

## Between *The Intervals* Stuart Mackinnon's Dialectics

In his long poem *The Intervals*, Stuart Mackinnon defines the presence of time, or the absence of time, through the denotations and connotations of the “interval.” The tension between the “interval” as a space of time or place intervening between two points, and time or place measured only as the two points themselves which define the intermittent space of the “interval,” is the tension that creates a compelling dialectic in *The Intervals*. The “interval,” therefore, is defined by its essential “betweenness,” and its meaning is derived from both temporal and spatial terms. Underlying MacKinnon’s dialectic is the philosophy of Heraklitos: “Things taken together are whole and not whole, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things” (frag. 10; ctd. in *The Presocratic Philosophers* 191). In Heraklitean philosophy, the appositional dialectic constitutes cycles of time (e.g., day/night, winter/summer); MacKinnon, however, recognizes that time, like history, is not wholly cyclical, yet it paradoxically generates itself out of a cyclical dialectic and moves forward. In the “Statements by the Poets” collected at the end of Ondaatje’s *The Long Poem Anthology*, MacKinnon illustrates this paradoxical structure of time as the underlying structure of *The Intervals*:

I wished to avoid the temporal narrative of simple cause-effect logic, so I tried to write discrete pieces that would go together as a longer work, trailing bits of themselves into each other and harking back, not by repeating actual lines as in a chorus, but serially, as in visual puns. Hark back not like going back to an earlier time, but as if history were something carried forward, or cyclic with a twist in the end which is the spiral forward.<sup>1</sup>

For MacKinnon the dialectic of time is warped: the form of *The Intervals* cannot sustain narrative continuity through traditional lyric devices such as the chorus or the refrain (since this technique could effectually be termed cyclical), nor can a linear narrative convey the discontinuous structure (that is, a serial poem divided into “intervals”) of his long poem. *The Intervals* is defined *in part* by what Dorothy Livesay calls the “documentary” tradition in her essay, “The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre”: “a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet” (267). Livesay’s idea of the dialectic process in the long poem is accompanied by her recognition of the essential heterogeneity in the long poem: “[T]he Canadian longer poem is not truly narrative at all—and certainly not historical epic. It is, rather, a *documentary* poem, based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements” (269). As a correlation of Livesay’s concept of the dialectical process and aggregative form of the long poem, Smaro Kamboureli, in *On the Edge of Genre*, offers her own reading of the contemporary Canadian long poem.<sup>2</sup> “[T]he long poem,” she writes, “although not necessarily narrative in form, has the ability to absorb into its large structure... disparate elements, thus creating a textual process of ‘betweenness’” (77). As I have noted above, this “betweenness” is what defines the interval; *The Intervals* encompasses a world of (inter-)textuality; it comments on the very process by which MacKinnon gives the “interval” form and meaning as the substance of his long poem; it is, in short, his literary dialectic “with a twist in the end which is the spiral forward.” *The Intervals* exist in the (inter)textual space, in the interval between the objective space of previously documented sources (i.e., the sources that comprise part of MacKinnon’s text) and the subjective space of the poet’s mind. For MacKinnon, *The Intervals* spins in a vortex, spiralling through, or rather between, the points in time and space that shape his long poem.<sup>3</sup>

The text of *The Intervals* opens not with MacKinnon’s own definition/ interpretation of the “interval,” but rather with a pre-script taken from Paul Valery’s *Poems in the Rough*:

We must say that these exist  
 since here are the names for them,  
 and we are aware of the intervals  
 between things, and the silences  
 between sounds. (46)

In the context Mackinnon places this quotation from Valery, it operates as a commentary on the title of his long poem which appears on the title page. Thus *The Intervals* must exist since Mackinnon has already named them in his title; it follows that *The Intervals* are indeed something “between things,” as is the passage from Valery: it exists between the title page and MacKinnon’s own text. Valery himself gives a partial definition of the “interval”: first, in terms of space (giving voice to Mackinnon’s placement of Valery’s text within his own poem), and second, in terms of the sound (articulating the way in which a serial poem such as MacKinnon’s is read as a continuous long poem, yet divided into sections and/or “intervals”). Valery’s definition of “the intervals,” with its implied coalescence of space and sound, describes the very act of MacKinnon’s poetic act, for *The Intervals* exist in the (inter-)textual space of the poem, but they also have a voice, they resonate—in a space of time—with the sounds of the persona’s voice as it emerges from the subjective space of the poet’s mind.

The interval is presented in the pre-script as something which evades definition; in the “Notebooks” that are appendices to *Poems In the Rough*, from which MacKinnon draws his quotation, Valery comments that the interval “is a thing that does not exist... What is a void?—who could paint a beautiful lacuna, a nothing, an absence?... There is quite certainly such a void that this terrible name fits it only as an empty analogy, since it presupposes a certain presence and a thought...” (301). It seems that MacKinnon has accepted the challenge that Valery puts forward in 1943; he may not paint the “interval,” but he may sculpt the intervals as spaces, as sounds in his long poem. The latter half of the passage I have cited from the notebooks also prompts MacKinnon’s enterprise as a “documentary” poet, for *The Intervals* “pre-supposes a certain presence” of Valery’s *Poems in the Rough*. As I have noted, the passage is not taken from the *Poems in the Rough*, *per se*, but from the “Notebooks”; Valery’s text then is a post-script, a text which exists in the marginal space of Valery’s collection of prose-poems. As a pre-script, MacKinnon too places Valery’s text in the margins of his long poem. The form of Valery’s text has also been altered by MacKinnon, for the *Poems in the Rough* are prose-poems, and MacKinnon has cast their type as *vers-libre*. The overall displacement (in terms of form) of Valery’s text, therefore, creates the possibility of “betweenness” in MacKinnon’s long poem, placing it in the interstices of (inter)textuality. That is to say *The Intervals* exist in the timeless space of the “void,” the “lacuna” of Valery’s

idea of the “intervals.” *The Intervals* are “all the existence one could wish, including non-existence itself, in the form, say, of an idea” (*Poems in the Rough*, 301).

