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from nothingness and going:
Jackson Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Jennifer Bewerse

Committee in charge:

   Professor Charles Curtis, Chair
   Professor Anthony Burr
   Professor Susan Narucki
   Professor Sheldon Nodelman
   Professor Victoria Petrovich

2017

The Dissertation of Jennifer Bewerse is approved, and is acceptable in quality and

form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

from nothingness and going:
Jackson Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries

by

Jennifer Bewerse

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Charles Curtis, Chair

In October of 1960, Jackson Mac Low created a system for generating poems called Asymmetries. The system evolved from his earlier chance poems to create a situation where poems could be "self-generating." Over time, the system itself evolved, generating poems of endlessly varying content, each with its own self-contained features that could be translated into performance. These features were described in detail by Mac Low in his instructions for performance. However, like his poem-generating system, these instructions also evolved over time.

Mac Low's Asymmetries can be approached from many vantage points: as a reader, listener, performer; through a solo performance or simultaneity; through the original or evolved instructions; or through Mac Low's copious documentation. Exploring these vantage points generates an evolution in one's understanding of the poems and their openness or limits in the context of the many formats in which they can be realized.

Where are the limits to Mac Low's extraordinarily contingent compositional and performance scenarios? How do Mac Low's countless performance scenarios impact the work's identity? Mac Low's creative processes pulled at the boundaries of the poem/score and show how a work can exist as a complex and evolving system that can have both clear boundaries and limitless possibilities.

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING MAC LOW

Jackson Mac Low's work is generally categorized as chance poetry or collage by observers who have only experienced his work by reading it from the page. However, by compositionally enacting his lifestyle of Zen Buddhism and politics of pacifist-anarchism through chance, and indeterminate and simultaneous performance, Jackson Mac Low created works whose ability to be transmuted through generations of scenarios call the boundaries of poem and score into question.

Mac Low descends from a long line of performing poets and poetry intended for performance – the poem as score. Before the 1950's he wrote many experimental verbal works influenced by Kurt Schwitters, modernist poets like Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore, and Dadaist works.[1] One of Mac Low's earliest influences was the work of Gertrude Stein, which he read in elementary school in the 1930's and heard later at the University of Chicago in the 1940's.

> [her recordings] certainly influenced my delivery – especially her
> 'downright' way of saying her prose writings and poems. And when I
> began working with chance operations in the middle 50's, the fact that
> some of the results affected me like some of her works was an
> important reason why I continued using such methods.[2]

These poets' work destabilized temporal and narrative conventions and explored the word's ability to shift from an object with semantic meaning to a sound. Mac Low's

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[1]Jackson Mac Low, *The Effect of John Cage and His Work on Contemporary American Literature*, 1981-2, MS 180 Box 67 Folder 7, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[2] Gil Ott, "Dialog: Interviews and Correspondence," ed. Gil Ott, *Paper Air* 2, no. 3 (1980): 24.

artistic output also explored these ideas, but his particular contributions to the poem as score are directly traced through his adoption of chance methods, which he first encountered through John Cage.

Cage's use of indeterminacy, non-standard instruments and sounds, and his philosophical ideas made him one of the most influential composers of the 20th century, but it was Cage's use of chance that directly inspired Mac Low's own work. In a letter to Brian Ferneyhough, Mac Low describes his early relationship with Cage in great detail.

> [Cage] played the *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano at Columbia University in 1948… [and I] became personally acquainted with him in 1953. He moved to a community in Rockland County, north of NYC, that had been started by two anarchist pacifist friends of mine, Paul and Vera Williams … After a year or so of intermittent discussion and argumentation with Cage when I visited him and my other friends in the country, I made some crude chance-operational experiments with music for piano sometime in 1954…[3]

Between 1957 and 1960 Mac Low also occasionally attended Cage's course in experimental composition at The New School for Social Research, during which Mac Low presented his work and met likeminded artists such as Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Toshi Ichiyanagi, and eventually Richard Maxfield, when Maxfield began teaching the class in 1959.[4] Both Mac Low and Cage attended Dr. D.T. Suzuki's Columbia University lectures on Zen Buddhism, and Cage's

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[3] Jackson Mac Low, *Reply Letter to Brian Ferneyhough 12-13-90*, 1990, MS 180 Box 15 Folder 12, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[4] Ibid.

adoption of chance to evade the ego and present sounds "unburdened by composers' subjectivity" informed Mac Low's application of chance to poetry.[5]

Beyond his use of chance, Mac Low attests to Cage's general influence in the article *The Effect of John Cage and His Work on Contemporary American Literature*, saying "More than any other artist of this century, his work has been *emancipatory*. It has helped countless other artists do and make things they'd never have dared to make – even if they'd have thought of them – without the example of his own daring."[6]

Mac Low's earliest and most well-known chance poems are his *5 Biblical Poems,* written in 1954-55. In these first chance poems, Mac Low used dice to select "linguistic events" and bracketed spaces, which could be performed as silences.[7] Though they are often studied as exemplars of Mac Low's performable chance poetry, Mac Low continued to develop his chance methods beyond the *5 Biblical Poems* in search of a form that could be "self-generating" and whose performance could be derived through each poem's intrinsic features, rather than an external, interlocking system.[8] In September, 1960, Mac Low found his self-generating form with the invention of Asymmetries.[9]

Appropriately, John Cage offers the simplest description of Mac Low's Asymmetries with one of his mesostic poems.

[5] Ibid.
[6] Jackson Mac Low, *The Effect of John Cage and His Work on Contemporary American Literature*.
[7] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260: The First Section of a Series of 501 Performance Poems* (New York: Printed Editions, 1980), 244.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 245.

```
                                        asyMmetries
                                          Are
          typewriting transformed into musiC

                                        siLences
                                         sOunds
                                         Words
```

Figure 1.1: John Cage's Mac Low Mesostic[10]

Mac Low constructed his Asymmetries by translating his daily reading practice into a system for generating scores in a way that transformed typography into dynamics, letters into tones, blank space into silence, and phonemes into proportional rhythmic structures. With the addition of performance instructions that include ten performance methods and the possibility for simultaneous performance, these poems can assume a number of closely intertwined forms.

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[10] Ibid., back cover.

CHAPTER 2

AN EVOLVING SYSTEM

Jackson Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries can be understood as an

evolutionary process spanning several generations. Throughout this evolution the

Asymmetry takes different forms: a system, a written poem, or a performance. This

process can be outlined as a kind of family tree, where each generation is a new form

of an Asymmetry.

