READING ALOUD MATTERS

This folio and commentary give me the opportunity to consider one component of my sound/language-based art practice, that of reading aloud. Reading aloud has become an increasingly central part of how I consider our relationship with other animals through voice and language. Sound is three dimensional and fills space, and vocality adds a sonic dimension to a text that transforms reading into a shared spatial multilingual experience.

Text and Images by Catherine Clover

eading aloud is a component of my art practice, an art practice that uses listening as its raw material. Reading aloud is one response to this listening process. It could be suggested that when I read aloud, I am not listening, but this is not the case. Only through attentive listening to particular sites are texts selected for reading aloud. Voice cannot function fully without listening.

Reading aloud is a physical act that is spoken and heard; it is social and inclusive. The texts I am addressing here are not my own writing but are written by others. These readings take place out in the real world where multiple species congregate. In keeping with Donna Haraway's term naturecultures, where a constantly changing reality is manifested and where previous oppositions merge and blend, the listeners to the readings are multispecies.

Most of the readings take place externally, outdoors in the physical worlds of people and animals and birds and insects, in the mixed and maladaptive settings of cities: along streets and in squares, under bridges, in parks and gardens, beside railway lines. The sounds of each site blend with my voicing of the words; voices mix with my own; sometimes my voice is drowned out and inaudible. Listeners are locals and visitors, wild and domestic, frequent or infrequent users of the site, who may be listening attentively, casually or just in passing. Voice carries the words on the page but separates from

them, and communicates independently of them while restoring the vocal act to writing.

As children we are attentive listeners to stories: an adult reads to us at bedtime and we listen, enthralled, as we drift off to sleep through imaginative worlds. From a young age, well before we can read for ourselves, we are a ready audience for listening to the storytelling voice, to the voice that reads aloud, the voice that precedes silent reading. We learn to read by reading aloud yet soon after this achievement we are expected to stop what we are told is a bad habit (Perec, Species of Spaces, 177), and learn to read silently. Perec suggests that this is "... no doubt because it smacks overmuch of application and of effort. Which doesn't stop the ... muscles of the vocal cords and the glottis being activated when we read. Reading remains inseparable from this labial mimeticism and its vocal activity – there are texts that should only be murmured or whispered, others that we ought to be able to shout or beat time to.' (Perec, Species of Spaces, 177)

Reading aloud is not storytelling in the oral tradition where characters and plot may change and morph with each re-telling. Reading aloud is based in the literary tradition of the written word, where re-tellings are expected to repeat and repeat the same story over and over again. The reader mostly reads the same words each time. I say 'mostly' because while the words on the page remain static, the readerly voice is in flux and moves through the text differently each



Catherine Clover
Reading Place Aloud rehearsal documentation 2017 CC3.0 Catherine Clover



Catherine Clover and Stephen Barrass *Untaming the Urban* collaboration/performance 2016
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time. The reader's contribution is enactment, not accuracy with language. I sometimes make mistakes: I skip a word, I say a word twice, I misread and I mispronounce. 'Voice is fundamentally and expressively paradoxical' (Neumark, *Voicetracks*, 8).

Reading aloud means I hear my own voice, but these texts are not my own language. My voice coordinates with the words on the page, words that are assembled and constructed in a particular way. The words form in my mouth as I find my way around them and push them out into the world through the breath. The shape of the words and my pronunciation affects the telling. I learned to pronounce the characteristics of my language, this language, when I was young; this language and its sounds shape how my tongue teeth lips jaw and breath enmesh and coordinate to deliver the words vocally. My lungs project the sound out into the world.

As these readings do not use my words, this is not my vernacular or my idiom. So, when I read aloud in this way, my voice is separated from language – that is, the language and words I would



Catherine Clover *Reading The Birds* site-specific performance 2014 CC3.0 Catherine Clover



Catherine Clover and Johanna Hällsten

Calls from Bethenal Green site-specific collaboration 2013 CC3.0 Catherine Clover and Johanna Hällsten

The Birds

ON December the third the wind changed overnight and it ON December on the autumn had been mellow, soft. The le winter.

winter.

had lingered on the trees, golden red, and the hedgerows

had lingered. The earth was rich where the plant had been mellow, soft. The le had lingered. The earth was rich where the plough had turn still green, because of a war-time disability Nat Hocken, because of a war-time disability, had a per

Nat Floor work full-time at the farm. He worked three and did not work full-time at the farm. He worked three and did they gave him the lighter jobs: hedging, the week, and they farm buildings. repairs to the farm buildings.