The first “interval” (i.e., the first section of MacKinnon’s text) perpetuates the theme of “betweenness” as the persona enters a physical interval. The persona comes into the interval “after ten years of travel” (47), which suggests the persona, as a traveller, is always between places, and further, that the persona, like Odysseus who returns home “after ten years of travel,” alludes to the poetic tradition of *nostos*, or the long poem of the hero’s return home. *The Intervals*, however, is not *within* the *nostos* tradition, but rather *outside* the tradition: it is placed by MacKinnon in the time “after” the persona’s voyage. In *The Intervals*, then, the persona (dis-)locates himself in a specific “interval,” one which is defined by both time and place:

Another time and place I’m new to  
this city this narrow park  
sixty feet wide of grass and cement  
making a long corridor  
between the hospital and prison (47)

In this instance “time” and “place” are analogous “intervals” in which the persona finds himself. As “place,” the “interval” refers, etymologically, to its Latin root: “*intervallum*, orig. ‘space between palisades or ramparts’” (*OED*, vol. 8, p. 1). The physical “interval,” therefore, if its etymological root is divided into its constitutive parts (i.e., *inter*, “between” and *vallum*, “an earthen rampart”), is a compound word which implies not only the space between things, but also the things themselves, the physical edges which shape the intermittent space of the “interval.” These endpoints, the hospital and the prison, are at once the concrete parameters of the “interval,” as well as the thematic points of reference in *The Intervals*.

The archaic denotation of “interval” as a geographical phenomena is later evidenced by the persona’s uncovering of some local history about the park itself: “This park was built on old fortifications/ that stick out under water like drowned cannon” (48). “Cannon” obviously denotes the artillery of a garrison; however, “cannon” connotes one of MacKinnon’s “visual puns” (*Endnotes* 314), or a homonym: as a “canon” or body of literature—perhaps that of the ancient texts, the “old fortifications” of history, that the persona will explore throughout the body of his own text. The persona/poet becomes a literary archaeologist; he not only submerges himself in the literary

“canon” represented in *The Intervals* itself, but also imagines himself in the original topography of the park as a sunken fortification. Thus the visual pun merges the topographical and literary “interval.”

While the persona locates himself in a physical “interval,” MacKinnon expands this image of the poet-as-archaeologist so as to encompass a self-reflexive image of the poet-as-cartographer viewing *The Intervals* on the page as a map, though in conjunction with a physiological metaphor: “On a map the lakes resemble/ an empty womb” (47). This “map” of *The Intervals* fuses the the topographical “interval” (an external space) and the bodily “interval” (an internal space), or the space of time that one spends in the womb (which is, significantly, an unmeasured portion of one’s life-span). The persona/poet, then, enters into the internal space of an “interval”; he is drawn into the space of the poem; he is borne into the “empty womb” surrounded by amniotic fluid and living in the space of his own metaphor:

how did I get here  
 living as usual  
 anywhere but in the present  
 treading air in an interval  
 a period of time between events  
 also intervale (48)

At this point the persona explicitly offers his own definition of the “interval”: “a period of time between events.” This definition reads like a dictionary entry; it is, in fact, *verbatim* the first entry given under “interval” in the *OED*. MacKinnon presents his definition in these formal terms so as to clarify the various denotations of “interval.” As in a dictionary entry, MacKinnon offers a variation on “interval,” that is “intervale,” which is a collateral form based on popular etymology (see *OED*, vol. 8, p. 1).

“Intervale” is popularly associated with the geographical “interval”; in *The Intervals*, however, “intervale” is the transfiguration of “interval” in a physical locus, though executed in the poem as a graphological word-shift: “harking back, not by repeating actual lines as in a chorus, but serially, as in visual puns” (*endnotes* 314).

Linguistic play in *The Intervals* is not only limited to the valences of “interval(e),” but includes topography as a whole in an attempt to find what is an “interval(e)” and what is not. MacKinnon’s quotation from Valery, “We must say that they [the intervals] exist / since here are the names for them” (47), is a recognition of the instability of language; even though the

word “interval” exists, the word itself is changeable, and its meanings indeterminate.

Similarly, as in “documentary” poetry, MacKinnon’s evocation of texts, and citation of texts procures a dialectic, as Livesay writes, between the objective and the subjective; yet this dialectic between the “original” text and the “documentary” text is not necessarily a smooth process. For instance, in the eighth “interval,” the inaccuracy of the “documentary” poet’s imagination is indicated by the break-down in line length:

in the flat places  
they build mounds  
it’s hard to tell  
a drumlin  
from a mound  
all the earth  
moved and dumped  
sometime or other (60)

In the way MacKinnon writes of the landscape in the first “interval,” “as if a stare could make it mean” (47), the persona here states that his “stare” cannot give the landscape a precise definition, nor impose meaning upon it. The persona’s gaze cannot read or interpret the landscape as one can a map, or a text. Although MacKinnon apparently explores the “intervale” in this passage, the variations of land formations produce uncertainty in the persona’s mind as to the categorization of geological structures. The ambivalence whether the topography is glacially formed—as in the case of a “drumlin,” “a long narrow hill often separating two parallel valleys” (*OED*, vol. 4, 1083)—or whether human interaction has produced the landscape—as in the case of a “mound.” The distinction is in itself unimportant, except that the persona’s recognition of the array of geological structures, as well as the array of semantic variants in apparent synonyms—and the difficulty of segregating them—leads into the text of W. O. Raymond’s *History of the River St. John*.

The shift in locus, from “a public park in Kingston, by the lakeshore, between the Hospital and the Kingston Penitentiary” (*Endnotes* 314) to the place and time of Raymond’s text, marks the gap between the document and the documentary text. As Kamboureli writes, “These gaps between the poems [in a serial structure], these absences, suggest the erasure of the binary complexity that threatens to lock the poet between the landscape he visits and the mindscape of his language” (*On the Edge of Genre* 123-4). So

the introduction of Raymond's *History* provides a break in MacKinnon's dialectic, a twist, which carries history forward into the inter-textual space of *The Intervals*.

MacKinnon introduces the text as an exploration of an early 20th century historical text, as well as a archaeological exploration:

Besides mounds, there are walls and special sites, like this Malicet town on an intervale of the St. John river, as W. O. Raymond described it in 1905:  
...the intervals were admirably adapted to the growth of Indian corn—which seems to have been raised there from time immemorial. <sup>4</sup> (61)

This opening passage captures the timelessness of natural regeneration. However, in regard to the human presence in this “intervale,” Raymond comments on the ability of humanity to erase history, to obscure their own traces of settlement:

The spot is an exceedingly interesting one, but, unfortunately for the investigator, the soil has been so well cultivated by the hands of thrifty farmers that little remains to indicate the outlines of the old fortifications. (61)

