

Neo-Baroque Configurations in Contemporary Canadian Digital Poetics

Innovative achievements in poetics are not always fully acknowledged or recognized by literary critics because such expressions move beyond the peripheries of their own established field. Contemporary digital poetics moves beyond print to screen, live events, and inter-media formats. Marshall McLuhan and D.F. McKenzie demonstrate that the *material form* of a text helps define its meaning. McLuhan's maxim "the medium is the message" resonates in McKenzie's *Bibliography and Sociology of Texts* where he defines "texts" to include oral expression, sound (voice, music, or audio sources), cinematography, radio, video, visual graphics, and excursions into electronic media. Contemporary poetics has moved beyond conventions of poetry, fiction, or drama. By "poetics," I refer to both literary discourse and theories of literary expression.

Digital poetics can be understood as a movement from a dominantly visual response to an engagement with both visual *and* aural dimensions. Such contemporary innovative literary expression invites broader aesthetic views of "poetics." Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* and McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* have spoken about the shift from oral culture to written culture with the advent of the Gutenberg press. Ong identifies three phases in the development of Western verbal communications media: 1) pre-literate or primary *oral/aural* and prior to the printing press; 2) chirographic-typographic or primarily *visual*, following the advent of the printing press; and 3) electronic, or what McLuhan and Ong identify as a secondary *oral/aural* phase. I suggest that this third, present phase, populated by radio, cinema, television, video, internet, MP3

players, iPods, iPhones, YouTube, etc., is more accurately a combined or *integrated* visual *and* aural phase, and not just a new “aural” phase. We *have* experienced a greater emphasis on orality during the twenty-first century, but because of inter-media, we have arrived at a point where visual and auditory communications are more or less in *balance*, perhaps for the first time in recorded history. Our culture has been shaped by our privileging of visual modes of expression. For example, in recent history, performative expression has received less credence than printed texts. Over the past century, the Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded over one hundred times but, of the authors honoured, only a handful were dramatists (notably, Shaw, Pirandello, O’Neill, Beckett, Soyinka, Pinter, Fo). In the twenty-first century, textual expression has expanded from print-oriented visual formats to include aural or combined aural/visual digital and inter-media formats, thus distancing itself from the literary canon. With the emergence of digitally-enhanced, language-based expression, and accompanying movements to audio, screen or performative formats, innovative forms of digitally-enhanced poetics have multiplied and transformed the literary landscape. We are riding the cusp of a global shift from primarily visual literary expression to combined visual/auditory expression. Such cultural changes take decades, but the electronic dimension is expanding more quickly than any other mode of expression in human history. It is predictable that this shift will transform the canon and transform our aesthetics.

We have already seen co-relative shifts in aesthetics during previous turning points in history. For example, early cinematic directors made the error of harkening back to theatre when rendering film productions in a “stage-like” manner. Eventually, they developed a sense of film aesthetics. Similarly, digitally-enhanced literary expressions have transcended conventions associated with print media or the codex, thereby generating expanded aesthetic modes. This is not to argue for a superiority of acoustic over visual poetics, rather, it is a recognition that there is an increasing connectivity of *both* modes when one moves into the digital realm.

The three Muses of *lexis* (language), *opsis* (spectacle), and *melos* (music), inspire inter-media performance. A “musicality” can be heard not only in language, but also through figure-ground interplays between the different media. For example, we may experience compositions of poetic vocalizations layered over physical movements, sound effects, visual presentations (e.g. video), and so on. The interactions of varied media create interactive counterpoints that can be interpreted musically. By considering performance

pieces by artists such as Robert Lepage, one can immediately appreciate the effects of inter-media layerings.

