

Maybe I should say what I always say, which is that I propose love to involve a rhythm of an ambition and an intention to stay in sync, which is a lower bar than staying attuned, but still hard and awkward enough. The anxiety to define—a key feature of being in proximity to all magnetic ideas—especially cleaves to love, and so the conversion of a love into a properly political concept must induce attention to what to do with the freight the term ports with it: in this case, quite a huge dust ball.

2023-11-07 “So why are you here?” Alice asked a few times, in a few ways. We spoke of Doug’s work [Douglas Oliver, *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*], which I assured her I had replicated without requiring the poet to enjoin with a mechanical contraption. I said that I had started this work when I believed in diagrammatic knowledge, in a knowledge of distance. I had abandoned most of this interest, but said that it was different to have abandoned that interest than to have never gone down the path in the first place. Alice seemed to understand. I said that, reading the letters between Doug and Jeremy [Prynn], I found myself more intrigued with Jeremy’s critique. Doug wrote often of “crude” analysis that might open up new avenues for interpretation, while Jeremy broke down elements of anticipation that would fall outside of a measurable signal. That the different pathways of possible language closed off by each word had more

The graph is read circularly. Each dot represents a constant unit of time that is determined privately by each performer. This unit should be a natural pulse that does not tend to subdivide in the performer’s mind. The individual performer assigns to each quadrant of the score one of the following sound elements: pitch; intensity; timbre [tonal color changes effected through the use of mutes, filters, bow movement, etc.]; density [the mixing of tonal ingredients, as in: flutter-tongue, double-stops, mixed vocal and instrumental sound, etc.]*. These sound elements may be assigned to the quadrants in any pattern, and that pattern—while it will “revolve” in its relationship to the score—will remain constant. (in the relationship of its parts) throughout the performance. The ensemble should prepare a sonority within which the individual instruments are not distinguishable. This sonority will provide, for the individual performers, a tonal reference for the various sound activities that constitute the performance. Whenever any performer is playing his contribution to the reference sonority, time (duration) is unmeasured (free) for him. Whenever any performer is playing through the

Above: Robert Ashley, ... in memoriam Esteban Gomez (quartet) instructions, 1967

*... in memoriam Crazy Horse (symphony), additional notes on density, 1967: The concept of “density” is intended here to include all aspects of the sound information produced by the ensemble (group), not just density of harmonic spectrum.

Thus, the term “pure” means ... unanimous, similar, redundant, synchronous, integrated, etc., ... in describing the performers’ actions (sounds) and implies (1) a lack of individuality among the parts and (2) a high degree of redundancy in successive actions.

Conversely, the term “noisy” means... disparate, dissimilar, chaotic, asynchronous, divided, etc., ... in describing the performers’ actions (sounds) and implies (1) a greater individuality among the parts and (2) a high degree of moment-

Michael [Hardt] proposes to release the sensorium from capital, which means from the habits of attention and mediation that translate objects immediately into property, equate possessive individualism with sovereign freedom, and conflate narcissism with recognition, ethics, and justice.

[Epigraph] Lauren Berlant, *A Properly Political Concept of Love*

impact on the “stress” than anything mechanically measurable. Alice told me that Doug had assimilated that concept fully, that finding the stress was an obsession of his precisely because it could never be found. Students would invariably come to the same definition of poetic stress, would seem to be honing in on it, but it always proved elusive.

Doug treated his search for poetic stress as if it held the secrets of the cosmos.

That was their “bit” at dinners: “So, what should we talk about?” someone might ask. “Well let’s talk about The Good,” Alice would say, poking fun at Doug. She explained this idea to me, from the philosophy of David Hume, something like a radical regard for others. She has experienced The Good on a handful of occasions, she said. (The conversation would always devolve into bickering, argument, bitter fun...)

Robert M. Ochshorn, Subject: “Some incomplete and fragmented notes on wine with Alice”

(sixteen) measured pulses of a quadrant, he must deviate continuously, but as gradually as possible, from his contribution to the reference sonority.

The performance begins with the reference sonority. At any time, then, individual performers may play through any (starting) quadrant. Subsequently, they will continue reading circularly, alternating unmeasured periods of their contribution to the reference sonority with measured periods of assigned deviations.

Whenever any performer first becomes aware of a deviant element (other than his own) in the reference sonority, his pattern of assigned sound elements (quadrants) shifts circularly so that the mode of deviation he recognizes is assigned to the quadrant opposite that in which he is playing or will play next. (As the pattern of quadrants remains constant, thus, all quadrants will be redesignated.) The pattern of quadrant designations remains in its changed position until the performer has played through the succeeding (newly designated) quadrant, after which it is subject again to transposition through the appearance of deviant elements in the sonority.

to-moment change in successive actions.

