds to the requirements of programmed space. The VR experience feels like a more directly embodied experience than online space due to the weight of its hardware (goggles, gloves, suits) that appends as a phenomenal body within the lags and movements contained there. In general VR space is minimalist. Movement creates the space in VR, positioning the body in harmony with Merleau-Ponty’s argument for agency:

\[\ldots\text{the perception of the world is only a dilatation of my presence field, it does not transcend its main structures, here the body remains always agent and never becomes object. ... The inside and the outside are inseparable. The world is within myself and I am outside of me.} (\text{Lanier cited in Manovich 2001: 58})\]

Poetry is absorbed by the machine – if one is to think of the computer in this limited way. Thus poetry becomes the language of the machine, the cyborg, the post-human. Poetry is performed in relation to reproduction and technology, both on and offline. The technological structures of the reading – lights, microphone, amplifiers, etc – are in symbiotic relationship with the poet. The microphone is expressed through the voice of the human, which is enhanced and projected through the presence of the microphone and its amplification system. But these are only arterial manifestations of the cyborg. The computer creates new spaces for the poem which has been quick to adapt to the ecologies of the online environment. Hypertext, flash
animations and machine-generated poems represent just a few examples.

The poetry community builds itself through listserves, blogs, links and websites. It is becoming borg in the sense that it is a manifestation of interconnectedness between humans and machines, that lives through a disseminated MIBOCU whose nervous system exists both on and offline. Like the cyborg, poetry beyond the page ‘is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self’ (Haraway 1991: 152). Haraway’s cyborg, as body politic, is thus witnessed through the enigmatic operations of poetry which, like the cyborg, is ‘resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence’ (Haraway 1991: 152). Poetry, like the MIBOCU, manifests the paradox of ‘being’ as a space of displaced actualisation and virtual existence.
Writing for publication on the internet is suffused with discursive tensions inside the words ‘author’, ‘reader’, ‘text’, ‘body’ and ‘space’ – which are tensions that exist more explicitly in live poetry readings. Both media, i.e. internet publication and live poetry readings, operate through what I would like to call ‘zones of dispersal’, where a central point of textual utterance is progressively dispersed, across sites of translation, until the original text is corrupted through mergers with the space / environment and the reader’s experiences and renditions of the text.

In a live reading, the dispersal is experienced in direct relation to the flesh of the poet’s body, whereas on the internet the dispersal is experienced through the technology and navigation activities of readers. Books are dispersed through the mechanisms of industry and marketplace, consumed and translated through a reader’s MIBOCU in a less-disrupted relationship with the original text – they can be constantly referenced in their original form and content. The text also however, expresses and contains aspects of the writer’s MIBOCU. Readers can take books into any environment they choose with minimal technological requirements and they can control how they proceed through the text without the click-maps that necessarily form a part of electronic literature’s (e-literature, e-poetry) cartography. Books do not require the author’s presence and manage, through their materiality, a longevity the author would never be able to achieve. Books have always had the capacity to be read in a non-linear way, though they do not perform sense-making well unless written specifically for that. It is the method of authorship and sense-making, rather than the linearity of reading, that could provide useful clues for reading differences between electronic and page literatures.

Technology mediates our conceptions of time, space and identity and the idea of virtual tissue is generally configured as something the computer imports onto the human body, a legacy of cyborg theory. To take a different view of this, the life forms on the internet, although predominantly discursive, are contained within a
cave-like space that is ecological, i.e. interdependent and constantly evolving. Identities refract from the angles of intention resident inside the niche communities and boutique personalities created and exchanged online. These are the cyborgs, the readers and poets whose bodies extend beyond the reaches of their skin to travel through space and time to meet others in imaginative worlds. The internet is already an enormous dynamic installation. Elizabeth Grosz shows up the internet as a 1980s performance space that positions the body in ways that are due for reinterrogating:

