Phrase

No reading\(^1\) of the words mark a ritual, annular enactment—a fall: the sentence was broken here; a caesura—even, one could say, of the caesura—has occurred. You could bridge the gap with one of many simple denotations supposed to get to the ensemble of what I want you, now, to hear, but that would have already been unfaithful to the truth and attention carried in the name of what, now, I would have you hear. But this will not be a meditation on the idiom of *Chinampas*.\(^2\) No reading because the understanding of literary experience which (a) reading implies is exceeded in the enactment of what *Chinampas* is and what *Chinampas* demands: improvisation. And so I have been preparing myself to play with Cecil Taylor, to hear what is transmitted on frequencies outside and beneath the range of reading. These are *notes* composed in the interest of that preparation. *Phrases*.\(^3\)

“Charles Lloyd, asked to comment on a piece of his music by a radio interviewer, answered, ‘Words don’t go there.’” (Lange and Mackey x)

Words don’t go there. Is it only music, only sound, that goes there? Perhaps these notes and phrases will have mapped the terrain and traversed (at least some of) the space between here and there.

Words don’t go there: this implies a difference between words and sounds; it suggests that words are somehow constrained by their implicit reduction to the meanings they carry—meanings inadequate to or detached from the objects or states of affairs they would envelop. What’s also implied is an absence of infection; a loss of mobility, slippage, bend; a missing accent or affect; the impossibility of a slur or crack and the *excess*—rather than loss—of meaning they imply.
Where do words go? Are they the inadequate and residual traces of a ritual performance that is lost in the absence of the recording?^4

Where do words go? Where, into what, do they turn in Cecil’s rendering: a generative disintegration, an emanation of luminous sound? The interanimation of recording, verbal art, and improvisation—which *Chinampas* is and enacts—places performance, ritual, and event within a trembling—which *Chinampas* escapes—between words’ florescence and the constitutive absence of the book.^5 Nevertheless that trembling raises certain questions: for instance, that of the relationship between words and their phrasing.^6 Changes, like that from word to growl, occur here taking the word to where it does not go but neither to any origin as pure sound nor to the simple before of the determinations of meaning. This change and movement might be at the phonemic level, might mark the generation of or from a lost language and/or a new thing that is, in spite of its novelty, never structured as if the before that is absent and indeterminate had never been or does not still remain there. What is the nature of this “sexual cut . . . [or] insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion,” this “[limbo [that] reflects a certain kind of gateway or threshold to a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles,” that is evident in Cecil’s words and improvisations of words?^7 Is the only rigorous model one that necessitates the elimination of any previousness, any new world? Where do words go?

Where do words go? Where, to what, do they turn in Cecil’s rendering? A blur, like the typescript on the cover of the album,^8 meaning lifted by design, slurred by packaging, the rhythmic architecture of text, texture, textile for example the Mande rhythm cloth, where patterns are juxtaposed against each other, several different types of seemingly different patterns that come together and make the ensemble garment. It’s acutely apparent on the poetry record where the overdubs, the voices just sliding around and between each other because (sings melody from *Pemmican*), but because I don’t know much music, or I don’t know musical terms, it’s difficult for me to articulate what it is that I’m hearing. Good, you have to define for yourself, all the . . . (Richards)^9: perhaps the blur signifies that everything is (in) Cecil Taylor, is improvisation or, more precisely, that the improvisation of a notion (or, perhaps more faithfully, a phenomenology) of the ensemble heretofore weakly signaled in the sharp edges of words like “everything” is in effect. Note that (in) is always parenthetical, between the opposing words of that structure, between acts or wars, like Woolf and Jones, homologous with the phenomenon of erasure; everything is (in) erasure, the mark of an imaginary structure of homology, the additive and
aggregative imposture of a nonsingularist, nontotalitarian ensemble. But, with these provisos, the phrase, the broken sentence, holds (everything).

Cecil’s phrase will not be read.

Performance, ritual, and event are of the idea of idiom, of the “anarchic principles” that open the unrepresentable performance of Cecil’s phrasing. What happens in the transcription of performance, event, ritual? What happens, which is to say what is lost, in the recording? I am preparing myself to play with Cecil. What is heard there? What history is heard there? There is one which is not just one among others I’m really quite happy, or becoming more comfortable with the conception that Ellington, after all, is the genius I must follow, and all the methodological procedures that I follow are akin, more closely aligned to that than anything else (Richards): the history of (an) organization, orchestra/ton, construction. The essence of construction is part of what that phrasing is after; the poem of construction—geometry of a blue space, geometry of a blue ghost—is the poem that is of the music So, actually, last year for the first time since the seventies I felt more like a professional musician. I never want to be, nor do I consider myself one. You say you don’t consider yourself a professional musician? I would hope never to be a professional musician. So, if one has to, how would you classify yourself? Ha, Ha, Ha . . . I’ve always tried to be a poet more than anything else, I mean, professional musicians die. (Phone rings) / Then the music, the imagination from the music led into the words . . . So that the music is primary, but everything is music once you care to begin to apply certain principles of organization to it. So that I imagine there is . . . people have told me they see a certain relationship between the word and the music (Richards). A poetry, then, that is of the music; a poetry that would articulate the music’s construction; a poetry that would mark and question the idiomatic difference that is the space-time of performance, ritual, and event; a poetry, finally, that becomes music in that it iconically presents those organizational principles that are the essence of music. The thing is, these organizational principles break down; their breakdown disallows reading, improvises idiom(atic difference) and gestures toward an anarchic and generative meditation on phrasing that occurs in what has become, for reading, the occluded of language: sound.

