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**boldface**

by

nasser hussain

A Creative Writing Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
Through English Literature and Creative Writing  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2003

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**Canada**

## **abstract**

**boldface** is a collection of spoken word poems. please read them aloud.



## **acknowledgements**

**kaley** dave burke stephen pender susan holbrook darryl whetter tamara kowalska di  
brandt marilyn dumont heidi jacobs dale jacobs carol davison corey thompson  
everyone who had the courage to take the microphone at Juice  
everyone who had the passion and fortitude to listen at Juice

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**do something**

do you know what  
they been feeding us

do you know

they been feeding us  
lines,  
man  
baloney sandwich  
thick lines

what we gonna do

somebody gotta do something

gotta gotta  
gotta make a pop record  
gotta stop hip hop  
and drop a lot of meatloaf  
some englebert humperdinck  
some weak tea and milquetoast

somebody gotta do something

papa gotta brand new prop  
papa gotta all new Pontiac

shock troops of hot sitcom  
activists shop for war toys  
at FAO Schwartzkopf

watch 'em lop the tops off  
the G.I. Joes and burn down  
Barbie's pantyhose wardrobe

somebody gotta do something

don't just sit on your laptops  
surf

don't just browse  
order now

we gotta do something  
the time is prime

screaming in HD 3D TV's  
goddamn painting giving me  
the Edvard Munchies

shot put the pot pipe  
and pirate gil scott CD's

somebody gotta do something  
somebody gotta get them

a long distance plan  
a sneeze guard attack

Lysol angels-  
beneficent toilets

can't wait until then

somebody gotta mini putt  
that bill payment  
slam dunk that legislation  
slapshot that deficit

somebody gotta make that  
stick and stick and stick  
till it don't come out without  
oxy clean or elbow grease

somebody gotta write a new line  
a faster food line  
a slicker byline  
use your head line

somebody gotta do something

**may 25<sup>th</sup> nineteen sixty-alive**

mouth, out!

fast

I'm so fast

can't catch me faster than

a light switch

candle wick

ding!

ducking uppercuts

made ya stumble cuts

rough mouth sucker

wanna nother ask your

mother may be you can

box but baby can you

ding!

round pound sound

ding! corner cut man

patch eye breathe sigh

ding! in again rope reeling

ding!

ducked,

seven eight nine

look, a ceiling.

## breakfast

an old man with sunshine caught between his teeth  
drooling good mornings  
asks for more coffee

a signpost on your daily paper route  
read it eaten forget it and gone  
move on

the most important sneer of the day  
ham and egg ham and egg and hams and eggs  
scram ham sand eggs man damned daily sad papers

truth a hot grill a spatula  
white memory handle sticky  
blue flame pure as pain  
burns hurt now no later

for the waiters out of serviettes and patience  
all things being equal to the  
bacon skaters on lumberjack griddles  
adam and eve on a raft writing riddles  
greasy and rhyming, I stop trying

and recall

ham sand egg soar easy burnt oats on the side  
and I'm eight minutes into taking five  
while the egg sand hammers pound another  
cholesterol nail down.

more coffee please  
more coiff sheep leads  
more cough lotion reliefs

a brief cheese dream omelette

and I rise

flap sleep from pancake eyes  
this is  
breakfast time

## business speak

I'm so close to the means of my production I can smell it. coffee tastes a bit like sweat. the lucid limit of my language. the plastic limit of my overdraft. da doo doo doo, da da da da, that's all I want to scat at you. they call it scat for a reason, but there is no reasoning three hours into a meeting, between floors, or buckled in for the takeoff. my ass is the means of my morning production. the relief of everything I eat. all labour runs to scat. all bacon strips in the end. chit-chat about cat shit. a ruined duvet and the effort to care. pain is a vertical index of humour. the more it hurts, the more we laugh, slapsticks in unison. groins tighten in dark theatres. a piece of work can't get much closer than that. if it looks like a hershey kiss, walks like a hershey kiss, talks like a hershey kiss, don't trust it my friend. I said *don't trust it* because you are my friend even though I don't like you. the best way to make friends is to make friendly. the leeward calmer seemingly. but wind is the collected farts of a ruminant planet, and it's easy to confuse a good idea with breaking wind. in elevators especially. it wasn't me, I'm thinking, and you know it's true since I am the friendly sort. I quit producing before I came to work this morning, so it couldn't be.

## **smoking god**

the basso lung oyster  
the shaker of rooms, boom  
here comes the choke victim  
have you seen him

check the size of his cilia

bending, a palm frond, on a so named beach

rehearsing a death rattle  
breathe a new battle

hauling ass  
up stairs  
he don't need to knock no more

lord don't let me get that sick  
lord I'll be good and clean and quick  
if you don't let me get dead  
lord be my oxygen tank instead  
lord tracheotomy, honestly  
I don't wanna be hobbled  
by the atmosphere  
I don't need a new lump  
here. I want to pick  
plum from the stumps  
of a lung orchard at a full run

my ashtray full of guilty  
cigarettes, twelve calendars  
rolled up and lit  
my clothes smell like shit  
bits of dried leaf

an addiction seeking missile

## **jazz is greater than working**

what's up bubble?  
you wanna ruble?  
I got no scruples  
I'll rumble ten goebbels  
so scramble, goobers  
stumble rivers  
eject the supers  
my crew got new shoes  
to kick loose  
the booze, I can't  
use fluids, I need food  
gotta squeeze the sweat  
shop out my george foreman  
grill  
still,  
there's so much dead labour to savour  
while these machines pick my busy teeth clean  
of strewn bones, ribosomes  
solo lone tones  
from a saxophone blown  
forty years ago  
I stole the soul  
out ma bell's telephone  
monopoly boards, dissonant chords  
a park place and a rusty ford  
the car was coveted by all.  
groan loud, jones  
me metatarsals splint  
me maxillaries grin  
spit lick and grind  
these giant bones  
flying is less form  
than aviation  
a pure state of mind  
is worth more than a united nation  
and to the left  
diego riveras a christ larger than death  
all the new war heads need to get checked  
cuz I'm poor broke and dissident  
with nothing left but a breath  
hanging out my neck

## **satisfied**

coulda picked him off the shelf man  
eaten clean to the sinews  
satisfied self man  
digs my violent blood views  
and thinks I be a different colour chalk  
    I really get a lot out of our talks  
    I like the pretty chicks  
    I'm a fucking idiot  
    I think I'm ugly and ungainly, why can't I get laid lately  
here's the answer you'd rather not hear, I fear  
you eat more shit than a professional shit-eater, peter  
not his real name either  
and my poems don't reach you  
you somehow satisfied self man  
gratified student on  
half a life of milk, and  
the rest is just the soup, can  
you spit your silver spoon for distance, man?  
I knew just where you stood  
soon as you said  
    conversation is education  
I want to make my treads your lesson plan  
I'd love to shove my foot and then you said  
    if only I could walk a mile inside your shoe  
and I actually watched as your white liberal guilt grew  
fuck smug snug in a hypocrite's dream jeans  
if the best things in life are truly free  
I won't make you pay for the beating, please,  
I beg you, open up a little wider  
the sun shining out your ass is only getting brighter,  
my tan is simply skin deep,  
my people so much wiser, please  
elaborate on why I'm great for surviving your last Kaiser.

I get tired, wanna go to bed.  
but the satisfied self man is wrapped up in my head.  
I slap my fist with my palm  
so it isn't quite as threatening  
but the message, the message  
as hard as I am sending  
is lost.

