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Klara du Plessis

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"do you read me?": Kaie Kellough, the Words and Music Show, and a Self-Curated Series Within a Series

Klara du Plessis
Concordia University

Curatorial relationality and self-curation

The literary event (poetry reading and reading series) as form—and the sociocultural context that allows the idea of the literary event to function—initiates relevant dialogue with discourses from the visual arts when curatorial theory and vocabulary from museum, gallery, and exhibition spaces are applied to it. By listening to the literary event as a curatorial construct, my research makes explicit collaborative structures, and hierarchies of agency, inherent to the public sharing of literature in performance and the necessarily "relational aesthetics"—to apply Nicolas Bourriaud's term—that ensues. Relational art is typically defined as that which takes "as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social content, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space" (14). The sociability inherent to the relational points to human exchanges during the duration of a work of art or the performance of a literary event. To extend this mode of thinking, my research places the public presentation of oral poetry, its interpersonal dynamics, and its investment in curatorial labour in further relation to the structures and non-human influences—what Beatrice von Bismarck calls the "close, inseparable entanglement of human and non-human actors" (81)—that

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made it possible to exist in the first place. The organizational and curatorial practice and thinking of the curator and performing poets—the labour that precedes or overlaps with the event itself or even follows it into the archive—is also a manifestation of relational aesthetics that then further enables the public-facing sociability of the literary event. The curatorial construction of the literary event is thus informed by an infinitude of other possible dynamic exchanges, such as the architectonic impact of a particular venue, the dialogic synthesis of poetic works performed alongside one another, the institutional reputation of the series itself, the positionalities of the poets as manifestations of the author in abstract terms, and so on. The literary event thus exists as a nexus of tension between shared, relational agency and the important correlation between the construction of individual reading and ongoing series. I call this mass of active and continuous potential, formative exchanges at the literary event, as understood within a broader context of relational aesthetics, curatorial relationality. While it is artificial to unravel and dissect different possible relationalities as separate entities, I do highlight dialogic and durational moments of relational influence and affect in this essay due to the temporal entanglement of the case study's poetic content.

In comically brief synopsis, my larger body of current research schematizes curatorial modes as applied to the making of literary events, investigating how various elements of curatorial relationality mobilize different ratios of interactive tension in the practical labour and conceptual decision-making that constitutes a wide range of poetry in performance. I call one of these modes self-curation as a merging of the roles of performing poet and curator. With the activation of this curatorial mode, the poet directs the performance of their work by curating a self-contained and self-defined event or series of events situated across time and space, while also considering the dynamic curatorial nuances of how and in which conditions they want their work to be performed and experienced. Self-curation can manifest in a more condensed fashion when the same poet recurs as invited performer at fairly consistent intervals within the structure of a pre-existing series. Even though that series then has its own distinct curator, the poet can weave a curatorial strand of their own work, through their recurrent presence, beneath the surface of the larger, better recognized series of events.

Klara du Plessis is a FRQSC-funded PhD candidate at Concordia University, affiliated with the SpokenWeb research network. Her research focuses on curatorial structures in the context of twentieth century and contemporary Canadian poetry, and she develops a research creation component called Deep Curation. Her debut poetry collection, *Ekke*, won the 2019 Pat Lowther Memorial Award.

Kaie Kellough at the Words and Music Show

Before poet, novelist, and performer Kaie Kellough won the 2020 Griffin Poetry Prize, he performed at the Words and Music Show seventeen times. This Montreal-based reading and performance series was founded at a nebulous, undocumented moment in the very early 2000s, survived the COVID-19 pandemic years online, and continues to be curated by poet and performer Ian Ferrier on a monthly basis twenty years later. It is possible to listen to the Words and Music Show audio repository—now in the process of being digitized and preserved by the SpokenWeb project—according to the distinct event or as a series of consecutive, curated events that reproduce their chronology in the archive. It can also be experienced laterally, however, as a series of interlocking traces that connect according to other sets of discrete variables. So, for example, it is possible to track stylistic or generic concerns—such as spoken word performance, literary readings, comedy sets, musical sets, interdisciplinary collaborations, and more—across the series as a whole and to understand those single entries as existing equally within their respective events as in relation to one another across events. It is possible to do the same for thematic concerns, with some keywords including, but not being limited to, identity, gender, race, love, sex, and so on.