Even the appeal of the Internet and cyberspace are part of the eighties’ heritage that we will have to acknowledge, rethink, and work through. While presenting itself as a celebration of the body and its pleasures, this fascination bears witness to a profound, if unacknowledged and undiscussed, hatred and resentment of the body. The preferred body was one under control, pliable, amenable to the subject’s will: the fit and healthy body, the tight body, the street-smart body, the body transcending itself into the infinity of cyberspace. A body more amenable, malleable, and more subordinated to mind or will than ever before. (Grosz 1995: 1-2)

Although uncertain about her claim that this configuration of the body as subordinate to the mind or will is greater now ‘than ever before’, Grosz’s view of the political productions / intentions of the internet as creating fetishised immateriality, desire for the malleable body and revulsion for the materiality of body expressing its wetness – tears, decay, sweat, etc – is useful to keep in mind.
constantly refreshed

Technology offers a reframe of a text's expression in relation to the poet's MIBOCU. Although television isolated us soporifically from each other and our communities by increasing the distance between us as material entities and our experiences, digital space seems to have reduced the distance, interrogated identity and forged renewed senses of community. Yet the computer does not alter the physical proximity of relations between people, simply the communicative proximity and the nature of identity.

Poetry was already a multimedia form before cyberspace and it has been easy to transmute its existing identities for internet publication. Cyberpoetry is increasingly expanding its range so there are now more examples of poetry online that could not be duplicated offline in some way. Hypertext may be the closest thing there is to a cyber literature at the moment and it may conceptualize its lexicon outside of the page, but it still looks and reads like systems of pages, for the most part.

‘New Media’ practitioners manifest a different kind of editorial aesthetic in cyberspace. New Media hands edit and create narratives through assemblage and montage situated in visual significations of space. By this I do not mean ‘visual’ in terms of image production, but ‘visual’ in the sense of a logic requiring a different kind of literacy to language. The editing hand harks back to the signing hand. The rise of a cinematic logic within cyberspace does not alter the difficulty of reconfiguring an understanding of spacetime and distance as part of the narrative. Cinematic logic has practically defined 20th-century Western experience of these concepts, and the computer, by becoming another pseudo television set, will not offer poetry the radical creative departure that virtual and posthuman discourses crave.

The possibilities reside not only in the poetics of cyberspace and the posthuman
discourses surrounding it, but also in the implications of access, production and commodification. I argue for a cyberspace situated inside the MIBOCU as a method of understanding the difference between the kinaesthetic experiences of engaging with poetry on and offline. This allows me to ask questions that I find interesting. For example, if I carried cyberspace within me, how would I choose to engage with the poetics of hypertext and what would the implications for my writing be? Working inside the space, as opposed to inside its technological framing, is a strategy to understand the limitations inside it and to discover exits to other possibilities.

New media space is a performance space already rich with the movements and traces of other bodies. In addition, as Ngugi wa Thion’o (1998) points out ‘performance space is never empty. ... It is always the site of physical, social, and psychic forces in society’ (Thion’o 1998: 41). It is not only the living teleported presences that fuel the performance terrain, but also the ‘ghosts, hauntings, memories, hallucinations and other “bodies” or images that we may not see’ (Thion’o 1998: 41). Katherine Hayles goes even further, alleging that embodiment is relative, contextual, ‘excessive and deficient in its infinite variations, particularities, and abnormalities’ (Hayles 1999: 196-7). Increasingly, embodiment and performance are seen as important tools in learning.
clicklit and cinelit

In its early days hypertext production operated inside the anxiety of knowing it was expected to manifest ‘original writings’, ‘new genres’ and ‘modes of thought’ to address the question: ‘What difference does hypertext make?’ This question, pitched 13 years ago by Mark Bernstein (cited in Moulthrop n.d.), is as relevant as it ever was, not just for hypertext, but for the whole idea of writing on, for, in and about the internet.