It is helpful to include discussion of inter-mediality through figure-ground relationships that can feature a range of compositional strategies including melody, accompaniment, harmony, recursion, multiple auditory lines, contrapuntal structures, juxtapositions, breaks, pauses, alternations, repetitions, oscillations, conjunctions or disjunctions, to name only a few. So, we can consider a rhetoric of composition that includes musical figures in inter-media performance including the articulation of time-space through pulse and rhythm. An acoustic rhetoric could include: 1) overall structure: clef, prelude, overture, motif, figure, cycle, *ritornello*, finale, etc.; 2) pace: largo, *lentissimo*, allegro, andante, etc.; 3) dynamics/intensity: forte, *sotto voce*, pianissimo, etc.; 4) recursion: vibration, frequency, iteration, repetition, percussion, periodicity, uniformity, pulse, pulsation, throb, flutter, palpitation, oscillation, echo, reverberation, resonance, echolalia, refrain, duplication, etc.; 5) harmony: medley, syncopation, euphony, eurythmia, etc.; 6) contrast: counterpoint, polyphony, heteroglossia, digression, tangent, punctuation, overlap; 7) rupture: cacophony, disjunction, interference, interruption, etc. These are only a few of the applicable terms; the language of musical interpretation is well established, although its application to language-based inter-media expression has been limited. Happily, one can recall that voice, and by extension, writing is an acoustic medium and there are intimate connections between language and music. For example, a “phrase” in music can be understood as a syntactical unit that features a cadence which forms part of a musical “sentence.” The term “sentence,” borrowed from language and applied to music, can be understood as being longer than a motif or phrase but shorter than a movement while still making a complete statement with some sense of resolution (or cadence). With musicians such as Schoenberg, the sentence need not come to a “period,” but can instead establish a concept and initiate a development of one idea after another. So, there is no single grammar or rhetoric of music that is universally applicable. Or, as John Cage demonstrated, silence or interval can be understood as an organizational feature, hence, pauses, rests, ellipses, all generate meaning. Nonetheless, articulations of time-space, language, and musicality can be revealing when conducting a critical analysis of inter-media performance.

The Renaissance and Baroque articulations of space evident in the compositional strategies of Bach and Chopin establish shifting and often

multi-stable frames. Contemporary inter-media performances extend such shifting frames through flips in perception that feature shifting figure-ground relationships. In Canada, language-based expression that engages both visual *and* acoustic elements with electronic media is traceable to artists and artists groups including the Automatistes, Herman Voaden, Hugh LeCaine, Norman McLaren, and James Reaney. If one were to name only a few of those who have expanded conventional borders of language-based expression through contemporary, digitally-enhanced, media, then it is possible to identify artists or groups such as R. Murray Schafer, Carbon 14, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, Penn Kemp, Nicole Brossard, Clive Robertson, Monty Cantsin (a.k.a. Istvan Kantor), Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Stephen Ross Smith, Christian Bök, Darren Wershler-Henry, Vera Frenkel, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, Robert Lepage, George Eliott Clarke, Kateri Akiwenzie Damm, Lillian Allen, Gary Barwin, Richard Truhlar, Pierre-André Arcand, Frank Davey, W.M. Sutherland, Nobuo Kubota, Thomas King, Tomson Highway, M. NourbeSe Philip, Joy Kogawa, J.R. Carpenter, Janet Cardiff, and George Büres-Miller, to name only a few. While many of these artists have published books, all have moved beyond conventions of print culture into digital realms of expression. For example, Carpenter, the youngest in this group, produces non-linear, computerized, hyper-media narratives that invite audience participation by entering into embedded text and image caches throughout her digitally formatted online video presentations. Inter-media language-based creations of such artists are growing at an exponential rate.

While this innovative expression opens new literary frontiers, it continues to engage in meaningful socio-political discourse. Language-based artists and artists groups working with electronic media such as Carbon 14 (founded by Gilles Maheau), Nicole Brossard, Shawna Dempsey, Lorri Millan, and Robert Lepage forward powerful commentaries on sexual exploitation, gay or lesbian rights, homophobia, and autocratic abuses within a late-capitalist context. Language-based presentations by Clive Robertson, Hank Bull, Cantsin, and Frenkel satirize the socially debilitating effects of overt commercialism while supporting freedom of artistic expression. Frank Davey's digitally altered anti-war postcards, and Cardiff and Büres-Miller's walking tours with their backdrops of violence, murder and war, examine more subtle epistemological matters related to cultural identity as well as the psychic effects of imperialism or the threat of violent social conditions. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker have commented extensively on

socio-political ramifications of digitally enhanced literary expression for over two decades and, among other topics, have considered the effects of electronic media in reference to military endeavour, diverse sexual identities, cultural, economic and military imperialism, and psychological reactions to all of these. In very important ways, the bulk of such inter-media artists are *engagé* in the sense forwarded by Jean-Paul Sartre, that is, they are socio-politically engaged. So, while the digital front offers no solutions to a range of global crises, it does provide potentially greater access to wider audiences and extends the palette of possible modes of expression. Accompanying the combination of acoustic and visual fields, there is one more dimension that is helpful to consider.

