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EKE
A COLLECTION OF POEMS

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
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ABSTRACT

This MA thesis, titled *EKE: A Collection of Poems*, consists a collection of forty visual poems and its accompanying exegesis.

The collection of poems is, to borrow a term from Friedrich Schlegel, derived from feelings arising from the “indissoluble antagonism... between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” (qtd. in Janowitz 448). The poems in *EKE* are fragments of thoughts and feelings held in a plasma state, held by a “cat in the throat”, in an instance where meanings diverge, divert, and oscillate in the visual fragmentation and displacement of words and expressions (“A Cat in the Throat”). The fragmentations, arising from “conflicting and contradictory” (“A Cat in the Throat”) perceptions and conceptualisations enact the “theme of incompleteness” and the “theme inexpressibility” (Janowitz 444, 446). The collection exists in trying to “(make) a path” to, through, from, and around the “cat in the throat” (“Stray Straws and Straw Men”). The collection, comprising forty visual poems each digitally illustrated in Adobe Photoshop, moves through arcs of ambiguity and ambivalence situated in sight and seeing, in the act of expression and meaning-making, caught in the forces of nature.

In the section that follows, the introduction and the exegesis explore the notion of what may make up the “Cat” of the “cat in the throat”. The heart becomes the chief modifier of the “cat in the throat”. Three poems – one by Apollinaire, one by Caroline Bergvall, and an original poem – about the heart are explored in order to uncover some ways in which the heart is a source of obstruction. The exegesis chiefly investigates the way in which the “fragment”, as a product of thoughts making their paths around and through the “cat in the throat”, comes to be an effective way of communicating out of incompleteness and inexpressibility. Following the introduction, the exegesis dissolves into a collection of fragments and presents the lyric subject and the many unknowns it faces with respect to itself and others. Titled “Eke-gesis: (S)matters of the heart”, the collection of fragments – of thoughts, feelings and reflections – is an “affirmation” of the “visible juxtapositions” that makes up *EKE* (Janowitz 449). Set up as a series of personal contemplations upon the origin and conceptualisation of *EKE*, it invites the reader to track through the “fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]” that pervade the heart of and forms the basis for the collection of poems in *EKE*.

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EKE, A COLLECTION OF POEMS

let ter s
let u
s tell 'er
hleft us
tell uses
let's tell
what's, what's left
what's, felt
s what's teller
a letter
a let'er
a let sheer
let's, us sheer
write a letter.

in the mo^ode
for a let^ter
the mood to let
an alpha bet
turn into d^rowⁿs
of wo^ur^ds on a page
in mi^dst of sum^moning
num^bers to be^tter^s wo^undⁱng
edge
delegat^es
sp^aces
between of
meanⁱng f^ollⁱsh
characters
make up
letters
made up
most for
mo^on^dst ruck
um^ming

with held
by holding
on hold
to be with and
with out by
a hand hold
held away
by and by a mark
a mark of touch
withholding
to hold, by
being
held.

look,
no further than
look at me
further than
can what other looks
further
look
don't
look if can't look
no further, further look
no, no, no,
further, further
look
at me, no, at me
at me
at, umm. no,
at, umm, me
at
look at
look for the
look for them me
look further
for me
look further
at me.

look no
look no further
look further no
look for the no
further
look for the no further
for the no to sink
look further for to
requires
looking
further, a little
for the
looks to sink in
look to smile
smiling in ssss
look, looks sink further
looks sink in, so,
look further.

eyeball
the space
before eye bawl
insp_e ace
in pace
in_s pieces
in eyed.

bawlings_sad.
b idea.
my eyes, _swalling in
yes_swell
yes,
well,
might as_{well}
as_{will} a_{swilling}
wa;lling
was eyes willing
as awed bawl
_sspacing

clooked up
conflatable meanings
concrete
sightings
lathered late
interupture
iterations
fascinations
concreations
placement
scale

can tell
by the guilty
look of
his efface
if fits really
ornament
or truth
masked original
which
truly is it
glitseeing

cleaver
a level cleverer
level levelled
a cleaved level up
cleaveable
ul

word^still
paper^sthin

hum^man^terrorⁱng
as water^as blood
as b^leeding
b^linds
evening
br^eathⁱng^guns

word^s in
papere^d still

word^still
paper^sthin
t^herr^eors
as water^as blood
b^linding
rining
brims toⁿe
boil
word^sill
papere dⁱn

dis miss ile
ed
dismally
mulled
dis tally m^u_ast
mistily
mask
drummed down
d_us^k_t

eras_err_r ure dust
ra_rz_or_r^ed us^t
ra_r_is_ed us
erase_a_ddust
erased us

dust lies
dust lies where it should
does lie when it should be
dusted
does lie
dust it lies where it should so it
does lie where
doesn't it lie when
dust is
does it should or
dust it?

so which
this itch
in time
switch lines
saves it? it ch
so w itches trick
sew thick to
inches?
which es?
so sitches itches
th ick es
stwitches
sick?

so it seems
bias seem binding
tapped off hemming
a full skirt's around
wrapping
openings out
with sound

the hissing stress on word is sing d riving
st inging mad ness
dam n in
to o mind

c^lear^sfully
m^eaning
s^to
w^ords
which dire ctⁱon
bl^meaning
b^ack
so m^ean thing
di ff ear^rant;

ma_yke
make_n
swa_y
mis_tsa_yke_n
say
for_s t_aking
miss_{st}r_{ay}
s_tr_aeps
for, sakes!
take_n over_take_n
for_sake_n
takes

gu^est
ga^ethering
gusts staying
only you sting
est. es
mult us
multi sooths
trying
to besaid
but justs
gspreaying
soundswindling
toplease
gues what
ayumm
sayin g ist
Gusts

of ferred
of field
of tact
con t ext
of ferred
con n; e l d ly
c of f i m
c o n g e s t e d
i f c o n t e s t e d
t e s t e d
f e s s o f f
p r o f f e r e d
c o n f e s t e d
c o n . o f c o u r s e
f u s s e d
o f j e c t
c o n s u b s t i t u t e
c o n f o r t
c o n f i t u d e
o f c r u d e

con fli^tting mess^ages
flee^ting
ta^king so^me^uch
time tickⁱng
de^ciding
ub^stan^tiating
dar^dising
an^swea^ring
damⁿit^picking
flⁱppⁱng con^tro^lling
flⁱckⁱng
p^ri^fli^tting
p^lease

to get a resolution
is to resist temptation
to solve
to find a solution
but to ir resolution
is to reabsolutely
to le
to solve
desolutely

not,
k^{no}w angry
no^t where near
a tang^{le}t d
of ang sty
but
ast^{ra}y has anger let
brought burn
ashh tray away
a sty of re^{arr} range ing
ra ge
angerrange
aknot of angstr ay
w roug tthing
waves

bruntle
blurrnt sky
brooding
brontide
bwroughtone
tideall waves
brrumbelling
thrunkne lling
l inking blacker
greyer shadows
shh woken song
thunders on
thunderstrum

im plie
im ple^{ore}ding
im parting with
tears with
im parti^{ble}cular
i'm voking
i'm vading
silence
to procure
all listening
tears for
the se^{offerings}

aScertain direction from
landm arks
the spli gh t
f
between
sea sand sweeping
weaves
throug h t cks
u

to as say
to es scribe
to in timate ly

toss ay
t ossify
to s p e cification
c e pacifically
s ailing
aid s eeking
miss iles

overboard
thrown
surely known
what's coming
capsized
retreating in
swaves after
the seat
the bow
topples
assault tougher
salt tongued
see, sea,
greater
together.

s
still
mounⁿring
st^{ill}ver
rain^{ment}
stale^{mate}
mourn
mount^{tain}
mour^{ument}
m^{umber}ation
mistilled
mustⁱ installed
must^{let}
must^{trailed}
musⁿt^{rain.}

and
th^{ere} was hhh
more
not hhh ing
toss ay.

the soul^lnd
sacred
wakes the
pain^ted days
the weaks
but does not
sleep
from
being

c^lou^d I watch the morning sun^{rise}_{ing}
rise¹ with d^rawn
blu^r_e rred orange b^elow

cloud oft
could^soften
like mirror calls
lightning
stabled moon
silver falls
cables of favour
be for a ttune ment
moment
turns
all.

Oud
clued slowly
s oft ly
c loud ly
ou1d
only shhh ou1d
l oft ly
s hold er

l and the reams
close a do or
ther
wi ndo wid e
open close
hopp e nding
certain calls

light
ac^rosse
the
grass that
grows in
d^roves of
green
g^roses that
re^moves
in light like
slight
grasses slender
slim

37: it moves across¹

¹ from Bernadette Mayer's "It Moves Across"

suppose a question say
an attention to details
to slip up errance
to say with poise ture plead
in supplication
in subtle ap lanting
answer
in ask ance^s
gl

won't dance
don't ask
won't heartfelt things
it should done
dance
won't
you?

what was I
saying?
was I trying
to say?
trying to through to
through say to
ends up
rashly
said
please what was I trying
to say?

EKE, AN EXEGESIS

1. INTRODUCTION

EKE begins with the problem of expression. It is a collection of visual poems investigating how thoughts, feelings, and personal histories interfere with the process of expression. It explores how visual manipulation of the word on the page can visually convey a struggle – visually illustrate a cognitive, intellectual, emotional, and physical “fumble [and] stammer” – towards expression (*A Lover’s Discourse* 19). The collection of poems demonstrates, in the word and letter fragmentations and displacements, the instability of signification. The recurrence of certain words within a poem, and the clustering of certain poems within the collection gestures toward potential arrivals, departures, and expansion of meanings to, from, and across poems.

Charles Bernstein, an American Language poet, claims that a poem should have “the eye... split open in such work” (39). Bernstein’s image of having the “eye” of the reader “split open” also evokes both a violent accident (to have one’s physical eye split open) and illumination, of being intellectually awakened by higher thought (to have one’s spiritual, intellectual, or emotional “eye” split open). In *EKE*, I sought to explore how I could have the “eye” – the reader’s readerly eye – “split open” in the struggle towards expression and meaning-making within the poems. The poems in *EKE*, however deeply or shallowly immersed they may be in emotional, intellectual, and semantic ambiguity, offer multiple paths of understanding. But what remains essential in these poems is that they are locked and clogged in an “attempt to express [the Whole]” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 19). Roland Barthes exhorts in *A Lover’s Discourse*,

the Whole cannot be inventoried without being diminished...
*my language will always fumble, stammer in order to attempt to
 express it, but I can never produce anything but a blank word,
 an empty vocable....* (19 emphasis added)

For the eye of the reader to “split open” in poetry, the act of visually and semantically processing a poem should reflect the same “fumble [and] stammer” that the lyric subject experienced in their attempt – their “fumble [and] stammer” – at expression in the poem. Charles Bernstein writes that poetry is “etched by making a

path not designing a garden" (39). To "fumble [and] stammer" in poetry means that the path that poems etch must be a difficult path with many obstructions.