More importantly for my research's focus on self-curation, a key characteristic of the Words and Music Show is the deliberate support and recurring invitation of individual performers, sometimes as frequently as every few months or on an annual basis across the timespan of the show. This singularity results in multiple entangled subsidiary series, dependent on individual identity and the recognition and growth of particular performers' personal bodies of work as they cohere over time. Many local performers—like Moe Clark, Cat Kidd, Nisha Coleman, among others—returned consistently to perform versions of the same work and to try out new compositions. As Ferrier recounts in conversation with Vincent Tinguely, "[a]s far as performance poetry or oral poetry or spoken word goes, it's as strong here [both at the Words and Music Show and in Montreal] as anywhere I've ever seen … So that breeds a lot more room to grow up in the scene and learn how to do it, and continue doing it" (*Impure* 10). In other words, Ferrier conceptualizes his series as a space where poets and performers can learn from each other but also from themselves as they are invited to return to the stage, "to grow up," and to "continue doing" the craft they are working to hone. The Words and Music Show as a series functions as a relational and durational procedural forum that nurtures self-workshopping, self-growth, and, as I argue, self-curation.

By appearing so frequently within the context of this series, Kellough inhabits an additional, individualized series beneath the more official series' surface. This subsidiary series creates its own sequence of events, complementing and shifting the overall structure and programming of the Words and Music Show and allowing it to loop back, to fold back on itself. Phrased in terms of the relational exchange happening within the curatorial field of this ancillary series, his multiple performances explore an interplay of dialogic and durational relationalities. That is, his performances from various events are in dialogue with one another across the duration of the series, alluding to Mikhail Bakhtin's articulation that "[e]verything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole" (426). Kellough's performances also bridge temporal gaps with the language of continuity, process, and creative and critical development, albeit not necessarily as a chronological progression. Channeling what Marjorie Perloff calls "differential texts"—"texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one" (146)—one can further understand these multiple performances as resisting the illusion of stability that often accompanies the finalized or printed text. In the archive, Kellough's performances exist as audio artifacts or audiotexts that occasionally appear in print but that more frequently voice themselves in altered repetition to celebrate their "fundamentally plural existence" (Bernstein 9) and to offer multiple iterations of the same work that counter a vector of trial, improvement, and publication. To delve into this archival recurrence of versioned works, I will use the network that exists between Kellough's first recorded performances in 2003 and 2005 as a case study, both featuring a poem entitled "do you read me?" While this work later appears as a handwritten scan called "Word Sound System 1, Part A and Part B" in Kellough's 2010 poetry collection *Maple Leaf Rag* (figure 1), even this print version relies on its status as score and its potential embodiment as differential audiotextual versions, rather than as a stable, or at least legible, typeset product. In a formal move to replicate the binaural listening required to engage with the non-linear—or, at least, with the interconnected—dialogue of Kellough's self-curated series, I have experimented with visualizing my analysis as two strands that augment the role of the footnote. In contrast to the traditional role of footnotes, these interjections are not intended to evoke a secondary text but, rather, to illustrate two equal parts of my argument that coexist and inform one another. This stereo approach emphasizes the innumerable moments of dialogic and durational entanglement that occur across the various recordings and versions of the same work, placing Kellough's poetry in conversation with itself and activating a durational perspective

that brackets his performances as a sequence of events as they develop sonically, stylistically, thematically, and conceptually but also non-linearly, over and across time.