Hypertext has successfully disrupted notions of reading and writing by introducing a method of interactivity inside poems and for expanding the video poem’s idea of scenes. However, I still can’t help but think that it often bears more of a resemblance to channel surfing and home shopping than truly convergent internet poetry. Hypertext is both an open and closed text; closed in the sense that its links are driven by pre-ordained and pre-programmed sets of intermediations, yet open in the sense that the user’s decisions and actions create fields of associations that are individually malleable. Interactivity in itself does not have the capacity for true openness and freedom since its texts are restricted by the design of the code. Text and code form a poetic operand that resides in partiality. Inside the scene is always the MIBOCU of the user and their movement. In the simple gesture of the click, I sometimes forget to think of myself sitting, feeling myself sitting. Movement and tissue enter the scene, which with each different user is tinted, shuffled, and reordered in response to the user’s preferences. There is rarely a sense of completion, only a residency in spacetime that follows John Cage’s acknowledgement that compositions usually contain a beginning, a middle and an end but that these do not necessarily occur in that order.

Cage frequently experimented with chance as a method of composition in order to challenge the way works were received and interpreted, ‘... my Music of Changes, composed by means of I Ching chance operations, followed Morton Feldman’s graph music, music written with numbers for any pitches, the pitches notated only
as high, middle, or low” (Cage 1991). Hence random order rather than narrative coherence became an important consideration in Cage’s structural inventions. In the case of hypertext structures, entrances, navigation pathways and exits form the main structural elements, usually in that order, though these occur in mostly unresolved experiential fields. Cage later entered a period of process oriented rather than structural oriented experiments, pursuing “music without beginning, middle, or end, music as weather” (Cage 1991).

In e-poetry derived from a cinematic logic, there are additional visual subtexts involved in the reading that emerge from the focal point, the point of view, scheduled for the scene. Even without a body represented inside the poem, the movement is most often tracked towards or away from the point of narrative interest.
Haraway argues that configuring the machine, computer and organism as coded texts is a postmodernist method that facilitates the ‘writing and reading [of] the world’ (Haraway 1991: 153). The tendency in poststructuralist and postmodernist theory to ‘textualize’ everything has, according to Haraway, been rejected by ‘Marxists and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for the lived relations of domination that ground the “play” of arbitrary reading’ (Haraway 1991: 153). She holds that the value of such strategies, as manifested through her cyborg myth, resides in their capacity to ‘subvert myriad organic wholes (for example, the poem, the primitive culture, the biological organism)’ (Haraway 1991: 153). Haraway’s suspicion of the idea of ‘original innocence’, with its incumbent return to unity after the ‘tragedy of autonomy’, is aimed at the embodied subject. On the other hand, her desire and the desire of posthumanists to fuse with the machine in an idealistic way, represents in itself a pursuit of unity – one that attempts to find ‘imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other’, only this time the machine or the prosthetic is the Other. In an attempt to co-opt and reclaim the machine as a site of purity that resists reproductive politics, the position of woman, and of mother, is confirmed within the argument as a site of inferiority, where the only way ‘female’ can gain ‘legitimate’ power is to fuse with the great iconographic representation of patriarchy, of male, of Other: the machine. The fusion is portrayed as a reclamation of power in a manoeuvre which engenders a return to wholeness. Haraway confuses her argument. Does she not advocate a return to wholeness through the machine-body coupling or the condition of hybridity? I read her as a critic of the ideal of returning to wholeness but also a practitioner of it.

‘The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us’ (Haraway 1999: 105), Haraway alleges. But machines fail, membranes rust, valves refuse to speak, making it difficult to render them as potent, reliable or regenerative. Being pro-flesh is positioned as anti-science by Haraway, something that posthumanists like Hayles
rightly took issue with. Hayles and Sobchack’s review of the bodiless-information speak of cyber theorists moderates the extremes between techno-fetishism and phobia. It may be a useful rhetorical device to position a utopian human condition as cyborg, with its 'bodiless information' and idealistic hybridity, but it has proven to be flawed thinking, that exposes itself to be quite narrow minded. Haraway says she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess (Haraway 1985: 107), yet the goddess is by her very definition a penultimate cyborg: a bodiless, immaterial power that is monstrous, magical and partial. Goddess is a much freer condition than the technologically embodied cyborg restricted by networks, machines, politics, etc. I do not agree with Hayles’ assertion that I need cyborg reading practices, simply because hypertexts are 'written and read in distributed cognitive environments, [where] the reader necessarily is constructed as a cyborg, spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines' (Hayles 2000: 13). I resist cyborg subjectivity because I don’t believe in its mytho-techno spiritualism. I accept myself as unavoidably fleshe...
course I am making a point. I recognise the distinction between Code and code the same way that I recognise the distinction between Poetry and poetry, Text and text, and my point is only to highlight the limitations in enclosing the discourse of technologically-compelled subjectivity within a strictly technological idiom. We know as much about what the face looks like behind the scenes as we do the deep code of the texton.