Let Cecil’s “musicked”11 and illegible12 words resonate and give some attention to their broken grammar, the aural rewriting of grammatical rule that is not simply arbitrary but a function of the elusive content he
would convey: what's going on is either in an interstice or of the ensemble, either between professionalism and its other—music and poetry—or in the holism of a kind of everyday ritual. Cecil's poetry: the geometry of a ghost? The physics of remembrance? The architecture of the archétrace? Is there a continuity to be written here, or is the continuity in the cut of the phrase? I am preparing myself to play with Cecil Taylor: what is the proper form of my endeavor? Perhaps the transcription of an improvisational blurrrring of the word; perhaps an improvisation through the singular difference of the idiom and its occasion; perhaps an acalculation of that function whose upper limit is reading and whose lower limit is transcription—an improvisation through phrases, through some virtual head and coda. Cecil says to his interlocutor, “I'm listening” (Richards). Perhaps he will have said this to me or to the word: I'm listening, go on. Then perhaps the ensemble of the word, Cecil and I will have veered off into the silence that is embedded in the transformation, the truth that is held in the silence of the transformation, a truth that is only discernible in transformation.

**Rhythm**

Sound: suspended brightness, unrepresentable and inexplicable mystery of music is the improvisation of organization

ritual is music: principled (archic) (spatial) organization that constitutes a kind of nonverbal writing: transparent or instrumental, un-inflected by the transformations of a buzz-growl extension, bending whistle, hummm—

... there are and we experience the fact that there are several philosophical idioms and that this experience alone cannot not be lived by a philosopher, by a self-styled philosopher, by whoever claims to be a philosopher, as both a scandal and as the very chance of philosophy.13

but an improvisation (anarchic) of those principles that sees through infinite divisibilities and irreducible singularities, sites of communications never to be received, rites of affliction, tragedies, bodily divisions, spatial/social arrangements that constitute a kind of philosophical writing enacted and reenacted in the annular rememberment and dismemberment of community, nation and race, the imposition and maintenance of hierarchical relations within these units, the vexed and impossible task of a reconciliation of one and many via representation: Here it is if I could work through expressive singularity, the im/possibility of direct communication, the ideas
of writing as visible speech and writing as independent of speech. Here it is if idiom becomes the site where an improvisation of/through these might occur: not in the name of an originary creativity or a grounded and telic liberty, but of a free, which is to say anarchic and atelic, generativity; a reconceptualization or out-from-outside reinstrumentalization of idiom that allows an improvisation through rather than a deconstructive oscillation within the aporia of philosophy.

Improvisation through the opposition of reading and transcription—precondition and effect of preparation to play with Cecil: the preparation is the playing, the trace of another organization; it starts like and away from a reading and ends like and beyond transcription but is neither homage to indeterminacy nor objectifying rendering nor reduction to a narrow sense of “writing”; not about the hegemony of the visual in reading, nor the suspicion of a singular vision; at the same time not about the etiolation of a capturing picture.

In reading, Cecil’s performance—the prefatory dance, the gestures at the instrument that produce/emit sound—along with his sound—-independent, though it is, of the reduction of the word to verbal assertion—are too easily subordinated to the visual/spatial and the pervasive ocularcentrism, structured around a set of obsolete temporal, ethical, and aesthetic determinations, which ground it. Nevertheless, Cecil’s poetry, the geometry of a blue ghost, is full of spatial and directional renderings. These are improvised in his sounding of them which I will not read and cannot transcribe.

Though the visual/spatial binds, its occlusion distorts the undifferentiated but unfixed ensemble (ensemble) the remembrance of the aural gives. The echo of what is not but nothing other than unremembered is a wound in Derrida (for example), confounding the dream of another universality, conflating that dream with the vision of an old song, old-new language, homely sound, naive or idiomatic writing. Here it is remedied in Cecil moving out from the outside, out from the paradoxes of idiom to offer up idiom’s re-sounding, one that avoids philosophical nationalism without devolving into transparent instrumentality, one that is not a reconceptualization but an improvisation of idiom in its relation/opposition to ritual via suspended luminescence, floating garden. That improvisation is activated in a sound that holds information in the implicit graphics of its rhythm, a spatial orientation affecting a spatial representation that is sound become dispersive sensuality. So, in a kind of holosensual, holoeesthetic reversal, one hears

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music in Cecil's visual-spatial description and sees gestures and spaces in an aurality that exceeds but does not oppose visual-spatial determination.

In Cecil float/drift/linger/cut are fresh in the improvised parlance of another architecture, another geometry. The recording gives the trace of performance in the product or artifact, is a constative vessel of information maintaining the question of the product as determinate sign; yet it also marks a temporal/ethical problem that can be solved only by way of a radical movement through certain questions: of the trace as performance, of sound, of the rending of the opposition of aurality and spatiality, of the opposition of speech and writing within verbality, of the question of the gestural in literary style, of the question of silence and the absence of the break...