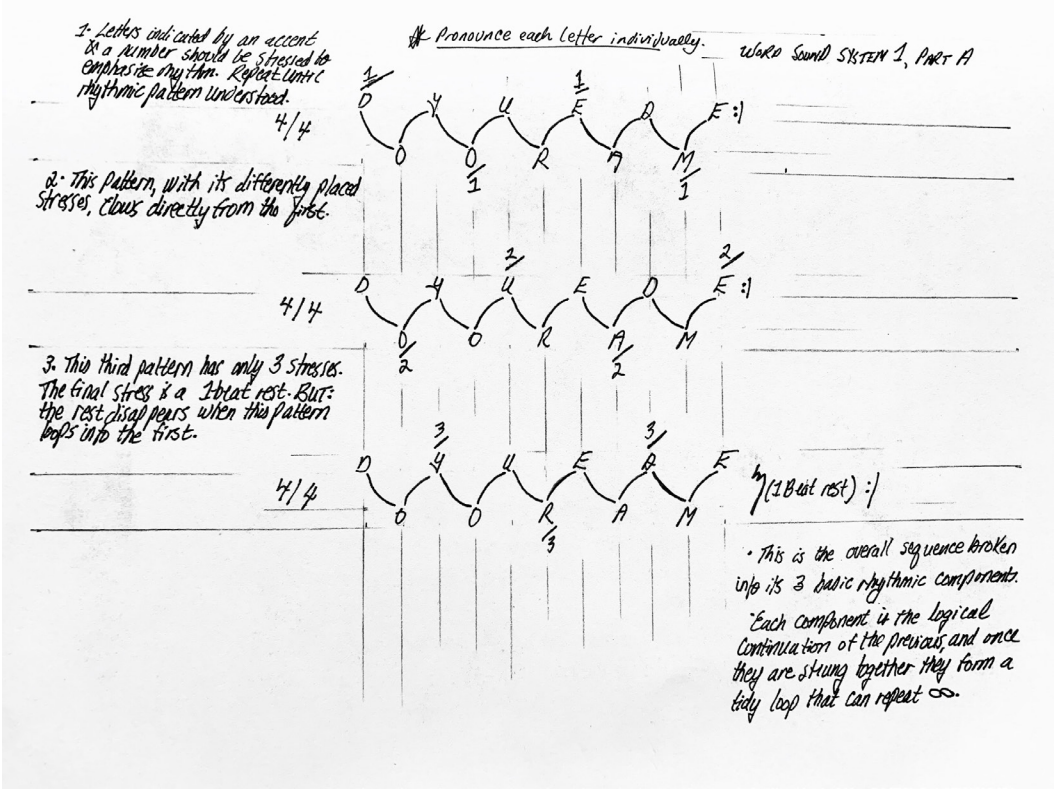

Figure 1. Handwritten scan of "do you read me?" included in Kellough's 2010 poetry collection *Maple Leaf Rag* as "Word Sound System 1." Rather than embodying an authoritative version of the work performed multiple times at the Words and Music Show, this published version functions as a score with notes on rhythm and vocalization that confuses and even opposes any notion of print as the definitive product (Kaie Kellough, 73).

"do you read me?"

Kaie Kellough is first noted as participating in Words and Music on 19 August 2001 during the series' third event on record. The first audio recording of him is available in the archive for 17 August 2003. He then reappears almost every year till 2018, with the future possibility of returning again since the series itself is still ongoing. Kellough's current seventeen documented performances make for a compelling and substantial

self-curated series that exists beneath the surface of Words and Music, especially since Kellough is aware of his multiple performances and how they connect to one another to form a coherent project.

When I asked Kellough[1] whether he was aware of the sequential nature of his recurrence on the stage, he replied that "[a]t a certain point, I was. At a certain point when I had performed already a number of times, and I was continuing to perform there, I started to understand that I had some leeway" (Kaie Kellough interview, 27 May 2022). By "leeway" he means a level of control over his performances in relation to one another; that he was making strategic, curatorial decisions about what he would present to always ensure a subjective standard to which he held himself and his work, as he continues to describe. He explains,

> a concern was making sure to always have something different for each invitation and each time going up there and trying to present things in a different way. If I hadn't done a straight ahead reading[2] in a while then I might do that. If it wasn't

1 For this research, I am indebted to an oral history methodology—and to the time and generosity of Kaie Kellough and Ian Ferrier, in particular, who graciously shared their knowledge with me. I rely on them as poet and self-curator, and series curator, respectively, to fill in factual gaps about the Words and Music Show that have not yet been recorded in the archive or documented by other scholars. Arguably, my dependence on Kellough is fraught with assumptions about the authority to the author over his own work, as if I am resuscitating the dead Barthesian author to serve as an expert so I may use his statements as support for my analysis. I would counter this critique, however, by establishing Kellough's contextualizing and interpretative statements about his own presence at the Words and Music Show as a continuation of the work he performed there, rather than a distinct performance of himself as author. More often than not, extrapoetic commentary is recorded as part of the audiotext and performers employ the preamble to situate their work. Kellough, in particular, experiments with the merging of these roles in performances, allowing them to bleed into one another deliberately. "The Voice that Is the Poem," a SpokenWeb Shortcuts podcast episode produced by Katherine McLeod, focuses on exactly this critical, creative blending at the Words and Music Show. Especially in the context of this essay that foregrounds the multiplicity and versions of a work, Kellough's function as an authorial agent in my oral history interview with him, to allude to Michel Foucault, is to prolong the oral liner notes that frame his performances. As with the versions of Kellough's performances discussed in this essay, performances that resist being formulated into a singular, coherent work, "[t]he word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality" (Foucault, 282). The edges of Kellough's authorship, of his work in performances, and of the two as overlapping entities are unstable as subject positions, while simultaneously serving as the foundation of this essay.