## **my speak**

is whole block bigger than brooklyn used to the speech till I caught up with my self quick Tennessee like ginger bread from a wolf mouth vocab like monkey see monkey what monkey see monkey what like that edge I got pushed against so close a needle in your ear a needle in your arm and flavour is a warning that time is on a chain that is on a neck and it's just too damn big and heavy bigger than brooklyn sometime I rhyme slow sometimes I run quick I just keep running away just keep running away in my adidas forget the laces I had enough of tying things up it's time to break it down so walk this way walk this way hit it run doo wap shoo wap doo wap shoo wap do dat do disc to diss emma p three two one time broken glass in my apartment now the street is one time too close and so far ladies first an I dodge the needle as it washes up upon a sandy shore on saturday it's a saturday it's a saturday y'all jump like it's brooklyn sized one arm up like a lady inna harbour skyscrapers and everything I speak very fluent brooklyn you know like borough and bodega you know what I'm saying knowwhati'msayinyo pro pop locks and break dance on backs smooth like linoleum supposing it's another jedi mind trick a black eye anna white stick a crosswalk anna boy scout who counts cars wishing he could go far on engine engine number nine on the new york transit line you so sweet and you so fine you done nearly stole my mind around the way my baby got base and a treble is a terrible thing to waste forget the house I'm in your place and out the back door left channels I break beats you leave hairline fractures my speak captures like south African coppers catch kaffirs bigger than ten mandelas on five podiums eighteen arenas and a brownstone short of a building my speak is whole block.

## **railsplitter**

bent back  
train tracks  
skin black  
trace that  
sweat stain  
    bead

**soyworld©**

a whole new set  
of excellent activists  
predict the bend

and now I'm intolerant?

soy joy  
    sells  
    sex  
    nog

soy suns set  
    nicely  
soy thinks

soy toys  
    pants  
    gasm  
    free

don't soy me  
wrong, I have been  
beef or you

I cut skins  
open, pulped  
flesh, salted  
ears

gemmed my ohs but good I did

oleo  
oleo

soy my soul clean  
in case nothing grows

## skin

if i start with my fingerprints and follow that panoptical aid to its conclusion i end up on the back of my finger where it mischievously dissipates into the nothingness the unidentifiable part of me (why criminals don't use the backs of their hands) and becomes a wave that cascades into the tiny wrinkles of my first joint too soft to be a knuckle the white bread of a violent sandwich perhaps from there to the second joint the beginning of a shut up the inconclusive circles of silence up to the second history of my gripping flowing into the follicles of fine hairs little islands of primate too short to grind on the ground flat surface of a punch into the web again looking no one else is marked thus they are stretches worn boots inevitable evidence of the effort no matter what i hold you old proteus.

**a monument gets built**

I  
I am  
I am a  
I am a sla  
I am a slave  
I am a slave my  
I am a slave my fat  
I am a slave my father  
I am a slave my father was  
I am a slave my father was a slav  
I am a slave my father was a slave his  
I am a slave my father was a slave his father  
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a  
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave  
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave his fat  
I am a slave my father was a slave his father was a slave his father was  
great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great

## **spice cabinet**

i was a number and three quarters  
and small enough to fit  
    in the big wooden spice cabinet  
    under the chopping block  
    in front of my mother's slacks

i'd hide among the clinking jars  
reading  
the lion the witch and the wardrobe  
so fantastic, such ice white queens  
among the cardomoms the papadams  
the dry chilis crushed for everything  
the cloves stored for  
coughing winter mornings

heard the supper preparing  
the where is the egg mutter

and a slim brown hand  
anticipating interruption  
would fish out the nutmeg  
and offer

### **stackolee has 2.5 kids**

went to the store for some apple juice like babymoms likes it see. and these mutherfukers keep muttering. muttering i go by and say. you gotta problem? you sayin something like i should know? one says shut up. two say yeah go fuck. and then he comes in, right? bitch i say, and he still comes in. i take the shot and then like i'm goin down, pickin up nickels or somethin, but i ain't hurt. shit. nobody jacks my shit in the neighbourhood. i been here twenty years. this is my hood. mine. people know me, they know me. except one and two. hitting my shit? in my hood? sayin go fuck? so i'm still pickin nickels and then i come up fast wham catch that mutherfuker hard in the belly and one is comin from the side over here and i got the bag with babymom's apple juice that she likes like that and wham i fukin whap that one smash his face with babymom's juice and the mutherfuker is cryin 'n' shit? laid my lugz into two all shit up and broke on the sidewalk like i killed his shit cold. whack in the head and i'm tellin him go fuck? and this one smell like babymom's juice and i knock wham his cryin ass conscious. go fuck right i says. stupid shit keepin his wallet in his pocket even. like he the insurance or some shit. he in good hands, now. mutherfuker. now i got all they shit. know where they live eat fuck and everything like money. like pickin nickels. shoulda seen his shit all bent up and wheezin. people know me. they know me. you mutterin? i did time like this tattoo. kick shit like pickin nickels bitch. and babymoms said don't go back? when she sees my blood lugz. they paid for that. i says to babymom's fuck that and get out my old bangin gear old school knucks chains chucks shiv and kicks like they gotta bitch army or some shit. i catch them two blocks up staggering coughin up. go fuck. didn't even see my shit comin knee bust and a scream punk ass lyin in my shit? my house? i don't care about any shit. bought babymoms juice with one's money. two paid for my lugz. and they still ain't clean? babymoms says where's my juice like i like. i gotta get it.

**for bruce lee**

two feet  
walk on

one foot  
hops

no feet  
crawls

but

knows  
this much

two feet  
stand firm

no feet  
knows loss

but one  
foot one  
foot

always  
falls

### **worst case scenario**

You are ugly  
and no one  
want to tell

you about it.  
You come to  
work one day

and you find  
in your mail  
a black card.

"You Are Ugly"  
in slow gold  
gel pen ink.

You fill in  
the long blank  
from then on.

Reflecting on this  
note is wholly  
unrewarding, but it

haunts your bathroom  
none the less.  
It becomes increasingly

difficult to shave  
with eyes closed:  
a fingertip operation

Why scrub at  
all? You are  
ugly. You are

the fearsome blemish.  
Even pimples cringe.  
A facade impossible.

Redeem me, Sir  
Pure. I will  
blossom at night,

become a beautiful  
novella, complete with  
portable night light.

Fairy tale ugly.  
Butt crack ugly.  
Stale elevator ugly.

Fairy butt stale  
tale crack elevator  
ugly ugly ugly.

You can't say  
it any more  
than escape it.

You is you  
gee you ell  
why you ain't

got no alibi  
you ugly you  
you you ugly.

And the best  
they can do  
is not call

attention. They manage  
this by not  
calling at all.

But the beauty  
of ugly reveals  
a simple truth:

do you know  
one person you  
are prettier than?

if not, think  
about it in  
your bathroom.

## **blaring american**

u s a  
u s a  
you are us  
u s a

i wanna be american  
like

charles ingalls hitting a grand slam  
breakfast and frisk down at denny's  
lenny bruce is screaming paki nigger  
a grove of freshly squeezed florida orange jews

where curious kids with guns  
and curiously twisted white sheets  
drive houses with white fences and  
whitewall tires  
defending dogs with deadly white teeth

forgive me father for i have sinned  
gimme twenty to one that the Dodgers win

ok, corral  
and special k the chuck wagons  
it's those damn no smoking signs  
that killed all the dragons

and nobody dies in advertising  
lies masquerade as savvy strategizing  
stomping down history  
like invading aboriginals  
no sense in stoppin till you've  
carved your own memorial

american like that

u s a  
u s a

**my problem with pundits to the tune of...**

fence watching is a poor sport  
played by spoilsports  
who choose pure sports

may they die  
(a thousand trumpets)  
no fences no more

no spoilsports  
no sweatshorts  
no soiled ports  
no no more

may they fly above their  
trumpets

no fences no more

## **observing in lines**

in	line	align
bodies	borders	orders
caps	afros	hijabs
bats	black	urdu
you	them	we
and	not	me
in	line	align

## **dancing in churches**

i might not be right  
but i am convincing.  
i'm not urgent,  
but i am pressing  
up against your  
mental furniture  
suggestively. but just  
when you do the dirty  
dance (react) i pull pure  
words from a can of  
milk, nice and clean,  
nice and clean, so true  
so new, that you know  
what i mean, know what  
i mean? So trite you  
nod in amen. some look  
on, some look in, scrubbing  
circles on frosty clichés,  
windowpanes, and i  
can't decide which is worse,  
dickens or church, a dearth  
of bursting hip huggers  
on earth. so i look out  
and look up, a way  
unsure, a dependable  
erasure, a saviour for  
rock and roll on every  
corner, a Savion Glover  
tapdancing lover, and  
we all call alleluia, alleluia,  
alleluia, alleluia.