Idealogical Influences
Budhissm, Taoism
Pacifist-Anarchism

Early Influences in Music
John Cage, Morton Feldman

Early Influences in Poetry
Stéphane Mallarmé, Kurt Schwitters
Gerturde Stein, Ezra Pound, M.C. Richards

Early Chance and Performance Poetry
Stanzas for Iris Lezak, 5 Biblical Poems,
Peaks and Llamas,
From Headline Glass Material Buildings

Asymmetry System

Source Text

Performance Instructions
(1960 or 1980 Version)

Printed Numbered Asymmetries

Other Works or
Other Asymmetries
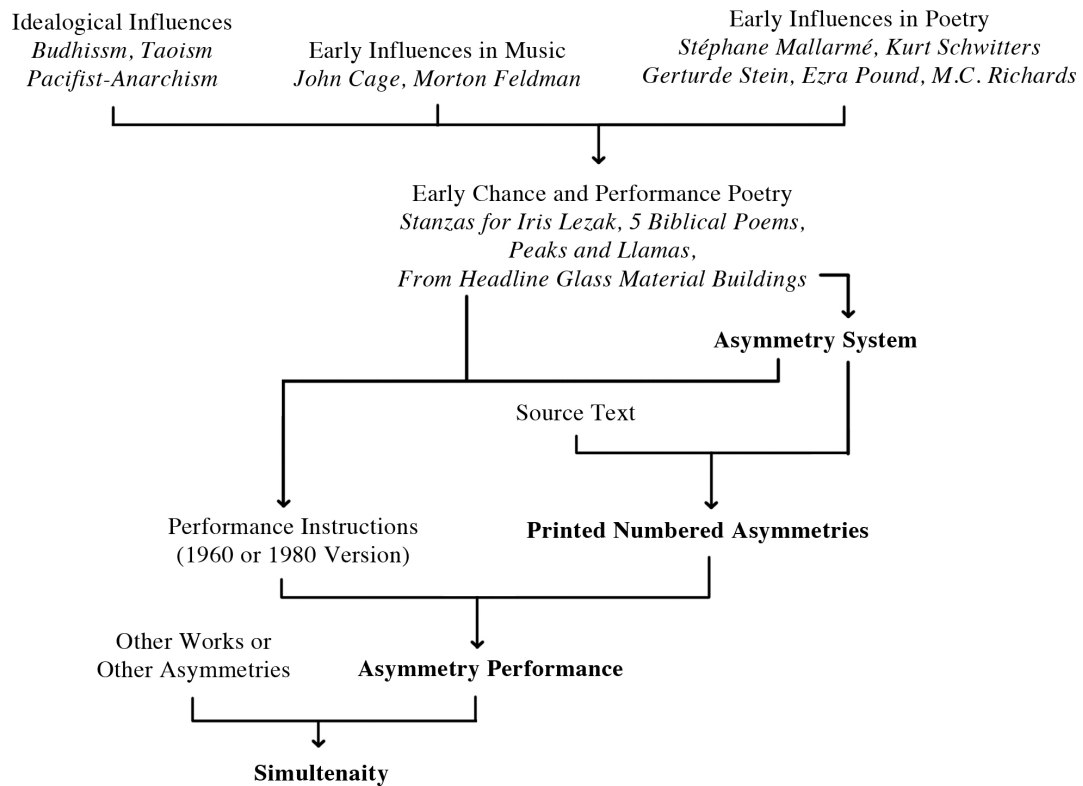
Asymmetry Performance

Simultenaity

Figure 2.1: Asymmetry Family Tree

In each generation, the Asymmetry is combined with an outside text to reach

its next form. All forms of an Asymmetry can evolve and re-form – microevolutions

with cascading effects in the Numbered Asymmetry family tree. As Cage described in

5

his article *Music and particularly Silence in the Work of Jackson Mac Low*, "All of Mac Low's work is moving towards a single work, always the most recent one."[11]

As an Asymmetry System, the Asymmetry is a container or filtration system. Source text passes through the system and a Printed Numbered Asymmetry emerges. The process is "self-generating"[12] in that, once it begins, its rules generate a complete poem ready for print or performance with no need for further contributions from the composer. However, for Mac Low, each realization of his Asymmetry System was an experiment whose rules could be changed. Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries were written sequentially between October 1960 and April 1961. Because of this, their evolution can be examined linearly and specific developments in the system can be traced.

With very few exceptions, all versions of Mac Low's Asymmetry System used an acrostic reading-through process based on an "index word."[13] Combining both systematic and impulsive chance,[14] Mac Low began his poems by selecting a source text from his daily reading[15] and an index word within the text "chosen intuitively, arbitrarily, or by chance method."[16] He then applied his reading-through process

---

[11] John Cage, "Music and Particularly Silence in the Work of Jackson Mac Low," *Paper Air 2*, no. 3 (1980): 38.
[12] Jackson Mac Low, *Poetry for Instruments*, 1982, MS 180 Box 69 Folder 6, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Jackson Mac Low, *The Poetics of Chance and the Politics of Spontaneous Simultaneity, or the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 1975, MS 180 Box 69 Folder 5, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[15] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260,* 247.
[16] Ibid.

wherein the words of the poem were found as an acrostic using the sequence of letters in the index word. This process is illustrated clearly in his *Asymmetry 87*.

Do opposite

opposite **p**receding **p**receding **o**pposite **s**tructure
influence **t**ransfigured **e**lement

Figure 2.2: *Asymmetry 87* reconstruction from *Asymmetries 1-260* By Jackson Mac Low[17]
Colors are added to demonstrate the acrostic spelling.

Using the letters in the index word, "Do," Mac Low read through his source text to find words whose initial letters spell "Do": "Do opposite." Once "Do" had been spelled in the first stanza, the second stanza began a vertical spelling of "Do," which also resulted in "Do opposite" in this case. "opposite" becomes the first word in the poem's second stanza and is spelled out to complete the stanza, resulting in "opposite preceding preceding opposite structure influence transfigured element." Because both the vertical and horizontal acrostic spellings have been completed, the poem is finished. This is one of three conditions – completing the spelling process, the absence of a word that begins with a needed letter, or reaching the end of the page on which the poem is being transcribed – that ended the Asymmetry System process, resulting in a Printed Numbered Asymmetry.[18]

Many of Mac Low's experiments with his Asymmetry System can be traced in his 260 published Asymmetries and divided into roughly four periods of experimentation: Extensive Experimentation (*Asymmetry 1-85*), Moderate

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[17] Ibid., 95.
[18] Ibid., 249.

Experimentation (*Asymmetry 86-139*), the Standardized Repeating Form (*Asymmetry 140-229*), and the Repeating Word String Form (*Asymmetry 230-260*).