The primary goal of word- and letter-displacements, and word and letter fragments in *EKE* is to form such obstructions and enact the "fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]" of expression. They function to disrupt the flow of reading, to have the "eye... split open" by the unruliness of the words on the page and the unresolved word meanings. To have the eye "split open" is to have the visual appearance *and* the semantics of the poem "fumble [and] stammer" in the poem. If Bernstein's "eye" were to be taken literally, "eye" as referring to eye movements, to have the eye "split open" would require that the eye is confronted with some manner of visual or semantic ambiguity. Psychologists have determined that "the proportion² of regressions (i.e. the eyes move backwards rather than forwards in the text) rises when forward reading is disrupted due to difficulty integrating incoming material" (Christianson et al. 1380). Although eye movements do not "split open" per se, that visual or semantic ambiguity causes the eye to move backwards to resolve the ambiguity reiterates that the process of comprehension involves the tracing, tracking of paths dictated by the text, in whichever way the way forward establishes itself in a text. By disrupting the flow of reading, *EKE* forces the "eye" to "split open".

The physical and psychological "eye" must be "split open" in *EKE* to allow for the central concept of the urgency of expression versus the struggle, the "fumble [and] stammer", of achieving complete expression to remain a constant pressure to the reader throughout. As such, both the collection of poems and the exegesis deploy the fragment as concept and mode. The concept and mode of the fragment is important in *EKE* as it functions as an emblem of the things that are unexpressed, remain inexpressible, or are rendered incomplete by the intensity of the struggle towards expression. *EKE* refers both to the history of the Romantic fragment and its later, post-structuralist development in significant predecessors such as Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, which similarly utilizes the fragment as an organizing principle. Anne Janowitz remarks that "the modernist fragment poem... is structured as a *whole*

² Christianson et al., cite *Psychology of Reading, 2nd Edition*, written by Keith Rayner, Alexander Pollatsek, Jane Ashby and Charles Clifton Jr., which states that, "[a]pproximately 15 % of eye movements during normal silent reading are regressive."

made of fragmentary parts – the juxtaposition or concatenation of discrete poetic units” (442). The modern fragment, Janowitz writes, “unmoored” from the “Romantic idea of “a ruin... [that] once had a full form that eroded through time”,

opens itself up to a new poetic matter: the relation between its own incompleteness and the greater whole to which it alludes, and which it both aspires to and struggles against... the fragment form becomes the place where the theme of incompleteness is enacted. (444)

According to Anne Janowitz, the modern fragment inherits the “theme of inexpressibility,” of “thoughts that lie too deep for words,” that is a “persistent theme” of Romantic poetry (446). But while the fragment³ in Romantic poetry “is an affirmation of the ideal” and functions to “[undervalue] its own achievement in the face of its unachieved ideal completion, its ‘beyond’”, the modern fragment, Janowitz asserts, “is an affirmation of its visible juxtapositions” (449). As “collages built up on fragments and ruins”, the modern fragment “does not allude to an invisible beyond” but instead “exhorts [both the reader and] the poet to abandon a fruitless search for the beyond and embrace the here and now” (449). The modern fragment poems aim to “[generate] new meanings out of visible and discrete remnants and ruins” (449).

To follow the fragments in *A Lover's Discourse* is to follow closely, to intellectually and emotionally trace a track with the “eye” – to have the reader’s sense of understanding “split open” by various paths leading to, through, and from – each contemplation of the meaning of words, to the next. While *A Lover's Discourse* may not be a modern fragment poem, it does function as a “whole made of fragmentary parts” and it is a “[collage] built up of fragments and ruins” – it is a collection of fragments, as it states in title of the collection. Barthes’s fragments share similarities

³ The Romantic fragment poem, according to Anne Janowitz, is “usually presented as a *partial whole* – either a remnant of something once complete and now broken or decayed, or the beginning of something that remains unaccomplished.” The Romantic fragment poems are poems, “published as ‘fragments’” such as “Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan: or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment*, Keat’s *Hyperion. A Fragment*, Byron’s *The Giaour, A Fragment of a Turkish Tale*”. In contrast, modern fragment poems are poems such as “T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, or Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos*, or Louis Zukofsky’s *A*” (“The Romantic Fragment” 442).

with the modern fragment poem. *A Lover's Discourse*, as a collection of fragments by a continental theorist who wrote at time that came before the modernist poets, enact the "fumble [and] stammer in [an]... attempt to express [the Whole]," similar to where the modern fragment poem "aspires to and struggles against [the greater whole to which it alludes]" (Janowitz 444). Wayne Koestenbaum aptly refers to *A Lovers Discourse* as "a jar of nuances" ("Foreword: In Defense of Nuance" ix). But these "nuances" are more living fragments – living paths – than ruins. Koestenbaum defines "nuance" as "a trace, like dust on plush, [which] *resuscitates a lost instant* when someone... raptly concentrated on a stray interpretive detail" (xix, emphasis added). The use of "resuscitates", a word collected with notions of breathing and of reliving, suggests that the "nuance" can breathe life into the "instant", the moment of liveliness. Nevertheless, Barthes recognises that the instance is "lost" and remains incomplete, that "the Whole inventoried... [that] language will always fumble, stammer in order to attempt to express it" (*A Lovers Discourse* 19). The word "jar" that Koestenbaum uses to refer to Barthes's "nuances" implies that there is no tangible narrative that holds the "fragments" of *A Lover's Discourse* together - *A Lover's Discourse* is a "juxtaposition or concatenation of discrete poetic units" (Janowitz 442).

In a similar vein, *EKE's* is neither a collection of modern fragment poems nor are the poems in *EKE* arranged in any narrative order. *EKE* does not dwell on a specific feeling or traumatic experience. or thought per se, for *EKE* is a contemplation of the "fumble [and] stammer" in expressing "[the Whole]" (Barthes 19). The form of the fragment is necessary in *EKE* as it "mak[es]... path[s]" to, through, and from the intellectual, emotional, semantic, and visual struggles present in the poems and in the exegesis (Bernstein 39). In the collection of poems, fragmentation is taken to the level of the word and the letter, via word and letter displacements, fragmentation, and enjambments. The poems in *EKE* defy the notion of the larger narrative by forming clusters of associations and web-like correspondence between different poems. In the exegesis, the fragment becomes the way in which the intentions, feelings and ideas behind the collection of poems can be tracked and traced in a manner more akin to Barthes than Bernstein. Bernstein's assertion that a poem is "etched by making a path" assumes that to write a poem is to confidently carve out a path in a violent and

destructive process. The word “etch” means “to engrave by eating away the surface with acids” (OE). The readiness at which the author “etches” the path implies certainty and in what they wish to express. There is no room for the “fumble” or the “stammer” when the poem or the fragment is “etched” – etching involves filling the path, left after a needle is traced through wax, with acid so that a grooved path will be left behind for the ink to sit in. In Bernstein’s rendition of the writing process, the poet is articulate, certain and in control of what they are doing. In contrast, *EKE* begins with, ends with, and takes the form of a struggle. Thus, the exegesis for *EKE* favours the approach of “making a path” as rendered in a collection of fragments much like Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* to form clusters in a “jar” of “fragments and ruins”.

The struggle is essential in *EKE*, and my linguistic background enables new formal ways of enacting the struggle that occurs in the background of *EKE*. Although I do not struggle with the English language, the more I struggle to find myself in it, or in any language for that matter, I find myself immersed in a history that is foreign to me. Even as I search for the etymological origins of the words “etch” and “wake”, they recede further and further away from me to Old High German and Old Norse. That these English words are indispensable to me goes without saying. But they are not mine. Even as I go along the trail I discover that neither English, Arabic, Tamil or Malay are mine. My identification card tells me that my race is Indian, but the only person who spoke Tamil in my family is my grandfather who had passed away. My grandmother is Malay and speaks Malay. I grew up with the Malay language as my mother tongue, but while I may have done well in school with the Malay language as a subject, I am not sure that I have subjected myself fully to it. I can read Arabic, but only understand a bit of it. I speak and write and think in English, and feel rightfully guilty that I am not as fluent or as immersed with the other languages. Thus, while Bernstein, as a language poet theorising a semantic economy in the 1970s, may speak of poetry as “etched by making a path”, the excellent intellectual exercise of language poetry has yet to make room for the intellectual dilemmas of the post-colonial, multilingual voice.

For Caroline Bergvall, a French-Norwegian plurilingual poet who works from a multilingual and global point of view, the poem is produced and takes place on the path of the larynx, where the voice is centred. Bergvall's path stands in contrast with Bernstein's – for Bernstein, the path that is made ends up being “etched”, but for Bergvall the path is lodged in the organic, moist environment of the throat. The path of the throat, much like paths in nature, is thus subject to the environment, the physiological and cultural variables of speaking. As such, the act of writing is also embodied, also subject and localised to the environment in which language is produced. For Bergvall, “the act of writing... manifests transit and spitting out” (“A Cat in the Throat”). However, it is not only the voice, the act of writing, that is important to Bergvall. The obstructions that occur in the path of the voice is equally as important, if not more. Even “in the clearing of the throat”, “a lingual event is taking place” for Bergvall. “In French,” she writes, “one doesn't just clear one's throat, one has a cat in the throat” whereas “it is a croaking frog that the English will wish to clear”. Bergvall poignantly asks, “So what if I were to decide to talk with a cat in the throat?”

For Bergvall, expressing the “greater whole” is less important than capitalising on the struggle, on the “fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]” of expression as she “decide[s] to talk with a cat in the throat” (“A Cat in the Throat”). The “fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]” (Barthes 19) of language in her poems are not a consequence of expressing the “greater whole” but rather, a consequence of having the weight of the “greater whole” of her French, Scandinavian, and English linguistic background pressing down on what she wishes to express (Janowitz 444). Although Bergvall does not refer to her collection as a “collection of fragments”, it is clear from her poems, such as “About Face” or “16 Flowers” that what takes place when “talk[ing] with a cat in the throat” is fragmentation. Her linguistic background reveals itself in her speech in the form of word and letter fragments and word and letter displacements, be they English or French. By dwelling on the nature of what obstructs speech, Bergvall highlights the history, politics, sociology, psychology, and physiology of language and articulation in the acts of speaking and writing. She rightfully points out that “bilingualism, a form of internalised dialogue, highlights rather than smoothes over conflicts and contradictory feelings of both belonging and dislocation in the throat of

the speaker" ("A Cat in the Throat"). And in Bergvall's preoccupation with working with, to, through, around and from the cat in her throat, the "conflicts and contradict[ions]", the "feelings of both belonging and dislocation" that shape her voice are brought out. For Bergvall, the "Cat" is "[her] hesitations, [her] speech's subjective accent, the tone in [her] speech, the stutter of [her] silencings, the explicit accentedness of its functionality" ("A Cat in the Throat"). When multilingualism obstructs articulation or makes articulation difficult, the "Cat" becomes the site where "fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]" reside in the throat. But as much as the "Cat" presents a tangible obstruction to articulation and thus to writing, the famously "enigmatic nature" of cats in literature could mean that much about the "Cat" remains elusive (Nikolajeva 248). In her essay, Maria Nikolajeva betrays the stunning audacity of the literary cat with its ability to become "a signifier without a signified" in the case phrases such as "to grin like a Cheshire Cat" (259).