Part of the subversion enacted through online poetry begins at the point of code. Code becomes a scene of translation, distribution and appropriation, beginning with pre-symbolic thought which is then translated through the liquid architecture of the MIBOCU, in a system of chemically-induced code transferrals, to enact the leap from MIBOCU to digital space through the body-technology exchange. The keyboard codes expression which is translated and recoded at the scene of the microchip, to parse through the code of the software, to return to the viewing space of consciousness through screen flicker and machine language, until the loop begins again. This is how code behaves, as a vector for writing, through an act of making and through the translation of different interiorities – the human and the technological. The performance poet’s body is more than an interface brokering acts of communication, it is a generative system that expresses partiality for the unspeakable language (code) of other bodies participating in the scene of the writing, as well as for the texts that are coded into utterance.
chopped cod

\[ H_2O, \ Liquid \ Stanzas \ and \ Dive \] are stripped of primary iconography, to echo Ong’s primary orality. In spite of this however, they are not free of the symbolic realm attributed to iconography, in the same way that literacy is not free of orality. The poems are performed in virtuality. Live utterance is rendered archival and disembodied, through its containment in recordings and broadcast through performance and technology.

I think of the words ‘new media’ as serving production and consumption agendas, and ‘cyberspace’ as serving an imaginary or theoretical / artistic one. They don’t appear to be interchangeable, though they may intersect, exchange with, and involve each other. New media sways with a Lefebvrian-style production of social space, that is yielded through the methods and technologies of communication management. Through its association with old media, ‘new media’ drifts towards commercially oriented activities such as cinema, games, networked communities (MySpace, YouTube), ring tones, podcasts, DVDs, etc. \[ H_2O, \ Liquid \ Stanzas \ and \ Dive \] are expressed within new media products and via its techniques but they maintain links with cyberspace, through an engagement with virtuality, spatial poetics and sonic architectures.

As a cyberpoet who experiments with augmenting liveness through technology, I find it interesting to notice how my experience with live performances snorkels within the experiments. My interest in articulating a body and its liveness was first represented in my website (\textit{The Stalking Tongue Book II: Slamming the Sonnet} 2002). Liveness is mirrored in the throbbing flesh, winking interfaces and interactive voting. Aurally, liveness is signified through the clapping, cheering and speaking surrounds that support the poets. The cyborg is disrupted by the flesh of humans infiltrating its space.

In \[ H_2O \] liveness is vested in the person who strolls around the space investigating and making the poems. In \textit{Liquid Stanzas} and \textit{Dive} liveness is contained in the first person accounts of the scenes of the recordings, the breaths, slurps and sloshes of the MIBOCUs and their worlds. My hybridity as a poet manifests in the performances of multiplicity and dimensionality that
take place in all of my works. When I write I hear voices. When I perform I feel language. When I compose with Flash, concrete poetics trace themselves into consciousness. When I rehearse I discover music and memories. When I compose sound poems I hear lyrics and stories. The multiplicity is natural and easy, but the genres are rigid and framed by criticisms that privilege their genre specificity. It’s hard to explain a practice that’s perpetually filled with noise, interference and unstable subjectivities.

H₂O, Liquid Stanzas and Dive manifest some of these invisible aspects of my practice. As poems that were conceived for ‘new media’ they were always situated in virtuality and borne through technology. The page does not facilitate poetic spatial choreography in the way that technology does. H₂O, Liquid Stanzas and Dive are expressing cyborg natures as a result of their technological origins and augmentations. Although they are of my body and the bodies of marine animals and other humans, they are not located in our bodies: instead, they express a dispersed embodiment that is performed in the wet spaces of recipient MIBOCUs.