The Indian settlement marks a space in time, an “interval” that has all but vanished from the geographical “interval.” At once one recalls the resemblance of these “old fortifications” with the submerged “old fortifications/ that stick out under water” (48) in the first “interval.” Interval(e) as place, then, provides a textual locus, linking the historical remnants of intervals at the site of the St. John River and the interval(e) in which the persona locates himself. As the “documentary” persona, one might say that he occupies both the historical text and his own text in simultaneity. Furthermore, the work of Raymond, as an archaeologist, is aligned with the work of the poet; both uncover and record “intervals” of place and time. As Kamboureli recognizes, “[r]ecording geography, a scriptive but *polyvalent* act, is a primary component of the long poem” (*On the Edge of Genre* 123; italics mine). The archaeologist, however, in contrast to the indeterminacies of the poet's work, provides specific measurement, literally mapping the topography of the “intervals”:

The site of this ancient Maliseet town is a fine plateau extending back from the river about fifty rods, then descending to a lower interval, twenty rods wide, and again rising quite abruptly sixty or seventy feet to the upland. (61)

Raymond's text provides what the poet's gaze cannot; the map of *The Intervals* both includes Raymond's textual map and integrates it into its own textual topography. The rectilinear type-setting of Raymond's prose

within the ragged lines of MacKinnon's poem sets the text apart as a map, a diagram (there is one in the original). It is as if Mackinnon's linear typography represents the remnants of an "interval"—that is, the text as an archaeological site—but being careful not to disturb its original form.

MacKinnon quotes further from Raymond, elucidating the relationship between poet and archaeologist/cartographer by way of a description of the burial ground on the "interval":

The only place where the old breast-work is visible is along the south and east sides of the burial ground, where it is about two feet high. The burial ground has never been disturbed with the plough, the owners of the property having shown a proper regard for the spot as the resting place of the dead. It is, however, so thickly overgrown with hawthorne as to be a perfect jungle difficult to penetrate. Many holes have been dug there by relic hunters and seekers of buried treasure. (61)

MacKinnon's integration of Raymond's document in *The Intervals* is in itself a piece of literary archaeology since the text dates from 1905. However, MacKinnon's work is far more than the random digging of "relic hunters and seekers of buried treasure." Typography and topography are mirrored in MacKinnon's textual representation of an "interval." *The Intervals*, as a "documentary" poem, does not follow a linear structure—like the furrow of the farmer's plough, or a historian's words—for the "interval," and *The Intervals* itself, generate a textual nexus of referentiality like tangled hawthorn bushes.

The graphological interplay between "interval" and "intervale," and the idea of Mackinnon's text as textual representations of intervals is developed in MacKinnon's first typographical variation on the page as he arranges the connotations of "interval" in a column, perhaps even a "long corridor" (47), for the eye to travel along:

So many names for this state  
so many meanings

interval  
interregnum  
hiatus  
winter of the heart  
halcyon days  
lacuna

they all express this gap I'm sitting in (48)

Here MacKinnon expresses the valences of meaning, the nexus of connotations and/or synonyms, connected to the word "interval." Heading the column



of words is the textual/semantic origin, the word “interval” itself; the column is contained within the frame of a visual “interval” on the page, and so the frame places the words in a specific context. At the head of the frame, MacKinnon plays upon the word “state”: (1) as a personal “state of affairs,” and (2) as a geographical term in which an area of land is demarcated by borders on a map (which recalls the “map” earlier in “interval”<sup>1</sup>). In this second sense the “state” is analogous to the topographical “interval” (and *intervallum*), which is defined as a physical space between two points of land. The two connotations of “state,” however, equally shade the “meanings” of the column of words. Also, the bottom of the frame expresses the essential paradox of the “interval”: that it is at once a “gap,” an absence, and yet it exists as a physical, inhabitable place (as in the second connotation of “state” and its relationship to the topographical “interval”). Within these textual/semantic parameters, the “interval” is also defined by the interconnections between “so many meanings”: (1) “interregnum,” “[t]he *interval* between the close of a king’s reign and the accession of his successor; any period during which a *state* is left without a ruler...” (*OED*, vol. 7, p. 1134; italics mine); (2) “hiatus,” “[a] *gap* or interruption of continuity in a chronological or other series; a *lacuna* which destroys the completeness of a sentence, account, writing, etc.” (*OED*, vol. 7, p. 203; italics mine); (3) “winter of the heart,” a metaphorical phrase which, like the “interval” itself, evades specific definition and can only be defined by an inadequate paraphrase; its anomalous presence among such a list of “definable” terms is therefore significant; (4) “halcyon days,” “is associated in Greek myth with the winter solstice. There were fourteen ‘halcyon days’ in every year, seven of which fell before the winter solstice, seven after: peaceful days when the hen-halcyon built a floating nest and hatched out her young” (Graves, *The White Goddess*, 186-7); (5) “lacuna,” “[i]n a manuscript, an inscription, the text of an author: a *hiatus*, blank, missing portion” (*OED*, vol. 8, p. 577; italics mine). Thus, the polyvalence of meaning, or rather the “betweenness” of meaning that manifests itself in the word “interval” informs the essential indeterminacy and evasiveness of the “interval” that had pre-occupied Valery, and so MacKinnon.

**W**hile the denotations of the words show an obvious interrelationship (as indicated by my emphases), and the column of words are associated by shades of meaning relative to the frame of this textual “interval,” there is a subtext to this arrangement of words. As noted above, the

“interval” is the textual origin. “Interregnum” is a political application of an “interval” (also relative to “the names for this state”); but this kind of “interval” is particularly associated with political unrest, which anticipates the events of the Kingston Penitentiary Riot in the later sections of the poem. “Hiatus” is both a temporal and spatial (textual) usage of the “interval,” which is particularly associated, in terms of textual space and time, with the form of MacKinnon’s long poem as a discontinuous serial poem. “Lacuna,” too, reflects upon the act of writing itself, but writing which precludes the possibility of its own “non-existence” (*Poems in the Rough*, 301). Furthermore, the etymology of “lacuna,” like “interval,” originates in topographical terms: that is, “[L]atin *lacuna* a hole, pit, F[rench] *lacus*, lake” (*OED*, vol. 8 p. 577). Again, the idea of *The Intervals* as a map is intimated by the “lacuna” as a lake on a map—just as they are described earlier in “interval” 1—and thus derived from both the etymological origin of “interval” as well as the geography of the “intervale” itself, for it is located at the edge of a lake.