"Rhythm is life, the space of time danced thru" (Taylor) the cut between event and anniversary wherein lies sound, writing, ritual, all improvised. Two passages (David Parkin's and Claude Lévi-Strauss's) to the crossing of rhythm and ritual:

Ritual is formulaic spatiality carried out by groups of people who are conscious of its imperative or compulsory nature and who may or may not further inform this spatiality with spoken words. (Parkin 16)

The value of the ritual as meaning seems to reside in instruments and gestures; it is a paralanguage. The myth on the other hand, manifests itself as metalanguage; it makes full use of discourses, but does so by situating its own significant oppositions at a higher level of complexity than that required by language operating for profane ends. (Lévi-Strauss, qtd. in Parkin 11)

In these passages ritual is primarily defined by distinctions between itself and forms of aural/verbal activity—most importantly, myth—in which ritual is seen as impoverished or by distinctions between itself and other forms of nonverbal activity that, in their mundaneness, remain untransformed by any ceremonial aura. Parkin focuses on the silent communication of propositions in ritual as that which matches or even exceeds verbal assertion through spacing, position or the visual-graphic architectonics that oscillate between fixity and contestation. such communication quietly echoes the staging of some neo-conservato-classically boompish set of sets of sets as in Rodney King—anniversarty reenactment of what Langston Hughes theorized as the origin of real bop's name, the sound whenever a cop bash a (black) guy in the head—for instance: proposition made in the step—never not of the dance—and in the gesture, arms rising, falling: passionate reimposition of a social hierarchy supplemented by various epithets.
commentaries, phrases-in-dispute which we all know: the beat of da Lench Mob, “gorillas in the mist,” what is the origin of hip hop’s name. According to Lévi-Strauss, however, words do go there, arriving under the motive force of “a higher level of complexity” than that afforded by the instrumental or gestural in ritual. If one thinks, though, of a poetry reading—which may very well be (for) a “profane end”—one confronts that which requires that we take into account the ways ritual consists of physical action (in time) that may be, as well as emit or transmit, the kind of meaningful aural expression that improvises through the distinction between the paralinguistic and the metalinguistic. And if words that had been thought of as the elements of a purely constative expression are radically reconnected to their essential sonic performance by eccentric physical action, by an excess of the physical (trill-making vibration of tongue or vowel-lengthening squint) that deforms the word conceived of as a mere vessel of meaning, then that requirement becomes even more urgent. The attempt to read ritual as it is manifest in the sound of such words or the attempt to transcribe myth transformed by gesture and meaningful positionality might be better thought in terms of the improvisation of ritual, writing, sound, idiom, event.

The spatiotemporal constitution of ritual raises ambiguities as well. On the one hand ritual is durative. The structure and dance of its positions are ongoing, part of an annulus that seems unopposed to the uninterrupted process of the everyday against which it would be defined. But what of the punctuality of the endlessly/daily repeated event? This punctuality is, too, of ritual, and ritual thus lends punctuality the aura of ceremony: the special occasion. There is, then, a temporal contradiction in the opposition of ritual and nonritual, one that activates in both terms a juxtaposition that is manifest as the traumatic/celebratory and obsessional rhythmic breakage of the everyday and that implies a directionality of time—a spatiotemporal constitution—that transforms rhythm into a double determination: of position or movement, on the one hand, and syntagmic order on the other. Thus Parkin’s focus on “the use made . . . of directionality—of axes, cardinal points, concentric zones and other expressions of spatial orientation and movement” (16) and his interest in the random and contingent effects of contestation as a kind of reading-in-performance, a shifting and reshifting of spatial conventions and temporal order determined by a radical break as when, for instance, the community cuts the body in an interanimation of affliction and renewal, the fragmentation of singular bodies and the coercive reaggregation of community.
Escaping the in/determination of the opposition or sacrificial synthesis of rites of affliction and renewal requires working through the logocentrism of Lévi-Strauss, the ocularcentric, spatiotemporal determinism of Parkin, and their interrelation in a discursive field grounded in a notion of singularity that I want to move through in my preparation. In Cecil’s, the spoken words, the speaking of the words, are not an arbitrary feature but are instead constitutive of that which is not but nothing other than (the improvisation of) ritual, writing, ritual as a form of writing. There, the words are never independent of gesture but the gesture is never given priority over the words-as-sound. For gestures (and spatial direction) are given there as the sounded, re-sounded (which is to say transformed, bent, extended, improvised) and resounding (which is to say generative) word.

We then can define writing broadly as the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks. (Boone 15)

Here Elizabeth Hill Boone moves in the direction of a redefinition of writing in anthropology in general and in the study of Mesoamerican and Andean graphic systems in particular. That movement is critical of notions of writing as the “visible speech” that marks a technospiritual difference between cultures capable of graphic-verbal presentation and those before or outside of the historicotemporal frame of the advanced or enlightened. That direction would lead to a more inclusive definition of writing, one that is able to acknowledge the rich constative capacities of nonverbal graphic systems, one that explicitly acknowledges the insistently unbridgeable gap that separates the spoken word from any visual representation. This direction, seen in conjunction with Parkin’s attempt to think through the constative/performative opposition that grounds Lévi-Straus’s notion of the difference between myth and ritual, would also lead to an indelible connection between ritual, on the one hand, and writing, on the other hand, if writing is defined in the broader way that Boone lays out. Ritual and nonverbal graphesis would both be seen as constative and both would be subject to prejudices that end in the denial of that constativity. There is another similarity between Boone’s and Parkin’s projects that we’ll arrive at shortly (the primacy of the visual-spatial), but these are enough to allow us to follow, for a bit, one of the paths this connection implies.