2 On 21 August 2011, for example, Kellough reads a descriptive prose work about Montreal as "a distillation of some stereotypes," as he calls it (recording 3

> necessarily brand new work that I had recently written then it might be older work that was in collaboration with somebody else[3] where I try a narrative or something with electronics.[4]

The poetry presented at each event did not exist simply in isolation as an opportunity to present a single set to the public but, rather, in conversation with every past and future set that he had performed or would still perform on the same stage. Kellough's personal curatorial mandate can thus be summarized as an expression of variation and an effort to consistently display the versatility of his output and his ability to transform even the same work into different renditions of itself—these are objectives which are clearly audible in the archive with the performance of the same work in different styles and modes over time, as I will soon discuss.

Considering this observation in terms of curatorial relationality, I will argue that Kellough's self-awareness about the serial nature of his presence at Words and Music activates both dialogic and durational curatorial relationalities as they coexist and become interwoven with one another. While the sociability inherent to Bourriaud's relational aesthetics is fundamental to an understanding of Kellough's public-facing curation of his own performances, it is also relevant, in temporal terms, to introduce Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and how, with the reading series, the transformational energy of relation places multiplicity in correspondence with itself, creating a dynamic interplay of parts within an accelerating array of possible exchange. He writes, "poetics of Relation interweaves and no longer projects, that it inscribes itself in a circularity, we are not referring to a circuit, a line of energy curved back on itself … Each of its parts patterns activity implicated in the activity of each other" (32–33). It is difficult, impossible even, to iron out the infinitude of ways in which, dialogically and durationally, Kellough's performances could refer back to themselves, but one could say, with Glissant, that these curatorial relationalities are circuitous without being a circuit and that patterns of parts exist in non-

00:25:40). It chronicles the process of walking the same route between home and metro station over the course of many years and collects scenes and characters along the way and across time.

3 On 21 November 2004, percussionists Zibz Ng, Karl Perralt, and Chimwemwe Miller and saxophonist Jason Selman perform in collaboration with all vocal performers present that night at the Words and Music Show. Rather than one prolonged set, Kellough performs three times over the course of the evening, always in rhythmic conversation with the musicians.

4 On 20 November 2016, Kellough intertwines pre-recorded audio with live voice and a real-time recording that replays itself with warped sound, creating a triple-layered, technologically-mediated vocal performance.

systematic entanglement. In an attempt to linearize this interrelation, one might suggest, however, that the self-curated series at the Words and Music Show is constructed temporally across twenty years, allowing for a narrative of growth and development, as well as a relevant expression of the poetic concerns that linger and define Kellough's work exactly because of their prevalence across so many years. Similarly, a dialogic relationality is discernible in the effort to understand each performance as rubbing up against one another and influencing the events preceding and following it. This dialogism is further present through repetition as much as through dissimilarity, in the reiteration of the same works in varying styles and in the deliberate formulation of each performance as contrastive and distinct from the others. A dialogue by conscious difference thus exists, one which constructs itself both chronologically and through the overlaying of durational time across the temporal span of this self-curated series. That is, consecutive recordings from August and September 2003 are in dialogue with one another to the same extent as recordings from 2003 and 2018.[5]

Similarly, a dialogic relationality is discernible in the effort to understand each performance.

5 In fact, the recordings from 21 September 2003 and 25 November 2018 are in direct conversation with one another in terms of their performance styles and techniques and as a comparison of transformation and development over time. Dialogically, it is clear how the kernel of the earlier presentation's rhythmic, linguistic dismantling has become a vocal flavour that is varied with more linear and narrative modes in the later performance. Durationally, the two performances loop back over fifteen years to harness past experiments in language and sound and to place them in relation to the ability of a more mature poet and performer.