“Halcyon days” is an allusive phrase which extends its mythological origins into the influential texts of T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Charles Olson’s “The Kingfishers.” The ambiguous phrase “winter of the heart” is therefore—by its juxtaposition with “halcyon days”—layered with inter-textual references to Eliot’s and Olson’s use of the halcyon/ kingfisher myth. If the phrase “winter of the heart” is divided into its constituent parts, “winter” might be seen in relation to Eliot’s lines at the beginning of *Little Gidding*: “Midwinterspring is its own season. . . / Suspended in time between pole and tropic” (1, 3). MacKinnon’s “winter of the heart” also echoes Eliot’s phrase, “In windless cold that is the heart’s heat” (*Little Gidding*, 6). “Midwinterspring,” in Eliot’s terms, is a correlative to MacKinnon’s “halcyon days,” as they both relate time as it is “suspended” at the seasonal instances of winter solstice and spring equinox. Time in *The Intervals*, therefore, is “suspended” in a continuum of “betweenness.” But “time” is not measured here by a calendar; it is measured by the “heart”; it is a psychosomatic progress of time—in other words, time which is not chronological or linear, but time which is measured in a subjective space. As MacKinnon writes in the “Statements by the Poets”: “The *place* worked its way into my consciousness until it became the central metaphor of the interval, which could expand and contract, taking moods, incidents, people into its structure” (314; italics mine). The subjective space of the poet’s

mind, as well as the persona's physical presence, becomes enveloped in the metaphor of the "interval," and so both become enfolded in the textual space of *The Intervals* itself.

As an intertextual link to Eliot's halcyon lore, MacKinnon's also alludes to Olson's "The Kingfishers," reflecting upon the compositional process of the long poem, and the textual space and time which the long poem shares and occupies, as Olson himself articulates:

The message is  
 a discrete or continuous sequence of measurable events distributed in time  
 is the birth of air, is  
 the birth of water, is  
 a state between  
 the origin and  
 the end, between  
 birth and the beginning of  
 another fetid nest  
 ("The Kingfishers" 4. 1)

The echoes of Eliot's *Little Gidding* ("This is the death of air . . . This is the death of water . . .") in Olson's "The Kingfishers," and, in turn, the resonances of Eliot and Olson in *The Intervals*, represent the intertextual relationship between "the origin" (*Four Quartets* and "The Kingfishers") and "the end" (*The Intervals*). Yet the "state between/ the origin and/ the end" recalls my previous statement that the word "interval" is the textual/semantic "origin" of the column of connotations of the "interval"; it follows that the final word in the column, "lacuna," is, textually, the "end," or (as I have defined "lacuna" above), the absence of text. The column, then, exists in the textual space between the "interval" and the "lacuna," between presence and absence. These "states" or "meanings" of the "interval" are therefore between intervals themselves; they all express a space between things, spaces (in a Heraklitean sense) through which "all things flow" (qtd. in *De Rerum Natura* 238). MacKinnon's column is, to use Olson's words, "a discrete or continuous sequence"; the words themselves are not ordered in a hierarchy, but interactive in a dynamic of upward and downward flow. To quote the fragment Eliot extracts from Heraklitos for his epigram to *Burnt Norton*: "The path up and down is one and the same" (frag. 60).

The intellectual approach (in the first "interval") towards defining what an "interval" represents, is countered by an anti-intellectual approach in the second "interval," as the persona falls into an "interval/ of comatose seclu-

sion" (50). He enters a state of what could be called "winter of the heart" at the moment he encounters a deaf-mute in the "intervale":

I thought of Ruth  
who took us into  
times the memory rejects  
the long dull waiting  
those minds that society rejects  
children idiots fools  
who have no memory (51)

At this point the persona enters into an mnemonic dialectic, in that the erudite poet who can intersperse so many connotations of the "interval" is confronted by his fear of mental incapacity: a fear of being forgotten in an "interval" of social procrastination, caught (or stereotyped) in a space of time. Emphasized by the parallel structures, the dialectic occurs between the storyteller (Ruth) who takes us "into times the memory rejects," and her antithesis, the mental invalid who "society rejects" and "who [has] no memory." The poet/persona lies in the area between the two poles of the mnemonic dialectic. In this state he is reduced to a level of primal fear that he might never go beyond this "interval" of "times the memory rejects."

In the third "interval," the persona is again confronted by his fear of mnemonic/ intellectual loss as he imagines himself in the same state as the deaf/mute he had encountered earlier:

I began to put together  
times before I'd had this fear...  
I was looking at a self portrait  
Sally's optical colour flashes  
went into a trance  
and dreamed I was a simpleton (52)

The mental process of assembling "times before" reflects the process of poetic composition; in particular, the process resembles a serial structure, as in *The Intervals*. The persona, however, recalls times before his "interval" of fear (not unlike the process of the documentary poet). The persona is drawn into the "self portrait" he holds in his hands—just as in the first "interval" the persona is drawn into the map. As a self-reflexive gesture, then, the photographic "self-portrait" mirrors *The Intervals* itself.

For the most part, the "self-portrait" in the third "interval" portrays a static image, but not wholly, for the "optical colour flashes" suggest movement within the frame of the photograph. Later in the poem (interval 17),

the photographic “interval” reoccurs as MacKinnon evokes the specific context of serial photography:

broken into frames between trunks  
hand held for split second after second  
all the motions of the runner  
strung out like Muybridge for viewing (68)

MacKinnon’s evocation of Eadweard Muybridge, whose photographic studies of human anatomy in motion would involve taking “a succession of automatic exposures at intervals of time” (*Animals In Motion* 14).

MacKinnon, however, constructs his analogy to Muybridge out of the topography of the “intervale,” an act which absorbs the persona into his own photographic metaphor. The Muybridge photographs capture the idea of motion within a framed space, the state between the kinetic and the static—that which is the essence of the “interval.” As the persona states in the thirteenth “interval”: “Anything to break the pose” (64).

**B**eyond the photographic metaphor, the persona’s interval of fear is re-evoked textually as part of an intellectual dialectic. In the seventh “interval,” MacKinnon introduces a philosophical inquiry from Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, with what appears to be a child’s question: “Where do good thoughts come from/ where do bad thoughts come from/ out of mommy’s tummy?” (57). The question recalls the persona’s entrance into the metaphorical womb (a physiological interval, perhaps as long as the period of gestation) in the first “interval.” More important, the question counterpoints the intellectual inquiry posited by Lucretius’ text:

As Lucretius in *The Nature of Things*  
‘What thing is it which meets us  
and frightens our mind when we  
are awake and under the influence  
of disease, and when we are buried  
in sleep’ (57)