So, what if *I* were to decide to talk with a cat in the throat?

Bergvall may have had an idea of what the "Cat" means for her. but I, on the other hand, am not sure what precisely the "Cat" means to me – if the "Cat" can or should be reduced to what it signifies. The post-colonial status of my relation to the English language is what, I feel, keeps me rightfully hesitant to define what the "Cat" means to me. In some ways the "Cat" is "my hesitations... the stutter of my silencings", but to claim that I share the same voice as Caroline Bergvall, that *my* hesitations are the same as *her* "hesitations", that the stutter of *my* silencings are the same as "the stutter of [*her*] silencings" would be irresponsible ("A Cat in the Throat", emphasis added). I have borrowed from Bergvall – but the implication of the word "borrow" is to also have a "pledge to return it", and to "borrow gently" from Bergvall brings with it a requirement to "take or obtain [something] on pledge to return it" in a way that is "courteous... mild, tender, not harsh" or "without rudeness" (OE). And in borrowing, I am not certain that I can return it unaffected.

Regardless of what the "Cat" may be in *EKE*, the collection asks and "fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]" on itself while it addresses the issue of talking – of writing, specifically – with a "cat in the throat". While the poems in *EKE* may not draw directly

from modernist fragment poems, any singular traumatic experience, or form a larger narrative, the focus on the themes of struggle, of the themes of inexpressibility and incompleteness remain a primary influence. The “theme of inexpressibility” is a source of obstruction, the “cat in the throat”. The poems in *EKE* enact cognitive and affective incompleteness by having each poem – down to individual words and phrases within the poem – fragmented and displaced. These poems are caught, with these “cat[s] in [my] throat”, in the path of what I wish to express. Friedrich Schlegel’s description of Romantic irony⁴ as “[containing] and [arousing] a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” is a forceful sentiment that mirrors my intentions behind writing the poems in *EKE* (qtd. in Janowitz 448). *EKE* observes “the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” and chooses, as Bergvall did, to talk – or in this case, write – nonetheless.

EKE addresses itself to the reader, and asks the reader if they would “[generate] new meanings out of visible and discrete remnants” within each fragment in the collection of poems and the exegesis. *EKE* places the responsibility of suggesting paths and routes into, out of, and through individual poems and exegesis fragments in the hands of the reader – the wiser reader? The preoccupied reader? The responsible reader? The irresponsible reader? The charitable reader? The biased reader? The gentle reader? How and whoever they may be, even if they may be me, my “decid[ing] to talk with a cat in the throat” means that *EKE* relies on the reader to witness – to “resuscitate the lost instant” with the “eye” of their eyes, hearts and minds – the “attempt to express” the inexpressible and the incomplete “instant” of the poem or the exegesis fragment. *EKE* invites the reader to witness “fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]” it puts itself through the struggle towards achieving complete expression.

The section which follows presents the way in which my poems, and consequently the poems in *EKE*, came to be. By comparing an original poem, titled “hear t”, with Guillaume Apollinaire’s “Heart” and fragments of Caroline Bergvall’s “16

⁴ Romantic irony as defined in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* is where “[a] writer... exhibits true presence of mind by showing an awareness, a sensibility, that he does not expect his work to be taken wholly seriously – and does not wish it to be.”

Flowers”, I will illustrate how *EKE* is influenced by and interacts with the poetics of modernist French concrete and visual poems, and later, the poetics of transnational visual multilingual poems.

(Ach/Ek)ing (a)long the Hear(t)

The heart is very much a tangible, personal obstacle for me mostly because, as a writer, I am not sure where my heart is when I write – if I can even encompass all of my heart, all of its “conflicts and contradictory feelings”, in writing (“A Cat in the Throat”). While my heart is not my “Cat”, it does, when it foils my attempt at expression, become “a cat in the throat”. According to Professor Syed Naquib Al-Attas, a Muslim philosopher, the heart is as the “spiritual organ of cognition”, from which the “intellect, the spiritual substance” projects reason (34). From his assertion, the heart has to maintain spiritual clarity in order to project truth. I am not sure which state my heart is in, but it is surely not at a state of spiritual, intellectual, or emotional clarity if I am struggling to find truth in my own heart. Language already finds itself wanting, but for my heart, for the seat of cognition to find itself lacking in knowledge or clarity makes the heart as the “cat in the throat” a key obstacle to work around and work through. That said, it is less a question of how my heart is than *where* my heart is that it presents itself as an obstacle. I had begun writing wishing to write with my heart, about my heart, with my heart on my sleeve. But I find my (fl)ailing heart lodged in my throat instead, its nebula of incomplete and insufficient knowledge, inexpressible thoughts and feelings, and the unexpressed and the unknown thoughts and feelings, thwarting my attempts at expression. If I were to reframe Bergvall’s question to the state of my heart, I ask: so, what if I choose to write with my uncertain heart in my throat?

The poem in Figure 1, “hear t” was an experimental prototype I composed four years ago, and it will be used to illustrate the path – the path that finds itself obstructed by an uncertain heart – that the poems in *EKE* follow. The poem “hear t” contains more of a narrative than the poems in *EKE* – there exists the characters of “I”, “heart” and “you”, and the act of “hear(ing)” become primary obstacles between them. The first word of the poem, “heart”, was intentionally separated so that the

hear_it,
 hear you_r
 swa^eet w^his_pers.
 must^t_as_k,
 in^et^uernal to the
 sen_ses,
 sans^action_s
 satⁱate^d.
 he,art,
 half ('d)
 my so^ule,
 be so bold
 so a^s to
 catch_me,
 un^aw^eares.
 you,
 here it.
 in_my heart
 it's his_per
 hearing.

Figure 1. An original poem titled “hear t”.

word “hear” would be salient. By having “i” interject in between “hear” and “t”, the character “I” is inserted, signifying that “I” could be an obstacle to “heart” or “heart” an obstacle to “I”. To illustrate the tension between “I” and its “heart” it would be useful to appeal to Al-Attas’s observation, that when the self is at “contemplation of [it]self” it sees that it is

an island set in isolation in a fathomless sea enveloped by darkness, saying that the loneliness that [it]self knows is so utterly absolute because even [it] knows not [it]self completely. (89)

At the same time, the addition of “i” modifies “t” of the fragmented “hear t” to “it” because of its proximity. Here I am exploiting of the cognitive tendency towards associating objects that appear close together as associated with one other – thus, “i” is not just “I” but also “it”, possibly meaning that “I” and “heart” are separated, that “I” can “hear it”, or that even “heart” can “hear” the “I” “it” belongs to. In addition, the proximity of “i” to “heart” indicates that the heart “I” wishes for “you”, who is introduced in the next line, to hear belongs to “I” – the “heart”, fragmented to “hear t” belongs to “I”, and “I” wishes for “you” to “hear it”.

The second line complicates the conversation between “I”, “heart” and “you”. One reading would be “hear your sweet whispers”, introducing the “you” which has brought discord between “I” and the “heart”. It can also be read in a few ways in association with the first line. It is both, “I hear your sweet whispers” and “hear it, hear your sweet whispers”, as well as, “heart. I hear your sweet whispers”. Depending on the way the reader chooses to read the poem, the poem reveals different narratives, different obstacles that would appear and that would add on and complicate the tensions between “I”, “heart” and “you”.

The poem “hear t” revels in the notions of and tensions between action and inaction, inaction and indecision, as well as the act of witnessing and participation. “hear t” deals with the layers upon layers that lie at the “heart” of decision-making. The poem “hear t” loiters between the desire and honour, between what “I” want and what the “heart” wants and the disparity (and despair-ity) between the two. “hear t”, in its fragmentations and word- and letter-displacements, enacts what happens when “I” speaks with its “heart” in its throat.

Essentially, the poems in *EKE*, like “hear t”, enact my decision of “talking with a cat in my throat”. They feature visual and semantic obstructions to enact the “fumble (and) stammer” of expression and demonstrate how the “cat in the throat” occupies language and how language occupies the “cat in the throat”. The poems are visual depictions of affective and cognitive ambiguity that are rendered using semantically ambiguous words and polysemic words which are deployed along with

the heavy usage of word- and letter-displacements and enjambments. In doing so, *EKE* comments on Saussurean structural beliefs of the signifier and the signified. The sign is not as simple as “a game of chess” – the signifier is not entirely arbitrary, the signifier is not entirely still, and that the unexpressed and inexpressible signified may find expression in fragments (*Course in General Linguistics* 88).

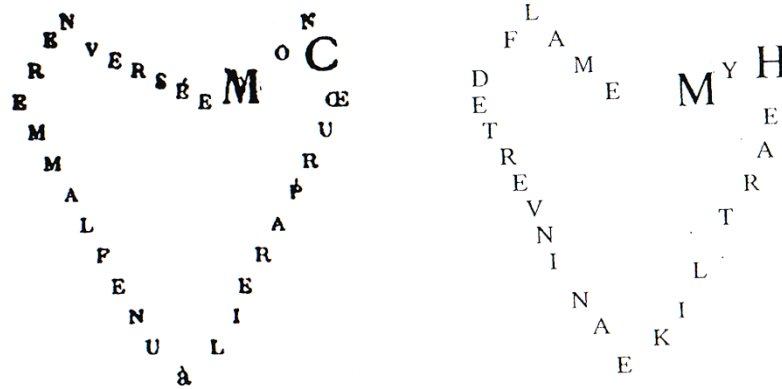


Figure 2. “Cœur” (on the left), and its translation “Heart” (on the right) by Anne H. Greet, from Guillaume Apollinaire’s poem “Cœur, Couronne et Miroir” in *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916) [A Bilingual Edition]*.

The visual poem “hear t”, as with the poems in *EKE*, experiments with whitespace differently than the concrete poems of French modernist poets like Guillaume Apollinaire. In Apollinaire’s “Heart” (see Fig. 2), from his poem “Cœur, Couronne et Miroir”, the letters from the words “My Heart like an inverted flame” are strung together to form a heart-shape. With “Heart” Apollinaire immediately discards the rules of reading – “Heart” is read in an anti-clockwise direction, and traces the imperfect heart-shape. By subverting the conventions of reading left to right and of encountering the poem as a list of meaningful words strung together in a straight line, line after line on the page, Apollinaire frees the page and the poem from the Saussurean notion that words and images are vehicles for meaning or a static signifiers for the signified.