The 2018 performance begins with the rhythmic enunciation and repetition of the letter "P," leading to the eventual spelling of the phrase "people arrived." Initially, the "P" sounds like the more fully voiced "B," while the subsequent "E" and "O" letters are sounded as "eh" and "ah," alongside the syllable "le," creating a period of uncertainty in the listener about what is being spelled out; almost humorously, this initial sounding of letters offers a word closely aligned to "apple." As I will elucidate later in this essay, this aural disorientation through the dismantling of language into orthography is a method that Kellough has developed over time and that he applies frequently and to great effect in both the 21 September 2003 and 25 January 2005 performances of "do you read me?" In 2018, however, the incremental process of building language into meaning grows beyond the introductory phrase into historical statements of arrival to the Americas: "people arrived from Portugal / people arrived from Africa / people arrived from India / people arrived from China / people predated arrival" (01:42:21). This list of people continues with anaphoric repetition till it deliberately breaks down into gibberish again—suggestive of the vast and unenumerable moments of mobility that syncopate human history due to desire, lifestyle, necessity, or violent displacement—before ironing out into the clearly articulated recitation of a long, fifteen-minute poem about historical migrancy, settler colonialism, diasporic descendance, and racist and racialized narratives

Time is folded to create lateral curatorial connections that emphasize the creative and critical project that unfolds at Kellough's self-curated series. While the attempt to systematize relational elements within this series simultaneously coheres and resists its own rationalization, as Glissant might suggest, it is possible to trace a rough trajectory of performance style and development throughout Kellough's series. Bearing in mind the constant caveat of not being fully able to linearize relationalities that keep looping back on themselves, a track dependent on the chronology of the Words and Music Show is discernible nonetheless, one that starts by dismantling language into its smallest units (namely letters of the alphabet), then continues to rebuild them through what Karina Vernon describes as Kellough's "synesthetic poems that work with jazz syncopation, dub-influenced rhyme" (409) and the deployment of syllables and parts of words as eventually reconstituted language on the more continuous level of sentence and poetic line.

To illustrate the warp and weft of these relationalities playing out in Kellough's self-curated series and to consider, first, this dissolution or atomization of language into its raw materials in more concrete detail, I will now turn to a recorded performance that takes place on 21 September 2003. This event features Canadian dub poet extraordinaire Lillian Allen alongside Montreal-based spoken word artists, including Kellough, Vince Baxter, Paula Belina, Brian Highbloom, Cat Kidd, Erin May, Alexis O'Hara, and Padraic Scanlon. Unwittingly, Allen sets the tone for Kellough's work as she presents poems entitled "Language" and "Grammar," stating that one should understand the "English language as metaphor," that language

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that often result from these histories of mobility. As the poem reaches its volume peak with a series of explosive "boo" sounds emphasizing the words "boom" and "boost" (01:53:59), it also systematically stutters to a halt with a series of letters which could either sound "B" as an alliteration of the preceding words or "P" to mark a return to the poem's opening.

While this piece looks back to performance techniques developed almost two decades earlier and offers moments of aural ambiguity similar to that of the earlier poem "do you read me?," it has equally pushed itself into new ground that relies on a rhythmic performance style at the level of the syllable and word rather than the letter or sound. The ability to perform continuously according to the syllable and word further gestures toward a practice that experiments narratively with the sentence and lyrically with the poetic line. Kellough's decision to frame the longer syntactical and semantically stable (as far as that is possible) poem with first the granular construction of words and finally the dissolution into single letters replicates his own trajectory of performance experiments over time in the more condensed environment of a single work. As such, the dialogic relationality activated in the link between the 2003 and 2018 shows is synthesized durationally from a journey of fifteen years within a fifteen-minute piece.

is not only functional but is affective and malleable to the needs and desires of self-expression (recording 2 00:21:35). Independently from Allen, Kellough performs a poem—"do you read me?"—that also centres on language, illegibility as resistance, and identity. During this performance, he rhythmically spells out the question "do you read me?" but in such a way that renders the content of the poem unreadable and almost impossible to comprehend aurally. During our conversation, Kellough recounts, "Ian [Ferrier] invited me to do a performance for children at the Westmount library. I thought, 'What do children like? I don't know. They like spelling, I guess.' So I thought, I'll spell for them. That's where the poem came from" (interview, 27 May 2022). Whereas the children soon lost interest, their parents continued deciphering the words. Like the adults, I too tried to spell out the poem, but despite listening to this poem a myriad of times with numerous dedicated attempts at transcribing it, I have never achieved a full written copy. I have only been able to isolate words like "letter shapes," "translate," and "language"—words which clearly resonate with Allen's "metaphors of language"—while also resisting a comprehensive sense of the words building this poem. Differently phrased, a full understanding of this poem relies exactly on that sense of partial understanding. Although the listener is quickly aware that Kellough's poem functions as an exercise in dictation, the inability to complete the task at hand transforms the representative value of the alphabet into sounds that do not consistently need to cohere. As he states in "Word Sound System 2," a poem performed at the Words and Music Show on 25 October 2009, "you don't have to say the words, you just have to make the sounds" (02:23:29). Similarly, on 25 January 2005, he explains that "at a certain point all our language becomes sound and you can organize sound in patterns and it becomes another language when it becomes musical" (00:52:18).