What kind of writing Is Chinampas?14 Cecil presents no graphic system—if Chinampas is writing, it is so in the absence of visuality. Under what conditions, then, could Chinampas be called “writing”? Perhaps within an understanding of writing more broadly conceived as nonverbal, as well as verbal,
systems of graphic communication. Yet, since what we have there is non-
graphic verbal communication, the legitimacy of its claim to writing is not
self-evident. Nevertheless ideas of and about graphic systems are presented
in *Chinampas*, sound blurring vision in the improvisation of another writ-
ing; and image, position, and direction are so encoded—the visual-spatial
so embedded—in the poem that what we have is something more complex
even than some newly included Outside of writing. Rather, *Chinampas* is
out from the outside of writing as it is conventionally defined or redefined
in what have become conventional redefinitions. Writing is, in *Chinampas*,
a visual-spatial-tactile improvisation of system that activates the aural re-
sources of the language. The poem is an improvisation of writing not to be
appropriated by, not proper to, an older and somehow more inclusive gra-
phesis: it is not a valorization but an improvisation of the nonverbal; not
an abandonment but a (re)sounding of the visual-spatial.

A possible formulation based on the inclusive redefinition of writing: it's
not that Cecil creates visible speech; rather his is an aural writing given an
understanding of writing that includes nonverbal graphic resources. This
would almost presuppose that Cecil is interested in grounding the aural in
an originary writing (the “older and somehow more inclusive graphesis” re-
ferred to above) that corresponds—as spatial, rhythmic organization—to
ritual. Ritual here is implicitly conceived as Parkin explicitly describes it: a
form of nonverbal graphic (visual/spatial) communication for which spo-
ken words are merely supplemental. We could say, then, that Cecil’s refers
to an originary writing that is neither hieroglyphic nor pictographic but
geometric, positional, directional. In that referent, if not in Cecil’s refer-
ence, spoken words are not only nonoriginary; they are not even seen in
terms of a reversal of traditional, conventional views of language in/and
its relation to writing.

*But this formulation doesn’t go there.* Rather, what is required is a further recon-
figuration of Parkin, one that moves beyond the idea of constative ritual
and beyond the idea of ritual as a form of graphic, nonverbal writing to
the extent that in such writing priority is given to, originarity is assumed
for, the visual-spatial constellation of gesture, position, movement. That
reconfiguration is opened by Cecil’s aural improvisation of, rather than
(un)silent adherence to, an originary writing-as-ritual and his infusion of
the diagrammatics/diagraphesis of ritual with sound. For spoken words,
especially when infused with the buzz hummm of the metavoic,
Thus, on the one hand, “words don’t go there” marks the inadequacy of verbal representation of sound while at the same time signaling the excessive, out-from-the-outside motion and force with which sound infuses the verbal. Words don’t go there; words go past there. Bent. Turned. Blurrrred.

The picture is text, the image is writing, sounded and not visible though of a brilliant luminescence in the ensemble of the graphic, the (non)verbal, the aural. That ensemble is what the floating garden is: word lifted from stone or cloth; quipu (an article composed of colored and knotted strings used in Andean cultures to recall various categories of knowledge that are specified by an interpreter; an article whose aesthetic is related to the tactile and to the tactile’s relation to rhythm)\(^{16}\) or rhythm cloth; text/ile, tactile. There meaning is held not unlike a talking drum holds meaning in tone and rhythm; meaning held, for instance, in “eighty-eight tuned drums,” independent of any simple, sentence-relational form, given only in phrasing and bent words. In that phrasing Cecil’s moves, crucially, past whatever in/determination, whatever singularity, the paradoxical interanimation of ritual and idiom puts forward as if it were or could be The Event.

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an “event,” if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—or structuralist—thought to reduce or suspect. Let us speak of an “event,” nevertheless, and let us use quotation marks to serve as a precaution. What would this event be then? Its exterior form would be that of a rupture and a redoubling.

. . . up to the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always been interdicted (and I am using this word deliberately). Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the
center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere (Derrida, Writing 278–80; my emphasis).

The event of which Derrida speaks, the putting of the structurality of structure, the center itself, into play, is the moment “when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse . . . a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences.” Derrida writes of an event, a rupture, which is also a circle, a circle of thinker-writers but also a circle “unique” in its description of “the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics.” Here he places the event within a narrative. Part of what I would argue is that this placement of the event within narrative is The Event of the event, the rupture or caesura of the event that occurs within a paradoxical duration or contextualization or montagic-dialectical temporal mapping of the event. This self-rupture of singularity is precisely the geometric precondition of the circularity that Derrida diagnoses and to which he succumbs: the self-deconstructive singularity of the event is the axis on which the circle turns—the one which is not central, the center which is not one. Restructuring could be seen, then, as the process by which structure is placed into play, which is to say into narrative, into the circularity and tension of a narrative that is composed of and that turns on elements or events.