By having the word and image of the “heart”⁵ and the word and image of the “flame”⁶ be mired with visual imperfection, permeable to the whitespace surrounding it, and disintegrating the sentence into individual letters, Apollinaire’s “Heart” surpasses reductionism. “Heart”, despite its visual simplicity, is composed of two of types of signifiers, the words in the running text and the image formed by the running text. The image of “Heart” is also doubled in its signification potential as it both signifies a heart and a flame, and the heart and the flame share meanings which affirm and build upon the other. However, the poem, “shaped like an imperfect [icon of the] heart”, with its sharp edges, resists being “reduced to a signified ‘heart’” (Drucker 157). Additionally, with its visual imperfection, it resists being dismissed as a symbol, an “overdetermined referent”, of love or passion and instead opens its doors to the “emotional impact of the text” (Drucker 157). The poem’s resistance is further perpetuated by having no solid barrier exist between the letters of the poem and the empty area surrounding it. There is a designated boundary to be sure, but it is permeable, incomplete – a fragmented boundary. The poem is, quite literally, “open” to the whitespace surrounding it. The image and the words, the signifiers, are not closed or contained – there are paths that can be visually traces to, through, and from it, and the whitespace offers these paths.

In contrast, the paths in “hear t” are offered by the word fragments themselves, as a way out of the oppressiveness of the white space, but “hear t” exists in a state of flux between freedom and safety. While Apollinaire’s “Heart” is ready to stand triumphant above the tyranny of the page, the whitespace in “hear t” is still uncharted territory. Like most of the poems in *EKE*, “hear t” is dense, narrow, and tentative when it comes to its relationship with the whitespace. That said, “hear t” offers more paths to the whitespace than poems like “i’m pluie”, which seem more tense with its refusal to give into the whitespace. Thus, while Apollinaire’s “Heart” is more generous when it comes to leaving the interpretation of the poem to the reader, “hear t” jitters in its uncertainty, in its not being certain of where to draw the line between giving and holding back.

⁵ According to the *Online Etymological Dictionary*, “heart” means “soul, spirit, will, desire”, “mind and intellect”, “memory”, and refers to the “seat of inmost feelings...emotions, especially love and affection... [and] of courage”, as well as the “inner part”.

⁶ According to the *Online Etymological Dictionary*, “flame” means “

In comparison with “hear t” and “Heart”, Caroline Bergvall’s poem, “16 Flowers”, is less giving. In Fragments 10 and 11 (see Fig. 3), Bergvall’s resistance does not come from manipulating the whitespace or supplanting established ways of reading. Fragments 10 and 11 are numbered, ordered, read from left to right, and the spacing between each fragment and the one that comes before and after are equal in height. Bergvall’s resistance comes from her words which are undeniably conquered by the many languages that she speaks, by how she makes meaning from the fragments of sounds she hears, even if the words she chooses to articulate the sounds comes from different languages. “16 Flowers” becomes a list of coded messages that only Bergvall, with her linguistic diversity and with her particular sensitivity to the sounds of words, can understand. That said, “16 Flowers” is not impervious to meaning – it simply requires that the reader trusts the conclusion that their hearts or minds make. The reader really needs to trust their own meaning-making process, because even if the words themselves can be taken apart individually and understood, the fragments do not make immediate sense as a whole.

10. heave-heavends Glissening *Hearts* be attitudes

11. soar Coeurs formidable *foam* liS-p

Figure 3. Fragments 10 and 11, excerpted from Caroline Bergvall’s poem “16 Flowers” in *Fig.*

For example, in Fragment 10, when “heave-heavends” is read aloud, it sounds like “heave heavens” – it is an instruction for a sustained effort to lift the skies. To refer to the heavens is to also gesture to a greater beyond, the “greater whole” that Anne Janowitz refers to (444). But visually, “heave-heavends” appears to read as a brief moment that ends as soon as it begins – “heave – heave ends.” The “heave” ends with “Glissening Hearts,” if “Glissen” is to be read as “glissant” from the French verb

“glisser”, meaning “slippery” (*Collins French to English Dictionary*). It means that the “Glissening Hearts” are unreliable. But the hiss of the “ss” in “Glissening” aurally isolates the word “listening” from the hard “g” sound. If so, “Glissening Hearts” would then be suggestive of attentiveness. However, the word “glistening,” suggestive of a polished, shiny surface, is hard to ignore to the English-speaking ear. The play of light on a shiny surface obstructs meaning-making here. The word “attitude” is a word that has various meanings – “attitude” is the “posture and position of a figure,” or the “habitual mode of regarding” or the habitual state of mind of a person, or could be suggestive of an individual who is “antagonistic and uncooperative” (OE). There is no distinct conclusion that can be made of Fragment 10 except that it jitters between antagonism, unreliability, attentiveness, and ambition.

If Fragment 11 were to be read as a continuation of the conversation in Fragment 10, “soar Cœurs formidable” provide the idea of indefatigable hearts soaring towards a greater beyond – pursuing the “heavends”. However, “foam liS-p” is especially contrary to the notion of indefatigable hearts. If it were to be read as foaming lips or foaming at the mouth, “foam liS-p” would conjure an image of rage and fury. Read as “lisp”, meaning to “speak imperfectly or childishly”, “foam liS-p” suggests restriction and difficulty in articulation (OE). That “liS-p” echoes the word “Glissening” from Fragment 10, carries forward the notion of slipperiness or slipping – “liS-p” is after all an anagram of “Slip-“. With both fragments, there appears to repeat the unreliability and slipperiness of the word on the page and in the act of articulation.

Together, Fragments 10 and 11 of “16 Flowers” strongly enunciate the difficulties involved in “talking with a cat in the throat”. However, where Bergvall’s “16 Flowers” makes it difficult for the reader to acquire meaning, thus leading the reader to also experience the “feelings of... belonging and dislocation”, Apollinaire’s “Heart” allows the reader in, only for the reader to discover more paths leading out to the emptiness of the whitespace. Apollinaire’s “Heart” is an exploration of how the signifier is an “open” structure built upon a transitory space – enter “Heart”, and the reader discovers that “Heart” is empty, and does not hold anything but paths. The poem, “hear t” stands, urgently pacing between “Heart” and the fragments of “16

Flowers”, oscillating between “feelings of... belonging and dislocation” (“A Cat in the Throat”), between confidence and uncertainty, and ultimately stops itself in the “indissoluble antagonism” between wanting both freedom and safety (Janowitz 448).

EKE, the collection of poems with its accompanying exegesis, is a work that resides within “the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” (Janowitz 448). The poems allow the “cat” to “sit on the throat” a little longer, to allow the reader and the lyric subject ample time to form multiple paths around it, and revel in the momentary freedom of having the luxury, away from the urgency and incompleteness of expression, to find agency in their own “reading” of the text. The section that follows presents “Eke-ge-sis: (S)matters of the heart”, a collection of fragments which bears witness to my struggle in collecting various personal and theoretical fragments that makes the “cat” in my throat. The fragments form the weight of my thoughts, intentions, feelings, and personal history. With these fragments, I trace the way in which my encounters with theory, and my own memories and experiences influence the shape of individual poems, and the shape of the overall collection of poems in *EKE*.

2. EKE, EXEGESIS

The title of the collection, in its brevity and symmetry, is a representation of “talking with a cat in the throat”. *EKE*, the collection of poems and the exegesis, are my “fumble[s] [and] stammer[s]” caught in an “attempt to express” the unexpressed and the inexpressible. To “eke” becomes my way of “talking with a cat in my throat”, as much as “eek” can be a sound made while clearing the throat. The sound, “eek”, that *EKE* makes, is a frightened squeak, a brief and sharp expression of fear too brief and too sharp to encompass otherwise insurmountable fears that the I face in “not know[ing] myself completely” to trust myself to talk, much less write, with a cat in my throat (Al-Attas 89). To “eke” is to “increase [or] lengthen”, and in the phrase “to eke out”, it means “to make a supply of something go further or last longer” (OE). Particularly, the fragments of the exegesis for *EKE* prolong the experience of writing with the “cat in the throat” to identify the various ways in which my “Cat” manifests itself and how my “Cat” is formed. In the previous section, a reading of my poem “hear

t” presents my uncertain heart as a key agent in shaping my “Cat”. But it is never just my heart, and my heart is never as constant as I would like it to be. As an adverb, “eke” also means “also”, and thus *EKE* also includes the many “also” of what could shape or exacerbate the condition of having and writing with a “cat in the throat”. These include instances where language itself becomes the “cat in my throat” with its aural and visual divergences, with its polysemantic nature, and with its semantic ambiguity.

The “Eke-ge-sis”, subtitled, “(S)matters of the heart”, is a collection of “small matters” that form obstructions in the paths of thinking and feeling, and of talking and writing. As an exegesis, “Eke-ge-sis: (S)matters of the heart” is an “explanatory note... [an] explanation [or] interpretation” (OE). The word “exegesis” originates from Greek “exegeisthai”, where the word fragments “ex-” refers to “out” and “hegeisthai” is “to lead [or] guide”, wherein the root “sag-” means “to track down [or] seek out”. The element “ex-”, from Greek “ek”, is also a “word-forming element... meaning usually “out of, from” but also “upwards, completely, deprive of, without,” and “former”” (OE). To write an “eke-ge-sis”, is “to track down [and] seek out” how the “cat in the throat” shapes various elements of the collection of poems, from the connections between poems to the poetics of fragmentation and displacement. The “Eke-ge-sis” is also a movement, paths that reach outwards and upwards, from a tumultuous inner space. As “smatters”, the “Eke-ge-sis” contains fragments of “[idle] talk, chatter” or “[ignorant or superficial] jabber” (OE). But as “matter”, these fragments are “subject[s] of thought, speech or expression” that are “of importance or consequence” (OE). From its Latin root, “materia”, “matter” also refers to the “substance from which something is made”, and traces its origins to “mater”, meaning “origin, source, mother” (OE). As “(s)matters” the fragments of “Eke-ge-sis” are “matters” that concern the heart and leave the heart concerned.

Eke-ge-sis: (S)matters of the heart

1. Mrs N. once remarked that I was very careful and very cautious when I shared my opinions in class. I could not decide then and still cannot decide now if carefulness and caution in what I choose to say or not say does me good or does

me ill. Was it a praiseworthy action to be careful or was caution a sign of my own weakness of character? I could remember moments where speaking out of turn had caused harm to others, when angry outbursts had been a cause for regret. But I could also remember moments where holding back what I had to say had caused me harm, eaten away at my peace. Must the choice between speaking and not speaking always be a risky activity, always accompanied by vertigo, always involve peering across the edge?