**in order isn't always**

a bored cat doesn't even fear grooming. her insides jump, keeping limber moments nearly open. people quite readily saw the underbelly, viewed worldwide, examining your zephyrs.

actually, breathing can drive everything. force gears heaven. immanent juries keen longingly most noondays. often power quits: radiation, solar, turgidity, uranium. vitriol will excuse yesterday's zones.

ample buyers can drain economies for gratis. hope i journal kalashnikov lines merry, not only pedantic. quills really seem torturous unless very wet. extremely young ziggurats.

age bleeds character. doing everything fearlessly gives hours immortality. jiggle kelp. leave mom next. oral poems quickly recede. some turn ugly. violence washes. exit, yet zoom.

**abstract egypt**

tis is this after several revolutions

this uppity typing

and a refusal to say that this is is

isis

osiris

iris

seeing the dead return

reseeing the rerun

a simpsons

as imps on esses slide down

a pole

or

an

i

tsk, tsk ma cherie

i told you before

i have no sis

only this is purple or risible

## **metapoor**

bull is mean  
demeanor is polish  
nation is office  
cubicle is disinfectant  
microbe is science  
screaming is not  
rope is trying  
hold is crop  
corn is step  
lace is wing  
swan is moon  
wane is mood  
cheap is ease  
well is able  
cane is walking  
song is foot  
path is note  
memory is ink  
pad is soaking  
flow is inevitable  
resist is stop  
sign is read  
colour is anger  
mean is bull.

**ncomplete**

unctuation is  
nnecesssary and  
rrelevant when  
nderstanding is  
mplicit

**not yet**

the moment  
has passed

the back  
end of  
a bus  
and you  
don't run  
too fast  
these days

so sad  
it had  
such language  
and applied  
so directly  
to your  
life that  
you might  
have changed  
your shirt  
before you  
left the  
house this  
lovely morning.

in fact  
you just  
missed the  
defining moment  
of your  
whole life.

i'm just  
so good.

and now  
all that  
remains here  
is exhaust

eleven minutes  
quicker and

you might  
have grabbed  
a hold  
of it

crumpled fists  
and beat  
back the  
terror or  
dusted the  
oppressor or  
more to  
the point  
made a  
play for  
what matters

now, though  
time tatters  
are your  
legacy. a  
beauty queen  
sash in  
sequins. a  
blast crater  
in the  
desert. a  
house of  
kindling in  
kansas. another  
abandonment.  
a dead  
phone and  
no oxygen.

the plain  
truth of  
poetry and  
prophecy is  
not yet  
my friend

my someday  
cadaver, not  
yet for

you a  
river trip

floating candles

not yet  
the light  
and the  
long tunnel

not yet  
the everlasting  
saran wrap

not yet  
my beast  
of bethlehem

not yet  
old seagull

crusts wait  
for the  
final toss

**portrait suite**

**sounds**

a sound is

a pound of blue

a pond you

would swim

across

strokes like sable

brushes

tickling

your inner

matisse, or,

ear.

**ruler**

a ruler

is a history

planned out

in advance

marching,

it inches along,

metering

and measuring

faith

by decrees

**book**

leafing along,

you gasp.

afterword,

you prolong

for another

introduction.

such touches.

**glass**

this is intimate

the smooth run

of tongue over

the lip, the ridge

the saxophone

of a drink.

all the intoxication

is an afterthought.

lick.

**vein**

i clench my arm until

i stand out

i magazine sometimes

i porn occasionally.

cutpurse, i dare you.

this accouterment cost

me a bundle of

nerves. and i'm sensitive

to the light,

besides

all the gazes.

**mirror**

mirror, what?

greatness?

a changing of the guard?

are there diapers enough?

i looped a parsi to a whale

and potioned a poison

in a prophecy.

i am the sea

that makes reflection

possible.

**month**

twenty eight butterflies

baked in a pie.

left on the sill

for fortyeight hours

until a thumb thick

high jumper

stuck it in the fire.

we wonder at moths.

**exercise for the sake of it**

the pun just found you

**when i was you(ng)**

when i was young and hated puns  
when i was Jung and hated puns  
when i was you and, gee i hated puns

when i was Pliny and hated reference  
when i was hung and hated rhyme  
and transpositions all the time

before i got old i disliked euphemism  
a constant stream of not say, staying hidden  
when i was young i looked for points

never pricked or hung up at all  
when i was young i moved like a metaphor  
placed bees a foray, and brayed to see

**you are unequal to your subject matter**

all bums and phalluses  
all hoboes and obelisks  
all politics laved lovingly  
with soapbox staves

all the best of sex and war  
are mumbled in these  
stutters, a pip in the ocean  
so white, so grape

so batten down the hatches  
maintain an even keel  
the equilibrium of liquid  
underestimate the god  
in the muffin  
ask for blueberry instead

it is just a forest  
nothing here to fear  
ah, trees, you make  
such smooth sheets  
good poems to lie with

all ballocks and punk tunes  
all scrotal and basketball  
all jock strap and release  
a long train ride to climax

even if they know you  
and your globe and mail  
predictions. even if your  
coffee don't change  
you can comfortably neglect to  
leave even the slightest tip.  
even if your corporate talents  
are latent; sublimated into  
powdered sugar and cooler  
conversation, please rest assured  
that i am humble enough not  
to punch your lights out.

i will be the question instead

just who do you think you are  
do you think you are just who  
just think you do who you are

are you just who you think you do?

all asscrack and airplanes  
all ennui and activist  
all a part and apathetic  
or integrated and mortar  
a mason of the psyche  
    got a plan a hammer and a blueprint  
    got a trick and a wink and a brief stint  
    as king of the snow banks  
    tall white pyramids  
while such rascals scramble for  
finger-holds on your one piece  
zip-up subject position.

all gender and facial hair  
all pinks and blues  
so miles to go before  
and over there they do things better different  
&  
more European

all commercial and conformist  
all small cars and performance  
pocket book and palm pilot  
slack khaki environment

i clean glass houses  
with the windex i piss.

**half of one, six dozen of the other**

you wash the brush, the brush washes you

self esteem is the highest tautology

fifty percent of statistics are improvisations

a train is a raincoat at top volume

hammers made the world harder

design assign resign

•

## **louis harmstrong vs hornette coleman**

*Armstrong, though an exemplary figure in the  
diatonic tradition, is already forcing us to question  
the time honoured belief that emotions constitute  
the substance of musical sounds.  
-ajay heble, "landing on the wrong note"*

inch fit fuck stop  
pop onomatopoeia  
sit can't pulls kick  
stop on a cat of seeing

this on aunt sis  
recapitulation  
kin stint marathon  
a jay warbles jazzily

this agree aunts  
in harm own he use  
sacked kraft dinners  
per box topper

stop fuck grinding  
pit stop dunk  
wheels pin foreheads

sensitivity issues  
sensitivity issues  
propensity is shoes  
that fit inch fit stop

come from rests  
thank you come again  
truck stop

a lot of hounds  
meet tarnish amply

**vengeance stood before me in a line**

skull                  cap and a half

subheading:

bad ass  
sweetback

nervous wallets

twitching back

forward pass

all mayflower

police mean

history.

carrying concealed opinions

a new, literal

folder.