Some, but not all inter-media performances and digital poetic expressions involve direct audience engagement, and so can be identified as having either cyber-textual or ergodic qualities. Espen Aarseth in *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, has defined as “cyber-texts” as texts or forms of literary expression which offer multiple paths, with too many branches or points of divergence for any individual to follow (3). This cyber-textual quality is evident in contemporary Canadian expression, notably, in pieces such as Darren Wershler-Henry’s “The Apostrophe Engine” created in conjunction with Bill Kennedy. “The Apostrophe Engine” relied on a Google API program to execute search results based on any individual word appearing within an on-screen text. The original text that became the foundation for this approach is roughly a full page long and begins as follows:

you are a deftly turned phrase, an etymological landscape, a home by the sea •
you are a compilation of more than sixty samples overlaid on top of a digitally
synthesized 70s funk groove (Wershler-Henry)

By clicking on any word within the body of the online text, a reader can start a search engine which generates an entirely different “poetic” body of text on screen, replacing the original. The project is currently being retrofitted. When operational, the optional choices in this piece are infinite and it is impossible to follow all possibilities. As such, the piece can be defined both as cybertextual and as “ergodic.” Aarseth explains that “ergodic” texts are those that require significant extra-noetic responses, specifically texts that demand *direct* audience engagement apart from the simple reading and turning of pages or simple attention to a page, a stage, or a screen (3). Some genealogical tracing is helpful here.

The conceptual frame of “The Apostrophe Engine” finds a kinship with earlier ergodic texts such as Raymond Queneau’s *One Hundred Thousand*

Billion Poems (*Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, 1961), which offers ten sonnets printed on flip cards divided into multiple parts (much like children's head/body/legs flip-books) thereby generating 10^{14} different poems (Rowe "Queneau's poems"). Queneau engaged the help of mathematician François Le Lionnais in developing the piece, which, incidentally, led to the founding of the Oulipo movement. So, while digital literary expression moves into the partially uncharted waters of electronic media, connections with earlier innovative, non-digital forms are still evident. Nonetheless, any demand for direct audience engagement shifts the literary paradigm slightly by increasing the degree to which readers actively participate in the generation of meaning. Rather than functioning purely as receptors, audiences can potentially become hybrid receptor/generators of meaning, but their engagement is typically limited by the parameters of the expression. So, with Queneau the limitation involves his flip-card format, and with Wershler-Henry, the parameter is limited to a mouse-click engagement. Nonetheless, this shift from a predominantly "receptor" mode, to a "receptor/participant" mode permits the audience to at least partly share the role of "creator" of expression with the principal authors.

In addition to cybertextual or ergodic properties, such forms of expression also result in a condition of *tmesis*, which Aarseth explains as a cognitive response to expressions that are physically impossible to grasp by any single recipient or participant because they include too many divergent elements (47). *Tmesis* (literally, to "cut"), is a notion originating with the ancient Greeks, but re-introduced and re-defined by Roland Barthes in his *Le plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*). Barthes speaks of *tmesis* in describing the way a "reader" will cut or skip through portions of any textual expression that provides too much information or too many diverging paths (10-11). As such these modes of expression typically privilege process over product, avoiding closure, and adopting positions outside of the conventions of "commodity." In addition, the manifold layerings, and the articulations of time-space in such inter-media forms of expression reveal features that find roots in the Baroque.