Words are sounds that carry a different, affective vocabulary of meaning but can also work against semantics through sonic methodologies of repetition, rhythm, and elision. During the 21 September 2003 performance of "do you read me?," for example, single letters are repeated to the point of isolating them as singular, material agents—individually and metrically enunciated—rather than the collaborative building blocks of spelling: "D / D D D / D." The three middle Ds are repeated in quick succession, while the two outer Ds are slow and drawn out, creating a rhythmic pattern. This pattern deliberately reiterates presence through repetition rather than breaking down into parts; however, it also works to focus attention on the single letter for long enough to disorient the listener from the spelling task at hand and the question of how all those Ds might

relate to adjacent letters. Letters are also rhythmically misaligned from the words they are intended to spell out: "U / R" have sonic proximity to one another, for instance, even though they are the last and first letters of the respective words "you" and "read." Blurring the boundaries between orthographic units works to disorient the listener but also to suggest different meanings as "U / R" could also (as homophones or internet-age abbreviations) be read as "you / are." This shift of signification relevantly emphasizes the ontology inherent to the poem's project and its speaker's consistent questioning of the ability to be read at all. Every letter has ambiguity built into it. Each letter could belong to one word, equally as it could belong to another word. It could belong to both words evenly. It could even be a self-sufficient sound opposing the commodification of tone into linguistic meaning.

"oh why you?"

Many poems recur across the Words and Music Show; transforming over time, these sets of versioned poems can be interpreted dialogically and durationally as processes of change and development in relation to themselves. "do you read me?" is performed again at Ferrier's series, for example, placing it in both dialogic and durational relationality with itself. The 2005 Words and Music Show event is singularly hosted at Champlain College, and Kellough appears alongside Ferrier, Alexis O'Hara, and Jill Tanoja. He performs a lengthy twenty-five-minute set and presents himself as confident and charismatic, offering expansive, narrative preambles to the audience, interjecting even during the performance of his poems to provide a more chatty context. He introduces "do you read me?" almost provocatively by telling the audience that "I've got a question for you actually" (00:58:37), immediately giving listeners a clue as to what they are about to hear. He then launches directly into an a cappella, semi-sung, condensed variation on the earlier version of the work, cutting the second half of the poem (mostly undecipherable in the 2003 performance) and limiting the text to the central, titular question instead. Significantly, the answer to the question "do you read me?" is in the affirmative this time, at least in terms of understanding the words spoken. Rather than breaking the words into letters designed to be aurally disorienting, Kellough now syncopates them as syllables.[6] The poem thus begins: "do you re / do you re

6 Kellough's development across time as an individual, rhythmic performer is audible during the 25 October 2009 performance where he experiments not only with breaking words down into their alphabetic roots but both protracting syllables into sounds and contracting words into syllables. He introduces

/ do you read me" (00:58:48). This version does not begin with fragments that need to be rebuilt into or deciphered as words but offers the whole phrase from the start and only then, once the semantic foundation of the piece has been laid, continues to dismantle it into letters. The effect of this shift from sentence to spelling is not so much to confuse the listener as to illustrate the complexity and hidden nuances of language. So, for example, he manipulates the spelling of the word "you" through repetition so that "o" precedes "y," creating the additional question, "o / y" or, homophonically, "oh why?" Adding the letter "u" expands this existential invocation to a second person: "oh why you?" The question "do you read me?" thus echoes itself with an emphasis on the pronoun, developing by extension

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"Word Sound System 2" by suggesting that this piece is "hard to represent orally because it's actually a diagram" (02:23:11). He then proceeds to perform this diagram with the statement, functioning like a guideline for the piece and a manifesto for sound poetry at large, "you don't have to say the word, you just have to make the sound" (02:22:29). This sentence immediately transforms itself into syllable-sized vowel sounds which, the listener soon realizes, is supposed to represent, transform, but also reproduce the recognizable words. For example, "you don't have to say the word" is abstracted to "ooh / oh / ah / uh / eh / uh / ah." A serial, vocalized beat, this semi-recognizable phrase—shimmering like a sonic shadow of the coherent syntax—is a clear dialogic and durational expansion on both performances of "do you read me?" with its project of dismantling language into letters. In this new piece, letters or, more precisely, vowels, stand in for entire words, before developing convexly from sounds back into pithy, shrunken words: "ooh / oh / ah / uh / eh / uh / ah" becomes "ye / dint / hiv / t / say / th / wird," before scrambling itself into varying configurations of the full words: "sound / don't / say // don't / say / sound // make / word // don't / say / word // don't / say / sound // make / word / sound," and so on. Words, sounds, silence, and the omission of words and sounds all collaborate in the construction of a performance style that formalizes a percussive, embodied manipulation of voice as poetic instrument.