How do you express – actually write down in one word – that “feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” (Janowitz 448)? This was the feeling I was after in writing some of the poems in *EKE* – of the cat that wants to both stay in and go out of the door, like cat that is both alive and dead in Schrödinger’s box.

2. “Eek!” – a sound of brief fear. In sound, the fear resolves itself too quickly with the sharpness of the high-pitch vowel sound preceding and following the sharp “k”. It will not matter that the heart is still beating fast. The adrenaline that pumps through the blood is quick to rise but slow to fall. “Eek!” – a trivial squeak in contrast to the struggle involved while trying to eke out what limited resources in what limited prowess of calm and containment that individual has. So “eek!” falls short. A brief expression of fear in the larger, lasting fear that seems to overwhelm, barely just the (kee)ning scream that wishes to outlast itself.

Forming anagrams became a key source of inspiration and distraction for my poems. From “eke”, I was able to form “eek”, and “kee”. Although “kee” is not a real word, it does prime the word “keening” within my cognitive repository. The poem “teller”, in *EKE*, came from forming anagrams of “letter”. Although “tel” is one “l” short of “tell”, it was enough to inspire a question about what letters can tell. Yet another anagram that occurs in the same poem is “felt” and “left”, anchor points in what is told (or not told) by the teller of the letter. The polysemantic nature of the word “teller” also become an important focus of what is accounted for in the letter.

3. Psychologists V. S. Ramachandran and E. M. Hubbard, drawing from research by Wolfgang Köhler and Heinz Werner, revealed that every individual has low-level synaesthesia, and that such synaesthesia features strongly in the language we use. The sound that “kiki” makes, for example, corresponds to sharper shapes and brighter colours, whereas “bouba” makes for rounder shapes, and darker, more earthier tones. Such an effect occurs across various participants in various experiments regardless of the language that each person speaks (Ramachandran and Hubbard “Synaesthesia”). In fact, we remember the sounds of words that correspond to the shape of the image better than if the sound does not correspond to the shape. For example, according to Suzy Styles, the names of viruses that correspond to the spikiness or bulbousness of viruses are remembered better, if “spiky” viruses are given “spiky” names and “bulbous” viruses are given “bulbous” names (“Sound Symbolism in Learning”). No, the word is not completely arbitrary vessel for meaning, and the shape of the word is not purely aesthetic.

For example, the title of the poem “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” by the American experimental poet, E. E. Cummings, *looks* like a grasshopper lost in the grass. “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” alone is a visual representation of a grasshopper leaping and getting lost in the grass. “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” is composed of the letters of the word “grasshopper”, and to have the word fragmented into letters, jumbled about, and separated by hyphens, visually projects the grasshopper getting visually lost in the grass. The “gr” fragment primes the “gr” of “green” and “grass”, easily situating the green grasshopper in the greenness of the grass. The word fragment “p-o-p”, primes the word “hopping”, and in the making of the sound “pop!”, the fragment comes to suggest a hop taking place. The roundedness of the “o” suggests an arc – the arc of a hop, and thus the letter “p” becomes the moment in which the grasshopper touches down. The letter “r” that appears at both ends of “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” is suggestive of an even bigger arc. Thus, “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”, even within a reading of its title, is poem about the green grasshopper rendered fragmented, split, and hidden in the greenness of the green blades of grass.

Poems like “brontide” in *EKE*, capitalise on continuing the rumbling “r” sound produced when pronouncing the fragment “bron-“. The poem continues the rumbling “r” sound by having the fragments “br” and “rr” repeat across the poem, thus perpetuating the ominous sound of rumbling skies that precede a thunderstorm, or, in the case of “brontide”, a “thunder strum”.

4. Mrs C. had told us to carry a Pocket Oxford Dictionary wherever we went. This was the time where iPhones were handphones, and handphones that were a luxury for a Primary School student to have – none of us had handphones to Yahoo or Google anything. When we found a word which we could not understand, we would jot it down in our Word Bank Books and carry on with our day. The idea, the habit, that the meaning of a word is conveyed by other words, stuck with me. My being led to the *Online Etymological Dictionary* only perpetuated the obsession I had with the meaning of words.

But to encounter Derrida and Barthes, and what they say about *différance* and how “the Whole cannot be inventoried without being diminished” only added to the feeling of the inadequacy of language I was beginning to discover. This awareness of language’s inadequacy now pervaded what I studied and only made my relationship to meaning one that was filled with restlessness. Restlessness gave way to distraction, and distraction returned me to word games that involved anagrams.

Unfortunately, forming anagrams became a habit. And now no word would sit still that could be combined and recombined and be made to form other words. The restlessness did not go away – it merely found a new branch to perch on. And all the words begin to move.

5. Michael Borkent suggests that words on a page can move. In a piece of concrete or visual poem, the letters, the letter-like entities, the words, and the word-like entities can display “fictive change” and “fictive motion”. According to Borkent, regardless of whether the poem contains meaningful words, the legible or

illegible text or letters “... [exemplify] the semantic and visual energy... to construct multiple levels of meaning” (“Visual Improvisation” 2). This way, they achieve what Richard A. Lanham means by “looking AT the text” instead of just “looking THROUGH a text” (*The Electronic Word* 5). However, these concrete or visual poems go beyond just allowing the reader to view the poem as a visual object – the visual aspect of the poem functions to complement or contradict the overall meaning of the poem. But in doing so, the visual aspect of the poem adds additional layers of meaning to poem. The poem becomes, in their unconventional visuality, visually more interesting and more meaningful.

Borkent illustrated his point using a poem by bpNichol, a Canadian poet working at the intersection of sound and concrete poetry. bpNichol’s poem, “em ty” consists of the letters “e”, “m”, “t” and “y” as the only text in a blank page. To Borkent, bpNichols has “[created] an experiential gestalt for the word as *it becomes what it means*” (“Illusions of Simplicity” 146, emphasis added). The familiarity of the word calls upon the reader to fill in the word fragment with the letter “p” – the “experiential gestalt” comes in here, were the reader irresistibly fills in the missing “p” because they envision “empty”. The word “becomes what it means” when the missing “p” makes the word “empty” *feel* empty. It makes the silence of the “p” sound of “empty” more pronounced – when said out loud, the “p” is lost between the “m” sound and the “t” sound. Is the “p”, an empty sound?

The word “empty” is related to a Greek word used to refer to “unoccupied”, as in “freedom from duties” (OE). The “p” of “empty”, usually freed from its duties when said, but aggravatingly important to the mind which seeks completion in “em ty”. We seek surety in completeness or in ideas of completion. When we do not see a “p” in “empty”, our minds compulsively fill it in. A naturalised habit of reading. Nothing bad with seeking completion. But, completion and completeness can become a crutch when it is used to put a stamp to things we have no control over.

6. Saying “always” is one of the stamps of ownership we attach to things. Always. All ways? The word “always” totalises. It warps (and wraps) opinions and

perspectives and subjectivity to an immobile truth. It puts a veneer of assurance, at times an unfair assurance, promise, and ownership over statements and sentiments. It nips in the bud that the sure fleetingness, incompleteness, or inexpressibleness of thoughts and feelings, as well as the doubts surrounding them.

In *The Big Bang Theory* episode, "The Recombination Hypothesis", Leonard Hofstadter claimed that "always" always made things worse, adding "always", "sounds more like something you'd say if you don't want a relationship with someone." Penny concludes that, "everything goes wrong when [they] talk." Another one of these problematic words is "everything". Why everything? Why not just some things?

Why in conversation and in thought and feeling and things in words, inwards, in other words, must we deal in absolutes? Why does "everything [go] wrong when we talk" ("The Recombination Hypothesis")? Why is talking so risky? Why is talking so problematic?

If I were to write a poem with the words "always" and "everything" that discusses how such words ruin conversation, I would begin by fragmenting the words. What follows would be the process of turning them into anagrams and then adding to them other letters that would introduce associated thoughts or sentiments. For example, "always" gives way to "all ways", and "all sway" – "sway" adds the notion of how "always" may sometimes be used as a word to convince someone of something. The word "everything" could be broken down to "eve" and "ever" – with "eve" signalling a time before the fallout that comes when the promises made with "always" and "everything" start to sound hollow. With "thing" is an opportunity for "(i)t hing(es)" priming "always" and "everything" as the point by which the problem radiates outwards.

The poem "conflitting" in *EKE* deals with the bothersome nature of conflicting messages, with the obsession for clarity and the compulsion for obfuscation being the source of frustration in conversations. The word "answering" gives way to

“an(d) swearing” in the frustration that arises out of confusion. However, the displacement of “wearing” from “swearing”, also primes the notion of “wearing (your heart on your sleeve)” – feelings can be a clearer and more direct signifier than words. The word “conflicting” gives way to “con-flicking”, “con-fleeting” and “con-flitting”. The word “flicking” giving rise to an agitating visual of someone repeatedly flicking their hands on someone’s face⁷, whereas “fleeting” suggests a passing fancy, and “flitting” suggests an inconsistency.

7. Conversation leaves many ambivalences, many ambiguities, many thoughts unexpressed, and casts many more responses, thoughts, feelings aside because they are inexpressible or incomprehensible.

The word “ambivalence”, for me, would always be associated with the film *Girl, Interrupted*. There was a scene where Dr. Wick shared with Susanna the meaning of the word “ambivalence”. Dr. Wick said that “ambivalence... suggests strong feelings in opposition. The prefix, as in ambidextrous, means ‘both’. The rest of it, in Latin, means ‘vigour’. The word suggests that you are torn between two opposing courses of action. Will I stay or will I go? Am I sane or am I crazy?”

The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines “ambivalence” as “simultaneous conflicting feelings,” from German “Ambivalenz”, coined 1910 by Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) on model of German “Equivalenz” meaning “equivalence,” etc.. From Latin “ambi”, meaning “both” and “valentia”, meaning “strength,” from present participle of “valere” which meant “be strong”.

When expounding on the notions of the sublime, Immanuel Kant expands on the ambivalence involved when experiencing the sublime. He shares that the ambivalence reaches a point where the experience of the sublime becomes an internal mental struggle to hold two extreme and contradictory valences of emotions together. The “negative pleasure” (431) of the sublime causes

⁷ In the episode titled “His Last Vow”, in Season 3 of *Sherlock*, the villain Charles Augustus Magnussen repeatedly (and rudely) flicks his hand on Dr. John Watson’s cheeks to test Dr. Watson’s patience.

“agitation”, or “a vibration... with a rapid alternation of repulsion from and attraction to, one and the same object” (NATC 437).