Canadians are part of a worldwide digital cultural expansion and one significant branch of that expansion can be defined as Neo-Baroque. A recent issue of *PMLA* (January 2009) features a section devoted to Latin and South American Neo-Baroque, but excludes North American proponents. Critics in that issue note that the Neo-Baroque adopts the multi-layered compositional patterns of the Baroque, while it reacts against earlier

imperialist models. William Egginton, in “The Baroque as a Problem of Thought” argues that the Neo-Baroque extends Immanuel Kant’s pursuit of the epistemological questioning of assumptions of human knowledge. Egginton explains, “But this problem is not exclusively philosophical; as I have argued elsewhere, it imbued the skills and practices of generations of people who learned to express an anxiety about appearance’s relation to reality in the way they enacted spectacle, read literature, viewed art, organized political power, and thought of space.” (144) Egginton applies Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s strategy of theorizing a “minor” literature which de-territorializes conventions of expression. Put briefly, “minor” literature does not directly denote “minority” groups. Rather as Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), “minor” expression assumes an ethical response by positing itself against the “majority” and by taking measures to avoid becoming fascist, or part of a corporate elite. I will emphasize that this socio-political position is directly tied to Neo-Baroque articulations of time-space.

In a related analysis, Ronald J. Deibert in *Cyber-Diplomacy* notes that there are two prominent views of digital-electronic telecommunications or what he calls “hyper-media.” In one formulation, we are told that the “information revolution” breaks down hierarchies, authoritarian regimes, and closed societies while generating openness, integration, freedom, and democracy. Recent events, including the use of social media during political uprisings in the Middle East, and the spread of information through WikiLeaks support this perspective. By contrast, an alternate perception of this same phenomenon warns that the suppressive and “panoptic” power of governments and corporations allows cyber-spatial tools of surveillance to penetrate the most private lives of individuals (27). Governmental reactions to WikiLeaks including arrests and new laws restricting the spread of electronic information support this second view. We are left with two *mutually exclusive* views of world order: 1) a “free” but globally integrated, hyper-libertarian system, and, 2) a tightly compartmentalized, state-centric, “corporatist” or “control” system. These two perspectives are irresolvable. Instead, digital culture has only served to polarize existing power groups, heightening rather than ameliorating global tensions. Within this political enfoldment, we find inter-media and digital literary expression typically forwarding anti-autocratic values, often rejecting, or even satirizing commercial conventions of mass consumer culture. Inter-media and digital poetic expression is not especially viable as a mass-market item. Artists who

work this field have chosen these modes for a reason. While they do not hesitate to reach out to large audiences using the digital realm (which in many cases extends through the internet), they do not privilege generating revenue for their expressions, and instead choose a “minor” stance outside of existing hegemonies. So, the struggle continues. Egginton helpfully observes that Neo-Baroque expressions typically react against imperialist models even as they raise epistemological questions, particularly when one considers the manner in which time-space is articulated in language-based, inter-media expression.

Deleuze’s study, *The Fold*, speaks of the Baroque tendency to engage the senses as it de-centres or shifts perspectives (21). The enfoldments of interior and exterior spaces accompany manifold layerings of time-space just as they de-stabilize perception. Norman McLaren has worked with language and text, but perhaps the best representation of the Neo-Baroque can be seen in his film *Pas de Deux* (1967). Through its stroboscopic effects, *Pas de Deux* depicts cascades of layered time-space which find counterparts both in Baroque forms such as the fugue and in some contemporary poetics. Nicole Brossard’s spatio-temporal leaps (e.g., *Baroque at Dawn*, or *Picture Theory*), or the montaged layers in Robert Lepage’s stage productions (e.g., *Tectonic Plates*, *Zulu Time*, *Geometry of Miracles*, *Far Side of the Moon*, *Ka*, *Berlioz’s Damnation of Faust*, or *The Dragons’ Trilogy*), as well as Cardiff and Büres-Miller’s inter-media super-impositions of acoustic *mise-en-scène* atop visual *mise-en-scène* (e.g., *The Paradise Institute* or *The Missing Voice*) result in experiences that demand direct audience engagement even as they abandon more conventional or linear perceptions of time-space. Leibniz established that space can never be void, but always includes matter. In this he anticipated post-Einsteinian theories on physics as forwarded by thinkers such as Stephen Hawking. Although the Neo-Baroque frequently features post-Einsteinian views, including relativity, the uncertainty principle, probability theory, fuzzy logic, chaos and fractal theory, such expression finds roots in the Renaissance.