Transcribing from the audio recording, I have added the line and stanza breaks according to the rhythm and as they feel discernible. By doing so, I hope to illustrate the rhythmic nature of the performance which keeps the words as metrical as the vowel and contracted versions do. As Kellough quips at a performance of 19 September 2010, "It's kind of an exercise in remixing the poem on the spot, so like, putting the words in different places. It's just not that much fun to read the poem from beginning to end" (recording 2 00:09:47). By incorporating the introductory sentence and building the sounds back into full words, at the 25 October 2009 performance, however, Kellough is flirting with the linearity of reading from "beginning to end." He might be destabilizing a more traditional linguistic project and confronting the ubiquity of language that functions according to self-contained units and syntactical structures, but he is also moving beyond "gibberish" (00:29:57), as he mocks his own performance of 21 November 2004, toward the narrative and/or lyrical sentence and line, as in some of his later work, versions of which are compiled in *Magnetic Equator*.

into "oh why do *you* read me?" This version of the poem is much more interpolative than the first one in which "you" barely seems to apply to the audience at all. Yes, the listeners are included through literal participation as they try to decode the dictation, but they do not embody the addressee of the poem in the same way that the second version seems to challenge the listeners to expose who they are and how they read and interpret the speaker of the poem.

It seems facile, when placing the 2003 and 2005 performances in dialogic relationality with one another, to suggest that the second version is the more mature one. This poem does not only exist in its newest iteration but in every version that precedes it and might follow it in the future. The newest version does not mean that it is *the* version, only that it offers the poet's more recent thinking about that work. In fact, in some ways, the earlier version is the more developed—it is a substantially longer work running for four minutes two seconds rather than the much contracted second version of one minute nineteen seconds; it has a longer script, delving beyond the initial title question to an exploration of language and translation, aligning theme and concept by translating how the dismantling of language itself becomes a language which communicates in a different way from syntactical and semantic linguistic comprehension; it pushes the limits of spelling as performance method, displaying impressive technical skill in the speed and dexterity of the recital but also wearing the audience out as they realize at a certain point that they do not have the stamina to continue transcribing against the odds of sonic fragmentation and aural difficulty. That said, the 2005 version of "do you read me?" learns from the limitations of the earlier version, reconsiders the implications of the title questions, and shifts the poem's focus to a politically engaged motif. As Kellough acknowledges to me:

> Later I realized that it ["do you read me?"] became its own political statement. I'd often thought that sound poetry, at least in Canada, is this thing that predominantly white men do. Where's the political content in it? I think it's a political statement because it's me who's doing it. I feel like that "do you read me?" poem is a poem that I could perform for the rest of my life, in a sense, and the statement would always be there, given who I am performing that kind of work. (interview, 27 May 2022)

In contrast to the linguistic project of the 2003 iteration that hinges on the act of aural reading and decipherment of dismantled language, the later version gives way for a conceptual reading practice that relates to the

That said, the 2005 version of "do you read me?" learns from the limitations of the earlier version, reconsiders the implications of the title questions, and shifts the poem's focus to a politically engaged motif.

speaker, in this case Kellough himself. Directly alluding to his positionality as a Black Canadian man of Guyanese descent, centralized in the literal spotlight of performance, his question could then be reframed as: how do *you* read *me* as performer? How does the audience read Kaie Kellough? Is he being read according to positionality, as sound poetry performer, or as author? The insistence on *reading* places the audience in a lineage of print in relation to the aural piece, but Kellough's embodiment of reading through the poetry reading or performance as form reinstates the act of reading as oral, directing his own performance while resisting the status of creator and expert as linked to the fixity of print tradition. Even in the print version of this poem—as shown in figure 1—the work functions as an audiotext, remains indeterminate, and offers notes for future performances rather than an understanding of a text as preceding vocalization.