But, pleasure? Pleasure. Kant stipulates that there is some pleasure to be had in the negativity of the potentially terrible. The potentially terrible which exists in “vibration”, with being in the know, being in control. The “vibration” resides in constantly stepping back and forth between the boundary of the known and unknown, the yet to be known and the unknowable. It is to be at the edge of the precipice, fighting between vertigo and curiosity, between the survivalist and thriving instincts.

It became important for me to pursue ambivalence, the point of “vibration” in my poems, as important as it was to unveil any ambivalence, any vibration, I found in the words. These points of “vibration” I found exists in the many meanings of polysemantic words. It also exists in points where meaning diverges, and points where the etymology of word fragments leads away from the topic of conversation. This was where learning the etymology of words provided me the opportunity to uncover the deeper, if fictional, connections between seemingly unrelated words.

For example, in the poem “angerrange”, the word-fragment “sty”, displaced from the word “angsty”, is a point of semantic “vibration”. The word “sty” refers to a “pen for pigs” or a “filthy hovel” (OE). But, according to the *Online Etymological Dictionary* “sty” also means “inflamed swelling in the eyelid” and “go up, ascend” – to have an angry wound is to have an inflamed wound, and to be angry is also to have one’s blood pressure go up. in the poem, Thus, “angsty” does not only mean a state of “neurotic fear, anxiety, guilt, remorse” – it could be rendered as a “filthy hovel” that is increasingly “tight (and) painfully constricted”⁸ with accumulating frustrations and festering annoyances.

⁸ The *Online Etymological Dictionary* further explains that the word angst can be traced back to its Proto-Indo-European root “angh-“, meaning “tight, painfully constricted, painful”.

8. Short of an “e”, “eke” becomes “ek” or “एक”, Hindi for the number “one”. As an adjective it describes the “sole [or] only” object (Wiktionary). In Sanskrit “éka”, as an adjective, describes the “alone, solitary, single, happening only once, that one only”, “single of its kind, unique, singular, chief, pre-eminent, excellent”. Aside from meanings associated with the one and only, “éka” is the “one of two or many”, and also means “sincere [or] truthful”, “little [or] small” (Wiktionary). “Wahidah”, or in one of its Arabic form “واحدة (wāḥida)”, pronounced as “waahidah”, also refers to the feminine singular form of “واحدة (wāḥid)”, the Arabic number “one”. As an adjective, “wāḥid” shares similarity with “ek” and “éka” – “wāḥid” means “single”, “unique, incomparable”, or “a certain” (Wiktionary). In its other form, “واحد (waḥīd)”, pronounced as “wahiid”, “Wahidah” could also mean “alone” (QAC). It remains unclear what was intended with “Wahidah” – as a name, a Romanisation of its original Arabic, there is no telling where the extended vowel occurs. So “Wahidah” oscillates between “single” and “unique” – not as unique as it seems, when encountering other Wahidahs – and “alone”. How “alone” is Wahidah in its contemplation of itself, in the unknowns that lie within and without it?
9. That “I” take up so much of my time frustrates me – there are so many more important things to do, so many more important things to address outside of “I”.

But I also started to find myself in words that begin with the fragment “im-“ which I often manipulate to “I’m”. So, words like “impossible” and “impart” become “i’m possible” and “i’m part”, beginnings of new paths, new points of explorations out of the “impossible”. Isolating the letter “i” out of “impossible” subverts the hold impossibility has over “I”. A poem like “i’m pluie” illustrates paths out of impossibilities.

10. Ustad Z. had told us a story about Al-Ghazali, a famous Muslim scholar, and his encounter with the bandits.

One day, whilst returning from a journey, Al-Ghazali was waylaid by a group of bandits. When they took his documents from him, Al-Ghazali begged the bandits

to return the documents to him, saying that those documents are of great value to him because they contained precious knowledge. The bandit, in a profound wave of wisdom, had turned to the scholar, and asked him how it was that a few pieces of paper could contain knowledge so precious that it could be so easily stolen?

“Knowledge is in the chest (the heart), and not in the lines (the books)”, would be the Arabic proverb that Ustad Z. would use to conclude the story with. I would return home and look at the books I have accumulated, at the books I have but have not read, and I would turn again to my heart. What knowledge did I really have?

According to Professor Syed Naquib Al-Attas, “knowledge” is “the arrival of the soul towards meaning... or the arrival of meaning to the soul” (161). The word “arrival” is a promise that with a heart, the “spiritual organ of cognition”, that is purified of obstacles, the soul would know the true meaning of things. The word “arrival”, also means the “act of coming to land at the ends of a voyage by sea, [or] disembarkation” (OE). It comes from “arrive”, which means “to come to a position or state of mind” (OE). But what is truly fascinating about the word is its Latin origin – “arrive” comes from the Latin “ad ripam”, meaning “to the shore” (OE). This would mean that the “exhilarating emotional experience” of beauty, of knowing, is where the heart *feels* “the arrival of the soul towards meaning... or the arrival of meaning to the soul”.

So, how do I account for the instances where I have to speak and write without knowledge or with insufficient knowledge? How do I account for my still being far away from the shore? Can I claim to write with my heart, with its many incompletions?

The dilemma of writing from the “conflicting and contradictory feelings of... belonging and dislocation” from knowledge – either by my lack of knowledge, or inarticulation – factors deeply in *EKE* (“A Cat in the Throat”). From “thisstress”, for example, comes the “fumble [and] stammer” of expressing stress. With “bleaming” comes the struggle at expressing the mixture of frustration and

disappointments – with the self and with the other – involved when blaming someone of something. With “thisstress”, the tension lies in the being unable to articulate the *feeling* of stress despite knowing what it means, whereas in “bleaming” the frustration comes from wanting to blame the other, but at the same not knowing who is in the wrong and to what extent. In “bleaming”, the accuser is held in frustration with the objective need to know who is in the wrong is interfering with the emotional knowledge of the weight of accusation on the accuser and the person subject to the accusation.

I ventured into poetry wanting to be a more honest, more truthful, with myself, with or without others in eye, in heart or in mind – and this desire to be more honest in my expressions overtook whatever concerns I had with regard to my inadequacies in knowledge or articulation. But in trying to express – the intense, the fleeting, the sublime, the beautiful – I find myself second-guessing my word choice to the point where I could not write. For instance, in “bleaming”, to say outright that “blaming is mean” excludes the *feelings* of the accuser from the situation, and casts feelings aside in favour of *facts*. The action of “blaming” is then only seen in a negative light, from a moralistic standpoint, and not in light of emotions. To fragment the word “meaning” to “mean” and “leaning”, and to hyper-fragment “black” to “lack” and “back”, and even “mack” (and thus to “Mack” from the song “Mack the Knife”), is to allow the “blame” to oscillate back and forth from the accuser and the person being accused, and let the reader determine the outcome.

11. Ustad Z. once explained the meaning of “aayat”, the Arabic word for “sign”. Within the context of the Qur’an, “aayat” refers to the Qur’anic verses, the divine revelations. But the meaning of “aayat” also extends to all manner of creations, the world- and worlds-full of signs and symbols that are but fragmented gestures to their All-Knowing Creator.

Within the Islamic worldview, knowledge could be gained from both the divine revelations as well as from the natural world thus there existed no separation between the knowledge as gained from the human interaction with the existing

world, or science, as it is called, or that of religion. The Arabic word for “knowledge” “ilm (عِلْمٌ)”, was related to “alam (عَالَمٌ)”, meaning “world”, “alim (عَلِيمٌ)”, referring to “the knowledgeable”, and “alimun (عَلِيمٌ)”, which refers to “(the) All-Knowing” (QAC). Thus, the heart of the knowledge seeker pursuing knowledge must become profoundly connected to their teachers and to the “aayat (آيَةٌ)”, or signs, in the words of the Qur’an and the “word” of the world as it is.

I found it easier to write poems about the beauty of nature – the “aayat” or sign from Allah – by having words be reduced to fragments, being submitted to decay. Word and letter fragmentation produces expansion, this I knew. But could I connect the painterly strokes of the sky by enacting painterly strokes in words? With “sunrise”, I wanted to convey the varied splashes of colour – the impressionistic daubs of pinks, yellows, blues, purples, and orange that accompany the sunrise. But to achieve the impressionistic style in words requires that the poem, in three lines, be fragmented into “daubs” of colour. The letters “l” in “c(l)ou(l)d” and “r” in “d(r)awn” and “blu(r/e)rred” are displaced and function as the instances where different colours rub elbows with the other. The word “blu(r/e)rred” is an instance where the seam between two colours, “blue” and “red”, are “blurred” into one another.

12. There is such a thing as the word-length effect. According to Gabriel A. Radvansky, “[t]he word length effect is the finding that a person’s word span is smaller for longer words... The longer [the articulation duration taken] to say the words, the fewer that can be easily recalled” (86), “because longer words are more likely to decay” (303).

Words “decay”, like ruins, and in that decay, they fragment. The most delicate ruins fragment to fragments from the lightest touch, the lightest brush of memory or recollection. Words “decay”, like traces, like vestiges, like tracks. Over time and with decay, these traces and tracks would be difficult to follow. Where the words have gone would be difficult to find.

But different things also decay at different times, depending on the conditions of the environment.

Figure 4. An original poem titled, “rain ropes”.

The poem “i’m pluie” is written in response to an older poem, titled “rain ropes”, as seen in Figure 4. While “rain ropes” is a more contained, more distant expression of sadness, “i’m pluie” figures more desperate, more “pleading”, in what “I” am trying to implore. If “rain ropes” is a morning drizzle, then “i’m pluie” is raining cats and dogs in the evening during rush hour. The lines in “i’m pluie” are closer together, and the letter displacements between lines take up what little gutter space there is between lines. The dense containment of a lot of letters and words in “i’m pluie” gives a claustrophobic impression – letter displacements become invasive, become problematic distractions. In contrast, the wider gutter space between the lines in “rain ropes” make the letter displacements appear as pleasing distractions, almost similar to a picture of the last drops of rain that move and slide the small, yellow leaves of the rain tree on a glass window.

13. Ustad Z. shared about the parable of the wall. He had asked us if we thought a wall provided safety or if it was a barrier to our freedom. We leaned towards one

answer or the other. What matters is the person, he would say. For a prisoner, the wall was a barrier to freedom. For the free person, the wall provided safety from harm.

The word is like a wall, and I felt imprisoned. But I am imprisoned not because of the wall, but because I *felt* imprisoned. It was my *feelings*, the state of my heart, that made me see words as a barrier or as the wall.