During Mac Low's first period of Extensive Experimentation, he solidified many of his Asymmetry System rules, including acrostic spelling and spacing rules. By *Asymmetry 25* word strings (as opposed to single words) were regularly included to acrostically spell the index word. All of the words and word strings found by the Asymmetry System process were incorporated into an Asymmetry with their surrounding punctuation. This punctuation activated the system's rules for spacing to result in Asymmetries that include three types of blank space: left indentations, right indentations, and empty lines. By *Asymmetry 65,* Mac Low almost always spaced the words in his poems according to consistent rules based on punctuation. Whenever a word included parentheses, quotation marks, commas, colons, semi-colons, hyphens, or ending punctuation, the following words would be notated on a separate line (after an additional empty line in the case of ending punctuation). For example, in *Asymmetry 188*, the hyphen in "unconscious" results in a line break, and the period after "hand." results in a line break followed by an empty line. When a line is broken, the following words are placed horizontally in the same place as if there had been no line break. So, for example, there is an empty line plus the two spaces that would normally follow ending punctuation between "hand." and "accent."

```
Thus "hand."

                    uncon-
                           scious spirit

"hand."

              accent.
```

Figure 2.3: *Asymmetry 188* reconstruction from *Asymmetries 1-260* by Jackson Mac Low[19]

The margins of a Printed Numbered Asymmetry are determined by its rightmost and leftmost letters, but during the Asymmetry System process, a poem's limits were the edge of the page onto which the poem was initially transcribed: Mac Low's personal notebook where the handwritten manuscripts for all Numbered Asymmetries Were Created If fulfilling the acrostic spelling process resulted in text that didn't fit on one line of his notebook, Mac Low wrapped the text back towards the left margin of the page. To maintain the vertical acrostic spelling of the index word, only the initial word in each stanza was placed at the left margin. Words that wrapped across lines often aligned with the second word in a stanza. For example, in *Asymmetry 87* spelling "opposite" wraps onto a second line that begins beneath "preceding."[20]

Some spacing rules were inconsistently applied throughout the Numbered Asymmetries: wrapped lines would sometimes cascade so that the first new line would align with the second word in the stanza, the second new line would align with the third word in the stanza, and so on, Mac Low was inconsistent in how many empty

---

[19] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 176.
[20] See Figure 2.2

lines would follow ending punctuation, and furthermore, spacing mistakes were

accepted.

> If after I'd set a poem aside, I discovered a mistake in working it out, I
> usually accepted the mistake-making as an auxiliary chance operation
> and kept the poem as it was, mistake and all. [21]

Even so, the solidification of spacing rules based on punctuation was an important

landmark in the Asymmetry System's evolution. *Asymmetry 65* marks the point where

the internal rules of the text could self-generate the spacing of the poem with minimal

interference from the poet, the beginning of what I have named the Standardized Form

of the Asymmetry System.

Near the end of Mac Low's first period of Extensive Experimentation,

Asymmetry 79 introduced a rule where the same words are always used to spell

specific letters in the acrostic spelling process. This results in words that are often

repeated fairly extensively. The sonic shape of these words foregrounds their musical

and rhythmic quality, an effect similar to other artists' use of musicalized text such as

Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*[22] and Samuel Beckett's *Not I*.[23] Often, the repetition

also generates a connotative shading of the text through shifting proximal association.

For example, in *Asymmetry 157*, "assembly same same excited" casts the word

"excited" with a sense of irony or boredom, while "unity things excited" has a more

hopeful quality. While syntactically abstract, these strategies – structural repetition

and contextual connotation – are hallmarks of poetic and musical writing and resulted

---

[21] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260,* 246.
[22] Steve Reich, *It's Gonna Rain*, Nonesuch, 2005, CD.
[23] Samuel Beckett, "Not I," in *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 213-224.

in what I have named the Standardized Repeating Form, an Asymmetry System that dominated the following three periods of experimentation.

In his second period of Moderate Experimentation, Mac Low reduced his experiments to variations on three main forms, of which the Standardized Form is the progenitor: the Standardized Form (and its sister Standardized Repeating Form), Environmental Asymmetries, and Word String Asymmetries (with and without repeated words/word strings). All of these follow the basic acrostic and spacing rules of the Standardized Form, but add variations. For example, Environmental Asymmetries use index words acrostically spelled using the same standardized spacing rules as the Standardized Form, but the word source is Mac Low's observation of his surroundings, not another text.

Some experiments from Mac Low's first two periods were completely abandoned. For example, *Asymmetry 2/2* is the only instance where a poem doesn't use an index word, instead spelling words completely separate from the poem. However, many experiments led to desirable features, which Mac Low retained and developed over time. In Mac Low's final two periods, he used two types of Asymmetry Systems almost exclusively for long sequences of poems: the Standardized Repeating Form followed by the Repeating Word String Form. Accounting for 121 of the 260 published Asymmetries, these two periods can be considered the most mature, evolutionarily stable, and fully realized versions of Mac Low's Asymmetry System.

Both of these forms rely on a strict application of the acrostic spelling process and assign specific words or word strings to each letter in the spelling process, resulting in repetition. In the Standardized Repeating Form, the vast majority of the acrostics are spelled using single words or short word phrases. Spacing is ruled by punctuation as in the Standardized Form. When describing how Numbered Asymmetries are formed and function, this is the fundamental Asymmetry System to which Mac Low always refers.

The Repeating Word String Form is very similar to the Standardized Repeating Form, the acrostic is spelled almost exclusively with word strings. "Word strings"[24] were intact sequences of words that Mac Low found in his source text. Unlike single words, which were found solely by chance in the acrostic spelling process, the additional words in a word string were chosen intuitively and impulsively by Mac Low. Extensive use of his word strings can be found in *Asymmetry 259*.

---

[24]Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 248.

two the telephone rang.

                                went
                                        on:
                                                "**o**ut here for
        whore-
                houses."

went
        on:
                e x p a n d   a   l i t t l e
                                                out in the
country,
                nose,
                        two the telephone rang.

"**out** here for
                whore-
                        houses."

                                "**u**p two sons
        out here in a decent way,"
                                        two the
        telephone rang.

Figure 2.4: *Asymmetry 259* reconstruction from *Asymmetries 1-260* by Jackson Mac Low[25]
Colors are added to demonstrate the acrostic spelling.

---

[25] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. La Monte Young (Bronx, NY: L. Young & J. Mac Low, 1963), 71.

In this Asymmetry, all of the poem's units consist of word strings, with the exception of the single word, "nose":

> two the telephone rang.
> went on:
> *"out here for whore-houses."*
> e x p a n d a l i t t l e out in the country,
> nose
> *"up two sons out here in a decent way,"*

Figure 2.5: List of Words and Word Strings from *Asymmetry 259*

In the Repeating Word String Form stylistic continuity is dramatically increased as the Asymmetry takes on more of the characteristics of its source text. For example, *Asymmetry 259* contains a strong sense of isolation and vernacular, so much so that it would be conceivable to identify the source text as discussing pioneering or prairie life in the Americas. The decision to include word strings is a clear example of Mac Low's authoring intuitions and their stylistic effects on his Asymmetries.