## **autobiography**

i got born  
i got beat  
i got fucked  
i got feet  
so i ran

i got a job  
i got a home  
i got told  
i got a go  
so i left

i got a stop  
i got a watch

i got dollars  
i got fed  
i got a pillow  
i got a bed  
so i sleep

i got rem  
i got visions  
i got alarms  
i got buttons  
so i snooze

i got up  
i got down  
i got stereo  
i got james brown  
so i dance

babybabybaybay  
babybabybaybay

i got that feelin  
i got moves  
i got time  
i got you  
so i win

i got sick

i got better  
i got again  
i got forever  
so i die

i got begin  
i got end  
i got story  
i got now  
i got then  
i got nothing  
i got want  
i got letters  
i got haunt  
i got shoebox  
i got that  
i got attitude  
i got hat  
i got apartment  
i got adidas  
i got your back  
i got reruns  
i got mouth  
i got keyboard  
i got both  
i got another  
i got over.

**what i do on lunch breaks**

holy sexual

refuses to  
enter discourse<sup>1</sup>  
or  
that course  
for that matter.

love is in  
lungs lunges urges and lunches  
i eat

note on my door:  
gone burgeoning-  
-back later

---

<sup>1</sup> a line from Doug Barbour's book *Breath Takes*, 2001.

**right back at you ee**

my father was      never

which isn't to say

he wasn't

just that

he didn't

and i probably      was.

& even though

i know

i shouldn't,

i do.

## **satellite**

lay down with the satellite  
where's the remote  
channel flicker  
coffee's black  
the image thinner

yes honey, I'm listening  
this sunday  
the christening  
no missing  
I'm listening

please cheapen  
my lover  
I'm sweeter than lower  
my equal  
my only  
tabs fizzing  
images dwindling  
I'm lonely

Gilligan! sweet skipper  
so ginger  
the nipple  
remote flickers

yes honey, I'm listening  
discoveries bristling  
teeth whitening  
muscle relaxing  
lazy boy ears

solo like black coffee  
where's the double  
double  
cleansing bubbles  
troubled women  
break the huddle

yes honey, I'm whistling  
chanel numbers glistening  
cat walks quickening

remote channels flickering  
images dwindling

please, lover, cheapen  
sweetly, lower, breathe, in

my equal so only  
my body exploding  
tab is fizzing  
belly dieting  
images flickering  
satellites nipping  
prime times conflicting

yes honey, I'm listening.

## **summerjob**

those summers  
sweating the steaks  
boiling the oil  
a hundred new greek curses  
mixed in the drinks

maria's smooth brown calves

ya moto moo knee sous

dimitri's mile wide mule stance  
dangling his dick in the deep fryer

poor fotes johnson  
such hair such hair  
i burnt it in a fit of pique  
set that barbecue lighter to the  
back of his curly head

had enough of his ass tactics

and pulled the hard  
black plastic trigger

maria's smooth brown calves

and the portuguese word for chicken

gal in gya  
gal in gya

i walked out three times  
and came back every summer

and labour day  
and christmas  
and party

a pirate ship of sweat and appetizers  
mutinous bounty

i cut a tomato at home  
like there's a case left to slice.

**thank you**

thank you god  
for this knife in my back

you're really keeping me on my toes

blades of grass  
and no handles  
the tang of dew  
on my lizard  
tongue. halved  
brains  
scrotum  
mitochondria

a long razor  
machine made  
just for all occasions

energy is for expenditure  
expenditure is for change  
and change is for good

god of static cling,  
god of jingles  
god of cherry pits  
all hollowed out and affordable  
god of stumbles and staircases  
what else could be made  
in taiwan  
these manicured lawns  
haunted by our dry garden  
hoses, abandoned tractors

now our ploughshares  
are beaten back  
change is a fact  
but regress is a flank attack  
history from way back  
may appear closer  
in a rear view mirror

and this god is a serial killer

and we're working  
the most mysterious case ever  
he ain't gonna stop  
until  
he got us all

this is not a moral place  
this is not a comfy chair

absolutions and thigh masters

no god,  
i don't blame you

i just hoped  
it would be sharper

## **hailing**

you who poll votes  
you who pool views  
you who stole oil  
you who sing tang  
you who bring thing  
you who where as  
you who that which  
you who know those  
you who war far  
you who near past  
you who fear rue  
you who row fast  
you who find this  
you who fist tines  
you who first time  
you who smell gas  
you who bull doors  
you who dull boors  
you who pill heads  
you who skulk chores  
you who chant storm  
you who shit chat  
you who fill form  
you who can't, wait  
you who be born  
you who birth babes  
you who same them  
you who gave great  
you who choose chance  
you who blind faith  
you who fruit peel  
you who pain taste  
you who plain feel  
you who pop cans  
you who plait waists  
you who can do  
you who teach learn  
you who spies dark  
you who pot ferns  
you who read books  
you who tread bare  
you who slip feet  
you who over there

## **baseball**

high got the swing  
high got the stride  
hi de hi, hi de ho

low so below  
low got broke  
low de la low de lie

high so high  
he popcorn below  
sweet cherry pop  
sweet cherry blow

low neck swing  
red neck swung  
low stop song  
before sing begin

high swung sixty one  
sung seventy two  
low catch a bat  
low strikeout, too

low know no joy  
high play de ploy  
high got the ride  
low got the toy

sigh, games play  
so slow for boys.

**best in its class**

the most popular car in its class  
has a nigger in the passenger seat  
an arab in the gas tank  
and gun turrets for six

the damn thing handles like  
it's on rails  
thanks to our guidance systems  
the damn thing  
practically drives itself (leaving you  
free)

pre-emptive bumpers  
air bags and  
whiplash headrests  
defenses for bent fenders  
and accidents of mass chassis  
destruction.

the car alarm instantly dials  
levine gittleston tettenbaum shapiro radley powell varley wapner  
and associates  
to protect your investments

cuz it's the best in its class  
and so are you

you deserve to take curves more sexily  
you deserve global positioning  
rich like corinthians who  
follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts  
but rather ye may profit

the neighbours won't believe  
you can see through  
hijabs, burqas  
and liberate any woman you desire  
custom tinted windows  
amplify your better side

fire seduces, and internal combustion  
is covert masturbation for public  
consumption

three year warranty  
zero percent financing  
for qualified lessees  
and a baghdad of cash  
back at signing

best in its class  
first overall  
and plenty of room  
for backseat angels

you won't hear a pin  
drop, a protest,  
or proust a temps perdu  
in our soundproof interior

won't feel a speed bump  
or the demonstrative punk  
who prostrates himself  
for something more gandhi  
as you off road all over  
their asses

and mileage?

the money you save  
will offset the gas gauge  
for ten minutes after  
you leave the lot

and if the engine runs too hot  
send the nigger to pop a gas cap  
in the ass of the arab in the tank

a simple solution in these complex times

best in its class  
and so are you

**ella allah saddam**

things have come to a pretty pass  
diplomacy is growing flat  
for you like your oil in wells  
while our imperialism swells

goodness knows where the bombs will be  
oh i don't know where i'm at  
it looks as if we two will never be one  
something must be done

you say eye-rocky and i say ear-racky  
you say a monster, and i say a martyr  
eye-rocky, ear-racky, who cares about the pakis?  
let's call the whole thing off.

you like a miss-isle and i like a muslim  
you like pre-emptive and i like defensive  
a miss-isle, a muslim, pre-emptive, defensive  
let's call the whole thing off.

but if we call the whole thing off  
then we must part  
and oh, if we ever part  
then that might break my bank

so if you like a humvee and i like my freedom  
i'll wear a burqa and give up my blue jeans  
for we know we  
need each other so we  
better call the calling off off  
let's call the whole thing off

you say civilian and i say beleaguered  
you say a just war and i say you murder  
civilian, beleaguered, a just war, you murder  
let's call the whole thing off

i say an ummah and you say a voter  
i say a jihad and you say i work hard  
a shia, a sunni, iraq might, but would we?

let's call the whole thing off. Yes, let's call the whole thing off.