In his essay, “Renaissance Performance: Notes on Prototypical Artistic Actions in the Age of the Platonic Princes,” Attanasio di Felice informs us that in Italy (c. 1450) during the reign of the Medicis, Neo-Platonic humanism, Artistotelian form and allegorical structure often characterized performance works:

In Quattrocento Italy, once the liberating factor of a philosophical framework was established, artists manifested work in every form possible to the technology of

the day. From the design and execution of fountains to the production of spectacles for the courts, the artists of the Renaissance were encouraged in the pursuit of their pronounced multimedia concerns. Their normal activities included the creation of *trionfi* (triumphal processions frequently requiring the construction of elaborate temporary arches), *cortei* (court pageants), *grottescherie* (masquerades and bizarrely costumed participants), and *carri allegorici* (allegorical vehicles often used in jousts). (6-7)

Manifold layerings of time-space characterized both Renaissance and the Baroque expressions that followed. As far back as *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze develops a theory that rests on Baroque aesthetics. He considers the notions of difference-in-itself and repetition-for-itself in light of a transcendental empiricism which disorders the *a priori* Kantian faculties. Instead of the (neo-)Platonic notion of copies that refer to some higher ideal or original form, Deleuze suggests the notion of a repetition of simulacra without model or ideal. This permits a conceptual, non-representational idea of difference to emerge through layering effects. Deleuze's early works, including *The Logic of Sense* (1969), consider paradoxes of linguistic meaning, subjectivity, delirium, nonsense, and surface effects of signification as well as potential slides in polyvalent meaning. Deleuze and Guattari's argument in *Anti-Oedipus* helps decode or de-territorialize the limits of capitalism that result when artists scramble codes while gesturing to a world free of hierarchy and dialectical opposition. Yet, at present, it seems that hierarchies and dialectic oppositions are entrenching themselves further, even while paradox, delirium, surface effects of signification, and slides in polyvalent meaning increase. To go a step further, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* argues that we have devolved into an alienated state characterized by mindless industrial production, incessant growth, energy waste, and pointless transformation. Baudrillard argues that the resulting "white noise" of society or the "information overload" that McLuhan spoke of leads to dissolutions of identity, collapsing social classes, and blurred distinctions between actuality and representation. Much of this coincides with what Egginton has called "the problem of thought" evident in the Neo-Baroque. For many of the Canadian artists mentioned earlier, language-based inter-media performance frequently raises problems of thought through epistemological questions of identity, when individuals become swept up in the ever-multiplying Narcissistic folds and layers that constitute a culture of simulacra.

The notion of simulacra, the fractal-like repetition of repeated imagery, is fundamentally Baroque. While much of Baudrillard's argument applies, I question his suggestion that there is an ensuing collapse of social classes.

Instead, the opposite appears to be the case. There is an increasing stratification of classes; the upper classes are becoming ever more isolated, insulated and distant; the middle class is embroiled in its own struggle to survive; the working class is experiencing ever deteriorating economic conditions due to a global recession. Meanwhile, social outcasts, the “street-people,” have even less leverage than ever by which to re-enter society. Given this situation, Deleuze’s views on paradoxes of linguistic meaning, subjectivity, delirium, nonsense, and surface effects of signification, coupled with Baudrillard’s discussion of white noise, *simulacra* and infinite regression as they relate to a schizo-culture, help illuminate a socio-cultural perspective of Neo-Baroque expression that positions itself against corporate models. On another level, the ambi-valence of Neo-Baroque expression helps point to its inherently epistemological position. In “Towards a Semiology of Paragrams,” Julia Kristeva’s notions of semiotics and paragrammatics (i.e., pattern recognition of conceptual networks with ambivalent or polysemous interpretations) offer a theoretical viewpoint that helps illuminate patterns of enfoldment in Neo-Baroque expression while recognizing its syncretist qualities.