Which Asymmetry Systems survived the evolution process points to another important aspect of authorship in Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries. Though Mac Low did not author individual words within his poems (with the arguable exception of the Environmental Asymmetries), he did carefully author his Asymmetry System, choosing which variations to pursue extensively, as is demonstrated in his last two periods of Numbered Asymmetry composition. These decisions would probably be described by Mac Low as "impulsive chance," but actually, they belie the illusion of chance as a truly objective process that could bypass the ego.

Though the Asymmetry System and resulting Numbered Asymmetries are distinct entities, tracing the Asymmetry System's evolution shows that they influenced each other – understanding one requires understanding the other. Though the Asymmetry System ruled individual Numbered Asymmetries, each Asymmetry had the potential to change the system, and the system is only visible through the Asymmetries. Still, the Asymmetry System exists independently, able to produce an infinite number of Asymmetries, which, in turn, can create an infinite number of performances.

CHAPTER 3

FROM THE PAGE TO PERFORMANCE

Transforming an Asymmetry from a page-based poetry object into a

performance involves the application of extensive Performance Instructions provided

by Mac Low. Two versions of these instructions exist: a three-page document from

1961 in La Monte Young's *An Anthology of Chance Operations*,[26] and an extended,

13-page version in Mac Low's 1980 book, *Asymmetries 1-260*.[27] The most obvious

difference between the two Performance Instructions is their length; the 1980

Instructions are more than four times as long as the 1961 Instructions. For the most

part, Mac Low expanded these instructions to be more explicit. For example, both

instructions introduce the Asymmetries by explaining that they were created with

chance systems, but the 1980 instructions go on to describe many of these systems in

detail. At their core, both sets of instructions describe how a poem's spacing should

translate into duration and how typography should be interpreted as dynamics. Mac

Low calls this foundational set of instructions the Basic Method, which "is the one to

be followed when all or most of the others are ruled out by circumstances."[28]

3.1   The Basic Method

Duration in an Asymmetry performance is directly related to the poem's

position on the page – including both text and blank space – and is measured by words

and parts of words read out loud or silently. Prior to the Asymmetries, Mac Low

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[26] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, 69-70, 73.
[27] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xiii-xxv.
[28] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations,* 69.

experimented with different methods of measuring duration in his poetry, including measuring silence with a flashing light, a conductor, silent counting, or by using pulses agreed upon by the performers in advance.[29] A notable precursor to the Asymmetries, Mac Low's *5 Biblical Poems* used event boxes to represent silence, during which the performer should measure the silence represented by each box as "equal in duration to any word the reader chooses."[30] While these methods could somewhat predictably control the duration of silence, they failed to achieve a direct relationship between the spoken words, blank space on the page, and performed silence.

Mac Low first encountered the idea of measuring silence through silent reading in Mary Caroline (MC) Richards' poem, "Hands… birds." After hearing John Cage play a recording of Richards reading the poem, Mac Low decided to publish "Hands… birds" in an anarchist magazine. But, having only heard the poem as a recording, Mac Low was unsure of the poem's spacing and wasn't able to contact Richards in time to confirm it. He guessed correctly that it was the length of a 14-line sonnet where the first word was "Hands," the last word was "bird," and the middle was blank space read silently. Richards confirmed Mac Low's guess later in a 1962 letter.

> I found I had guessed correctly. However MC never told me about her
> method of 'reading the spaces as silences' described in the present
> letter of June 6, 1962, until she wrote me this letter. I thought of it
> myself while spacing the poem for <u>Resistance</u>. Thus it could be called

---

[29] Jackson Mac Low, Notebook, 1959, MS 180 Box 1 Folder 7, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.

[30] Jackson Mac Low, *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces, 1955-2002* (New York: Granary Books, 2005), 18.

both a coincidence and parallel invention that made her spacing correspond with mine…[31]

In the Asymmetries, Mac Low was able to develop his own method for performing silences loosely based on his *Hands... birds* guess. In this Basic Method, he instructs the performer to measure blank spaces as "equal in duration to the time it [would] take to read aloud the words printed anywhere above or below them."[32] Both versions of the Performance Instructions provide a schematic to illustrate this process.

In the following recreation of Mac Low's 1961 schematic, *Asymmetry 147* is presented with its original, printed spacing on the left and with its blank spaces measured by words on the right, where spacing words are grey and original printed words are black.

```
                                    new enjoy work.ins. K one young.
  new enjoy work.                   new enjoy work. ns. K one young.
                                    new enjoy work.ins. K one young.
                                    new enjoy work.ins. K one young.
                                    new enjoy work.ins. K one young.
  enjoy not Jacobins.               enjoy not Jacobins. K one young.
                                    enjoy not Jacobins. K one young.
              one young.            enjoy not Jacobins. K one young.
                                    enjoy not Jacobins. K one young.
  work.                             work. not Jacobins. K one young.
                                    work. not Jacobins. K one young.
        one re-                     work.  one re- ins. K one young.
            forms                   work.  one re forms K one young.
                K.                  work.  one re-forms K.one young.
                                    work.  one re-forms K.one young.
```

Figure 3.1: *Asymmetry 147* reconstruction from the 1963 Asymmetry Instructions released in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*.[33]

[31] Jackson Mac Low, *M.C. Richards Correspondence: 6 June*, 1962, MS 180 Box 31 Folder 15, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[32] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations,* 69.
[33] Ibid.

Many realizations of the schematic are possible, as Mac Low acknowledges in both sets of instructions,[34] but whatever the realization, the entire structure of the poem – both spoken and silent durations – is measured through the syllabic rhythm of the words in the poem, not an outside pulse or text. As a result, if the words are read more slowly, the silences are proportionally longer, and if the words are read more quickly, the silences are proportionately shorter. This creates an intrinsic proportional relationship between the spoken words and silences that is similar to the rhythmic structure used in Western Classical music notation, where a change in tempo does not alter the proportional relationships of the rhythms.

To shape the dynamics of a performance, Mac Low uses a system of rules based on features of his found text. This is a substantial development from Mac Low's early attempts to incorporate dynamics into his performable poetry, such as in the 1958-59 poem *Peaks & Lamas*. In *Peaks & Lamas,* dynamics are extrinsically generated through secondary chance procedures and are notated using traditional musical markings like *pp*, *f*, or *mf* placed to the left of each line of poetry.[35]

---

[34] Ibid*.,* 70.
[35] Jackson Mac Low, *Doings*, 24.

```
A - 1

Initial Silence:  0

f       weather degree letters frontiers illnesses      49
pp      acts      22
ff      song bed      29
p       col proportion word Sunday load ridge path descent Basháhr      41
m       domination      91


A - 2

pp      current glacier Odsung skyline tone      4
ff      valley      24
p       care things      41
pp      pitch left archers speck miles fact ledge rate one      45
p       prejudice      55
```

Figure 3.2: Excerpt from *Peaks & Lamas*[36]

In the Asymmetries, dynamics are determined by the typographic features and accompanying punctuation of Mac Low's found text. Words with emphatic typography and punctuation, like capitalization, boldface, italics, and exclamation marks, are read more loudly or shouted.[37] Words in enclosing punctuation, like parentheses, brackets, or quotation marks, are read more quietly or whispered.[38] By connecting dynamic decisions to the typography of his Asymmetries, Mac Low allows the results of his reading-through compositional process to generate their own intrinsic dynamics.