Both of these terms describe, of course, antipodal, “ideal” densities that the ensemble tries to achieve during the course of a particular duration of activity. Thus, the contrasting of “purpose” and “lack of purpose” is expressly not part of the concept of contrasting densities.

Finally, perhaps it should be noted that it will defeat the purpose of the performance to plan detailed “realizations” of densities. The preparations for performance should exclude neither the fortuitous initial densities that are the sum of the sound ingredients that individual players have chosen spontaneously, nor the processes involved in the players’ attempts to work in ensemble toward the “ideal” extremes.

The Eye of Time and Intermediate Reason

Things shift in medieval Europe, at the moment writing changes its appearance. Text, which had once flowed seamlessly like a voice without pause, began to breathe: words separate, lines open up, and pages are ordered into readable units. No longer a mere witness, the eye becomes an organising force; and almost naturally, this new regime of the visible opens another door to another phenomenon: musical notation.

Antonin Gerbal, “Space and Contingency in [Ahmed]” (transl. by WH) in [Ahmed] *Writings*, 2026

I suppose I solved the problem of *after* by being part of one *first*: part of the first really strong and numerous generation of American women poets. With Anne Waldman and Bernadette Mayer, I was creating a certain female voice, which as I say somewhere else we seemed to pass around among us as it picked up its initial characteristics from each of us: a love for the sentence from Bernadette, a brave forthrightness from Anne, a feminized traditional lyric sound from myself. Those are the qualities I first perceived in us. But the voice then seemed to pass around more, as we assimilated tricks from each other, adding, changing, becoming more complex. We weren’t terribly conscious of doing this; self-conscious movements are more a male phenomenon. And other women were obviously part of what we were doing, e.g., Maureen Owen and then Eileen Myles, and perhaps a little further away stylistically, women such as Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino, Susan Howe, Fanny Howe.

Spenser made Mutability a woman. Staking and seesawing. To balance on a precipice of falling into foolishness was often the danger of opening your mouth to speak if you were an intellectually ambitious person with a female education. [...] Emily Dickinson took the scraps from the separate “higher” female education many bright women of her time were increasingly resenting, combined them with voracious and “unladylike” outside reading, and used the combination. She built a new poetic form from her fractured sense of being eternally on intellectual borders, where confident masculine voices buzzed an alluring and inaccessible discourse, backward through history into aboriginal anagogy. Pulling pieces of geometry, geology, alchemy, philosophy, politics, biography, biology, mythology, and philology from alien territory, a “sheltered” woman audaciously invented a new grammar grounded in humility and hesitation. HESITATE from the Latin, meaning to stick. Stammer. To hold back in doubt, have difficulty speaking. “He may pause but he must not hesitate”—Ruskin. Hesitation circled back and surrounded everyone in that confident age of aggressive industrial expansion and brutal Empire building. Hesitation and Separation. The Civil War had split America in two. He might pause, She hesitated.

Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*

I do not come to you
save that I confess
to being
half man and half
woman. I have seen the ivy
cling
to a piece of crumbled
wall so that
you cannot tell
by which either
stands: this is to say
if she to whom I cling
is loosened both
of us go down.

* * *

William Carlos Williams, quoted by Alice Notley in *Doctor Williams’ Heiresses*

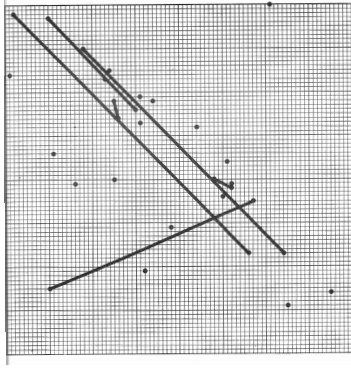
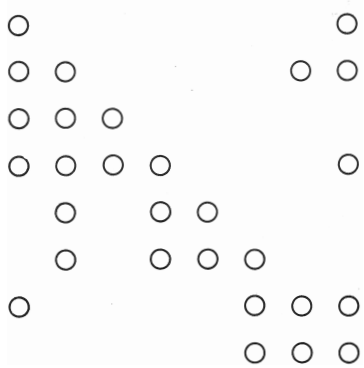
Truthfully, I informed Temple last summer that I would call this talk “Instability in Poetry” because I had discovered that my son, the poet Anselm Berrigan, in his handout for a summer course he’d taught at Naropa, had used a portion of a poem by me, and had, on the copy of the handout he’d given to me, his own, drawn lines around the following lines:

Come with me amid this instability
permit me not to know what things
mean yet

The lines, I knew, were relevant to his esthetic, and so to his own generation[...].