### **the wrong dog**

you ain't nothing but a dogma  
crying out lies

you ain't nothing but a dogma  
trying to survive

your cold war's over  
pay the air force overtime

you ain't nothing but an airplane  
crashing my side

you ain't nothing but a boeing  
flying outta line

you ain't never killed a prez  
and you ain't no land of mine

you said you were underclass  
and that's just fine

you said you were third world  
and the oil's all mine

molten jet fuel and a skyscraping  
jihad time

yeah!

if you against us  
you ain't an ally

if you refute us  
you're evil inside

if you can't muster troops  
you better make do with mines

you ain't nothing but an airplane  
and you ain't no friend of mine.

## how to write an emotional poem<sup>2</sup>

however it starts,  
its gotta be quiet  
and then,  
get a little quieter

mumble, refer frequently  
to your mother's hands  
and swallow  
between lines.

because losing your inner child is bad  
but when your inner child forgets its sweater  
you will finally understand that you mother  
*gave* you birth  
instead of getting paid  
and that they call it labour  
for a reason  
and that she did it all for your  
outer child  
because she couldn't reach deeply enough  
to remind your inner kid to  
stay warm  
when the nights are so cold, lonely, and soulless

without her.

you see,

melancholy works best  
when composing an emotional poem

there is no joy  
in an emotional poem

there is loss, pain, sadness, blackness  
like dry roses, metaphors more tortured than your soul is, heart attacks, chokes  
back, missing buttons, missing mittens, missing moms  
and dead kittens

---

<sup>2</sup> many thanks to spoken word artist Taylor Mali, whose piece "How to Write a Political Poem" is the template for this.

and above all there is poignancy.

the whole point of the emotional poem is to be poignant  
even if the poem is pointless  
the point of poignancy is to point out  
out poignant your pain can be.

when delivering your emotional poem,  
if at all possible  
act as though you are going  
to cry at any given moment.

this will make your audience shut up

it's important to make them shut up  
because they can't appreciate your  
poignancy if they aren't quiet. your pain is quiet.  
they don't understand poignancy, or pain.

they're happy.

they wear their shirts  
they shave their parts  
and no one has ever lost a kitten  
their mother, or their sweaters  
all their inner kids are playing with  
Peter Pan in Neverland forever.

referring to a hackneyed kids'  
story will add poignancy

embrace every possible  
cliché because you can't  
embrace your mother anymore.

always miss  
that last chance to say it.

and when you have done this for twenty handwritten minutes  
and even you wonder when it will finish,  
to end an emotional poem,  
just get a little quieter,  
teary eye-wiper,  
and say the bravest line of all  
three times:

I love you  
I love you  
I love you.

## **executional excellence**

don't just win win  
win win win  
e-commerce solutions for licensing poets who  
trickle down into manageable chunks, let's  
position product and bucket  
strategically so we can  
turn data into information into knowledge into insight

analyze around the gap to engender actionable forecasts, dude

implement appropriate metrics and accountability for leading and lagging  
indicators that will track progress  
against the strap plan

win win win win?

drive the project ramping down the operation  
put it in the parking lot, and,

regardez--rising tides raise all boats!

issue is problem, and value is added

iteration of corporate culture  
will engineer passback to shareholders  
who  
prize granularity of cash burn rate  
and  
practice ambush marketing.

if results drive the brand soul,  
spin  
don't drop the ball on the 360  
feedback loop  
question with clarity and trim the fat  
win win win win win  
i'm resonating with aha

if the juice is worth the squeeze, say please,  
or look up steven covey:

highly successful people or something.

## **I don't speak no greek**

eros rose sore this morn  
zeus uses ruses to bazooka big bazoongas boom boom boom  
apollo allows solar solos  
aphrodite is too difficult  
psyche sighs ink, likely  
mars all arse and marsh farts  
boreas or lord blow  
persephone's phone fits purse. say: funny funny  
ariadne an abacus adding arachnids  
dionysus, i die: wild iodine  
athena a then a the ahem then at he  
artemis nemesis deliciousness  
poseidon poisoned poise. propose portions: purposes per porpoise  
orpheus phones o'er us.

## **serious problem**

you got a serious problem  
you got a surrealist problem  
you got satellite television  
you gotta keep running david  
you gotta keep running david hassellhoff  
the beach is deeper than pamela's tabloid tanlines  
and you could just as easily be a stay at home kind of dad  
with some bratty kid who wishes he had the cars you did  
so keep running david  
keep running david hassellhoff  
cuz 23 brothers snorting air  
jordans  
are gonna chase you offa this glass building  
so slick you can see your faces in it  
so keep running david  
keep running david hassellhoff  
make a jump cut a blade trim a waist  
and land safe in sanitary garbage  
no needles to prick that blue blue eye  
don't touch that dial  
and keep running  
keep running david hasselloff

**motto**

i'm not left wing  
i'm left over  
the guts that  
don't get into  
mink stoles, or  
garage sale  
failures of  
character.

i'm not paranoid,  
just postmodern  
fragments of  
special effects  
simulacra  
voice over.

i'm not resisting.  
no really, i insist.  
just frictioning  
like any good  
particle  
pass over.

i'm not repeating  
not repeating  
in spite of some  
setbacks, re-  
recording  
old tapes,  
old stories:

the best minds beaten  
in with nightstick  
politics. a lost layer  
of soil means less petrol  
for later. running  
things honourably  
in absentia. proxy  
and roll. windows  
aluminum and siding.  
moose display, horses  
are for riding. praxis  
express. see them,

with earphones on the  
frontlines. unconfirmed  
rumours, near the old  
valley. the pony is  
coming. the vision is reality  
you can be surprisingly  
literate on the couch

what a good thing to keep in mind

timely, accurate and  
thoughtful. you can  
depend on me. experienced  
hard working and  
unquestioning. what  
grandfathers knew is  
made oil by time.

i'm not arguing,  
i'm agreeing.  
oh no, i know  
what you mean  
when you say  
that is is  
what is was.

we vague all  
day, a dance  
without brains  
under a sky  
we made out  
of desperation

## **one eight hundred**

have you been  
angered, disabled  
injured or alienated  
by the alarming  
rate of injustice  
and hypocritical  
governmental  
incursions into  
your personal?  
your purse and all?

call one eight hundred who gives a shit

call a million muslims and call 'em up quick

call a radio station and broadcast your complaint  
about the state of the beach and your mortgage rates

and i'm not saying i'm  
found  
but i know when to get  
lost

and we don't get  
paid unless  
reparations are made

so call now:

one eight hundred life ain't right

and our team of experts  
will shift the strife,  
especially if you are  
suing  
one rung below

## **movie night**

take out a stain and you got a clean shirt for thursday  
teach her to do laundry and your ironing is done forever

someone paints lampposts for money  
the ones in my neighbourhood are green

i never herd of a poem like this before

as usual, nothing is planned in advance  
this is a line to trip over. i need those

topographic maps for the honeymoon  
the hills have lines where i'm going.

lost my boot in a snowbank when i was  
six and passive aggressive. i monkeyed

with the tin tan bathroom scale, dialed  
the springs to maximum tension, and

pretended a ten pound me. i was good  
on the moon.