Because these spacing-duration and typographic-dynamic rules are determined by the intrinsic characteristics of each poem, each poem can be realized from one set of performance rules without further composer/author supervision or intervention; the basic performance characteristics are self-generating just as Mac Low's Asymmetry

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xv.
[38] Ibid.

System self-generated poems. Mac Low's Performance Methods expand this scenario so that poems can include other musical features.

3.2   The 1961 Performance Methods

Mac Low's original set of Seven Performance Methods were created in 1961 and published in La Monte Young's *Anthology of Chance Operations* in 1963.[39] In these methods, Mac Low permutated combinations of words, tones, and silences resulting in the following seven methods.

1. **Words and Silences (Basic Method):** Printed words are read out loud and spacing words are read silently
2. **Words Only:** Printed words are read out loud and include silences only for breath and punctuation as in prose (blank spaces are ignored)
3. **Silence Only:** All words (both the printed and spacing words) are read silently
4. **Words, Tones, and Silences:** Printed words are read out loud, spacing words to the right of printed text are read silently while a tone is played, and all other spacing words are read silently
5. **Tone Only:** One tone is played while all words (both the printed and spacing words) are read silently
6. **Tones and Silence:** All words are read silently, and tones are played during the silent reading of spacing words to the right of printed words
7. **Words and Tones:** Printed words are read out loud, and spacing words are read silently while a tone is played

Figure 3.3: Original Seven Performance Methods Descriptions

In a note at the end of his 1961 performance instructions, Mac Low also includes an Eighth Method, "first used in July 1961"[40] shortly after Mac Low completed the 501 Numbered Asymmetries.

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[39] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations,* 69.
[40] Ibid.*,* 70.

8. Spoken and Whispered Words: Printed words are
read out loud, and spacing words are whispered

Figure 3.4: Eighth Performance Method Description

In all methods except Words Only and Spoken and Whispered Words, spacing words are performed with "silent reading," but they aren't simply read silently as one would read a book. Instead, they should be read silently at the same rate it would take to say the words out loud.[41] This results in a much slower form of silent reading, which maintains the proportional relationship between the spoken words and blank spaces.

Tones are freely chosen from letters in the immediately preceding printed text (and in the case of the Tone Only Method, any letter from the entire printed text) that are also a German pitch name: A, C, D, E, F, G, B, and H. Except for B and H (which must always be performed as B♭ and B respectively), all letters can be chromatically altered so that, for example, C can be C♮, C♯, or C♭. Tones can be performed with microtonal inflections and in any octave.[42]

3.3   Interpreting the 1961 Performance Instructions

These foundational instructions are where I first entered into Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetry family tree. In 2011, I selected Mac Low's Asymmetries for my focus of study in a course on *An Anthology of Chance Operations*.[43] My first impression of the carefully described instructions was that the Asymmetries should be

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[41] Ibid., 69.
[42] Ibid.
[43] La Monte Young, editor/compiler, *An Anthology of Chance Operations...* (La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, 1963).

performed with strict accordance to Mac Low's rules in an effort to aurally reconstruct

the visual form of each poem. This interpretation stemmed from Mac Low's only

clues for performance style and aesthetic, which described realizations of his

Indeterminate Numbered Asymmetries.

> For readers who are not poets or composers and who have not
> undergone the discipline of composition by chance methods or other
> "objective" (as against "ego-centered or even "intuitional") methods,
> the improvisational way of realizing these poems is beset with perils,
> not the least of which are cuteness, corny dramatics and other types of
> posturing. For this reason, the reader who realizes indeterminate
> asymmetries, whether for public performance or his private pleasure,
> [would] do well to think thrice before rejecting the chance method in
> favor of improvisation. In any case, he [would] do well to try both
> methods if he has the time.[44]

Mac Low's emphasis on serious "objective" performance pointed towards a

nineteenth and twentieth century definition of music that oriented it as a musical

object, emphasizing the score and situating performance as a repeatable object

transparent to the score. As Tanja Orning observes in her article *Pression – a*

performance study:

> The concept of the work itself is central here, with the performance
> viewed as secondary... The loyal performer becomes transparent or
> even invisible as he or she is only a medium for the music... In this
> context, it is as though all the information the performer needs is to be
> found in the score, so there is no need for an individual interpretation,
> just an execution or a rendering of what is already there.[45]

In my final paper for the course, I described a Mac Lowian performance as a serious

conveyance of precise measurements for each poem.

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[44] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations,* 72.
[45] Tanja Orning, "Pression - a Performance Study," *Music Performance Research* 5 (December 31, 2012): 17, accessed November 19, 2014, http://mpr-online.net/Issues/Volume%205%20[2012]/Vol5_Contents.html.

> While such careful consideration of the detail of performance may seem excessive, Mac Low clearly expects such mastery and seriousness in the performance of his Asymmetries. When all seven of the methods of performance are available, a dice is thrown to determine which method should be used. The performer must be a master of them all, which, due to the construction of the methods, is to say that the performer must be a complete master of the words to be spoken and to fill the spaces in Asymmetries.[46]

Between December, 2011 and July, 2014, I gave three solo performances of Mac Low's Asymmetries, which reflected this understanding. I aspired to give an accurate, repeatable performance reflective of the score with special attention to silently reading at the exact pace of my reading out loud. In 2014, I went so far as to create an audio "metronome" of *Asymmetry 259,* where I recorded myself saying each of the words in the poem once, then copied and edited those words together to create an aural version of Mac Low's Asymmetry schematic realization. Each word was said with an identical pace and vocal inflection, so I could practice reading silently at the same pace as reading out loud and could express each word without any contextual emphasis while my "metronome" objectively guided my reading.

In October, 2014 I gave my first simultaneous performance of Mac Low's Asymmetries joined by Rachel Beetz.[47] Our approach remained the same, to objectively and consistently read poems without inserting any personal preference or egoistic influence on the resulting sound. The effect of this interpretation was, to my taste, beautiful. Mac Low's words would circulate in a performance space with tones

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[46] Jennifer Bewerse, *Jackson Mac Low's Asymmetries*, December 8, 2011, Unpublished Essay for University of California San Diego Seminar on An Anthology, Jennifer Bewerse's Private Archives, Los Angeles.
[47] See Appendix A

and silences. Our individual renditions were concrete, but the exact alignments between her and my readings were unpredictable. As performers, we experienced the unfolding of the work on equal footing as the audience, and unpredictable alignments or associations between words and tones would spontaneously arise throughout the performance.

