

Recognizing that poetic methodology and artistic practice inflect each other in many ways, we invited three artists to discuss the mutual implications of their linguistic and performative work:

Tanya Lukin Linklater is a choreographer and visual artist with a parallel writing practice; Tiziana La Melia is a writer and artist; and Hanne Lippard's work uses performance, her voice and language. We asked them to consider the ways that poetry and art come together and diverge, what it means to come to poetry from art, or to art from poetry, to consider the potentials and risks of the convergence of the forms, and to talk through the slippage between art and language in their respective practices. In response, they have offered three distinct visions of the rhythm between method and subject, subject and object, thinking and appearance, and poetry and art.

— *Kari Cwynar, Danielle St-Amour and cheyanne turions*

Three Parts on Poetry

Hanne Lippard

*Every sound we make is a bit of autobiography...
A piece of inside projected to the outside.¹*

ANNE CARSON, "THE GENDER OF SOUND"

Orality and Action

Orality cannot exist without action. Orality differs from the text on paper and screens, ready to be read – whenever, wherever and by whichever pair of eyes feels free to stroll upon the fixed linearity. Orality has its own linearity, yet this linearity is not fixated on parallel divisions or controlled by a flipping gesture. It can appear, seemingly out of nowhere, and vanish into thin air, because air is what the voice is made of. The sound that exits our mouths is, in fact, only existing through the simple fact that it is going out of its own existence. Orality only lives in full awareness of its own mortality, like the body itself. Although nothing seems to last forever, sound is a particularly frail fugitive cutting the space between us. The speed of sound is slower than that of light, as the fired gunshot is seen before it is heard. Although our ears are situated at more or less the same height as our eyes, the eyes get the better of us: we weigh shapes heavier, and give them instant meaning. Being a human being is being a being of noise, as none of us pass through our lives audibly unnoticed – even if you tip-toe across the room and remain in the corner. The uncontrollable nature of our noises can be controlled through poetry, although we cannot control how it will be perceived by others. Poetry is a shared noise, an active *we* to the passive *I*. Mind, lung, mouth, air, mind is a different circulation than mind, nerve, touch, screen, nerve, eye, mind. Sound travels from air to ear. Through waves of oxygen, it is pumping the matter of the lungs up across the tongue to create a common or uncommon language. But poetry is not simply an inversion of the lungs – like a scream or a whistle – poetry is the amalgamation of the mental as well as the physical insides of a human being.

I says to I: *Hi!*, and I replies to I: *Hi!* And this is all it takes for both to exist beyond the sight of the other. When I say “I” to you, it is already a *you* to *me*, and through this exchange, we have established a *we*. Orality is inevitably a shared experience; it exists between beings, stating a *we* between two or a few more individuals. And once you are all ears, you might forget the actual contours of your body, as well as the body next to it, and next to it, and so on. Together, audience and reader might rediscover a shapelessness once lost: the idea of speech without writing. Text in novels, text in dictionaries, text in autocorrect, text in Wikipedia, text in your emails, newsfeed, receipts, advertisements, the tattooed shoulder walking in front of you down the escalator, the bills, the piles of paper, the postbox, the papyrus, the multiple matter that shapes the word – it all has its root in the shape of the tongue. Before we learn to read, we learn to listen to our mother’s tongue, the mouth that teaches us the sounds that eventually will appear to us in symbols. It is a long travel from A to B, from A to Z, for a shapelessness to take such a present form.