Although he was married, with children, his was a disposition; he liked best to work alone. It pleased him disposition, a bank to build up, or a gate to mend at the was given a bank where the sea surround mend at the was given a where the sea surrounded the farm of the peninsula, where the sea surrounded the farm of the period of the period of the farm of the side. Then, at midday, he would pause and earlies wife had baked for him and its wife had baked for him and its wife had baked for him. either side. either had baked for him, and sitting on the that his wife had baked for him, and sitting on the would watch the birds. Autumn was best for this, spring. In spring the birds flew inland, purpos spring. where they were bound, the rhythm and they knew where they were bound, the rhythm and life brooked no delay. In autumn those that had overseas but remained to pass the winter were car same driving urge, but because migration was followed a pattern of their own. Great flocks of the peninsula, restless, uneasy, spending themselves wheeling, circling in the sky, now settling to nurned soil, but even when they fed it wa

ned by the then with. churned, that same g, calling, ke haste, ourpose? a spell ey must s edge,

Winter rehenfolly,

gure

hine nan

THE BIRDS

heard the wind in the chimney. Not the storm and bluste sou'westerly gale, bringing the rain, but east wind, cold are It sounded hollow in the chimney, and a loose slate rate the roof. Nat listened, and he could hear the sea roaring bay. Even the air in the small bedroom had turned chill: came under the skirting of the door, blowing upon the drew the blanket round him, leant closer to the ba sleeping wife, and stayed wakeful, watchful, aware of without cause.

Then he heard the tapping on the window. Th creeper on the cottage walls to break loose and scra pane. He listened, and the tapping continued until, in sound, Nat got out of bed and went to the window. and as he did so something brushed his hand, knuckles, grazing the skin. Then he saw the flutt and it was gone, over the roof, behind the cottage

It was a bird, what kind of bird he could no must have driven it to shelter on the sill.

He shut the window and went back to bed knuckles wet put his mouth to the scratch. Th blood. Frightened, he supposed, and bew FROM Penser/Classer

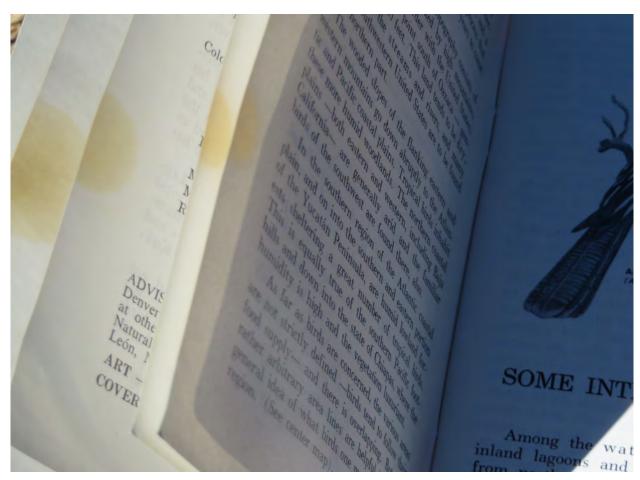
the scope of this article. From the abundant literature devoted to the scope of this article. From the abundant interature devoted to this question since the beginning of the century (Yarbus, Stark least derive one elementary but basic countries. etc.), we can at least derive one elementary but basic certainty the eyes do not read the letters one after the other, nor the words one after the other, nor the lines one after the other, but proceed jerkily and by becoming fixed, exploring the whole reading field instantaneously with a stubborn redundancy. This unceasing per usal is punctuated by imperceptible halts as if, in order to discover what it is seeking, the eye needed to sweep across the page in an intensely agitated manner, not regularly, like a television receiver (as the term 'sweeping' might lead one to think), but in a disorderly, repetitive and aleatory way; or, if you prefer, since we're dealing in metaphors here, like a pigeon pecking at the ground in search of breadcrumbs. This image is a little suspect obviously, yet it seems to me characteristic, and I shan't hesitate to take from it something that might serve as the point of departure for a theory of the text: to read is in the first instance to extract signifying elements from the text, to extract crumbs of meaning, something like key words, which we identify, compare and then find for a second time. It is by verifying that they are there that we know we are in the text, that we identify and authenticate it. These key words may be words (in detective novels, for example, and even more in erotic productions or what purport to be such), but they may also be sonorities (rhymes), page layouts, turns of phrase, typographical peculiarities (for example, the putting of too many

and the property of the party of the second A the popular popular to strong this work of recession to the popular to strong this work of recession to the popular to strong the and the property of the proper arm and have only a tregative confinituation of wheen Anna Junes (... Anna Jukhailovka Junes Junes Askort foreshold and Junes (... Anna Junes Junes Junes) And miles formal internal Long at the hand of the central and for the hand of the central and formal internal long at the hand of the central and the central do modelet Strailor, asset for the transport of assisters of the strain about the present the reputedly Market of the state of the stat Market Steven Dipole Universes one processis and labor as home me my pears are the interplay between the interplay betwee Amrae ingua perfricuit . . '). patrale and the unpredictable, between expectation To come across or come across odar trankly slang expressions casually strewn through wweelegantly expressed might provide one exampl alled Burhes describes at the start of Writing Des Commerce began an issue of the Père Duchène withou niles "lucks" and "buggers". These crudenesses di