Now we might easily be speaking of the song form as that de/centered structure that Cecil radically reformulates, if not abandons, precisely by re-thinking its status as the singular site of order in improvised music. For the point here is that in his aesthetic Cecil deals in what has truly been the unthinkable of the event-determined circularity of the history/narrative of the West and its thinking: the structure or totality that is un(de)composed by a center or its absence, by the event or The Event and their absences. This is a possibility given in ensemble tone, in the improvisation through a certain tradition of temporization and tympanization, through that tradition’s injunction to keep time in a simple way, on the beat (of the event), in that simplest (mis)conception—excusable because of the terminology (and we could all see why Plato would be misled by James Brown in the first place)—of the one. Am I saying that Cecil or The Godfather or The Music in general is not trapped within the circle that is (the history of) metaphysics as the slide away from the ensemble it would propose? Am I saying that there is ac-
cess to the outside of this circle or that, somehow, we (who? we.) are always already outside it. Yes. I’m talking about something free of the circle, free of the eventual tension/tensing of (this) narrative. Other things are also free.

What is immediately required is an improvisation of singularity, one that allows us to reconfigure what is given beneath/outside the distinction between the elements of the structure and its total form. Because what I’m after is an attemtive, anarchic organizing principle (I note the oxymoron), a notion of totality and (ensemble-)tonality at the conjunction of the pantonal and “that insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion.” But wait: the point here is not to make an analogy between the deconstruction of the center and the organization of the jazz ensemble: it’s to say that that organization is of totality, of ensemble in general. Among other things, this music allows us to think of tonality and the structure of harmony as it moves in the oscillation between voice and voicing, not in the interest of any numerical determination (the valorization of the multiple or its shadow), not in the interest of any ethico-temporal determination (the valorization of the durative or of process), but for a kind of decentralization of the organization of the music; a restructuring or, if you will, a reconstrucion. Cecil is working through a metaphysics of structure, working through an assumption that equates the essence or structurality of structure with a center. What I’m interested in in Cecil is precisely the refusal to attempt a return to the source: one that is not, on the one hand, forgetful of what is lost or of the fact of loss; one that is forgetive, on the other hand, in the Falstaffian sense of the word—nimble and full of fiery and delectable shapes, improvisatory and incantatory when what is structured in the mind is given over to the mouth, the birth, as (that which is, finally, way more even than) excellent wit.

In “Structure, Sign and Play” Derrida goes on to quote Lévi-Strauss’s *The Raw and the Cooked*:

But unlike philosophical reflection, which aims to go back to its own source, the reflections we are dealing with here concern rays whose only source is hypothetical. . . . And in seeking to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythological thought, this essay, which is also both too brief and too long, has had to conform to the requirements of that thought and to respect its rhythm. (Qtd. in Writing 286–87. See also Lévi-Strauss, Raw 14.)

Lévi-Strauss and his differentiated echo in/as Derrida go on to think this complex copresence of the question of center and origin in terms of myth and music:
Thus the myth and the musical work are like the conductors of an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers. If it is now asked where the real center of the work is to be found, the answer is that this is impossible to determine. Music and mythology bring man face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized.

Here the musical becomes a sign for the absence of center by way of an all too facile assumption of some correspondence between myth and music. What happens when we begin to think music in its relation to ritual? Myth and text (myth as the written text of the music, betraying a musical rendition of a certain logocentric assumption in Lévi-Strauss) operate in Lévi-Strauss as the agents of a structural fixity whose submission to the law of supplementarity Derrida would always enforce. In this sense, for Derrida, there is a correspondence between myth/text/totality that is troubled by a form of musical organization like Cecil’s. Now we are dealing in precisely that absence of the center that Lévi-Strauss and Derrida both read and comment on. Both deal, Derrida more knowingly or self-consciously, with the tension in their work between structure—that which is unthinkable without a center—and the absence of center. This tension is productive; it constitutes or produces something, namely, philosophy. But I’m interested precisely in the unthinkable of philosophy in Cecil’s work. For the unthinkable, as we can easily show, is not structure in the absence of the center (for we see all the time that this absence is constitutive of structure; this is what Derrida shows); rather, the unthinkable is structure or ensemble thought independently of any tension between itself and some absent origin. The unthinkable is a tone. That tone is to be thought neither as or in its absence (atonality) nor as/in its multiplicity or plenitude (pantontology): it is rather an ensemble tone, the tone that is not structured by or around the presence/absence of singularity or totality, the tone that is not iterative but generative.18 (Note that Lévi-Strauss insists on a certain iconicity, insists that discourse on myth must itself become mythic, must have the form of which it speaks. Certainly Derrida follows this formulation to the extent that the old-new language may only be spoken of from within, that it constitutes its own true metalanguage, thereby driving Tarski and his definition of truth as the relation between object- and meta-language crazy such that the old-new language is not only its own metalanguage but its own truth.)

Cecil’s is a voice in the interruption of race and nation, just as it is a voice in the interruption of the sentence and, indeed, in the interruption of the word itself. He works the anarchic irruption and interruption of grammar, enacting a phrasal improvisation through the distinction between poetry
and music in the poetry of music, the programmatic manifesto that accompanies the music, that becomes music and turns music into poetry. These things occur “between regions of partial shadow and complete illumination” in the cut.