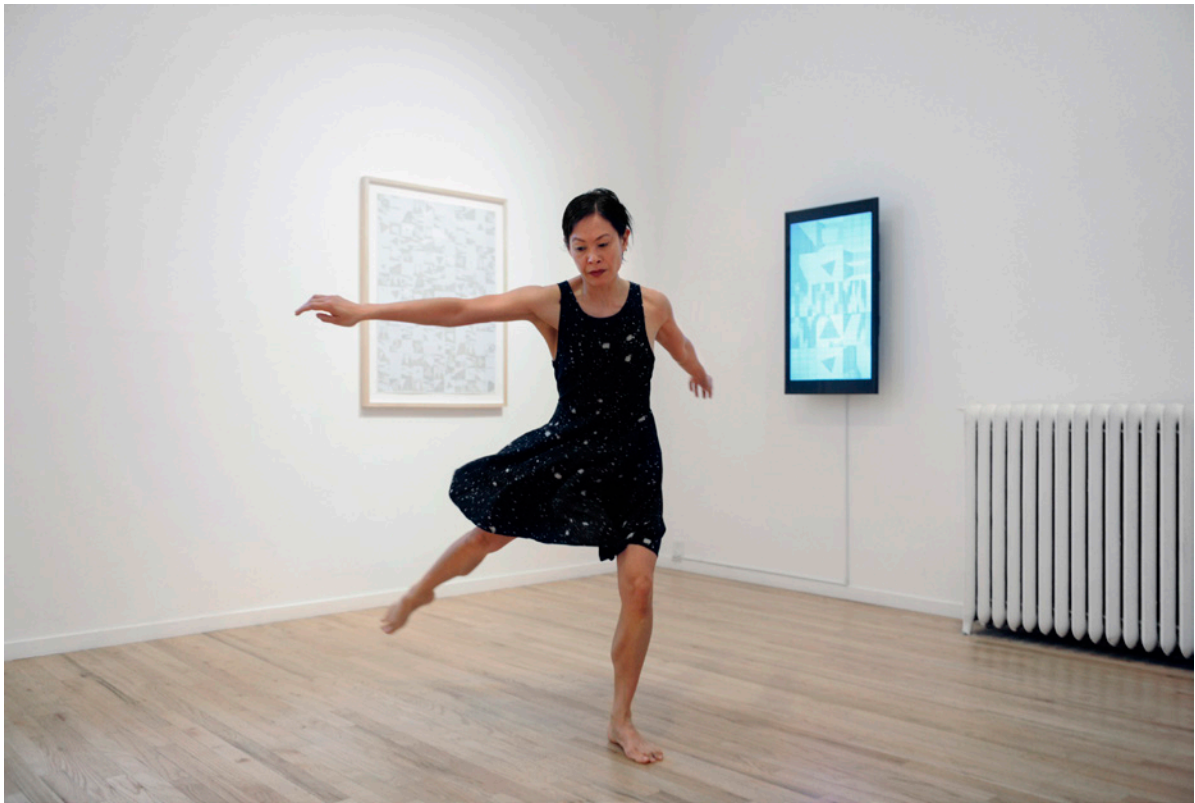
If at first there was the word, to be heard, there must also have been someone around to hear it, like the sound of the solitary tree falling in the forest. But it is stated that nothing was nothing, or anything, before the first word was spoken. Not only did orality trigger action, it triggered the awareness of the other through the sound of oneself. Nothing was nothing, or anything, until there was a someone. The first word to be worded was as shapeless as the last word to be heard and simply fell to the ground, unable to fossilize its ephemeral body. And left undated, nobody knows the extent of the silence that followed. Perhaps no reply was called for, but rather, like poetry, the exit of the sound was only the entrance to an afterthought.

What is meant is not always clear to the ear. It is not the size of the air that counts, nor the size of the ear that surrounds it. It is a simple matter of speaking the same language. The Norwegian word for “poet” sounds very similar to the word “potato.” If I said both words repeatedly, a foreign ear would hardly hear any difference between the two pronunciations. We have a saying, “like the potato, which can be used for everything,” that plays upon the fact that the potato is one of the few edible things that grows in such a northern rocky climate. As a poet, I would like to use my poetic freedom to change this sentence around, giving it another meaning, and state the following: “like poetry, which can be used for anything.” A failed actress (2000–2003), a failed novelist (2004–2005), a failed graphic designer (2007–2010), she can take her failures and rearrange them into a verse all its own and instead become a successful poet (2010–2015). Through the seemingly simple action of opening my mouth and expressing the words that were passed around me, I cut through the silence of the word. Extracting language from information, making sense out of nonsense, or the exact opposite. Re-arranging language by giving it back to the body, where it might not have had a body in the first place. Poetry is the respiratory passing of symbols, lending one’s own body to the text, fully aware that nothing can last forever.