MacKinnon has omitted the lines that follow this passage, which he has quoted from a translation of *De Rerum Natura*: “The replicas of those who have left the light/ Haunt us and startle us horribly in dreams” (4. 38-9; trans., Rolfe Humphries). Lucretius’ images of the dead are born from the imagination; these figures of the dead are, in MacKinnon’s translation,<sup>5</sup> “things” which are neither alive nor dead, for they are undefinable, existing as non-entities in an interval state of being, in the void of an “interval” of

sleep or a fevered dream. Sleep or disease, then, is a medial state between a waking or healthy life and death. Furthermore, MacKinnon adopts Lucretius' philosophy that we see the world through a child's eyes: "...just as children, fearing everything, /Tremble in darkness, we, in the full light,/Fear things that really are not one bit more awful/ Than what poor babies shudder at in darkness" (*De Rerum Natura* 6. 37-40). MacKinnon's persona, aligned with "children idiots fools" (51), is thus the same as Lucretius' subject in *De Rerum Natura*. For Lucretius, the dead are metaphorically reborn in the imagination. Therefore, it is possible that Lucretius' images of death, in the literary space of inter-text, are reborn in the womb-like imagination of MacKinnon's persona; or, perhaps (alongside Heraklitos) the phantasmal images are metaphorically reborn as part of the poem MacKinnon has reset on his page as an invocation of ancient philosophy.

MacKinnon's alteration of Lucretius' text (taking into account the flexible boundaries of translation) presents a curious typographical variation which is reminiscent of the changes of Valery's *Poems in the Rough* in the pre-script of *The Intervals*. In contrast with Humpries' translation, MacKinnon's arbitrary (and unusual) line breaks appear as poetry (as in the original), although the pedestrian rhythms indicate that the translated passage is in fact prose. Thus MacKinnon's typographical variance effectively places Lucretius' text in an "interval" between prose and poetry.

In *The Intervals*, MacKinnon's evocation of ancient texts is gauged against hierarchical philosophies such as Plato's. MacKinnon refers to Platonic thought cynically, whose order of Forms or Ideas the persona envisions as if strung on "the clothesline of god/ Or Plato or whoever/ in the sky holding up/ our menial delight" (63). He speaks of the decline of Platonic thought and the pre-eminence of atomist philosophy (i.e., pre-Platonic Heraklitean and post-Platonic Lucretian) in *The Intervals*: "from another better world/ these hierarchies began to yaw off slowly" (63). The persona, in contrast with the elitism of Platonic thought, effectively recognizes the value of the perspective of the deaf-mute:

I had been asking myself  
was there an order behind things  
under the appearance  
looking for the pattern  
and I knew there was no order  
for him but the ones his eyes made  
no order no plan no end (63)

Although the dialectic is fundamental to Platonic thought, its hierarchical perspective, as a linear construct (“the clothesline of god/ or Plato”), must have an end; MacKinnon, however, is concerned with continuity, the reflexivity of dialectics as in Heraklitean thought. So the presence of the deaf/mute emphasizes a non-elitist perspective in as a polemic opposite to Plato; and thus MacKinnon perpetuates his intellectual dialectic.

Like Eliot, however, MacKinnon is indeed an erudite poet, and his contemplation of time in *The Intervals* reflects upon the problematic situation of solipsism, of living in “such personal allegories” (67). In “interval” 14, MacKinnon’s recognition of “intervals” of time bears comparison to Eliot’s meditation on time in *Burnt Norton*. Without naming them, Eliot writes of “the intervals between things, and the silences between sounds”:

Words move, music moves  
 Only in time; but that which is only living  
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
 Can words or music reach the stillness . . . .  
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
 not that only, but the co-existence,  
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
 And the end and the beginning were always there  
 Before the beginning and after the end.  
 And all is always now. (V. 1-5, 7-12)

Mackinnon, however, is not so positive that we may occupy a perpetual present in language or in music; or that if we may, the consequences are that if we obliterate past and future that we can only live in the self-enclosed space of an “interval”:

Not by any conscious act of will  
 can we inhabit tense . . .  
 wandering  
 wholly in the present  
 only by surprise  
 stunned into awareness  
 forgetting for a moment past and future  
 living so close to things  
 that we forget time and are united  
 to the gross particulars (65)

Time, in a perpetual present, i.e., at the moment of Eliot’s “stillness,” is relative to Epicurean and Lucretian time: “a sensation we get from bodies in motion or at rest” (*De Rerum Natura*, Endnotes, 238). MacKinnon’s persona, as a

passive figure, lives in a time and place between events, enclosed within an “interval.” Yet MacKinnon employs a typographical technique in this passage, breaking the syntax of the lines, infusing visual energy into the language—which is written in the progressive present tense—that would “inhabit tense/ wandering/ wholly in the present.” Thus, typographically, the continuum of time is fragmented: time is lost in the incoherent plurality of things. To paraphrase Eliot’s own words, it is the form, the pattern of MacKinnon’s text which dispels the possibility of uniting past and future in one tense.

Instead, MacKinnon sees time as a tension between things, like the interval itself which can be seen as a cyclical space in time (“wandering/ wholly in the present”), or as an intermittent series (“united/ to the gross particulars”):

I would live there  
 but haven’t the strength to fasten myself  
 to such a wandering wheel and live instead  
 these periods of dull interspace  
 away from the shock  
 until time gets heavy (65)

“The wandering wheel,” the idea of cyclical time, relates to the archaic belief embraced by pre-Socratic thinkers such as Heraklitos, who believed time to be a cosmic cycle (i.e., day/night; winter/summer). MacKinnon, too, embraces the cyclical dialectic of Heraklitean philosophy. However, there is no possibility to enter into or exit from these “intervals” of cyclic dimension; there are no pauses between the cycles of a strict dialectic. Yet the pauses are the “intervals” themselves. In these pauses, “time gets heavy,” as if the persona is in a state of sleep or dream; also, “time gets heavy” suggest the shock quality of the *zeitgeist* or spirit of the times in the modern era. Thus, the “interval” (of text) must necessarily be active, charged with physical energy to alleviate the lethargy of time, so that the poet/persona may interact with his own time. MacKinnon suggests the tension between repetition and change produces the infusion of energy necessary for emergence out of an “interval”:

by sleep by dream  
 by repeating this walk to the park  
 like a chant  
 or by changing houses jobs friends  
 living months of unrelation  
 until a new shock a new atrocity  
 a new lover offers me  
 that taste of living (65)



The chant itself exemplifies poetry of repetition—as in a cycle of time, of words, repeating themselves in patterns, as the persona does, textually, by way of paramoion (repetition of phrases equal in length). One might say that the persona has returned (as in a cycle) to his original stance in the first “interval.” This return in thought is typical of the cyclical pattern of an “interval,” and characteristic of the structure of *The Intervals* as a whole.