of this article. From the abundant literature devoted to this question since the beginning of the century (Yarbus, Stark etc.), we can at least derive one elementary but basic certainty. the eyes do not read the letters one after the other, nor the words one after the other, nor the lines one after the other, but proceed jerkily and by becoming fixed, exploring the whole reading field instantaneously with a stubborn redundancy. This unceasing per usal is punctuated by imperceptible halts as if, in order to discover what it is seeking, the eye needed to sweep across the page in an intensely agitated manner, not regularly, like a television receiver (as the term 'sweeping' might lead one to think), but in a disorderly, repetitive and aleatory way; or, if you prefer, since we're dealing in metaphors here, like a pigeon pecking at the ground in search of breadcrumbs. This image is a little suspect obviously, yet it seems to me characteristic, and I shan't hesitate to take from it something that might serve as the point of departure for a theory of the text: to read is in the first instance to extract signifying elements from the text, to extract crumbs of meaning, something like key words, which we identify, compare and then find for a second time. It is by verifying that they are there that we know we are in the text, that we identify and authenticate it. These key words may be words (in detective novels, for example, and even more in erotic productions or what purport to be such), but they may also be sonorities (rhymes), page layouts, turns of phrase,

State of the state of don't know by what know a below to possible to study this work of William Part I have only a negative constant and and the state of the state Weenganaman Anna Mikhailowa Is Magn north familiar, asked for the ham all posith, who preferred instead I van Mikhai we alke age of fifteen, I tried to decipher wind Didero's Les Bijoux indiscrets (S and the standard ori priapum, simulque a la fellurice me lingua perfricuit . . .). lertain art of the text might be based on the to predictable and the unpredictable, between appointment, connivance and surprise. To mal or frankly slang expressions casually subervise elegantly expressed might provise a Roland Barthes describes at the start of When never began an issue of the Père I

Some swifts probably also migra ica. Larger birds include kites a and nightjars. Birds have inhabited Mexico i a long time; their fossilized refound in several parts of the Repu are probably more bird bones (40,000 years old) in the Valley how to the rate (black arrows) that of Mexico in any other place within tropica show that the valley had a great their migratory of the state of small islands where water birds n MOUNTAINS OF COOK the Gulf of Mexico Monor division in their migration and the Michaele division when predators and scavengers to reap t wealth of life. Many of these preh. ably vanished before the Aztecs a northward or dying out when vo covered the great lakes with ash. Moctezuma, Emperor of the A: of the Spanish Conquest in 1519. Tehnantepec, Arraint hrongh Central Anunbe America aviary of considerable size and v Diaz del Castillo, in The Discover of Mexico, describes the wonder of Though King Philip II of Spai sonal physician, Francisco Hernán survey of the natural



choose—and I embrace another's language, another's way of articulating. This is not a foreign language, not a second or third language, but another means of articulating the same language that I use every day and that I know intimately. Reading aloud is voicing a text, adding voice to a text or, as Adriana Caverero notes above, reinstating voice in reading. My voice enacts the author's language. Reading aloud I animate and activate the text physically: I choose when to breathe, to pause, to emphasise a word or phrase or to diminish another. I choose the pace, the rhythm and metre, the prosody; the pitch (more treble here, less bass there), the amplitude and its choreography (loudly, quietly), the timbre of each word. I choose duration—how long the sounds will last and when they will fade. 'Voice works intersubjectively, relationally, affectively, and emotionally – transmitting and moving through us and between us and others. Voice, which is more than/different from the speech and the meanings it may carry, encompasses and transmits both preverbal and nonverbal vocalisations of intensities (affects) as well as expression of feelings and emotions.' (Neumark, Voicetracks, 7)

Through the act of reading aloud my voice leaves a trace on the words that does not occur when I read silently. While I grew up in the suburbs of London, my parents came from the country, the Scottish Highlands and lochs, and the flat expanses of Suffolk. I am now a British migrant living in Australia. When I read aloud, I am aware of this vocal heritage. My voice embraces a text that already exists and slightly minimally—recalibrates it, just to the left of centre, over to one side, just a little bit different from reading silently. I make the text my own through 'my body's capacity to make sound: my keen awareness of the muscles in my mouth and the stress-rhythms of the language I grew up in' (Briggs, This Little Art, 171). I read the language of the author, I use my voice to coax that language out into the physical world. Reading another's words is a duet perhaps, and certainly performative; perhaps it is a ventriloquism or even (could I claim the conceit of) a translation, in which, as translator Kate Briggs notes, the authorial position is complicated (Briggs, This Little Art 34). I am voicing for another who is physically absent from the site of the reading.

My voice shapes sound to fit the words on the page. The listeners hear my voice but may not speak the language of the words. As a multispecies audience it is unlikely that all who

are present speak the language that I read. But voice is its own communication and has its own reach. '... the act of speaking is relational: what it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices' (Cavarero, For More than one Voice, 10). Separating voice from language explodes the boundaries of language so that we are all, potentially, multi-linguists, breaking with the regulation of the master code (Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 3).

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Catherine Clover's multidisciplinary practice addresses communication through voice and language and the interplay between hearing/listening and seeing/reading. Using field recording, digital imaging and the spoken/written word she is exploring an expanded approach to language within species and across species through a framework of everyday experience. She teaches at Swinburne University (MA Writing) Melbourne, and holds a practice led PhD (Fine Art) through RMIT University.