Hanne Lippard is a writer and visual artist living and working in Berlin. Her texts are at the base of her time-based works, which include short films, sound pieces and performance. She has performed and exhibited at Bielefelder Kunstverein Berlin poetry festival; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Transmediale, Berlin; UKS, Oslo; KW, Berlin; Berliner Festspiele, Kinderhook & Caracas, Berlin; Galerie Parisa Kind, Frankfurt; Thomas Fischer Galerie, Berlin; Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien; Meet Factory, Prague; Marres, Maastricht; and Poesía en Voz, Mexico City. This year she is a participant in the 6th Moscow Biennial, and for 2016 she is the recipient of the ars viva Prize, Association of Arts and Culture of the German Economy at the Federation of German Industries.

*Tanya Lukin
Linklater*

The
Edges
and the
Centres



Performance at Western Front, Vancouver, by Tanya Lukin Linklater in collaboration with Ziyian Kwan, 2015.
PHOTO: CHRIS RANDLE; IMAGE COURTESY OF WESTERN FRONT, VANCOUVER

More than the experience of seeing a work, I want to hear the stories of objects – how they came to be. I experience a work in my mind, revisiting documentation, as I turn over the stories, retelling and thinking through the limitations and possibilities of the object, performance or film. And so, I like to hear the story of my work as well, even if no one else is listening. I am in relation to ideas, to writing, to language, to bodies of dancers, to structures, to objects, to architecture. The work becomes an embodiment or enactment or activation of a relational process. Relationality and orality inhabit the edges and the centres. These relationships become a part of what is generated, produced and experienced within the gallery. If a viewer transforms into conversant, relationality may also be about collaboration – a place of shared experiences, ideas and listening.

I write for many reasons, but the words don't always come easy. I am not as productive as many writers. I choose to read the long journalistic essay, a book of poetry, rarely a novel. If I do read novels, they are mostly short. Poetry reading continues to plummet, according to the news. Less and less readership each year. Yet, I yearn for structure within language – oral stories, poetry, songs. Perhaps we all yearn for structure. I consider what kinds of structures we choose to abide by and which ones we willfully ignore. Poetry is becoming ignored. Treaties, Indigenous relationships to land, our experiences and complex relationships to objects... these seem to be being ignored as well. There is the attempt to represent the thing itself with poetry, which is never quite successful because the cadence and rhythm of speakers' voices – the way their lips, tongues, teeth and breath move around their words – can never be fully known in written form. The attempt can be striking. In poetry there may be concision, a distilling of an idea into clarity that leaves time and space around and through language for metaphor and a denseness of meaning. Poetry can also fail. Poetry can't convince you to listen, compel you to look or catalyze your thoughts. But there is the possibility for all three – and more – within poetry.

Why do we investigate the place between poetry and visual practices? Text becomes a location that is generative and generous, even if the actions of writing, re-writing and editing are tedious. I give a piece of paper and markings to a dancer. They are like a smudge or an echo of ideas. She physically translates this immaterial echo into motion. The motion situates itself in relation to other bodies, to objects, to architecture. In this place of translation, there is transference of ideas between forms, in a state of continuous translation and re-meaning. Because she is translating and I am translating, and they are translating, the work is multi-vocal and there is slippage in meaning.

I am reminded of Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer – poets, scholars, linguists – and their *Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature* series featuring side-by-side Tlingit and English translations. They expand our understanding of poetry to include an unearthing of cultural and personal stories, oddly resembling anthropology. I am compelled by the space between the Tlingit and English – visually on the page and otherwise. I am also reminded of Zora Neale Hurston's gathering of African-American folk narratives