"How do you read me as performer?" dramatizes the encounter between performer and audience—in the physical terms of the face-to-face placement of stage in relation to audience seating—but even more so in the words' provocation for the audience to attempt to interpret the positionality of the person standing before them. Here one might think along with Sara Ahmed in terms of the relational space of the "encounter," one which might animate complex and often violent sociohistorical networks that reify difference. As such, she urges a mode of encounter that notices "not *the* other, but the mode of encounter in which I am faced with *an* other" (145, emphasis added). Kellough emphasizes this sense of the particular in terms of his positionality in an essay on the Sir George Williams Computer Center Occupation—an underrepresented student protest that he experiences as a sense of "historical … inheritance" ("Fire in the Mainframe" 31)—"the concern that has always lingered with me, as a person born of Caribbean and Canadian heritage, is how to rework narrative in a way that is reflective of the Caribbean diaspora but also imbued with the realities, sights, sounds, experiences, and (in)humanity of this place" ("Fire in the Mainframe" 28). Admitting the individuality of the encounter between performer and audience heightens the pitch of Kellough's "read[ing]" as the invitation to read him extends beyond gender and race to the particularities of how those traits articulate themselves into his specific personhood. As the audience erupts into applause, Kellough reminds them, "That's a question—I haven't received an answer" (01:00:28). It is, of course, impossible to provide him with an answer. Even if the second performance of this poem has strayed from the earlier poem's project and has transformed itself over time, it remains true to the original idea in terms of prompting interpretation from the audience while the act of

interpretation itself is one that can, by definition, never be achieved—the horizon of what can be gleaned from the act of reading is always one step beyond what the reader infers. In "do you read me?" Kellough literalizes a Judith Butleresque identity performance, asking the audience to read him, but simultaneously withstanding and defying definability. He embodies performance as he himself becomes the illegibility featured in the 2003 version of the poem. In its 2005 transformation the poem is stripped of much of its earlier poetic excess and down to a single question that prompts the audience to decipher the fragments that constitute identity.

Equally compellingly in relation to the curatorial project of this essay and of the broader scope of my research, "do you read me?" dares Kellough to reach beyond his roles as poet, performer, and curator of the series within a series and, conceptually-speaking, to relate directly and personally to the form of the poetry reading itself. In these terms, one might think alongside Irit Rogoff's understanding of "becoming research" as experimental process- and practice-based modes of knowledge production reverberate into scholarly contexts and as lived experience and critical positionality undergird, amplify, and *become* the work created. She writes, for example, that research as constructed through the curatorial field—that is, work that is similar to Kellough's dialogic and durational self-curation of literary performance—"is now the arena in which we negotiate knowledge we have inherited with the conditions of our lives … [I]t is here, in the immersion of conditions, that research transforms from an investigative impulse to the constitution of new realities" (50). If there is an emergent sense of being inherent to the making-of performance over time, the reflexive grammar inherent to *self*-curating allows Kellough to become a representative of the work presented, not through his function as an author but as the structuring referent that makes the performances possible in curatorial terms. He is not only embodying a series within the larger series of the Words and Music Show and accepting the labour of constructing his various performances in relation to both the larger series and to one another as individual events. He is not only entering the sequence of events into dialogic and durational relationalities with itself, allowing the performances to unfold intentionally across time with discernible reference to one another through repetition and similarity, equally as through deliberate difference and transformation. He is also unraveling the genre of the poetry reading with this piece—taking apart the words of the poem themselves and personally entering the fragments of those words through their vocalization, his physical presence in performance, and in the attempt to perform himself as readable. He offers

the poetry reading to the audience as a self-referential form that embeds the practice of interpretation and critical il/legibility into the structured performance sequence of oral poems in a public-facing venue. "do you read me?" activates the audience from listeners to readers—or complicates listening as reading (or complicates listening as writing even, alluding again to Barthes's ubiquitous active, *writerly* mode of interpretation)—so that the action at stake is shared among everyone present in the room. With this heightened level of social engagement from everyone involved in the Words and Music Show, the poetry reading as form animates Bourriaud's understanding of relational aesthetics as a critical space that relies on experiential reciprocity and exchange. The fact that this sociability hinges on Kellough's self-curatorial embodiment of poetry in performance points to a dynamic field of curatorial relationality that is simultaneously directed by Kellough's creative decision-making and shaping of literary events over time and is symbolic of those events' lineage as an activation and interrelation of literary community as an unstable but continuous process of becoming. Kellough reads, or rather recites, at a poetry reading series while constantly prefiguring the question of readability inherent both to the genre of literary event and to that performance itself. He thus simultaneously strengthens and destabilizes the project and genre of the poetry reading, as well as the acts of reading and being read, in the process.

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