Opening lines to “Instability in Poetry,” in Alice Notley, *Telling the Truth as it Comes up, Selected talks and & essays 1991–2018*

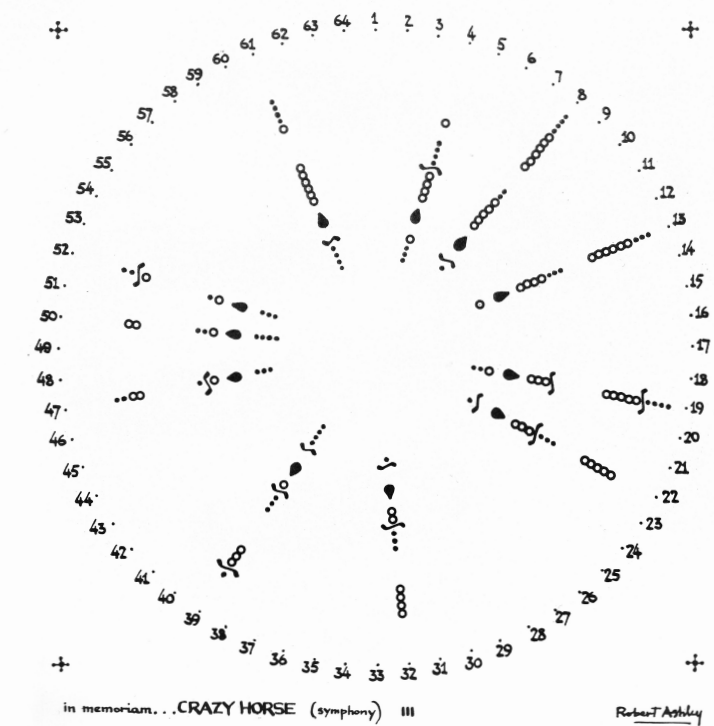
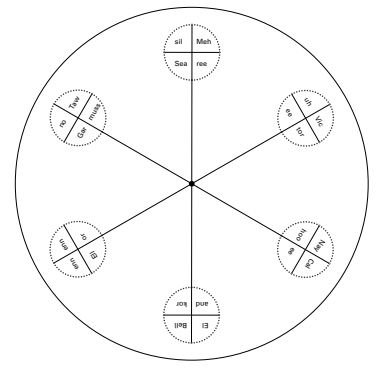
Will Holder, notes to live radio broadcast [*Song and Dance*] “The real codex is invisible; I’ll continue working on the false one” for *New Public Forum*, Cooper Union, NYC, April 23, 2026



Above: Robert Ashley, ...in memoriam Esteban Gomez (quartet), 1967
 Left: ...in memoriam John Smith (concerto, 1 of 4pp), ...in memoriam Kit Carson (opera, 1 of 6pp), both 1967.

Right: Postcommodity and Alex Waterman with Ociciwan Contemporary Art Collective, ...in memoriam Mary Cecil, Victoria Callihoo (née Belcourt), and Eleanor (Helene) Thomas Garneau (cantata), 2017

Below: Robert Ashley, ...in memoriam Crazy Horse (symphony, 1 of 32pp), 1967



Thinking about what I should say to you made me think about what we learn in college; and what we unlearn in college; and then how we learn to unlearn what we learned in college and relearn what we unlearned in college, and so on. And I thought how I have learned, more or less well, three languages, all of them English; and how one of these languages is the one I went to college to learn. I thought I was going to study French and Italian, and I did, but what I learned was the language of power - of social power; I shall call it the father tongue.

[Instruction] Opening lines of Ursula K. Le Guin's Commencement Address at Bryn Mawr Women's College, 1986. <https://serendipstudio.org>

These things that you do, that you be you, a poet or whatever, out of love of being you, here, because you are - that the hateful world only is because of love, so love is terrible, because love isn't love, it's doing what you do. So he tells me I have to say out the I'm-a-poet part, to you, to keep a bargain, the one not to be me literature, but to be me living, for you, you expect certain things out of a flower or a shoe, petals; foot-encasing - a poet, now, must conform to some being of a poet and making sure you know it, what that is - as I - as I present it - and what if I hate that? and that is maturity, so I will digress, if one ever does.

Opening lines of Alice Notley's *At The Foot At The Belt Of The Raincoat* (1979) published by Jason Dodge's Fivehundred Places, 2020 [reproduced sideways to minimise line-breaks]