Performance at Western Front, Vancouver, by Tanya Lukin Linklater in collaboration with Ziyian Kwan, 2015.
PHOTO: CHRIS RANDLE; IMAGE COURTESY OF WESTERN FRONT, VANCOUVER

through her anthropological work in the South, which are activated in her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and others. I am reminded of artist Glenn Ligon's appropriation of Hurston's writing in his text paintings, the repetition of stencilled lines from her 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" on gallery walls, canvases and doors. He repeats the lines "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" and "I do not always feel colored." Colloquial language, folk narratives, orality. Ligon also took Gwendolyn Brooks' collection of poetry *To Disembark* (1981) to title and frame his exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at the Smithsonian in 1993. To disembark is to land, to come ashore, to arrive, to step out of, to perch, to touch down, to settle. Within the context of slavery, it is a forcible landing, a violent settling. Ligon enters into a relationship with the complex experiences of being black in America and histories in their gendered, racialized, and sexualized iterations through research into an African-American literary canon largely obscured. By bringing language into his visual practice through repetition and other means, Ligon invites viewers to face histories and experiences of African-Americans that are discounted and often invisible. Similarly, the construction of a "classics" of Tlingit oral literature is an attempt to canonize orality with stories told from the experiences of Tlingit people and through the Tlingit language. I consider the desire to unearth and investigate histories – to lay bare and open – and what these histories tell us about who we are today.

Indigenous experiences of objects in relation to larger physical and cosmological conversations sometimes necessitate our peripheral relationships to Western art. While we are often on the outside, we are not always looking in. Rather, we are pointed away and looking at the middle of another circle where our concerns may be central. Yet, that may be too reductive, in that relationships to objects and ideas are nuanced and complex. Between many spheres of experience lie spaces of shared meaning where we are many, where we are multiple conversants, listening as deeply as we are telling.

Tanya Lukin Linklater's practice spans experimental choreography, performance, video and text. She is compelled by pedagogy, Indigenous languages, portrayals of women and children in film, and the body. Lukin Linklater has exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santiago, SBC Gallery in Montréal, the Western Front in Vancouver, the Images Festival and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto, among other places. Her poetry and essays can be found in *Yellow Medicine Review* and *Drunken Boat*. Originally from Alaska, she is currently based in northern Ontario.

Tiziana La Melia

Fashion determines empathy.

When one speaks to flowers for example

it is an empathy one seeks and offers

as when you offer thinking to a lily

and to you. But now we take a more humble view -

LISA ROBERTSON

“ABOUT 1836” / LISA ROBERTSON'S MAGENTA SOUL WHIP¹

Voices On Her Cures

After a reading by Roy Miki at the TransCanada Institute Literary Reading & Performance Series (now closed), hosted by Smaro Kamboureli at the University of Guelph in 2010, I remember Roy touched his flip phone after I flipped mine open to check a message mid-conversation. I excused myself for having to interrupt the flow, just to text someone, quickly. He touched his own phone, peered into the then-matte screen, and said, “Everyone will be a poet.”

What do you do when you live in a shoe?²

I had butterflies as I waited at my desk for the words to split. As I caught the bus to my studio, carrying a heavy backpack, I went back to the email prompt you sent me, which took me to the embarrassment I felt at saying that word – *poetry*. I’m not embarrassed now, not quite. Chris Kraus gave a lecture in Vancouver a few years ago; I remember her saying that art makes space for things that lose currency in the world, naming poetry as one of those things. I don’t think poetry has anything more to gain or to lose by the space in which it is read, since we write to the murmur of the T.V. and to the bubbling brook. Despite the apparent enthusiasm for poetry (as if it were the perfect platform shoe?), from where I’m slouching, art and poetry have always shared space, even if who is interested, and the intensity of that interest, shifts. Perhaps because I’m on the bus, and my shoulders are sore, I’m thinking about it in relation to portability, and the recognition that all you need is your voice, gesture, pen, paper, your senses and a mobile phone.

Its ubiquity as material and its economy of means are amenable to double-shifting, having trouble dreaming, sponging off the conversation of others and commuting through description. Something to do when you are too exhausted to do anything else. Word and image turned into a substance hesitating on the horizon; my weather report.

Was it a poetics of articulation for the inarticulate? There was no prescription. The intimacy of fingers walking across a pad. “What?” I mean, *pardon me*. Very calmly. Not afraid. No need for permission. We figured it out by talking. You said, “It has something to do with the compression of language, the way we touch and hear words.” You wondered, “Did autocorrect teach you to write poems?” It pointed to all the words we didn’t want to use, it misunderstood the one I looked for, and suggested something close, or more precise, or a chimera of sounds, tired wrists turn new line breaks, clumsy fingers and pocket *zaum* poetry. How many kinds of palm readers are out there? Even my brother who has been purely oral his entire life can write now thanks to sophisticated speech recognition software.