It is the deaf mute, then, who returns to prompt the persona away from his “interval(e)” of isolation. But now the deaf mute, as in a reversal of roles, is the leader, not the one being led out of the “interval(e)”:

he began to lead me slowly out  
with plenty of time to see  
the soft rich place beside the lake  
the interval of comfort and security  
the park in a city of walls  
the middle class I belong to (67)

The emphasis placed upon the slow passage of time in the social “interval,” perhaps representative of the slow process of social change, is particularly effective in anticipation of “the unpredictable changes” (67) which give rise to a seeming acceleration of time in the letter describing the central action of the poem—the Kingston Penitentiary riot of 1971.

The letter form of “interval” 20 is a perplexing, yet cogent form, in that MacKinnon is able to convey his perception of the prison riot through the immediacy of language and excitement of expression possible in a personal letter. This sense of immediacy is pointed to by the dating of the letter, “April 21” (72), since this date would place it one week after the commencement of the Kingston Penitentiary riot on the evening of Wednesday, 14 April 1971 (*Kingston Penitentiary*, 126). The letter, therefore, explicitly states its own historical time; even the journalistic style of the letter places it in the immediate context of the prison, for its “naive revolutionary rhetoric”<sup>6</sup> is not unlike the language that would have appeared in the Kingston prison periodicals of the 1960s and 1970s, *The K. P. Tele-Scope*, or *The Tight-Wire*. (If one notes the use of dashes, as opposed to conventional punctuation, even the textual presentation is suggestive of a revolutionary grammar.) This letter, then, presents what would conventionally be called a “documentary” text (in the sense of non-fiction journalism). To reiterate Livesay’s words, *The Intervals*, as “a documentary poem,” is “based on topical data” (269)—i.e., the events of the Kingston Penitentiary riot—but as a long

poem it is neither objective, nor non-fiction “documentary.” So the letter exists as another “interval” text—one which is between the borders of genre.

MacKinnon’s assimilation of a prison periodical style effectually aligns his persona’s voice with the *ethos* of the rioting prisoners and their social “interval” of imprisonment. This process of assimilation can be seen through the initial reference to time at the beginning of the letter—“They’ve been at it four days now” (72)—which seems to distance the persona from the events since he may still share something of a middle-class *ethos*. But then, as if drawn in by the hysteria of the riot, at the end of the letter he takes a position of alliance with the rioters: “four thousand men eighty-eight hours under the dome taking collective vengeance on the capital classes for a short while liberating the prison—Yours till we are all liberated/ *Stuart*” (72). The movement from a passive reference of “four days” to the precise reference of “eighty-eight hours” represents the evolution of the persona’s thought patterns as they are encapsulated by expressions of time. For I would argue that the writing of the letter is part of the process of the deaf-mute leading the persona out of his middle class “intervale of comfort and security” (67). In the letter he re-evokes the Lucretian image of death (primarily associated with the deaf-mute) as he has experienced it and transforms it, distancing it from himself; thus the persona’s personal dream “interval” is projected upon the “spaces of the citizens” (67) (the “interval(e)” between the hospital and the prison), and so simultaneously, upon their collective psychological “interval”: “that’s their nightmare the fear they live with and suppress and are reminded of each time they pass the pen...” (72). Ultimately, the persona’s voice in the letter (and afterwards, as he voices his imagined courthouse speech and his “coma dream” in “intervals” 22 and 23 respectively), therefore, is revolutionary, as he employs another visual pun, a double-entendre likening himself to the prisoners in the “pen[itentiary]” while he writes, metaphorically, with his “pen” to “start riots/ in the pen” (76).

These resonances of a revolutionary voice following the letter indicate a counter-turn towards the completion of *The Intervals*: “as if history were something carried forward, or cyclic with a twist which is the spiral forward” (*Endnotes* 314). In one sense, the historical context of the Kingston Penitentiary riot in April 1971 is carried forward in MacKinnon’s “documentary” text. But in another context, the persona, in his shift from passive con-

temptation within the “intervale” to the kinetic “interval” of political action embodies, in himself, a Heraklitean dialectic of contraries which propels him forward. The letter, in a Heraklitean context, is an “interval” of political change in conflict with the permanence of the status quo.

**C**hange and permanence become the poles of MacKinnon’s dialectic in the final stages of *The Intervals*. In the only titled section of *The Intervals*, “The Halcyon” (“interval” 21), which recalls the earlier reference to “halcyon days” in the first “interval,” the tension between change and permanence is manifest in the typography of diagonally aligned blocks. In contrast to the immobile, statuesque column in “interval” 1, the form of “The Halcyon” depicts the text at once in a medial process of change, inhering in new shapes and forms, reiterating the same connotations of the “interval”:

In the year at winter’s worst  
 in the heart stunned  
 after the end and before the beginning  
 the worst part of change (73)

The form itself expresses the balance of the seven days before and after the winter solstice, the “halcyon days.” Within “The Halcyon” the threat of division is inherent, for the form is

not in itself permanent  
 but what it refers to:  
     Eternal change  
     the too strict forms  
     must give way (73)

The form of “The Halcyon,” therefore, is Heraklitean: “something which is brought together and brought apart” (frag. 10, *The Presocratic Philosophers* 191). The resonances of Heraklitos didactic voice are assimilated in MacKinnon’s voice as he explicitly (and exclusively) refers to the philosopher himself in “interval” 25:

The permanence you seek  
 the order you wish to classify  
 lovely Heraklitos the first to ride chaos  
 seeking in change  
     permanence  
     in conflict  
     rest  
 Harassed T. S. Eliot the last to try (78)

We might wonder why Heraklitos is not directly quoted in *The Intervals* since his dialectic philosophy is fundamental to MacKinnon's long poem. Is it that MacKinnon wishes to avoid the pedantry of "harassed T. S. Eliot" and his *Four Quartets*?<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the fragmented typography of MacKinnon's text represents the juxtaposed anomalies of change/permanence/, conflict/rest; perhaps MacKinnon's fragmented text even imitates Heraklitos' *Fragments*. Yet the answer as to why MacKinnon avoids direct quotation may be found in "The Halcyon" itself, as he re-evokes Olson's and Eliot's kingfisher mythography, in addition to the work of Robert Graves (*The White Goddess*) and Jessie L. Weston (*From Ritual to Romance*):

Olson Eliot Graves the Greeks first  
then Weston commenting on them  
how to figure the rise and fall of states  
the installation of a new king  
or the change of any social order  
work and rework myth

Mythographers historians iconoclasts  
refurbish erect pull down  
the story remains the same  
not itself permanent  
but what it refers to: (73)

As mythographers compile many extant variants of the same myth (e.g., the kingfisher/ halcyon), and historians assemble many versions of the same story, MacKinnon too composes *The Intervals* as variations on "interval." To answer the question of allusion versus direct quotation, I would say that for MacKinnon there is no one text that will define the "interval," since its various connotations and denotations are in themselves in constant flux, but there remains one continuous and unifying *idea* of the "interval" throughout *The Intervals*. However, as iconoclasts tear down (with words) the idolatry of conventional religion (as do both Heraklitos and Lucretius), MacKinnon too threatens breaking apart the unifying image of the halcyon in *The Intervals*. "The Halcyon," then, is an example of Heraklitean flux, that "Things taken together are whole and not whole" (frag. 10 *The Presocratic Philosophers* 191). As an "interval," "The Halcyon" integrates and condenses the various interconnections between the idea of an "interval" throughout *The Intervals* and expresses them in a discrete "interval" of the long poem as a whole; but it also expands the intertextual space into which *The Intervals* reaches.