It was interesting to create an installation that expressed an acoustic VR rather than a visual one. Having spent time in VR labs, climbing stairs that led nowhere, flying to the tops of pyramids, or erasing the presence of the other in the space, I was struck by the artificiality of the constructs – visual, aesthetic and conceptual. Although the engagements were fun and sometimes interesting, they lacked the worldliness they were trying to achieve and a wordiness, a speech. I am satisfied that H₂O, Liquid Stanzas and Dive achieve the worldliness necessary for a successful ecological poetics. When I shut my eyes and listen to Liquid Stanzas and Dive, I invite other senses to create experiences and I am relieved of the pressure of ‘seeing things’. This enables a more intimate involvement and returns the joy of inhabiting ‘time out’ from the everyday. My performances within these collections are compositional. The audience is vibrating with poetry.
SECTION III: COMPOSITION

Composition refers to the dimension of creativity, creative gestures of living, expressing or being, as well as creativity stemming from an individual’s practice – in this dissertation’s case it refers to $H_2O$, Liquid Stanzas and Dive.
When oxygen and hydrogen find one another, their joining produces fiery passion. Out of this fire, water is born. Quaint Victorian chemistry gives us an image of one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms in a fixed molecule that bounces around from place to place. The reality of water is not so orderly. The hydrogen atoms are not owned by any particular oxygen atom. Water is a substance very much in love with itself, and the atoms connect in webs and clusters where oxygen shares around the hydrogen atoms freely, a fluid situation indeed. (Ian D. Anderson [Ian Lurking Bear] cited in Michael P. Garofalo n.d.)

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Mnemosyne

Watch him leak.

Cry out in secret

for his cold grief to pass. Pretend

not to see his moist

unpredictable crashes.

A sailboat cruises out from a headland

at 6 am the sea fills up with voices.

Nearby the dunes are turning blue

flowers open

grass lets go

of its damp aura.
radar angels

In coming to terms with the creation of poetry containing a linguistic element and impulse through its text, and a musical, non-linguistic element through some of its sound, I discovered that the spacetime of a poem could be enriched by enabling both. The poetics of poetry function on so many levels that I found the act of creating Liquid Stanzas and Dive drew me to seek different qualities within the text and sound to express an ecological poetics. I wanted to embrace abstraction as well as representation, the beautiful and the monstrous, the spoken and the unspeakable. Reading such work also requires an openness to non-linguistic meaning, as well as a capacity to read conflict, contradiction, pollution, noise, silence, spacetime, and text in a poetic rock pool that swirls them all together in a cone of multiplicity.

Within electronic media there is most often a MIBOCU performing, which in a sense augurs a return to the moment of primary literacy, where the self speaking also makes meaning. Additionally the moving MIBOCU is embedded in a field of commoving technology (e.g. sensors, camera movements, editorial cuts, scenic framing), a soundtrack and digitised visual fields. Literacy inevitably becomes a skill of multi-disciplinary deciphering and meaning making. ‘The body represented within virtual space,’ suggests Hayles, ‘is always already mutated, joined through a flexible, multilayered interface with the reader’s body on the other side of the screen’ (Hayles 2000: 30). The performance is thus further enacted at the scene of translation of the various identities engaged in creating and reading electronic texts.