For years, I thought the word is just a vehicle for meaning, that once it “delivered” meaning it was done. For years, I thought that the expression of gratefulness I was taught to utter, “alhamdulillah”, just meant “all praises and thanks (be) to Allah” (QAC). Ustad Z. corrected that. He shared that, not only does “alhamdulillah” refer to all the praises and thanks conceivable to humankind, it also refers to the praises and thanks that lie out of the limit of conceivable thought of humankind. He shared that the phrase also included the praises that only Allah can confer to Himself.

I remembered sitting in class stunned by the arrogance that I had, that I thought I had known what the word meant and did not need to be told what it means anymore. But it was also a delicious freedom to know that the word, any word, could extend beyond itself. I was humbled. And I hope to stay humbled, with the limits of my own observable thought expanded by just a little.

Within *EKE*, I found I could not expand the meaning of a word without inadvertently manipulating it – that is, resorting to fragmentation, adding word/letter fragments, and using word/letter displacements – to achieve such extension. In “se and plight” the word “split” has been altered to include “light”, “flight”, “plight”, and give way to “sparks”. In doing so, “split” refers to the splitting of the light in the water, the plight of the sea-goer (and, thus alluding to the marked tendency for those weighed with thoughts to seek the sea), the flight of birds or the flight of thoughts or the flight of people, as well as the in-text split between these three primary ideas and their sub-ideas. Thus, “split” extends and covers the visual, emotional, and cognitive splits the sea-goer has to endure.

K _ T _ K	K _ T _ K
K <u>A</u> T <u>A</u> K	K <u>O</u> T <u>O</u> K
K <u>A</u> T <u>I</u> K	K <u>O</u> T <u>A</u> K
K <u>A</u> T <u>U</u> K	K <u>E</u> T <u>A</u> K
K <u>U</u> T <u>U</u> K	K <u>E</u> T <u>E</u> K
K <u>E</u> T <u>U</u> K	K <u>E</u> T <u>I</u> K

Figure 5. Two variations of answers for Cikgu N.’s assignment.

14. Cikgu N. used word games, as demonstrated in Figure 5, to get us to learn vocabulary in the Malay language. The aim of the game was to change the one vowel with each successive word down the list. So, a word like “katak”, meaning “frog”, changes to “katik”, meaning “dwarf”, by changing the vowel “a” to “i”⁹.

He had named his worksheets “sehari selemban benang” after a fragment of a proverb. The fragment “sehari selemban benang” roughly translates to “with each day, a length or a piece of thread”. The full proverb, however, would continue

⁹ See Appendix 1 for a full list of what each word in Figure 5 means.

with “lama-lama jadi kain”, or how each length of thread would eventually amount to a piece of cloth.

To me, “selembar” is an interesting collective noun. Like “piece” or “length”, it could be attached to both the thread and the cloth, and be used with paper. It is a collective noun which refers to something that has length, that goes for lengths, and spreads over a wide surface. Aurally, “selembar”, when placed with a thread, sounds oxymoronic – “selembar” sounds more appropriate for cloth and paper than thread. The visual brought about by “selembar” conveys something flat and thin, long and large, and something that spreads – definitely not a singular piece of thread. The three syllables of “selembar” and the drag of the “bar” at the end visually conjures the spread of a sheet of cloth. The words “piece” and “length” are long, monosyllabic words. The mouth is small and near-closed, as it pronounces the “i” in “piece”. The hiss of “ece”. The word “piece” is for something small, quickly dismissed. The “gth” of “length” extends the word. A “length of thread” is seems longer than a “piece of thread”.

The word “selembar” is strangely appropriate – from the thread, a piece of cloth. From a fragment, a Whole. From “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”, a grasshopper. From “emty”, a sense of emptiness. From “hear t”, a sense of the “cat in the throat”.

15. According to Paul Stamets, the largest living thing in the world is the fungal network that grows in the undergrowth (“6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World”). According to Anne Casselman, it may cover about 1665 football fields (“Strange but True: The Largest Organism on Earth is a Fungus”). But the only thing that gets shown of the extensive fungal network is the mushroom that crops out of the undergrowth.

But the mushroom is not the thing. It is but a “word” on the surface of thread and threads, and web and webs, and network and networks of mycelia that operate silently below. Suzanne Simard shares that tall towering trees communicate with one another, share information with one another, and even help one another

through these extensive underground fungal networks (“How Trees Talk To Each Other”).

Can words talk to one another? Can poems talk to one another?

In *Plato’s Pharmacy*, Derrida states that within a text,

[the] dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web: a web that envelops a web, undoing the web for centuries; reconstituting it too as an organism, indefinitely regenerating its own tissue behind the cutting trace, the decision of each reading. (NATC 1697)

The use of hyperlinks within a text in online databases such as Wikipedia and TVTropes, allows such databases to embody what Derrida refers to as “a web that envelops a web”, where the associated terms are picked up alongside the target of the search and hyperlinks within the articles lead to other articles and even other websites to connect one web of information to other webs of information.

To know what a word means, to know the full length and depth and breadth of what it can mean, is to see the mycelia network from the mushroom. The poems in *EKE* certainly converse with one another – there are the obvious pairs like “teller” and “moodlet”, “look no further” and “look further” which appear side by side. But there are also more distant pairs like, “dismissile” and “said sail”, and “cloudsoft” and “and there was nothing to say”, or pairs that go across collections like “sunrise” and “rain ropes”¹⁰ (see Fig. 4), that are connected by the words they share in common.

The word “d(r)awn” in “sunrise” also occurs in “rain ropes”. The word disintegrates in to “drawn”, “dawn”, “draw” and “awn”. In both poems, “awn” is drawn from a likening of the sky or of clouds with the word “awing”. The

¹⁰ The poem “rain ropes” was written as part of a collection of poems titled *sliver screen* in fulfilment of an undergraduate course, HZ201 Creative Writing: Poetry.

differences lie in which of the two meanings of “drawn” each poem draws from – while the focus in “sunrise” lies more towards “drawn” as an artistic expression, “rain ropes” leans towards the meaning of “drawn” as exhaustion or extraction. Depending on the surrounding cues of the poem, the differences within the same manipulation of the word “drawn” can be drawn.

In “cloudsoft” and “and there was nothing to say”, with their emphasis on the shushing sound provide two meditations on quietude. With “cloudsoft” there is an atmosphere of trust, release and relaxation. The presence of word fragments with the letter “l” alongside words with predominantly occurring letter “o” functions as a lullaby. The repetition is reassuring. But with “and there was nothing to say”, the verbs “wash” and “toss” stand out and imply a cover-up. The repeated “hhh” sound, does not sound reassuring – it seems more like a quiet struggle. The word “more” that stands ostentatiously on the right implies that there is in fact more to say, but it seems like evidence of it has been (clumsily) wiped out.

16. The self, as a physical body, functions on neural networks and venous networks. The self, as it is aware of itself and as it is contained within its own cognitive and affective experiences, functions on a hypothetical network-based structure of memory. Words that are presented to an individual can cause multiple neural activations especially if these words share the same visual features or aural features with other words. These simultaneous activations could even occur across languages. But basically,

[l]ong before the word is finished, the brain’s language system begins to guess what the word might be by activating lots of words that matched the signal. If you hear ‘can’, you will likely activate words like ‘candy’ and ‘candle’ as well, at least during the earlier stages of word recognition. (Marian and Shook 2)

Psycholinguist Viorica Marian found that such mental activations are enacted on the physical level. When presented with four images simultaneously, the eye

would oscillate between the image of the candy and the image of the candle, even though only one item is supposed to be selected.

Before coming to a conclusion, we diverge. From a fragment, we diverge to all possibilities of what the fragment can be before converging to a meaningful conclusion. In *EKE*, it was important for me to explore and exhaust all possible meanings a word may have and all possible sub-meanings a word may have from its fragments. The word as a fragment is a gesture toward other words, other poems, other ideas. The network of the word driven by and diverging from the word fragment subverts the idea of poems needing a narrative. In *EKE*, the connections and interconnections that exist across poems from their very word fragments creates interesting clusters or swarms of meaning. In writing about nature, I began to see how particular poems would naturally cluster together – poems like “brontide”, “i’m pluië”, “se and plight”, and “said sail” could be grouped as poems about the sea, and “sunrise”, “softly shoulder” and “cloudsoft” could be grouped as poems about the sky. I arranged the poems in *EKE* based on the cluster they seemed to belong in to allow the reader to move on to the next poem with the “halo” of their previous reading still fresh in their minds.

17. Italo Calvino, in *If A Winter's Night A Traveller*, speaks about not being able to read without having need to pause and think about it. His thoughts go so swiftly as to be disruptive when he tries to read to the point where he “[moves] away from the book until [he] has lost sight of it” (254). He explains that,

[r]eading is a discontinuous and fragmentary operation... In the spreading expanse of the writing, the reader’s attention isolates some minimal segments... that prove to possess an extremely concentrated density of meaning. (254)

My thoughts go in tangents before I can even open my mouth to speak. Visually it feels like all thoughts and associated feelings had rammed themselves behind my closed mouth. A cognitive and affective pile-up. My tongue is twisted to silence before it can speak. A cat is in my throat.

Hasan Al-Basri said, as recorded by Al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Imān*, that “the tongue of the intelligent is behind his heart... [while] the heart of the ignorant is behind his tongue” (“Hasan on Speech”).

Where is my heart? Where is my tongue? How is my tongue that my heart is like this? How is my heart that my tongue is like this, that my thoughts are like this?

My heart is in my throat.

18. bpNichol’s “untitled poem” (see Fig. 6) is a visual revision of Matsuo Bashō’s “Frog Poem”.



Figure 6. “untitled poem” by bpNichol

With two words and fragments of words, linked together with curved lines, bpNichol, in the 21st Century visually conveyed what the Japanese poet Bashō semantically conveyed in his haiku in the 17th Century.

There’s a sifting away of the non-essentials in this poem, and the removal of the things which distract in order to bring out the true essence of the poem. In visually clearing the poem, bpNichol’s “untitled poem” takes on the minimalist aesthetic of Japanese Zen Buddhism. However, bpNichol’s poem is visually distinct from the visuality of Bashō’s “Frog Poem”. bpNichol creates is also more immediate, compared to Bashō’s emerging image. The split of the word “frog” suggests movement, the “fictive motion” of a leap (“Visual Improvisation” 2). A

momentary appearance and then a disappearance. The letter ‘o’ in bpNichol’s poem is the epicentre to the poem – the point where the ripples begin, the point when the pond is disturbed, the point when the frog disappears, the point when the ‘glop’ is heard.

It is the earnestness in capturing the “nuance”, the “lost instance” of a brief instantaneous movement that connects bpNichol and Bashō through time, that connects Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* to them (“Foreword: In Defense of Nuance” xix). It is not just about the frog. It is about the brief instance of the frog, only just made out, but also swiftly disappearing into the pond. These writers, these poets are rescuing the “trace, like dust on plush, resuscitat[ing] a lost instant when someone... raptly concentrated on a stray interpretive detail” (“Foreword: In Defense of Nuance” xix). In their simplicity they are rescuing the “lost instance” from the “muck of language: that region of hysteria where language is both *too much* and *too little*, excessive... and impoverished” due to the loss or lack of vision (*A Lover’s Discourse* 99).