Cecil’s also bears the trace of (the peculiar) institution and its organization—its deconstruction and reconstruction. This in connection to the continuous or anniversarial, the institutional-durative: marriage-birth-death-seasonal change; the temporal difference within ritual that corresponds to ritual’s temporal difference from, on the one hand, myth and, on the other hand, the mundane since rituals “involve a liminal phase, a betwixt and between element and so presuppose an initial phase of separation and one of reaggregation” (Parkin 16). But let’s enact and reenact the separation of separation and reaggregation: rather, let’s linger, float in the limbo of that cut, in order to mark nothing akin to an initial phase or prior singularity, but, instead, to mark “the insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion.” The trauma of separation is marked here, but not the separation from a determinate origin: rather the separation from the improvisation through origin: the separation from ensemble. How could we have heard the sound of justice called in/by the long duration of the trauma if it hadn’t been improvised?

Phrase

I’ve seen video of Ellington arranged at the piano surrounded by his instrument as they played without—which is to say outside—music, their arrangement signifying (their knowledge of the) arrangement: Ellington would sing the parts, forging the preparation of the music beside writing, the orchestra’s change of motion driven, given, proportional to his motive force, the force which feeds: motif. 19 So is Cecil. The instrument, for both, is (the) ensemble wherein lies the chance of a voicing beyond the chord or the cluster (which is to say beyond the simple in/determinations of harmony) even (or, more precisely, especially) in its originary Western philosophical manifestation: that between thinking and being.

Parmenides is, as far as we know, the first among many to “recognize” an essential connection between thinking and being: his poem is the originary text of that harmony, the originary written moment at which the shadow of what must be conceived of as a more fundamental formulation, a more elemental and singular form, is revealed. One wonders what the relation is between the writing of the poem—within which the trace of a
sound remains to be discerned or at least reconstructed from its shards—and that harmony. One wonders whether the harmony on which Western metaphysics is founded is not itself founded on—or most clearly manifest at—the intersection of music and poetry that, itself, seems to signal a prior and barely available unity of the two in mousike: the singularization of the muses’ art, the distillation of the ensemble of the aesthetic.

Only the trace of mousike is available to us and only by way of a tracing of the history of its dissolution. Under the heading “Music and Poetry,” The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics makes a brief survey of that history, moving from “the Egyptian ‘hymn of the seven vowels,’ [which] appears to have exploited the overtone pitches present in the vowels of any language,” to the first disjunctions (through which Cecil improvises) between systems of linguistic pitch, on the one hand, and systems of quantitative meter, on the other; from the technicistic origins of alphabetic writing-as-musical notation to the hegemonic excess of the visual-written and the differentiation of the arts it helps to solidify; from elemental mousike to its division/reaggregation as poetry and music to its fourfold fragmentation into poetic and musical performance and musical and rhetorical theory within which can be located that opposition between praxis and theoria that is never not connected to the harmony of thinking and being that constitutes philosophy’s origin and end. What becomes clear is a historical movement from the priority of sonic gesture to the hegemony of visual (which is to say theoretical) formulation. The written mark—the convergence of meaning and visuality—is the site of both excess and lack; the word-supplement—only theorizable in the occlusion of its sound—endlessly overshoots its destination; words don’t go there. Perhaps it is now possible to give a more satisfactory understanding of this claim, one that is concerned not only with where words do go, but with the nature and position of the “there.” First, though, it is necessary to think the effect of that dual spatialization/visualization of the word—its placement within an economy determined by movement, instrumentalization, position, and theorization—which troubles any distinction between ritual and myth.

“Chinampa—an Aztec word meaning floating garden.” This image moves toward what is made even closer by the conjunction of the image (of the title or name) and the sound (of the saying of what it marks or holds). It signals a suspension that is free or that frees by virtue of the contagion of its movement: when one sees a floating garden or is confronted with the sound that stems from the word-image, one lingers above or below surface and in what is open there. The surface or topography on which a spatiotemporal

Cecil Taylor Floating Garden  227
mapping depends is displaced by a generative motion. One imagines the possibilities inherent in that floating, the chance of a dropping off or an extension of certain of those sounds that require a vibrating surface: the \( n, m, p \) are put in motion, deepening and rearranging the sound of the word.\(^{22}\) This loosening is part of Cecil's method: of the word from its meaning, of the sounds from the word in the interest of a generative reconstruction, as if all of a sudden one decided to refuse the abandonment of the full resources of language, as if one decided to follow no longer the determining, structuring, reductive force of law.

There is a piece of musicpoetry by Cecil titled "Garden" whose words have been collected in *Moment's Notice*, a set of texts that mark the hope or call of a destination for words and for writing.\(^{23}\) Reading "Garden" raises questions concerning its difference from *Chinampas*, one of which I'd like to address in closing. It is, perhaps unavoidably, a question of spacing or position, a question always shadowed by immaterial visualization: what is the floating garden? Perhaps this: the garden that floats is the one that lingers in another, improvisational sense of the aesthetic ensemble that is no simple return to an imagined and originary singularity. Instead the floating garden marks the unprecedented present within which the aesthetic is "ongoingly" reconfigured and reconfiguring, bent and bending; within which the illusion of any immediacy of sound is re/written and the overdetermined and deferred fixity of writing is un/written by the material and transformative present of sound.