As with the Baroque, so with the Neo-Baroque: we are faced with a syncretist breadth of vision and a multiplicity of expressive inter-media forms. So, to add to the aforementioned *PMLA* issue on Neo-Baroque expression and to extend the perceptions of Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard, and Kristeva, I offer that digitally enhanced Neo-Baroque poetics often feature the following elements: spectacle, *trompe l’oeil*, anamorphosis, *mise-en-abyme* (i.e., into the abyss, infinite regression, dream within a dream, as standing between two mirrors), manifold layering of stimuli, polyvalent meaning, multi-stable perceptions (e.g., auditory or optical illusions), self-similarity, reiterative patterns, multiple surfacing, inclusion of the quotidian, refusals of a metaphysics of depth, and plays of often ritualistic simulacra that are often synaesthetic. Syncretist expression combining auditory and visual space underlies the Neo-Baroque aesthetics of recent poetic innovations.

Vera Frenkel’s satiric and language-based video installations situated in shopping malls offer an example of a syncretist approach that layers auditory and visual space in a deliberately anti-corporate manner, deliberately choosing a “minor” ethos that steps outside of the conventional “majority.” For example, Frenkel’s short satiric inter-media performance/installation, *This Is Your Messiah Speaking*, uses public audio address systems and large-format video screens strategically placed around shopping malls to convey several modes of language and representation, including English and

American Sign Language, to trace and disclose bonds between Messianism and consumerism, two conflicting romances of rescue. The following is a portion of the voice-over from Frenkel's installation:

I KNOW (FOR EXAMPLE) THAT PEOPLE MUST SHOP
FOR THE RIGHT MESSIAH AT THE RIGHT PRICE.
WHERE REDEEMERS ARE CONCERNED,
COMPARE GUARANTEES.
ASK YOURSELF; 'IS THIS REALLY THE MESSIAH SPEAKING?'
ASK YOURSELF (HE SAID),
'IS THIS REALLY THE BEST VALUE FOR MY MONEY?'
"SHOP AROUND," HE SAID.
"SEE FOR YOURSELF," HE SAID.
"I'LL BE WAITING. (Frenkel 26-27)

Using guerrilla-art tactics with a digital interface, Frenkel co-opts and "theatricalizes" public space, thereby engaging audiences while challenging what Deibert calls tightly compartmentalized "corporatist" or "control" systems. She deconstructs consumerist public address systems with a parodic, libertarian challenge featuring rhythmic ambi-valent language, through use of interval, and multi-stable perception (i.e., for shoppers, the performance is interrupted by ordinary distractions in the shopping mall). The result is subtly but multiply enfolded layers of acoustic and visual stimuli that satirize the convolution of a higher spiritual ethos with quotidian commercial values. Audiences are free to ignore or attend to the audio-video installation. The a-rhythmic shopping experience mixed with the more rhythmic audio-video presentation results in an appropriately disjunctive contrapuntality that mixes interior personal space with exterior public space in typically Neo-Baroque fashion. This digitally enhanced expression is aimed at inspiring social and ethical change among shopping audiences. Like her contemporaries working with literary and digital media, Frenkel inspires a re-definition of individual and larger socio-cultural identities.

The manner in which syncretist and digitally enhanced, language-based, Neo-Baroque expression appeals to the senses helps it extend the borders of mainstream aesthetics. If the audience must choose between manifold paths of expression, as with cybertexts, or is asked to engage directly in the production of meaning, as with ergodic texts, then in both cases there is a subtle shift away from more conventional notions of commodity and exchange, accompanied by a re-definition of the traditional roles of artist, audience, and art as "product." Lepage's cyber-textual performances do not demand direct audience engagement, but do provide more stimuli than any

single individual can absorb, thereby leading audiences to a condition of *tmesis*. Cardiff and Büres-Miller take audiences a step further by integrating them with the artistic performance in a willing collaboration, thereby eroding the difference between “sender” and “receiver.”