attack the world with as much wit as  
you can muster, and take a hot dog for later

i was an ass man, now i'm undecided

the nominal is not limiting  
mug is as good as glass

the world is almost the world

always an ell short, or  
a fur long. short linguist,

the inventor, dreams of  
unique conventions, combinations, not

necessarily originality. galileo  
was a lying leo for a reason

morning noon and night morning  
noon and night they yelled titanics

through walls, pillows floors doors  
blood in the chilis makes them hotter

no daughters, but two girls.  
people are conspicuously absent

from books. leave that  
stack industrial. i never figured

out which fence s/he straddled

dismantled factories produce ironic  
splits. the ice cream scoops are

square there. a sharp wire  
almost took my wife's hand.

she speaks yoga when  
she comes. fore fingers

curled to thumbs, three  
remain splayed in a wide

meditation. 30 seconds  
of kripalu remind me of

a hometown girl and  
limber cartwheels. i sprain

easily. you never think of  
toes unless you break or have

a fetish. nothing more  
ambiguous than a

sign. direct sunlight  
blinds and sustains

hard canonical shell  
creamy idea filling

inches off your landfill  
get cut. a ripped landscape

build a graceful windmill  
with a book stolen from

the library. i could salt  
the earth with them and who

would notice. hypnotized  
by phrases in mathbooks,

i chord the circle. diameter  
defeats me especially. the

most important angel sows  
dandruff: value added products

aren't so different from

contradictory presidents. i deny  
my past. where is my ulna again

wanted a pun and ended up  
with people. a white line is worth

a change of subject

position. the pen's smitier  
(as in smites more and harder)

than the word. no, no,  
you're not interrupting.

a caress without curves  
is quite kinky. no errors

with telephone operators.  
dial. soap smells.

everybody hurts in athens,  
georgia. NO, i said, i'm not

angry, just suffering random

juts in the guts. i shave penitent

shower to shower to stinging to  
singing to after shave tomorrow.

it's worth fifteen percent. a girl  
named after a muslim mount

made a mixed tape of my  
formative years. more form

to come. film at eleven.  
they told me you can't

spend what you don't  
have. i refer them to

a poem i read in 2003.

all i howl is watered down  
blues. latin is dead in south

america. take more photos.  
side arm pitcher of lemonade

bricolage is the secret handshake  
for our intellectual masons. but

i am not conspiracy minded, fellow.  
there's no good way to end a line with

Israelites. there's no good ending  
when the oxygen line breaks and

bond james bond has a harpoon  
in his pants. some body floats

away, dies off camera.

**dr. dyson**

sometimes you gotta begin with a demonstration of

power

but the tragedy is that some

people

refuse to understand the ways  
in which we are

intolerant

of such an

articulation

that

influences

the individual above and

beyond

the realities of late capitalist twentieth century post industrial rubrics of modernity as they are repackaged, represented, recycled, and reused as plastic hip hop or the mere facade of effective resistance.

and if this makes no sense, just understand

that the importance  
of this

the importance

is that the urban space is creating specular and spectacular vernaculars in direct response to the homogeneity and hegemonies that are part and parcel of wearing a paper hat in the first place

and this  
continues further into the discursive  
communities that were created  
in the public mourning that  
post di post nine eleven or  
for that matter

this

engendered, if you will  
manifested  
seven eleven

which ultimately  
our very bodies into precisely the  
required for the kinds of crisis

demonizes, ghettoizes and desexes  
commodities

that create  
a rhetorical illusion of self  
realization

that create

in the middle of

extremely large demographics

both young men  
and white women  
represent

begin to  
and

signify  
a suggestive breakage

and if this is

or is not  
reality

then one way to accomplish our ultimate goal  
is

to find the bottom line

abandon  
purity

as an ideal

or

adopt

a radical

new solo.

### **from concept to coltrane**

rhyme is palimpsest the echo and invocation of its sonic sphere it is here and it is song  
there and long ago and far a field all balls and rolling blunders make no mistake the  
break heralds

the angels we labour under and wonder over lover of where eyes and thighs collide  
students colluding about which allusion is most mellifluous or just enough to this  
moment a foam speckle in a torrent short wars and long armed warrants cops shock  
perps tazers cocked hammers spare power supplies for hair raisers hands up and  
don't reach for it no phone call for you dial louie up from retirement we bagged  
another ne'er do nothing much less nothing well

hell is twenty bullets  
for all the plastic in your wallet  
and it's all a simple fallout  
a paranoia of accountants  
and a bunch of paper options  
written on the skins of onions  
one october hallowed evening  
when the makeup and the artist  
who prefers to live in boxes  
built of bombs and economics  
met in baghdad over breakfast  
taking solace in the oil well  
gonna run out any minute  
so we might as well just finish  
cuz my caddy needs a daddy  
that can bring home all the bacon  
strippers live on all the tipping  
not a city in north china  
area has got more syllables  
than space, or mere, or final  
a breath is hopeful when it's taken  
sexual if it is stolen  
biological involuntary  
obligatory or beholden  
what you breathing mister biscuit?  
while you're in the oven tanning  
there's a slave in calico  
head kerchief and backlash hanging  
on your every single letter  
anthologized by our pal norton  
who knows that canons are more  
suited to the problem of the sorting

and where am i with all my meter  
that i pulled from my vain pounding  
at the balls of all the umps  
crouching calling strike three tiger?

rhythm is the problem and solution

all together now

language got more angles  
than a greek theoretician  
the great encyclopedia is  
full of entries to be written  
if it's bitter then it's bitten  
and you are too fine for  
definition and all this rhythm  
leads to kissing. art is always  
missing

the long slow lick  
the song low kick  
spit valve and blow  
the pure tone  
the saxophone knows  
no solo is played  
alone

**i hate vancouver**

i could knock you into the sea, for  
i am the earthquake  
the insurers assured you wasn't coming

i am the sun you are so  
unfamiliar with

i hate you vancouver  
for doing everything last  
except getting there

i am stronger than your coffee  
more potent than your drugs

i am the source of you  
you so full of my exes  
my axes blunt from too  
much grind

i bloom louder than your lotuses

i am prouder than your lethargy  
hippies  
take your ennui and shove it weakly  
on your nude beaches  
impossibly tanning

i can see your mountains from here  
and i scrape my big ass ontario  
boots on them

i hate every child woman and  
mancouver  
of you

i blew through you like twin chinooks  
an ali left hook to your chivalo  
and after fifteen rounds of impossible  
you're still standing  
defiant and world weary  
sifting through your flotsam  
and orgasms

does the rain fall nowhere  
so nostalgically?

no dreads twist tighter  
no revolutions righteouser  
no vegans veggier  
no lesbians lezzier  
no sweaters sweatier  
no mosaic mosaicer  
no boats floatier  
no poets poetier

## **marriage is not ending**

you live in the same world i do. so let's kill crows with rocks. if you will. if you won't it won't as it is wont to do. you live in the same world i do. so do two birds twittering, too. singing on my doorstep. signing on my newsprint. a bee pees somehow. and it can fly. you can be up or down. this is the same as trying to be two. this is a powerful comma. come on, you don't expect me to believe this insistence is the same as intensification. no. that is precisely the point. a précis of a pointed critique. they lived in the same world i live in. they insist on living. but you are a life. you are alive. this is the same world as a minute. tastes like a second. helping. this is the powerful period. you are alive in the same world i do. i do the world too. as you do. i like it. i do.