MacKinnon's relationship with Olson's and Eliot's kingfisher mythography has already been discussed; his evocation of Weston and her book on the Grail legend addresses the idea of variations on a single myth, in her case, of the Fisher King; his allusion to Graves in this context, however, summons a specific passage from *The White Goddess* on the legend of the halcyon/kingfisher:

[S]o the legend (which has no foundation in natural history, because the halcyon does not build a nest at all but lays its eggs in holes by the waterside) evidently refers to the birth of the new sacred king, at the winter solstice.... (187)

That the halcyon legend is not grounded in natural history is not an issue MacKinnon would raise; that the halcyon legend refers to the historical situation of the interregnum, or "installation of a new king," and specifically the birth of that king recalls the persona's entry into a metaphorical womb in the first "interval." Perhaps the space represented by the textual instances of "halcyon days" in the first "interval" and "the Halcyon" is indicative of the interval period of brooding of the kingfisher. The persona, therefore, as he is lead out of the "interval(e)," is also reborn as "The Halcyon," "featherbedding it/ across the plains/ in northern winter" (73). Yet the persona simultaneously embodies two connotations of the "interval" set out in the first "interval": he is both the halcyon of "halcyon days" and new king (perhaps in reference to Weston, the Fisher King) at the end of an "interregnum." His identity is thus balanced in a medial state of "betweenness."

As the persona identifies himself with the halcyon, MacKinnon turns away from the hierarchical class structures of society, for his mind instinctively follows the gravitational pull of the winter equinox into the courthouse and the trial of the prisoners after the riot:

The wind is getting up equinoxial  
equal strength of day and night  
equal pull of the dialectic  
blows me all the way back  
to the courthouse (74)

At once the dialectic of day/night recalls the cyclical dialectic of Heraklitos; and again MacKinnon's condemnation of the hierarchies that are inherent in a court of law recalls his earlier refutation of Platonic hierarchies. In the "Statements by the Poets" MacKinnon reiterates his polemical opposition to Platonic idealism: "Thus Heraclitos is chosen over Plato, dialectics over idealism, and political action over passive contemplation" (315). So in

“interval” 22 MacKinnon reconstructs his geographical “interval” to be one of political action set between the courthouse and the prison. And in contrast to his self-involved manner in the “interval(e)” the persona imagines himself addressing the judge:

If you stretched a cable  
from the courthouse dome to the prison dome  
and you hung these men from it  
that would be as obvious  
as the way you’re doing it now  
also if the wind got up a little higher  
the strain in this credibility gap  
might pull down both your houses (74)

The “cable,” as a symbol of hierarchical order, resembles the “clothesline of god/ or Plato” (63); its presence, however, creates an “interval” (associated with dialectics) between the courthouse and the prison. However, this “interval” is a “credibility gap,” an absence which subverts the hierarchies of the institutions which serve as the interval’s boundaries. The “wind,” representing the equinoctial tension (of “The Halcyon”) or “equal pull of the dialectic” (74), places strain on the hierarchical structures represented by the courthouse and the prison; thus like an iconoclast, the persona’s dialectic voices his will to tear down not the symbols of religion, but of social hierarchy.

Adopting a public, even didactic voice in the aftermath of the prison riot and trial, the persona directly addresses the reader in “interval” 24:

You who enter an interval  
of time of space of music...  
Who enter a valley a gap a winter...  
Who enter unaware  
the empty space between events  
remember from one who knows it well  
that your state of trance is like standing in traffic  
which blurs and blurs the vision  
as you wait to cross to  
subliminal glimpses (77)

Also, in “interval” 25, the persona directs himself towards “T.S. Eliot . . . your voice over the moving water is desperate” (78), as he spins away from the inter-textual space and the echoes in his own voice the reader sees and hears from Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. While Eliot is spun off from the text, the reader is introduced into its textual space. The passage above reads like the

persona's re-vision of his own text, perhaps as a conclusion to *The Intervals*. Even though the images summon to mind several "intervals" of his long poem, MacKinnon's use of the second-person pronoun transposes these pre-existing textual "intervals" into the context of the reader entering not only into the text, but the physical experience of being in an "interval."

The persona's "state of trance," expressed purely as a visual phenomena—like an accelerated vision of Muybridge photography—re-creates his experience of the deaf-mute and translates itself into the experience of the reader of *The Intervals*. Since the persona has left the "interval(e)" and the deaf-mute behind, he projects his didactic voice towards the reader as an example of the liberation of his aural and vocal tracts. Therefore, the dialectical dynamic of this "interval" operates between the persona/poet and reader, whose space of separation is bridged by words. This dialectic between text and reader, between silence and sound, between text and voice, is the intertext of persona and reader, whose reciprocal acts of writing and reading are expressed by MacKinnon in terms of an "interval... of music" (77).