- 19. The “o”, is small and round. The “o” is an “o” of an orifice, a small opening. The mouth, an orifice. The lips of the mouth in an “o” of mild surprise and not an “O” of shock. The “o” as, observed by Susan Barton in *Foe*, in “rows and rows... tightly packed together”. Friday had written them, on a “paper... heavily smudged”, and “[a] second page lay at his elbow, fully written over...” (Coetzee 112).

oo
oo
oo
oo

Friday’s rows of “o”, circular bubbles of air surfacing, “a slow stream, without breath, without interruption... [s]oft and cold, dark and unending...” (Coetzee 157).

The frog, as it croaks, its belly in an “o”.

The pond, as it ripples, its ripples in expanding rounds of “o”.

The cat, as it curls to sleep, its body an “o”.

20. Marjorie Perloff asks, in her book *Radical Artifice*,

[i]n what sense... can such acquired behaviour as computer formatting... be considered ‘art’? What about the binary choices computer screen-prompts impose on the writer-reader, the necessity of always choosing between ‘yes’ or ‘no’, ‘up’ or ‘down’? (18)

Within Microsoft Word, for instance, the software dictates how the blank space of the page is to be filled, where the line may end and begin, and how much space exists between two lines of text. It abhors mis-spelt words, repeated words, words that are grammatically incorrect. I could not write my poetry in here, and instead chose to do the poems in *EKE* and their predecessors using Adobe Photoshop, where I had more freedom to manipulate the text on the page without the distraction of conformity.

With the technical freedom of Photoshop, I was free to play around with the vertical and horizontal spaces between words and word fragments – it allowed the word to, freely branch out, to fork out to possibilities of meanings. To form word-webs. I was able to reconfigure the word in into a network, with threads of possible meanings branching out of it upon word fragments and letters cascading freely across a page to its end. The binary choices still occur. And the cursor, blinking in and out of existence on the empty page still presents a pressure for me to fill the page. But I don’t have to stay in the line, mind the gutter space, or sit two fragments together when they sit better apart.

21. In introducing his book, *The Disarticulate*, James Berger clarifies that the “real title” of his book is actually “The Dys-/Disarticulate,” with its “slash, the double

title, the stutter, [and] the confusion”. But, because he was “advised... to keep it simple,” Berger had to stick with “The Disarticulate”(1).

There could be many reasons for this. In its simplicity, “The Disarticulate” is easier to read, is compact and concise in the singularity of what it means, and is more easily remembered. But it is also easily overlooked and quickly discarded with the ease in which the word does its job as a correctly-spelt vehicle of meaning meaning¹¹, as Berger intends, “the separation or amputation of limbs at the joint” thereby inciting in thought the idea of a “figure... forcibly severed from the social fabric, stigmatized, silenced, possibly physically dismembered” (2).

1. disarticulate
2. $\begin{matrix} \text{dis} \\ \text{dys} \end{matrix} \text{articulate}$
3. $\begin{matrix} \text{dis/} \\ \text{dys\} \end{matrix} \text{articulate}$
4. $d \frac{i}{y} \text{sarticulate}$
5. dÿsarticulate
6. ḋisarticulate
7. d̂sarticulate

Figure 7. Visual representations of “dys-/disarticulate”.

Practically, “The Disarticulate” is easier to cite, far more easily typed out than “The Dys-/Disarticulate”. But even then, “The Dys-/Disarticulate” *can* be typed out – the other variations of “dys-/disarticulate” in Figure 7, in my sympathetic attempt to provide alternative modes of presenting both “disarticulate” and “dys-

¹¹ Microsoft Word cringes at the second repetition of “meaning”.

articulate”, were only achieved through structural manipulation of the space or the letter in Photoshop. This attempt to resolve Berger’s conundrum requires the use of another software, one that treats the word as a visual image and not a vehicle for meaning. It was a frustrating but also freeing exercise – I hope to incorporate more visual manipulations on the level of the letter in future projects. That aside, it remains a mystery why “The Disarticulate” was chosen over “The Dys-/Disarticulate” especially since the latter can still practically subsume both words without requiring any manipulation while still maintaining its typeability.

“The Disarticulate” privileges one meaning over the other – “disarticulate”, being made more visible thus having its meaning more easily retrievable than the secondary “dys-articulate”¹², stands out. With this title, Berger stood to lose the meaning of “dys-articulate”, what he defined as,

[a figure] blocked from language, standing at the convergence of all of language’s impasses: those of injury, trauma, neurological variation, socio-political silencing, and the working of language itself as language plots its own aporias... the “dys” also renders the figure pathological, an object of diagnosis and treatment. (2)

But either ways, Berger’s concern remains with the nature of articulation, because he understood that “it is always language we are concerned with, even when we study discourses of its limits, failures, or exclusions”. He thus concludes that “[the] dys-/disarticulate is the figure for the outside of language figured in language” (2).

22. James Berger stipulated that the necessary existence of the dis/dys-articulate as an alternative, a necessarily opposing force to an idea which originated in the Enlightenment, that is, with an “ideal language” all knowledge can be totally

¹² Microsoft Word disapproves of “dys-articulate” and “dysarticulate”, and has automatically changed the “y” to an “i” and requires another step of correcting the “disarticulate” to “dysarticulate” before it stays with the “y”. And even then, the red wavy lines appear to mark out the statuses as words with spelling errors.

represented and totalised (53). Berger iterates, that in a system “presumed to be total and without exterior or remainder, opposition must take the form of a failure of articulation (the dysarticulate) or forcible exclusion – dismemberment – from the social-symbolic order (the disarticulate)” (55).

The body is not a democratic entity. Dismembering the finger is not like dismembering the hand is not like dismembering the arm is not like dismembering the head. The head, not like the heart – “head” and “heart”, similar but not the same. “heart”, without its “t”, “hear”s. But “head” without a “d”, the “heart” without the “rt” hangs with a “hea” – a breath heard. The heart, the head, the ears – parts of the body, with scientific names for the parts within the parts within the parts to the up quarks and down quarks and strings of things unseen. The heart, the head, the ears – parts of the body which lead to the understanding of signs and symbols, through sense, through thought or through intuition. The heart, the head, the ears, and the tongue, the eyes, the hands, the fingers. What about the cat in the throat?

Bergvall’s “cat in the throat” functions as a source of dys-articulation – the “cat” as “the form of a failure in articulation”. But the cat is not of the body or from the body – the “cat in the throat” is the familiar, the indifferent friend, the enigmatic pet cat that treats the human body as warm furniture. The cat occupies the body (of language) and demands the body (of language) to occupy it. The “cat in the throat” cannot be dismembered – what does not belong to the body cannot be physically severed and cannot be cleanly severed. It is, at once a part of and apart from the body. It cannot be moved – the only course of action is to write, to form paths around it, until it tears away on its own accord.

23. The poems in *EKE* do not present a choice of interpretations, rather, they demand for all the “conflicts and contradict[ions]” (“A Cat in the Throat”) to exist at the same time, to be apprehended and understood at the same time, much like the concrete poem “tears” (see Fig. 8) by Austrian artist-poet Anatol Knotek.

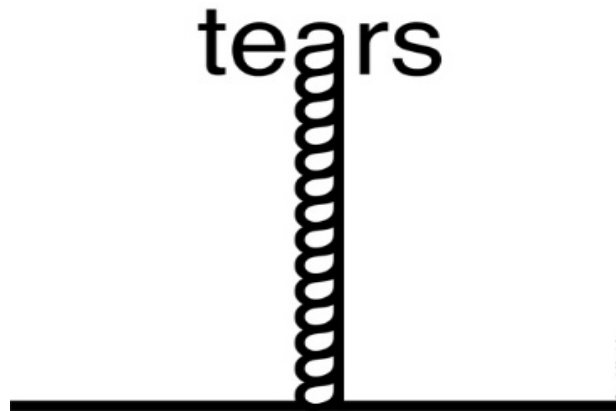


Figure 8. The poem “tears” by Anatol Knotek.

Knotek’s “tears” is visually manipulated so that the bowl of the letter “a” is repeated downwards. The transmission of meaning here is visual, rather than semantic. If Knotek’s poem was semantically rendered, it would be expressed as “many tears are falling”. But Knotek’s poem resonates with potential meaning – the physical experience of crying prevents the individual from speaking. The repetition emphasises the shape of the letter “a”. “aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa” is the sound of keening wail. That, and the similarity between the bowl of the letter ‘a’ and the shape of a tear-drop reinforces the visual of the tears. The repetition of the tear-shaped bowls of the letter “a” emphasises how much the tears pull down or weigh down the individual from expressing the experience – the tears take up more space than the text and terminates at the bottom of the poem in a dense “pool” of the black line, the wail weighing down speech. But “tears” can also refer to the “act of ripping or rending” (OE). Therefore, Knotek’s poem can also refer to something being pulled apart, and the repetition of the bowl of the letter “a” could be the teeth of a zipper.

Knotek’s poem does not present a choice – it, instead, implies that both meanings can coexist at the same time. Knotek relays the complications of sadness, of the act of crying, of the state of frustration in a simple, brief, thoughtful and contained play on the visual of the word “tears”.

In the same vein, the opposing forces of saying and not saying, of wanting to express the inexpressible, of not being able to express the inexpressible, holds poems like “bleaming” and “angerrange”, in *EKE*, in a permanent state of “indissoluble antagonism” (Janowitz 448). In poems like “brontide”, the beauty of the sound of the storm coexists with the ominous visual of dark clouds. “i’m pluié” is a poem about tears and tears – of holding sadness at the ripping seams binding but (k)not... in *EKE*.

So, eke. So, h (ere/ear). So, h (ear/err) ek(e), h (ear/ere) (i)t, my eke-ing, my tears.

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APPENDIX 1: List of Meanings from Figure 5.

“katak”: (n.) “frog”

“katik”: (adj.) “small”, (n.) “small person, dwarf”

“katuk”: (v.) “to beat with the palm of the hand”, (n.) “star gooseberry, sweet leaf”

“ketak”: (n.) “clucking”, (v.) “patter; ripples”, (adj.) “waves, wavy”

“ketek”: (n.) “monkey; button”, (v.) “stealing”

“ketik”: (v.) “stealing insignificant objects”

“ketuk”: (v.) “knock, hit; nicked, tricked”

“kotak”: (n.) “box”

“kotok”: (n.) “runny faeces from birds”

“kutuk”: (v.) “insult”