## **language is the engine of humour**

a banana peels because it's funny. peel a word, you might find fruit. peel a banana and find a symbol, just trying to be sweet. can foucault please explain why we spank each other for fun. i discipline my puns impishly. no one is naughty when roleplaying. or occupying a new subject position. there is an agenda afoot. gendering my foot. sexing my walk. fucking my gait. lying down is the ultimate capitulation. obelisk capitalist. what makes a pyramid strong. rendering geometry into literature is risky. now that's a word. there is a humorous hegemony afoot. keep your bananas to yourself, discard the peels, and await the slip, the hijinks, the laugh track derailing a coherent train of thought every five seconds. laugh along. stop when the sign tells you. start again when the sign stops being stop. where does an octagon say temporarily. all it takes to go is a breath. magic when someone waves you in and tells you to go even though you can't hear him. go ahead in spite of the euclid of it all. standing in the middle of the road to beat the yellow. lights come in cereal box colours. look before crossing the sign. why did the chicken transgress foucault. to get the grecian urn.

**king james and a bag of chips -- six transpositions**

**one**

my buddy,  
who sold art in toronto  
swallowed by his fame

why freedom comes  
my will is dumb

the hearse comes in at eleven

rivet this day  
sour sally sang  
and permit us our breakdancing  
as we pity those  
who discoed before us

and shake our butts to the Temptations

free pizza for the people

sublime as a pimple  
john kennedy on a pony

whatever, whatever

amen

**two**

an hour farther  
and we'll stop at 7-11  
handicapped parking spaces

but they don't sell rum  
and this one is done.

you fucking hogged that one, kevin

gimme that, HEY!  
our daddy's dead  
and he gave us those buspasses  
so we should go home  
and drop 'cid again, bud

hash is not enough stimulation

and my liver's incapable

you got the money  
i got the car keys

we'll be back in ten minutes

and then.

**three**

to bother,  
getting up in the morning  
demands the coffee's made

the bath is run  
the towels hung

and deodorants in the cabinet

razor blade shave  
after shave, balm  
and search for missed places  
as we learned to do so  
a thousand times before this

keep your nicks from hemorrhaging

with white toilet paper

or aspic and finger  
crispy bowl cereal

forget your briefcase

a.m.

**four**

iraqis  
that fart in baghdad  
embarrass just the same

as presidents  
in elevators

or worse, in oval office

this is to say,  
just turn your head  
and smile if you know who did it  
out of politeness  
because no one likes it

when people point out with laughter

four times i've been caught

in class in a car  
at the store and renting videos

terribly sorry

ahem.

**five**

'scuse me  
sweet babe in hot pants  
haven't we met before

i'm sure of it hon,  
at that party, the one

where everyone hung around the oven

my name is dave  
i like to give head  
and i really like young lasses  
so if i said, your bod is hot  
would you hold it against me?

no need for protection

and rings don't mean unavailable

this is my audi  
meet my pal tony

have you ever been on camera,

my dear?

**six**

ha childhood  
ha fart ha giggle  
guffawed hee hee gay

hee laughter haw  
haw snigger hee

ha chuckle ha ha ha hee smiling

ha ha tee hee  
ha ha hee haw  
ha chortle ha ha ha hee jiggle  
huh huh choke laughter  
hoo hoo ha bum bum

and hee haw snicker diarrhea

huh huh ha ribald

whee hee ha bellow  
ha ha ha shucks snifle

ticklish ticklish

hymen

## **Appendix: a statement of poetics**

In *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, Peggy phelan reminds us that performance is a way around the commodifying tendencies immanent in cultural production(s). I agree with Phelan's statement that "performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength" (149). I would argue, in concert with Phelan, that the moment of performance addresses a "now" that is concealed in the processes and processing of recording(s). During a lecture at the University of Windsor in April 2003, visiting artist Pauline Oliveros commented that the recording of her music was only a pale reproduction of her experience of "being" in the sound at the moment of creation, and further, that the CD could only conjure up a memory of that time, a mere echo of itself.

For the artist herself to admit that a mechanically reproduced copy of her work fails to accurately re-create its original state of being contradicts Walter Benjamin's quiet confidence in the mechanically reproduced work of art. For him, the photograph and the phonograph have within them the ability to import entire cathedrals and choruses into our studios and drawing rooms (Benjamin 283). Presuming the utter fidelity of the copied work permits Benjamin to continue along a dangerous track: when the copy and the "audience" (now scattered, liberated from the tyranny of having to show up and listen to the choir live in performance) come together, it is possible for the original work to be "reactivated" – a moment that recalls rituals and traditions that created the piece of art in the first instance.

But every day, someone sends a postcard featuring the Mona Lisa to a friend back home. Or, if the sender is a more ironic sort, he may choose to send Marcel Duchamp's

revision of the original, *L.H.O.O.Q.* Is it fair, anymore, to say that the *gravitas* of the Da Vinci, or the cultural and political debate sparked by Duchamp and his Dadaist colleagues is adequately invoked when we scrawl "Wish you were here" on the reverse of these postcards? Exactly what rituals and traditions are being made available to us in moments such as these?

Canonically speaking, we have been scrambling our linguistic signals since the decline of literary modernism -- a trajectory that begins (for the sake of argument) with Yeats' Symbolist Rose poems and ends with Gertrude Stein's radical reformulation "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." Godfrey Reggio, creator of the *qatsi* trilogy -- a series of feature length silent films -- offers this opinion about the state of language: "From my point of view, our language is in a state of vast humiliation. It no longer describes the world in which we live" (*Koyaanisqatsi* interview). I can only echo Reggio's eloquent summation: it most certainly does not.

How can language maintain its dignity when we are told that "Coke is it" or that you sincerely "care enough to send the very best" when purchasing a pre-fabricated, mass produced greeting card on Mother's day? Simply put, such linguistic short circuits (what is "it", anyway?) are a precise measure of our relationships to the material world. If nothing else, the "ID wars" of the 1990's demonstrated that people employ language in ways that reveal the degree of their alienation from the "centres" of the discursive trinity of race, class, and gender. I find Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's paradigm of "machinic assemblages" to be particularly useful when trying to measure the interrelationships among humans, the material world, and language. In the section "Postulates of Linguistics" they draw a parallel between the stirrup/man/horse interface,

and surmise that a similar dynamic occurs in language. In other words, the words we mobilize around concepts or objects partially create, liberate, or enable *tangible effects* between the subject and the object: we (man-horse-stirrup) become symbiotically related; we create a new machine (90). The stirrup modifies the human-horse assemblage, making it more efficient and as a consequence enables an entirely new stratum of the population to take up "riding"-- and even as the human-horse relationship is adjusted, so too is the vocabulary. In this case, the lexeme "riding" takes on a new immanence. Another entry must be made in the dictionary to account for this adjustment in the machinery of the material world.

The net effect of the process described above is a field of language in which words are always and already polyvalent, and anything can be made a pun, or contain a double entendre (or a triple, quadruple, to the *n*th degree). This is a source of infinite regress, not of authentication or definition, but of pragmatics. The quest is to find the word that is most suited to its task, to make the subtle adjustments that enable the machine to "run". This level of pragmatic language is commonly referred to as "everyday speech." My argument in **boldface** is that everyday speech and its necessary functionality has been leveraged by the sloganeer and the capitalist in an effort to render language merely symbolic once again. When language is divorced from its pragmatic roots, and we are unable to examine it "in relation to the implicit presuppositions, immanent acts, or incorporeal transformations it expresses and which introduce new configurations of bodies," then our words are vulnerable to the process of commodification (Deleuze 83).

In those cases in which the diction of everyday speech has been used to sell a product, I see the subject putting his/her critical mind to rest for a moment (again, just

what *is* the 'it' in "Coke is it")? The mere fact that such a statement passes for communication is evidence of a collective unconcern for the vitality and importance of our language.

