

Manifest

The poem is a topological space.

The poem *is situated on* a topological space. The "blank" space of the page is not "blank." It is volatile; it is active. Words may be in one place and may shift to another place. It is porous and unstable. Words may falls into faults or cracks in the page. It is spongy. Different places on the page have different weights and gravitational pulls. This affects placement of words.

Words may become unrecognizable due to geographic activity. Meaning is secondary to sight. Meaning must be collected in a treasure hunt through the page. Meaning is one of many possible maps through a page. Meaning is only possible on the level of the page. The page's topology determines meaning. The words' geological placement determines meaning. History determines meaning. The reader's specific travels determine meaning.

Sound is secondary to sight. The page is not a score for reading. The poem need not be read aloud. The "blank" spaces of the page are not "scored." The "blank" spaces of the page are not equal. Some spaces are more blank than others. Some blank spaces are larger than other blank spaces that may look equal. "Blank" spaces can be bridged, like a wormhole rather than like a musical measure. Sound comes after recognition.

The poem *is a set of* topological figures or features. Words are subject to disintegration, death, and other natural events that individuals of all types face. The words on the page represent the page at a certain geological moment. This moment implies a history. This moment entails a future. The reader sees merely a moment captured. The moment could have been otherwise.

The "level of the page" is the only level. The vertical "reader to page" and "author to page" and "author to reader" relationships are eradicated. The horizontal journey through the page, as a hiker on a trail, is the only way to search for meaning. As such meanings will be different for each traveler. As such meaning is made through memory. Connections are delayed, soundings are delayed, meaning is delayed. Meaning is put together. As such meaning is a compound impression of a physically traversed space (the eye moves physically through the space as the mind encounters fragmented signifiers). Each poem is a microcosm.

The poem and the page become topological at the same time; as the reader traverses their space, he or she perceives a shifting, coming-into-being topology. JS

silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio

Gomringer
Silencio

I.
TACET
II.
TACET
III.
TACET

John Cage
score for 4'33"

John
Long
Tammy
McGovern
M. Paolo
Sclafani
Jessica
Smith

I. Foreword

It's sometimes assumed that an author who doesn't read is just shy, or that the author's poem "has no sound," or that the author has nothing to read. Although each of these things may be the case with certain authors (Harper Lee, for example), those of us participating in the Silent Reading today (26 February 2002) have different reasons for avoiding the conventional poetry reading. Each of us is quite willing to explain the reasons behind choosing this "Silent Reading" format. I am creating this brochure to identify the reasons that *I* do not read in conventional poetry readings. Those who find this brochure are quite welcome to disagree entirely, & I do not pretend to speak for my fellow Silent Readers. JS

II. The Poetry Reading

The Poetry Reading in present-day Poetry Culture, especially as that culture is articulated by such seminal works as Charles Bernstein's *Close Listening*, but also as that culture is expressed in the high attendance at Maya Angelou readings & Canadian interest in sound poetry, is a mark of & venue for economic success, & (still) an opportunity for an audience to hear how an author's work "should" be read. The Poetry Reading offers the audience a privileged glimpse into the text—a sort of "director's cut" authorized by the writer. It also offers a market venue: a consumer is more likely to buy a book of poetry after hearing the author read it because he or she feels that his or her "inner ear" has been forged by the author's own version of the work. The Poetry Reading provides a political (within the poetry community) and economic meeting ground for poet-poet and poet-audience exchanges, and its importance in present-day poetry culture cannot be denied.

There are types of poetry that fall through the cracks and are not benefited by the Reading. One type is score-poetry (that is, poetry for which the page provides some type of metrical grid for performance, such as is common in sound poetry). There is a tradition of using the score to read *other people's* poetry (for instance, Christian Bök performs works by Kurt Schwitters), which is unorthodox in normal Readings. A second type is unique poetry, where a poem that is created as an installation work or is simply too complex to be recreated can be read (aloud, by an author) but not reread (later, at home, by the audience). This type does not benefit from the economic exchange that a typical Reading provides. A third type is visual

work that may or may not be immediately pronounceable but is meant primarily to be engaged with on a reader-page, rather than author-reader, relationship. By "unpronounceable", I mean work such as the "concrete" poetry in Darren Wershler-Henry's *Nicholodeon*; pronounceable visual work includes work like mine in *bird-book*, where the page is *not* scored but recognizable words and word-fragments exist. This third kind of poetry is the kind that we are addressing here today. A Reading of these works would only give the audience one authorized way of viewing the text, when the piece desires a reader-text interaction.

III. A Silent Protest

The "Silent Reading" is, in some ways, a silent protest. These writers are not satisfied with the environment a normal Poetry Reading provides. Establishing a public forum for "Silent Reading" gives priority to the reader-text relationship instead of the author-audience relationship (for whatever reasons each author has decided to make such a value claim).

IV. A "Pregnant" Silence

Historically, poetry has been a male-dominated world punctuated with a few women (usually wives or lovers of the men). With only a few exceptions, the role of women in poetry has been as a Muse or Lover for a male poet. The 20th century, which allowed more women writers than ever before recorded, lamented the "silent" role of the female. The 21st century can do better. As a woman writing, I can *choose* to be silent. I have the luxury of a certain equality that has not, before this generation, been achieved. At the same time that my silence is a luxury, it is a conscientious objection to the *kind* of poetry reading (and writing) propagated by males (such as Wordsworth, Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, to name only a handful in a certain tradition) who cited themselves as "men speaking to men." Granted, their language may not have intentionally been gender-specific—but the omission of women is there nonetheless. The tradition of a male poet-priest, however "innocent," must be entirely disbanded for women to have full equality in the creative world. Therefore, my luxurious silence (which appreciates the strides made by female poets before me, without whom I could not *choose* to be silent) is also a pregnant one that uses the silent role previously assigned to women as a weapon against the still sexist poetry world.

V. A Reunion

The primary reason why I, personally, need a forum like the "Silent Reading" is that my poetry prioritizes the reader-text interaction over any other kind of interaction with the text or author.

My poetry started as a "Choose your own adventure" game. Rows and columns of words could be read in many (though not "any") path the reader chose. The result was a fairly clear narrative picture slightly distorted by the incessant twisting of the path. I started writing poetry that way five years ago, and went through a more impressionist phase where the "picture" one got at the end of the poem, when one had exhausted one's options of reading paths, got fuzzier and fuzzier. I now see my poetry as cubist or "plastic," that is, situation upon a topographical plane (see "*Manifest*"). My poetry is indeed "sounded," but I like for the reader to have the pleasure of realization as he or she moves through the text on its own terms and on its own level. This aesthetic goal of reader-text interaction is so crucial to my sense of my poetry that I refuse to give an author-directed reading.

VI. Logistics

The Silent Reading has been planned as a multi-station environment where "audience" members or "readers" can view poems that are already in motion or waiting to be read. At tonight's reading (26 February 2002) we are presenting 5 stations:

1. Tammy McGovern will set up and maintain a computer station where readers can peruse her web poetry, which depends on reader-computer interaction.
2. John Long will make a non-verbal sound environment for which the score is unavailable. John also makes large, poster-sized poems that are multi-linear and multi-voiced.
3. M. Paolo Sclafani will present a poetry-film.
4. Jessica Smith will present a film incorporating her poetry. The film is entitled *Transient Views of Western New York* and is directed by Terry Cuddy (2002). She will also present a packet of poetry.
5. Jordan Berry's poem "Woman Poem" will be featured in a station with scissors and tape so that readers can construct the Woman. Jordan will not be present.