Lepage’s syncretist performances extend the inter-media works of artists such as Laurie Anderson (see *United States*), or Robert Wilson and Philip Glass (see *Einstein on the Beach*). Lepage’s many performances typically feature multi-layered physical actions, fugue-like layers of visuals and acoustics, often with rapid-fire movements of actors and props, contrapuntal interplays of digitalized slides, abrupt shifts from allegro to lentissimo, robotics, light-shows, cinematic cycloramas juxtaposed with acoustic contrapuntalities including voice, synthesizer, sound effects, and musical instrumentals, often presented within abrupt and disjunctive scene changes, punctuated with ellipses and silences. In addition, Lepage’s Neo-Baroque qualities include manifold layerings of stimuli, *trompe l’oeil*, and fugue-like patterns of reiteration that engage the audience in synesthetic, multi-sensory, syncretist barrages that often parallel jazz forms, as in his *Needles and Opium*, which features an homage to Miles Davis and Jean Cocteau. Both visual and acoustic space is layered in oscillating “sheets” or patterns, superimposed one atop another, akin to the multiple layers of Baroque architecture. Given these manifold acoustic and visual layers it is impossible for any single member of the audience to observe and retain the entirety of a performance by Lepage. The resulting *tmesis* renders any such performance an incomplete *rebus*, much like a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces, thereby contributing to its ephemerality.

The ephemerality of Lepage’s performative productions is also emphasized by the fact that, to date, very few have been put into print. So, the consumption of Lepage’s performances remains within the combined visual/aural space of the theatre, but evades the world of print that is fundamental to our literary canon. Consequently, despite the praise his performances draw from international critics, none of Lepage’s productions qualify for any of the major literary prizes in Canada, such as the Governor General’s award. Thus, Lepage’s digitalized inter-media performances deny corporatization and deliberately situate themselves outside the frame of conventional print-culture “literature.”

Cardiff and Büres-Miller’s performance/installation pieces are more subtle, but are highly complex when considering the poetics of their digitalized ergodic cybertext. Audiences become “co-creators” in Cardiff

and Büres-Miller's pieces and can add their own inspirations to the performances. It was *The Paradise Institute* that established Cardiff's and Büres-Miller's reputations as international celebrities at the Venice Biennale (2001). More recently, their "Forty-Part Motet" toured internationally, featuring forty digitally recorded singing voices, channelled through forty small speakers set within a closed space that convolutes pre-recorded sound with the actual space, thereby generating a "*trompe-l'oreille*" or audio illusion. Arguably, Cardiff and Büres-Miller's "walking tours" provide the most remarkable advances in the poetic cosmos. Their inter-active (ergodic) digital performance-installation *The Missing Voice (Case Study B): An Audio Walk* (1999-2000), was commissioned by Artangel in London, UK, and is one in a series of walking tours. *The Missing Voice* piece is forty-five minutes long and uses sophisticated bi-aural digital recording systems set to mimic exactly sound reception by human ears. The multi-layered audio track is then transferred to a CD headphone set (much like those handed out at major art-galleries), and then is given out to audience members with an invitation to take a short "tour."

The Missing Voice offers a walking "tour" starting at a library in the Whiteshapel district with a pre-recorded "*noir*" audio soundtrack of a narrator-tour-guide directing audience-participants on a tour of the neighbourhood. The pre-recorded "Discman" audio includes what sounds like a "live" first-person stream-of-consciousness "interior monologue" by the narrator-guide evoking a desire to leave her daily business behind and simply "disappear" from her own life. Interjected is a third-person account of a missing woman, the voice of a "male detective" commenting on the missing woman, the audio-recorded diary of the missing woman (the sound "filtered" so it seems recorded instead of "live"), ambient sounds including insect noises, street music, police sirens, footsteps, church-bells, sounds of other people in the "background," audio-taped voices being re-wound and re-played, automatic gun-fire, air-raid sirens, whirling helicopter blades, accounts of heaps of dead bodies, a report of a woman's body found and identified as the one on the tape, melodious singing, and finally, the guide, regretfully departing due to a lack of time, leaving any audience-participants on their own far from the library to which they must return the Discman audio unit. Atop these fugue-like audio layers, one typically experiences one's own interior monologue, and atop that, the actual sounds of the street are difficult to distinguish from the pre-recorded "virtual" street sounds. There is an embedded sense of vulnerability and menace throughout the "tour,"

with references to assassination, murder and an awareness that you might be followed by a dangerous person through the former hunting grounds of Jack the Ripper.