We wanted to get our ears pierced, yet also wanted to chew our way out of the holes we then occupied, making up our own rhythm of undecideability, this in itself a kind of critique. Rhymes to sublimate the daily grime.

The drama of mishearing and misunderstanding. My own upbringing and mode of understanding through images, through making do with whatever language you have access to. As a way of perceiving proprioceptively, as the morning latte lineup snakes around the block; awakened by scrubbing cars. To pass the time, we read out loud to each other, or told each other stories, not unlike the spinners who told fantastical tales to keep themselves up at night as they worked. In the ennui at work – something that needs only some breath and a pocket. Poetry as a way to get fired. To escape you. Fire me. I beg you. I’ll cope.

*What do you do when you live in a shoe?
Get some loot and move into a boot.*

I writhe, negotiating matter, turning conversation into substance, into a trail of slime streaked with yellow.

I don’t normally think about craft in my own work. Even though part of this week was passed by sanding the edges of aluminum surfaces into the shape of angelfish. For a moment I felt what it must feel like to be honing; preparing these supports that functioned somehow as diary pages. I spent a long time trying to climb out of books, and the process of writing this makes me want to get back in. After all that honing, I understand sandpaper better, and see how all this time reading, editing, writing is really a way to get comfortable speaking. For instance, a way for me to make sense of exhibition was to understand architecture as a book, with walls being its pages to get into you. The paintings become a way to get back into it, it being that starting place: in the body, mine penetrating yours. As a mode of talking. Pierce, sponge, like, fog, birds, sugar, colour, dust, decisions, makeup, inspiration.

Not with a purr but a serrated voice beside a stammering voice. The recognition between the physical and the virtual is a cube of sugar dissolving into morning coffee. Is the sensation I return to now out of nostalgia, of how chewing a shortbread cookie felt like walking over snow? Was it about having a sense of personal freedom within the constraints? A poetics of articulation for the inarticulate. No prescription.

A polish change.³

I had a copy of the book. I gave it to a friend. I went to buy another copy. It wasn’t there. I don’t know why it came up. Reminisces of A23 – a failed writing group that held meetings in the Duncan Building (formerly the Old Artillery Shed) on Pender Street in Vancouver from 2007–2008. We met regularly to share writing, but after two readings and the loss of our space, we let it go. With Emily, I had blueberries and coffee. I said something about going to the studio. She said, “Poetry, that underachieving commodity.”⁴

Even mould can be beautiful. In my old apartment, the building manager sawed holes in the wall of the stairwell in search of black mould. The holes were never patched, and one day I noticed a thin bubble-gum-coloured mushroom bloom from the mould.

Have you ever felt embarrassed by it?

A way of trying to organize an ambient poetry. Black mould is who we blame when our buildings make us sick. *The gallery as a place for reading out loud the residue of writing, going unnoticed when it’s not in fashion.*

Likewise, paper, thick hair, wool, and porous bodies of similar nature, immersed in liquids or otherwise moistened, so open themselves as to become softer, more easily torn, and as it were rotten.⁵

Tiziana La Melia is an artist and writer based in Vancouver. During the Autumn of 2015 she will be participating in the Second Homes Residency at Parc Saint Léger, in Pougues-les-Eaux, France. Recent exhibitions include Mercer Union, Toronto; Francois Ghebaly, Los Angeles; and The Apartment, Vancouver. She is completing her first collection of writing, *Oral Like Cloaks, Dialect*, forthcoming from Publication Studio. In 2014, she was Writer in Residence at TPW R&D, Toronto. La Melia is the 2014 winner of the RBC Canadian Painting Competition and was longlisted for the 2015 Sobey Art Award.

Endnotes

1 Lisa Robertson, *Lisa Robertson’s Magenta Soul Whip* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2009), 58.
2 Text message from Nadia Belerique.
3 From “Cures...” by Emily Fedoruk.

4 Jeff Derksen, *Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2009), 54.

5 Ada Smailbegović, “Of the Dense and Rare,” *Triple Canopy 19* (December 2013). http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/19/contents/of_the_dense_and_rare