I began to discover other parts of Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetry family tree while I explored Mac Low's Archives at the University of San Diego, Special Collections Library. Reading Mac Low's essays, which described how his lifestyle of Buddhism and politics of pacifist-anarchism connected to his work, undermined my initial interpretation of the score as object and pointed to a more social and political orientation for performing the Asymmetries.

CHAPTER 4

MAC LOW'S POETICS OF CHANCE AND SIMULTANEITY

Chance manifested itself in Mac Low's work in several ways: objective chance composition; performance indeterminacy through performer choice and environmental sounds that might occur during silence; and simultaneous performance. His decision to include chance in these ways directly related to his lifestyle and politics, and he was explicit about how they interlaced.

> Underlying chance compositions are the Taoist ideal of <u>Wu-Wei</u> (non-action, letting The Way do it); the Buddhist conception of egolessness; the Zen Buddhist realization that Nirvana (enlightenment) & Samsara (the ordinary round of life, death & rebirth) the universal & the individual & the subjective & the objective, are not 2 & that close attention to <u>any</u> phenomenon or experience can lead to the abrupt realization of this not-twoness; the Kegon Buddhist realization that all individuals unobstructedly interpenetrate & are interpenetrated by each other & the whole; & the <u>I Ching</u>'s assumption of the significance underlying or embodied in any simultaneously occurring events.[48]

In Mac Low's Wu-Wei influenced chance, he used what he called "nonintentional" or "objective" chance where, by using a pre-determined chance system, the poet "does not consciously or 'unconsciously' *select* the word, but as accurately as possible, *finds* it."[49] By removing conscious choice, Mac Low attempts to avoid action (Wu-Wei non-action) and evade the ego (Zen Buddhist egolessness). Through nonintentional chance, Mac Low hoped to discover what might result from

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[48] Jackson Mac Low, *Poetry, Chance, Silence, &c.*, 1961, MS 180 Box 68 Folder 3, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[49] Jackson Mac Low, "Something about the Writings of John Cage (1991)," in *Writings about John Cage*, by Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 292.

the absence of habit or taste, and to present material to the readers' bare attention, unburdened by his own preferences.[50]

Over time, Mac Low became less confident in chance's ability to elude the ego, but still recognized something "spooky" resulted from his chance procedures.[51] He credits this with "acausal connection," a term he borrows from Carl Jung that describes the philosophy underpinning the *I Ching*.[52]

> I myself think that if it is a connection and it does something, it's some kind of cause but it's different from the time-linear cause going from past to future. It's across any present, between any two things coexisting. … And I think that one thing that systematic chance does allow… is for something to happen on that synchronous plane.[53]

Mac Low encountered the *I Ching* in the early 1950's through the Wilhelm-Baynes translation.[54] While he didn't use the *I Ching* extensively to generate chance within his work (a major exception being *The Marrying Maiden* named after a hexagram in the *I Ching* and produced by The Living Theater with music by John Cage in 1960-61),[55] his attitude towards the results of chance was influenced by the *I Ching*'s assumption that any two events occurring at the same time are connected.

Silence was integral to creating this synchronous plane in Mac Low's chance poems. Extended silences enhanced the ability of the poem to allow "the poet, his sources, his audience, & the world" to interpenetrate, reflecting the ideals of Kegon

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[50] Jackson Mac Low, *The Effect of John Cage and His Work on Contemporary American Literature*.
[51] Jackson Mac Low, *The Poetics of Chance and the Politics of Spontaneous Simultaneity*.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Jackson Mac Low, *Poetry, Chance, Silence, &c*.
[55] Jackson Mac Low, *The Effect of John Cage and His Work on Contemporary American Literature*.

Buddhism.[56] This interpenetration occurred when listeners, made aware of their thoughts, feelings, desires, sensations, and environmental sound during the silence,[57] would interpret meaning from the way those feelings and sounds aligned with the poem's performance. So, by incorporating silence in his poetry, Mac Low was able to philosophically meld the spontaneous non-egoic meaning of his chance-generated text with the inherent meaning created between synchronous events.

By including simultaneous performance methods, Mac Low extended the ability of his poems to generate meaning through synchronicity. His first simultaneous poem and performance was the *21.21.29., the 5ᵗʰ biblical poem (for 3 simultaneous voices) the 1ˢᵗ biblical play* performed by Mac Low, Cage, and MC Richards in the spring of 1955.[58] Over time, other poems, including the Asymmetries, incorporated options for simultaneous performance, and Mac Low's elaborate performance instructions highlighted important attitudes such as sensitivity and virtuosity that should guide a simultaneous performance.

> I ask each person to add to the situation or not to add, what they want and how they want, but not as ego-tripping without regard to what else is happening, which is the worst of wrong notes in performing any simultaneity of mine. But every kind of virtuosity is strongly encouraged, when used with as much consciousness as possible of its place in the total sound, especially its relation to the contributions of the other performers: one must be both inventive and sensitive to others at all times, and not only to other performers but to the total situation. I think this exemplifies both an enlightened and anarchistic society.[59]

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[56] Jackson Mac Low, *Poetry, Chance, Silence, &c*.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Jackson Mac Low, *The Poetics of Chance and the Politics of Spontaneous Simultaneity*.
[59] Ibid.

These attitudes for performance – sensitivity, virtuosity, and inventiveness but not exhibitionism – enable Mac Low to link ideas of enlightenment to his politics of pacifist-anarchism.

Mac Low traces his pacifist roots to grammar school and identified as an anarchist from about 1945.[60] Throughout his life he adamantly believed that enlightened individuals could coexist sanely and spontaneously without a "coercive force" ruling over them.[61] Over time he realized that simultaneous performances of works generated by chance created an analogy for a free anarchist society. By removing the authority of the author/composer through chance composition and asking the performers to make substantial decisions before and during performance, as anarchist scholar Allan Antliff pointed out in his article *Situating Freedom: Jackson Mac Low, John Cage, and Donald Judd*, Mac Low created a "quality of collaboration: crafted so as to open itself up to the agency of others, the poems reduce the writer's voice to one amongst many…"[62] Thus Mac Low was able to unite his politics of Buddhism, the *I Ching*, and pacifist-anarchism wherein non-egoic structures create a situation for meaning to be spontaneously generated by the enlightened cooperation of free agents.