It's like when Coltrane, having been shown a transcription of his solo on "Chasin' the Trane," was unable to sightread that which he'd improvised. The beautiful distance between sound and the writing of sound requires a kind of faith that could only be measured, for instance, in Cecil's inability to read

*Chinampas #5'04*

ANGLE of incidence

being matter ignited

one sixtieth of luminous intensity

beginning spiral of two presences behind wind

light drum

*shelter*

angle of incidence observant of sighns

228 FRED MOTEN
be's core based fiber conducting impulses flattened spirals of spirit
prompting letter per square centimeter of three dimensions
swept cylinder and cone
cutting shape of drying bodies
Now pulverized having fed on
cacti
arranged service of constant spiral elements of floating cocineal and
kaay and kaay and kaay and
agité an-agité and kaay
and kaay and yyeagiye yoa,
y ya yoa
deposits of hieroglyphic regions
womb of continuing light
preexisting blood per square centimeter of aBlaack bhody
a curve having rotation in three dimensions
cutting spiral elements at a constant angle
behind wind
the inexpressssible inclusion
of one within another
a lustrous red, reddish brown or black natural fill compact or attacked
POINT fixed on circumference
curve about red
does in fact alter regions of contact as a rooase
on the outside circumference flushed toward slant
intersection new reference point
moves clockwise
representing a frequency’s
distribution
each bend of ordinan equals the sum in singular
youas youas youas
proceeding enclosure engulfing unending spiral
undulation
there floating amidst aiana and overhead
romela romelaya romela romelaya a ceeia
invisible expressions of warmed inake wood soothed by exudation of sloed balsam scent
is arielroot elixir is knowing circle crossed at oiled extremity
in center of wing burring
creates fire in air

*serpent* is preexisting light light yeah

the meter maintained is open yet a larger *whorl*
describing orbit of earth
eaters incisors as omniscient
pochee aida aida huelto aida aida huedo
uniting of three astral plains/planes corresponding to a serpent synthesis

altering the slii'de

disengage'd ecliptic traveling
due north

skip through at least two successive meridians

diagonal shear
uniting as macrocosm five heads degrees of *tangible* *abbbjects*
graded ascension of floor levels
suspended voice
vibrations

held within concretized mur'eau de perfume breath
again *floating*

'tween lighted mooon///soar
and silent cross of bird sensing cold at base
invisible to source of satyrial/siderial turn Between regions of partial
shadow and complete illumination.

omnipotence

omnipotence the florescence of the perpendicular
omnipotence
the floresce of the perpendicular pentamorphic
the florescence of the perpendicular pentamorphic
perpendicular pentamorphic

(kiss, silences, rhythm)

.......

**NOTES**

1. If this were ever sounded, I would not want the appearance of the cut to be marked by another voice. Just another voicing, which would not be reducible to a difference of voices, and which would be marked only by the palpability of the cut — no glance, no sound outside, just a pause, and *don't stop the tape recorder.*
The question remains: whether and how to mark (visually, spatially, in the absence of sound, the sound in my head) digression, citation, extension, improvisation in the kind of writing that has no name other than “literary criticism.”

2. I am going to write (about) the piece’s first section in Taylor 1988.

3. In the absence of reading, either or both of these terms might be just as reducible or virtual as work or sentence. Part of what I would like to relate is the way Cecil’s (work art ritual performance music poetry), the way that which is of Cecil, renders all of these terms unavailable. Nevertheless, I must retain them, at least for a minute, otherwise I Can’t Get Started. I hope it strikes no one as jarring or silly if I refer to Cecil Taylor by his given name. I refer any of you who are offended to Christopher Smith: “Within the jazz community, certain artists are named in such a ‘short-hand’ fashion: ‘Monk’ (Thelonius Sphere Monk); ‘Bird’ (Charlie ‘Yardbird’ Parker); ‘Dizzy’ (John Birks ‘Dizzy’ Gillespie). In its own way, it is a gesture of respect” (52). In the spooky-action-at-a-distance or strange nontranslation or unbridged transference between (the absence of) the surname and (the advent of) le surnom (see Dutoit), one asserts oneself—perhaps presumptuously—as a member of that community, that ensemble, in preparation (Cecil says), improvisation (is), self-analysis.

4. Or, more precisely, the double absence: the disappearance of the performance that is not recorded; the loss of what the recording reduces or occludes by embodying an illusory determinacy and representativeness.

5. Implied here is that glow, aura, sfumato, hazy luminescence that smears the edge, the containment, of the image or the letter. Halogen, neon, Las Vegas—though I’m pretty sure Cecil’s never played my hometown—are in my head along with a recent recording of Cecil’s, In Florecism.

6. Or, more precisely, a double phrasing: words’ syntagmic ordering and the arrangement and enactment of their internal sonic resources.

7. See Mackey, Bedouin Hornbook 34; Harris 26.

8. Gracefully designed by Mike Bennion.

9. Richards’s notes consist largely of an interview with Taylor. The recording is of a performance by the Cecil Taylor Unit given on 7 November 1987, just nine days before the recording of Chinamphas. Richards dates his notes May 1988.