In the final lines of *The Intervals*, MacKinnon develops the idea of a musical "interval" which is defined in the *OED* as "[t]he difference of pitch between two musical sounds or notes, either successive (in melody) or simultaneous (in harmony)" (vol. 8, p. 1). As a gesture of harmonics, and movement away from the didactic voice of "intervals" 24 and 25, the persona includes "us," the reader, in his final phrase:

The intervals are the silences which make sound distinct  
the stretch of pitch that makes harmonics  
The intervals are the time of rest or privacy  
the space between the steps  
that take us to the future (80)

As one reads these lines, their cadences repeat with the rhythmic succession of a chant. The presence of the musical metaphor in these final lines repeats the beginning of *The Intervals*, as in the cyclic repetition of a chant; they return to the pre-script, and Valery's *Poems in the Rough*: "we are aware of the intervals between things, and the *silences* between sounds" (46; italics mine). For without silence there could be no music, only noise; without space there could be no movement, only stasis. The musical metaphor resonates afterwards as a visual image cannot; so these are the "intervals," the silences which are measured in time, which are analogous (as in the "steps"

of a musical scale) to “the space between the steps/ that take us to the future.” *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* notes that the relationship between pitch in an musical interval is an example of “spatial metonymy” (399); the sound of a note, as a sign, is measured in spatial terms, just as the poet/persona’s voice is expressed spatially as text. As text, therefore, the structure of *The Intervals* can be expressed in musical terms: the long poem develops *melodically*, or in successive “intervals” (i.e., sections of *The Intervals*) correspondent to space between individual pitches; and *harmonically*, or as the existence of simultaneous intervals, as in the whole apparatus of *The Intervals* as a serial poem. On the musicality of the long poem, Ondaatje, in his introduction to *The Long Poem Anthology*, quotes a passage from Robin Blaser,

There is a further special analogy with serial music: the voice or the tongue, the tone, of the poem sounds individually, as alone and small as the poet is... but sounded in a series, it enters a field.

“The Practice of Outside” (in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*) (3)

In this way *The Intervals* is both didactic and introspective, public and private, the voice of “you” and the voice of “I.” Perhaps the voice of the long poem is in an intervallic state between these changeable voices, shifting in and out of each other in the co-existing silences and spaces within the (dis-) continuous structure of *The Intervals*. Out of this melodic and harmonic tension emerges what Phyllis Webb in *Talking* calls “the total music of the poem” (from “Polishing Up the View”), which I interpret as the consonant and dissonant structure of “intervals.” In the words of Heraklitos, the voice of *The Intervals* is “something . . . which is in tune and out of tune” (frag. 10, *The Presocratic Philosophers* 191).

But the inhering structure of *The Intervals*, in light of MacKinnon’s resistance of a linear or temporal cause-effect narrative, is a narrative that is expressed by a spatial metaphor, for he observes that “writing in longer forms . . . had to do with the shape a figure makes as it moves in time” (*Endnotes* 314). For MacKinnon this shape is a spiral, the revolution of an oppositional dialectic of time moving through space: “the state referred to as the interval works technically as a sculptural effect, moving through and around, sometimes calmly observing, sometimes passionately involved, moving between forces that pull and distort the eyes, bend the light” (*Endnotes* 314). The narrative of the long poem is located “between forces” in the interstices of the dialectic. Time, in *The Intervals*, is relative to the movement of the narrative line; it is a narrative of kinetics and stasis, that



winds its way through multiple texts, places, and endings, taking the reader not to an end point, but “to the future” (80). And so history and time become non-linear, that is “not like going back to an earlier time,” but inhabiting the space between time, “as if history were something carried forward, or cyclic with a twist in the end which is the spiral forward” (*Endnotes* 314). MacKinnon’s metaphor of light, which describes the figure that *The Intervals* generates as this process of time spiralling through space, also suggests a continuous motion: as a ray of light is refracted with a change of direction, but continues in a forward motion. The spatial metaphor of a spiral of light reflects the narrative process of *The Intervals*: it bends in a process of refraction, turning in upon itself in a motion of self-reflection, turning outwards in a motion towards the reader. The narrative process thus represents the process of change in the long poem, the shift in direction at the end “which is the spiral forward.” Ending *The Intervals*, then, cannot offer resolution but rather re-direction; it is a problematic situation, for narrative time in MacKinnon’s long poem, like a ray of light, can have no endpoint, no finite pattern:

I was looking for the changes  
to anticipate some end  
or make some pattern  
and saw only a succession of  
calm and movement  
that made intervals (80)

The persona is confounded by his attempt to find an underlying and permanent order to *The Intervals*: there can be no predicable pattern in an infinite process. Whether the persona explores the etymologies, or connotations, or variations, of the “interval,” he must accept that any definition will remain between co-existing definitions of the “interval.” “Betweenness,” is therefore the essence of the “interval” as either geological structure, historical era, mythological ritual, textual construct, photographic exposure, or musical nomenclature, for their apposition and co-existence bridges the “intervals” between gaps of meaning in the long poem and (dis-)continuous structure of the serial poem. The “intervals” are the spaces in which the process of composition and reading *The Intervals* occurs; they are the absences in a structure which are brought into being by the scriptive act and reading act; they generate themselves out of a dialectic between presence and absence, persona and reader.

- 1 “*Endnotes*” will denote all subsequent references to the “Statements by the Poets” in *The Long Poem Anthology*, ed. Michael Ondaatje. (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1979), 314-15.
- 2 Kamboureli, unlike Livesay who calls the Canadian long poem a “new genre,” suggests that “the long poem transgresses not the limits of a single genre but the limits, the frames, of various genres, such as those of the lyric, the epic, the narrative, the drama, the documentary, and the prose poem” (100). I am suggesting that MacKinnon’s long poem draws from several genres (also including historical prose non-fiction and non-literary texts such as the personal letter) but should be seen in terms of genre which avoids fixity and has fluid boundaries, like the idea of the “interval” itself.
- 3 As MacKinnon recognizes in the “*Endnotes*,” his concept of the spiral, or vortex, is indebted to Hazard Adams’s book *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision*, in which the author comments on “Blake’s attempt to rid his communication of temporal and spatial chains by creating a single image. The result is a certain disregard for narrative sequence.... He breaks down his narrative into a cyclic pattern so that any one cycle can stand for any other, and then he strongly implies that each cycle (or the single cycle) is itself a point rather than a wheel, a single archetype—the timeless and spaceless reality” (104).
- 4 I have altered the type-size here as MacKinnon does as a visual emphasis for the division between Raymond’s document and MacKinnon’s “documentary” text.
- 5 I am suggesting that MacKinnon’s translation of *De Rerum Natura* is possibly his own; I have searched translations exhaustively and not found a corresponding rendition of this passage. The translation I have chosen is Rolfe Humphries’ *The Way Things Are* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1968).
- 6 I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Stephen Scobie for his comments I have quoted here on the rhetorical style of MacKinnon’s letter: (University of Victoria, January 1993).
- 7 Another possibility is that Heraklitos, as G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven (in light of Diels’ *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker : Berlin, 1954*) suggest in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, “wrote no consecutive book, but merely gave utterance to a series of carefully formulated opinions” and therefore no source text could be quoted in MacKinnon’s text. However, the absence of quoted material is by no means an inconsistency of MacKinnon’s poem, but rather a subtle variation on the approach taken by poets such as Eliot and Olson.

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