By viewing all forms of an Asymmetry, as is illustrated by its family tree, one can see that all of these characteristics – chance, silence, and simultaneous

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Allan Antliff, "Situating Freedom: Jackson Mac Low, John Cage, and Donald Judd," *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 2 (2011): 51, accessed December 2014, http://anarchist-developments.org/index.php/adcs_journal/article/view/44.

performance – are woven into Mac Low's Asymmetries, and, as a result, the

Asymmetries reflect his lifestyle and political ideals. With this insight, it is clear that

an Asymmetry performance is not best understood as an aural recreation of the fixed

Asymmetry score as an object; performing an Asymmetry frees it from its fixed

format. In performance, an Asymmetry takes on a new cooperative form, wherein all

participants sensitively contribute to the total sound.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOVERING A PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

5.1   Interpreting the 1980 Performance Instructions

In November, 2014 I encountered Mac Low's *Asymmetries 1-260*, a 1980

publication of just over half of Mac Low's numbered Asymmetries. Mac Low revised

his performance instructions in this publication, extending them from a three to

thirteen-page document. The most obvious change in the 1980 instruction material,

besides its length, was the addition of two performance methods.

> **9. Phonic Prolongations and Repetitions:** Printed
> words are read out loud, and spacing words are read
> silently. In instances where a word or word string in
> the printed text is broken by blank space, spacing
> words are read silently while the last phoneme of that
> broken word or word string is prolonged or repeated.

> **10. Words and Indeterminate Silences:** Printed words
> are read out loud, and blank spaces from the printed
> poem are held for any duration the performer chooses

Figure 5.1: Ninth and Tenth Performance Method Descriptions

Mac Low first included phonic prolongations or repetitions as an additional

technique for sounding blank space in *Asymmetry 442* and continued to include these

phonic prolongations and repetitions in his numbered *Asymmetries 480* to *501* and all

Asymmetries created after the numbered series. With the inclusion of the Phonic

Prolongations and Repetitions Method, this technique could be retroactively

incorporated in all of Mac Low's Asymmetries. The phonic prolongations in this

method function to connect words or word strings from the acrostic spelling process