10. “Idiom” demands a break. It demands some extended quotation, first from the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, then from Derrida’s “Onto-Theology.” Idiom, according to the OED: “peculiarity, property, peculiar phraseology”; “the form of speech peculiar or proper to a people or country”; “the variety of a language which is peculiar to a limited district or class of people”; “the specific character, property, or genius of any language”; “a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language and having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one” (my emphasis). Idiom, according to Derrida: “I shall say simply of this word ‘idiom,’ that I have just very rapidly thrust forward, that for the moment I am not restricting it to its linguistic, discursive circumscription, although, as you know, usage generally folds it back towards that limit—idiom as linguistic idiom. For the moment, while keeping my eye fixed especially on this linguistic determination which is not all there is to idiom, but which is not just one determination of it among others, I shall be taking ‘idiom’ in a much more indeterminate sense, that of prop(ri)ety, singular feature, in principle inimitable and inexpressible. The idiom is the proper” (my emphasis). Let me add a couple of propositions.
to which I'll return: race ("a peculiar or characteristic style or manner—liveliness, sprightliness or piquancy," according to the OED) and idiom, in their determination by a conceptual apparatus made up of uninterrogated differences, classes, and sets, are interchangeable; T(race) and phrase constitute an improvisation of race and idiom, one activated within a certain understanding of totality or ensemble in which idiom is defined as the t(race) of a general idiom that is nothing other than the generativity (i.e., what is produced by and is the possibility of the production of) idiom.

11. Here's an echo of Baraka's oft-repeated claim that poetry is "Musicked speech." The particular manifestation of the phrase to which I refer is to be found in Melhem.

12. Or, more precisely, doubly illegible words: the sonic/visual blurring of the words; the fundamental absence of the written text.


14. Here I'm in debt to Boone.

15. See Mackey, "Cante Moro."

16. See Rappaport 284.

17. See Cecil's comments on Bill Evans, in Hentoff.

18. Imagine a tone, bearing within it the structure of a phenomenology of totality and singularity that would reveal some opening of the possibility of ethical agency. It would have to provide a sense—neither cognitive nor visionary, more than cognitive, more than visionary—of a whole not bound by the interminable oscillation of systemic relation and nonrelation. Such a whole would move beyond the endless and always asymmetrical tension between individual and society or self and other; finally, it would move beyond any ontological formulation of and in difference that displaces the ensemble and leaves us at the site of a discursive contestation of infinite curvature where our reality never escapes the forces power exerts over responsibility and in/determination exerts over improvisation.

Ensemble—the improvisation of and through totality and singularity in and as both phenomenological description and morphological prescription—must, therefore, faithfully reclaim the honor of the whole, an honor that is real only within the complex, radical, and realist attention and devotion we pay to particularity, a devotion that must move through the enlightenment tradition's allegiance to singularity and its conflation of singularity and totality—phenomena certain tendencies within poststructuralism both critique and extend in the analysis and affirmation of singularity's always already multiple essence that is embedded in ontological and epistemological questioning. Indeed, the theory of ensemble is enabled by and is an extension and improvisation of the tradition of a singularist and differentiated thinking of the ensemble, most particularly as that tradition—at its highest level of intensity and internal tension—begins to be articulated through calls for its dissolution or continuance in the impossible language prompted by the incomensurable conjunction of community and difference. In short, the possibility of a nonexclusionary totality is opened by the most radical critiques—those of identity politics in addition to those of poststructuralism—of any prior totalization.

The point, here, is that those critiques that pay descriptive and prescriptive attention to singularity and totality while responsibly confronting the horrific effects of singularist totalization must be acknowledged and assimilated. But the fact that
they offer no meaningful articulation of the ensemble—that which allows our aspirations for equality, justice, freedom—means they must be improvised. The various discourses that are informed by identity politics open the possibility for such improvisation in their directions toward other philosophical or antiphilosophical modes of thought and representation. But it is precisely in the thought of the other, the hope for an other subjectivity and an other ontology, that the metaphysical foundations and antilibertarian implications of the politico-philosophical tradition to which identity politics attempts to respond are replicated and deepened. Improvisation—and thus the possibility of describing and activating an improvisational ensemble—is thereby foreclosed. I am interested in something out from the outside, other than the other or the same, something unbound by their relation or nonrelation. That is what I think Chinampas is.

19. Thanks, again, to Boone (for quoting Stillman Drake) 9.

20. See Winn. Please take note that this entry in this definitive encyclopedia says very close to nothing of the life and shape of the synthesis of music and poetry in “the New World” or in non-Western societies. Cecil’s concern with precisely these registers is certainly a constitutive feature of his improvisation through the determinations of the dominant understanding of that synthesis. In his work the trace of mousike, the ghostly affect and effect of a certain free mode of organization, gives us to imagine a thought not grounded in the architectonics and dynamics of difference that harmony both marks and conceals. It is as if the real/phantasmatic duality of the encounter with the other opens that which demands an improvisation through the condition of its possibility.

21. See back cover of Taylor, Live in Vienna.

22. Note one such possible formulation: Chiapas. There a generative rearrangement is also under way; more power to it and the ones who carry it off.

23. Check the sentence (written by Art Lange and Nathaniel Mackey, the editors of Moment’s Notice) that follows Charles Lloyd’s expression of doubt concerning the capability of words to arrive at music: “Writers influenced by jazz have been variously rising to the challenge of proving him wrong.”

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