My poetry is deeply invested in this line of questioning. Using the accepted grammars of corporate capitalism, academe, and "street" argot (to name but three), I try to create chains of signification that reveal language itself as an immanence. Single words and phrases can be lifted from the cultural imaginary or what Benjamin calls "mass audience response" and be made to mean something entirely new. In other words: reproducing words, mechanically or otherwise, does not necessarily imply a perfect communication, or a static relationship between speakers/artists and receivers (which, incidentally, would be an ideal situation for the advertiser).

Because this relationship, this fidelity, does not exist, I perform.

I perform because the only tradition worth salvaging is a critical tradition. A critical tradition begins with listening. To listen is to learn, to learn is to become critical, and to become critical is the most vital step in becoming a subject/citizen of the world. I write surprises into my poems, because that is what makes people pay attention.

I wish to create an apperception of our most commonly reproduced medium: everyday speech. For instance, in order to reveal the multiplicity and possibilities embedded in our everyday speech, I engage in straight metrical transpositions of easily recognizable cultural artifacts. The template for **ella allah saddam** is George Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off", just as Elvis' "Hound Dog" was the metrical structure for **the wrong dog**. In the first instance, Gershwin's song is an innocent exploration of pronunciations within the context of romantic relationships, but the *same song* becomes

much more ominous when the language is re-cast along racial, religious, and military terms. The difference between toe-mato, and toe-mahto is a subtle class signifier in the original song. In **ella allah saddam**, this playful distinction moves into a register where the stakes of language are much, much higher. The current war in Iraq, like all wars, is fought with words as much as with munitions.

War is one of a constellation of ideas in **boldface**. I see this collection of poems as thematically linked in and around whatever stage of late capitalism that we now find ourselves. An imagined America -- sometimes glorious, sometimes a buffoon -- winds in and out of this collection. Those poems which feature a first person "I" are often an imagined American negotiating his position as a consumer-citizen in a country engaged in a war that it is burying under a mountain of consumer goods and shiny new distractions (a seemingly unending selection of SUVs, it seems). I highlight my preoccupation with America because I feel as though it is a subject matter particularly suited to an overlooked, but central concern in modern poetics: competition.

Before my readers get carried away and presume that I am advocating a form of amoral Darwinism, or cutthroat capitalism in poetry, I would like to draw a parallel between *competition* and another fearsome and misunderstood word: *jihad*. Contrary to popular belief, the *jihad* is not a declaration of bloody war upon the North American infidel. *Jihad* is simply "struggle". The word represents a self-overcoming, a quest for the willpower needed to resist temptations (the temptation to violence is only one). In the same manner do I understand competition. My main competitor is me. I compete with a culture of passivity (one that I have internalized, by default perhaps) that Slam poet Taylor Mali describes as "the most aggressively inarticulate generation to come along in like, you

know, a long time" (Def Poetry Jam). That said, I also compete with my fellow poets. I certainly do want my share of applause. But it is the quality of my presentation and my words that *earns* it, and further, I find it very difficult to oppress any body in this contest in order to "win". I have never heard of a poetic sweatshop. In **boldface**, competition is both content and process.

In eighteen months between 2001 and 2003, I have performed on stage over thirty times. Approximately half of these performances were at "Juice"-- a monthly open microphone poetry reading that Tamara Kowalska and I organized in Windsor, Ontario. The atmosphere was playful, the smoke was thick, and the content ranged anywhere from crude and revolting to incisive and inspiring. I discovered there were poets who came into the situation with absolutely no preconceptions or experience about reading aloud. I also found serious practitioners, armed with purpose, poise, and certain fetishes about which spot in the evening's order they might occupy. In every case, the audience applauded. Perhaps we were chastened by a raw and emotional poem, or stunned by the philistinism of the amateur poet enacting a self-help program before our eyes, or confused by an utterly personal and abstract take on the simplest of subjects, but in spite of our savage and critical minds, hands met in polite applause. I was (and remain) constantly impressed by the communal and tribal responses that even a poorly conceived work of verbal art can provoke. At its best, however, the open mike reading can be a breathtaking forum for self expression, political intervention, entertainment and enlightenment.

On July 20, 1986, at the Green Mill Lounge in Chicago, Marc Smith and a few of his poet friends developed a new form of open mike reading that has redefined the poetry reading as we know it. The "Slam" is an informal contest in which poets are allowed a

mere three minutes and only one poem to impress five randomly selected judges and emerge "victorious". Mark Smith, having observed "the boring poetry readings of the 1980s," instituted this form because "competition is a natural drama and...an exciting way of ending an evening's entertainment" (Eleveld 118). There was no prize money, no trophy with names engraved for posterity -- a triumph at the Green Mill represented only a fleeting glory. After all, next Sunday night, a new champion would be crowned. In my mind, this is the epitome of competition without commodification.

This kind of fun, low-stakes, and friendly competition has brought poets like Reggie Gaines, Carl Hancock Rux, the late Miguel Pinero, Saul Williams, Sage Francis, Taylor Mali, Beau Sia and a host of other men and women into the public eye. The Slam format has enabled meditations on gender relations like Evert Eden's poem, *I Want to be a Woman*, hyperbolic declarations of sexual empowerment like Maggie Estep's *Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere*, and stark portraits of inner-city America like Reggie Gaines' *Please Don't Steal My Air Jordans* (Aloud 425, 62, 65). The Slam poet has at his/her disposal practically any generic form invented, from the sonnet to the concrete/visual. The sheer democracy of the Slam reading, where anyone is invited to sign up and compete, has delivered an equally democratic new category for poetry. Slam is a genre without form, and that is a freedom that I have incorporated in writing and organizing **boldface**.

Formally, there is a politics at play in the composition of a Slam poem. In spite of the countless number of formats available, the Slam poem must have an obvious aural quality. In the words of Taylor Mali:

...that's the Hook, and you gotta have a Hook,  
More than the look, it's the Hook that is the most  
important part  
the hook has to hit and the hook's gotta fit,

Hook's gotta hit hard in the heart

from "how to write a political poem"  
(Eleveld 174)

The effectiveness of the Slam poem depends on these hooks -- lines that provoke an involuntary response from the audience, lines that "hit" too fast to be analyzed. The Slam poem must be as spontaneous and fast as the world. But this is not to imply that there is a slavish realism to my poetry. The involuntary response to the hook is the fruit of subversion, a dynamic in Slam that operates at the level of language and in the moment of performance simultaneously.

The Slam poet (and the spoken word artist who undertakes the same formal restrictions) is denied a great deal in his three minutes. Establishing developed characters and "realistic" settings must be done efficiently or not at all. Essayistic analyses of long swaths of history must be discarded long before any audience suffers through them. The Slam poet is left with the present moment, and this is his most effective tool. Stripped of introductory apparatuses, the Slam poem folds the work of art seamlessly into the moment of performance, and by default, into the real time and lives of the listening audience. The work of verbal art is no longer static (as it may appear when written down), but becomes a reciprocal, participatory act.

What is sacrificed is durability -- the poem lasts only in memory, and it usually doesn't "apply" for long. I considered including a poem called **open letter to the spice girl of your choice** in this collection, but the reference had already become stale after only a couple of years. Perhaps a new poem about Britney Spears, or Christina Aguilera, is in order. Reggie Gaines has lived long enough to see Brooklyn youths killed for other brands of sneakers since the popularity of the Air Jordan. All of this is to say that

durability itself is illusory and it rests on the poet to resist stasis, restart his process, retune his antennae, and reengage with precisely what is present before him again and again, three minutes at a time. Spoken word poetry isn't *about* revolution -- it *is* revolution. It is about the constantly recursive cycle between an engaged artist and an equally engaged audience. As in **nike with spikes**, "the nature of the revolution/ is all in the spinning." Perhaps the ultimate hook is a self-evident truth and this is the final and potentially impossible goal of my poetry in this project.

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**vita auctoris**

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