The multiple acoustic layers are characteristically Neo-Baroque by virtue of their inclusion of the quotidian, multiple simulacra, auditory illusions, iterative sounds and comments, combining in a fugue-like pattern of inter-laid acoustic tracks to generate an unstable or multi-stable sense of perception. Cardiff deliberately blurs differences between the virtual (simulacra) and the actual (quotidian). On the sound track, the “narrator” often anticipates the thoughts of the audience by “answering” expectations and questions that typically might arise in the audience-participant’s mind. By responding to the usual expected audience anxieties (e.g., “Is this the right way?”), Cardiff creates the sensation that she is actually within your mind. The audience as participant becomes an active agent directly engaged in generating meaning through this kinetic, inter-active, performance as ergodic “text.” While there is a game-like aspect to this literary expression akin to “Simon Says,” the audience still acts as agent, playing an active role in unfolding a narration in the form of a journey with its accompanying storyline. Surreal situations arise; for example, one hears rushing air and a revving car engine and is warned by the pre-recorded voice of the “guide” of a rapidly approaching automobile, but there is no car to be seen. Instead, it is a virtual digital audio illusion or a “*trompe l’oreille*.” The quotidian street provides the setting for this syncretist and synesthetic poetic performance. In Neo-Baroque fashion, Cardiff’s three-dimensional, interactive, multi-sensory, inter-media, digital performance generates an aporia between virtuality/simulacra and actuality/quotidian. There is a blurring between “interior” mindscape and “exterior” cityscape, or what Lacan calls *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*. Yet, if one attends carefully, it is possible to note that interior and exterior spaces are conjoined in the mind through a configuration like a Möbius strip. One becomes self-consciously aware of being both “audience” and “actor” echoing Shakespeare’s notion that “all the world’s a stage.” This awareness results in a sense of *mise-en-abyme* and accompanies the disembodied experience of being “wired” (akin to William Gibson’s notion of cyberspace), co-relative to a sense of being in two places at once. This spatial hallucination parallels Nicole Brossard’s notion of “double-time” (see Lynn Huffer’s interview with Brossard), and Barbara Godard’s “parallax” effect (see “Producing Visibility for Lesbians.”) The sensation is akin to the conditions of a schizo-culture as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Fredric Jameson expands this view in

”Postmodernism and Consumer Society” where he states that within a late-capitalist context, the individual is isolated and experiences a sense of being disconnected while facing multiple discontinuous signifiers which fail to link into a coherent sequence: “The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ over time” (119). In *The Missing Voice* signifiers connect, but incompletely, while the sense of self faces dissolution. Monica Biagioli comments on the spatio-temporal disorientation and disjunction in *The Missing Voice* with reference to schizophrenia: “In a schizophrenic way, Cardiff draws you into a heard experience, locks you into an erotic bond, and at the end of the trip, you are snapped back to reality” (3).

The *sotto voce* of the narrator, the rhythm of pre-recorded footsteps, and the overlaid narrative levels have a lulling quality that is in contrast to the *noir* subtext of stalking and murder. An “alienation effect” results and it is enhanced by the *aporia* or contradiction between virtuality and actuality which enhances the sense of displacement or disembodiment involved with being both manipulated audience and active agent. The inclusion of virtual and actual cityscapes extends the question of “textuality” insofar as one layer of the pre-recorded audio track offers what might be considered a reading of the city itself as a kind of text. Finally, the abrupt ending in mid-town, the abandonment of the audience member, and subsequent requirement to return to the starting point without directions extends the “text” of the performance in an *unwritten* way. All those who begin the journey must eventually return the audio equipment and choose how to do so, thus underscoring the ergodic nature of this piece. Cardiff extends the concept of cybertext, into cyberspace as a three-dimensional, interactive, synesthetic, inter-media experience.

In language-based, inter-media performance/installations created by artists such as Frenkel, Lepage, Cardiff, and Büres-Miller, manifold layers typical of Neo-Baroque expression generate cybertextual and ergodic forms that redefine the roles of artist and audience. These contemporary, language-based artists engage audiences directly in the poetics of inter-media expression, while assuming an anti-corporate ethos. The ephemerality of such inter-media expressions situates them outside of print-based conventions, offering expanded artistic horizons with unprecedented possibilities.

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