Liquid Stanzas and Dive (see accompanying excerpts) address the dimension of composition. For $H_2O$, poems, images, animations and sound loops were programmed into arrays of spatially situated possibilities that were triggered by bodies moving in space. $H_2O$ was a visual, oral, aural and tactile score full of kinaesthetic allusions. The music was largely eco-acoustic and computer manipulated with recordings from tapes, voices, instruments, loop databases, wave manipulations and ambient sounds. The images are composed of spectrograms, photographs, video footage, drawings, digital media manipulation. The work deliberately lacked closure as it manifested the cycle of water from land to sea to animal, to plant, to sky to land.
The enclosed DVD contains some $H_2O$ samples and offers itself as a handful of simulated water to its audience. This handful resonates with the harmonics of elemental speech, music, text, human, animal, environment and image in a way that acknowledges the tentative relationship between them. There is a reluctance to fuse or be incorporated. This reluctance to fuse, this resistance to amalgamation is what has made this project so interesting. At times the material meets and creates something satisfying; at other times, the noisiness of the meeting overwhelms sense according to certain schools of aesthetics.
I must talk about pain and duress because of the sounds contained in the acoustic ground of my poems. I acknowledge that what is behind them is the space of pain. Reading the thoughts of selected animal scientists makes it clear that certain of them think that the space of pain is a space of privilege – considered to be a marker of consciousness, of something worthy. Inside pain lies the route to status and rights. A fish is alleged not to have consciousness because it supposedly has no memory and cannot feel pain, because according to neurobiologist James Rose, the fish doesn’t have the neural apparatuses for pain:

Pain is a specialised process, just like self-awareness that we have, that I think it’s unreasonable to expect a fish to have. A fish brain is very good at doing what it does for a fish, but there are things that are simply not there in the hardware department. (Rose 2004)

Little regard is given to the possibility of there being other ways that an animal species might experience pain. Lynne Sneddon, fish biologist at the University of Liverpool, believes that, ‘fish do have the neural apparatus and they have the brain structures to detect pain’ (Sneddon 2004). It is not necessary to understand the speech of animals but it is critical that their voices be heard, supported and encouraged in everyday life. The silence against them is an enclosure that keeps them out. It is a way of erasing presence.

When animals dance, decorate nests, sing, fight, conduct rituals and choose a mate, they are expressing preferences. As I do not wish to spend too much time debating whether or not animals have consciousness, I invoke the privilege of the artist to use imagination to draw conclusions and express ideas, without a need to prove that which is patently unprovable – the thoughts and feelings of animals. I accept it as a given that our incapacity to experience the beingness of animals is a limitation that will always be there. Basing an entire system of reason and deduction on a flawed premise – i.e. because we cannot prove animals are conscious beings they must be assumed to be inferior and lacking – does not prove anything.
about animal natures, though it does say much about weaknesses in the investigative and religious beliefs that underpin the premise. Another flaw in this discussion is that it is founded on a binary of inferiority/superiority which is not a useful or valid way of critiquing the world, as theorists such as Randy Malamud have highlighted. In discussing poetry, Malamud’s desires mirror my own in recruiting ‘the empathizing imagination ... to enhance the awareness of sentient, cognitive, ethical, and emotional affinities between people and animals’ (Malamud cited in Armstrong 2003).

In the case of science, as mentioned earlier, some of the problematic aspects of the discourse have resulted in a consensus that limits knowledge and enables the viewpoint that ‘non-conscious’ animals are inferior to humans. This ideology is an obstacle to ecological sustainability and habitat preservation. It even compromises our own survival as the viability of the planet is compromised by habitat destruction, which in turn is enabled through this configuration of animals. It is ironic that the very scientists who work with animals in one way or another are often the same ones who perpetuate a lack of belief in those animals’ capacity to express individuality and emotions. As an antidote to such thinking, I table the story of the painting elephants here. This story demonstrates the struggle of a creative mind to limit itself, and yet once limited, to express itself creatively within the limitations:

The first day the keeper attempted to get the elephants to paint, she found herself, not the canvases, slathered in red, green, and blue. It was fairly easy to get the animals to hold the paint brushes – each pupil has been conditioned to grasp any object the human instructor might press firmly against its trunk – but it was an uphill battle to get an elephant to paint on a stolid white-square canvas when a moving, breathing target was a far more interesting workspace. It took days for the keeper to transfer the elephants’ interest from her own body to the easel; she often had to guide their trunks with her hand across the canvas squares. A sensual process, teacher and student, human hands directing each tactile proboscis in shared brushstrokes. Then, the student’s inevitable shrugging off of the master, the elephant shakes its head, shakes the keeper’s hand away, the birth of individual style. Slashes, spirals, lines. Enrichment. (Young 2002: 629)
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