that are broken with empty space. Typically, this occurred when a word was

hyphenated over a line break or a word string didn't fit on one line. For example, in *Asymmetry 217,* "Mart--lick" is used to spell the "m" in "Time" and is broken over two lines. So, the blank space between "Mart--" and "lick" could be realized by a phonic prolongation of the last sound in "Mart" for the time it would take to read the spacing words between "Mart--" and "lick".

```
Time international Mart--lick eyes
Time international Mart--lick eyes


Time international Mart--(t t t t
t t t t t t t t t t t )lick eyes
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Figure 5.2: Phonic Prolongation Excerpt and Illustration from *Asymmetry 217*[63]

In this case, the last phoneme of "Mart" is a plosive, so it is reiterated throughout the blank space, however, phonemes that can be prolonged like the [m] in "team" or the [s] in "plays" would be sustained. These phonic prolongations point to Mac Low's growing interest in phonemes and word sounds, which he developed more extensively after the Numbered Asymmetries with his Drawing Asymmetries, Gathas, and Vocabularies.

In the Words and Indeterminate Silences Method, Mac Low gives the performer more freedom than in any other method. Not only can the performer control dynamic gradations in their delivery and the pace at which they read the text, they can freely lengthen or shorten the amount of silence used throughout the poem. The Words and Indeterminate Silences Method deviates significantly from the performance practice I interpreted based on the 1960 instructions, and its inclusion of intuitive

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[63] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 199.

choice directly relates to the most important difference between the 1961 and 1980 instructions: a description of Asymmetry performance practice.

5.2   Understanding Spontaneous Relationships: "Listen and Relate"

Written after nineteen years of performance experience and Mac Low's invention of other group performance poetry forms including his Gathas and Vocabularies, the performance practice Mac Low describes in his 1980 instructions points away from an aural recreation of the score and towards spontaneous performance relationships. These relationships should be spontaneous in that performers should make as many choices as possible throughout the performance, including the text's pacing and loudness, any tone's pitch and register, poem order, and performance methods. Even the probability that each method might be chosen can be determined anew for every performance, either by creating a deck of method cards using random digits, so that some methods have a higher probability of occurring than others.[64] These spontaneous, objective, and impulsive chance procedures mirror the *I Ching*'s assumption that meaning arises from events that share time and space.

Most importantly to the Asymmetry performance practice, Mac Low emphasized that performers should "Listen and Relate."[65] Mac Low describes this listening as constant and "concentrated," that it should govern all sound-making.[66] In this kind of listening, a performer does not imagine what might sound next or enter into the performance with a pre-conceived idea of how the total aural situation will

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[64] Ibid., xxiii-xxiv.
[65] Ibid., xxiv.
[66] Ibid., xiv.

sound. Instead, listening is always focused on very recent and present sounds, so that it

can guide a performer's spontaneous decisions and sensitive contribution within the

performance. One of Mac Low's most striking descriptions of this performance style

is included at the end of his 1980 performance instructions.

> Sensitivity, tact, and courtesy must be exercised in order to make every
> detail of one's performance contribute toward a total sound sequence
> that is as similar as possible to what the performer would choose to
> hear. While egoistic overpowering of the total sound should never
> occur, the exercise of virtuosity is strongly encouraged when it is
> carried out with as much consciousness as possible of the total
> situation. Performers should try always to be both inventive and
> sensitive.[67]

Two seemingly contradictory priorities emerge from this statement: performer

contributions should work towards a total sound that reflects what "the performer

would choose to hear," and egoistic performance is expressly forbidden. So, a

performer must exert their ego to the extent that the performance reflects their

preferences, but not so that it overpowers the performance group's shared priorities.

Resources outside of Mac Low's Asymmetry publications help clarify Mac

Low's distinction between preferential choice and egoistic performance. In an

unpublished poem from 1959, *Showoff Music*, Mac Low describes an ego-filled

performance.

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[67] Ibid., xxv.

When one of those gentlemen
settles at the piano or opens
            his mouth to sing
his heart cries "success!
O Bitch Goddess attend my tune!"
and then he lets loose
a flight of ego, zooming
to the auditorium's gilded roof
with agonizing false emotion the excuse
for a parade of tweedledees and
            tweedledums of aural stupidness.

Figure 5.3: Excerpt of *Showoff Music*[68]

Here, Mac Low associates egoistic performance with showing off, with using

music and false expression to demonstrate ability, impress an audience, and accrue

capitalistic success. Sixteen years later, in a recording of a 1975 Asymmetry

performance, Mac Low invites the audience to participate, telling them to "give

yourself to the situation, not to impose yourself upon it."[69] Hierarchically, egoistic

performers overpower and destroy the egalitarian values of pacifist-anarchism that

Mac Lowian simultaneities allegorize. Instead, Mac Low asks the performer to listen

to the whole – to all sounds – with "an attitude of receptivity and responsiveness such

that 'choices' are made spontaneously, often seeming to arise from the whole."[70] Here,

the act of relating is made through intuitive and impulsive choices, but is always

governed by codes of considerate conduct. Sound-making becomes a performance of

listening as much as a mode of expressing.

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[68] Jackson Mac Low, *Showoff Music* in Notebook 1959, 1959, MS 180 Box 1 Folder 7, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[69] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries, 1975 November 23 Featuring Sharon Mattlin and Mordecai-Mark Mac Low*, 1975, MS 180 Box 251 CJ 110, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[70] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xiv.

This listening is responsive to what Mac Low often referred to as the "total aural situation,"[71] which he described beautifully in his 1980 instructions.

> Schematically, this 'whole' can be represented by concentric spheres: the inmost is that of the individual performer; next, that of the whole performance group; next, that of the performance space, including room acoustics, electronics, etc.; and finally, the larger spaces within which the performance space is situated: the rest of the building, the surrounding streets, neighborhood, city (or rural area), etc., all of which may affect significantly the aggregate of sounds heard by each individual at each moment. The spheres are best conceived as transparent and interpenetrating – not static shells but concentric ripples traveling simultaneously out from and in towards each center.[72]

These interpenetrating concentric spheres reflect influences of the *I Ching,* Kegon Buddhism, and pacifist-anarchism so that simultaneous events acausally relate, and enlightened performers navigate those relationships in a way that recognizes individuality and the individual's position within the whole. This situation is contingent on performers' enlightenment in the sense that they can enact the Zen idea of "not one" and "not two," where "not two" negates the division of the whole into parts (in this case the total aural situation) and "not one" negates the stance that the individual "dwells in the whole as one."[73] In the Zen characterization of personhood, the performer moves freely between the two positions, "neither not one nor not two," maintaining their judgment and mediation, while being an "interpenetrating" part of the whole. Seen in the context of Zen philosophy, the ability to "listen" and "relate" in performance amounts to a practice, a set of skills that allows a performer to navigate

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Shigenori Nagatomo, "Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy," Stanford University, June 28, 2006, accessed May 07, 2015, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-zen/.

the many chance occurrences in Mac Lowian performance that render every

performance unique.

The scale of this "uniqueness" – of potential unique outcomes in an

Asymmetry Simultaneity – can be represented by the following formula, where p is

the number of poems in a performance, M is the number of performance methods

used, and n is the number of performers:

$$(p! * M^p)^n$$

Figure 5.4: Asymmetry Simultaneity Formula for Possible Outcomes

This formula does make a few assumptions. For example, is assumes

performers will only play one instrument each. However, a performer could change

instruments throughout a performance, adding another variable that would increase the

possible number of outcomes. Additionally, the formula assumes each player will use

the same number of methods and does not account for variations in reading speed,

dynamics, or tone choices. Even with its limitations, the formula easily demonstrates

the scale of possible performance combinations.

For a single performer performing any single poem, there are ten possible

outcomes, one for each of the Ten Methods. If that performer is joined by one other

performer reading the same poem, the number of possible outcomes balloons to 100.

Between January, 2015 and February, 2017, I gave five performances of Mac Low's

Asymmetries which used his Ten Performance Methods with the following

combinations:

Jan 2015, three performers, five poems: $1.728 * 10^{21}$
Aug, 2016, two performers, four poems: $5.76 * 10^{9}$
Jan, 2017, six performers, thirty poems: $3.483 * 10^{274}$
Feb, 2017, six performers, ninety poems: $1.0755 * 10^{1369}$
Feb, 2017, three performers, three poems: $2.16 * 10^{11}$

Figure 5.5: Performance Combinations and Possible Outcomes

The smallest of these combinations is two performers performing four poems

for a total of 5.76 billion possible outcomes. If each performance combination were to

last 3 minutes, it would take nearly 33 thousand years to perform all of the possible

combinations. It is impossible to practice each possible outcome; instead a broader

performance practice must be mastered, so that a performer can spontaneously

respond (i.e. "relate" in a way that is "as similar as possible to what the performer

would choose to hear"[74]) to the particular combination of sounds they are hearing.

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[74] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xxv.

CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPING A PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

6.1 Learning to Listen

Over the course of my experience performing Mac Low's Asymmetries, I

developed a performance practice with a series of strategies for listening and relating.

The first phase of this process was learning how to listen, a skill I fostered through

repeated performances. Initially, I was fairly consumed with the act of reading while

applying the different performance methods and could only listen on easier methods,

like Silence Only or Tone Only. During methods like Words and Tones, Words Only,

and Spoken and Whispered Words, it was difficult to hear other sounds because I was

constantly producing sound. Methods like Words, Tones, and Silences took so much

concentration to switch between the different types of sounding, that it was difficult to

focus on anything besides the task at hand. Over time, simple familiarity with these

methods made it possible to listen while I was applying the performance instructions.

6.2 Relating to the Performing Group

By my August, 2016 performance,[75] the cumulative experience of giving the

previous eight performances, thoroughly understanding the additional 1980

performance instructions, and researching Mac Low's poetics in UCSD's Special

Collections Archives coalesced into a point where I could consciously identify specific

strategies for how I might translate my listening into relating.

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[75] See Appendix A

These strategies can be categorized within the different parameters that are governed by some degree of choice: pitch, timbre, pronunciation, and loudness in the speaking voice; loudness of the speaking voice; rate of reading in the speaking or silent voice; and timbre, pitch, register, and loudness of the instrumental tones. Far from exhaustive, these strategies open many possibilities for responsiveness in performance and point to the boundaries of possible performances rather than defining their limits.

6.2.1 Relating through Speaking

While writing his Asymmetries, Mac Low held no reservations about words' potential to mean. In his earlier acrostic poems, Mac Low included any word that matched the required initial letter from the index word, but Mac Low excluded most structural words in favor of "lexical words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs)"[76] for his Asymmetries and, significantly, *chose* on a case by case basis to include structural words which he determined had "appreciable 'semantic weight.'"[77] Likewise, pitch and timbre choices in the voice provide vocal inflections that can demonstrate semantic weight and imbue meaning on the text. However, Mac Low's instructions show he was reluctant to allow performers to influence meaning through vocal pitch and timbre. Most words are read "at an even pitch that simply stops at margins and blank spaces,"[78] and changes in vocal pitch are determined by punctuation (for example, one would use the sentence-final intonation contour for

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[76] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 243.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., xvi.

words preceding periods). Furthermore "voice *timbres* are free but should seldom give the impression of exaggeration or distortion."[79] Instead of implying semantic meaning, small adjustments in pitch and timbre can be used to respond to a performance's total aural situation and generate spontaneous meanings. This can be through imagining a context before saying a word,[80] imitating the inflection of other performers, or choosing inflections to relate a word to other text in the performance.

Several of these instances took place in my January and February, 2017[81] Asymmetry performances with Southland Ensemble. One member of the ensemble had to miss both performances because he was the recent father of twins. I often thought of him whenever I read *Asymmetry 24*'s text, "Twins. enjoy.", so that that context would spontaneously influence my inflection. During the January performance, my reading of *Asymmetry 87* aligned with another performer's reading of *Asymmetry 143* so that I read the phrase "preceding preceding opposites" right after she said the phrase "process process opposites." I related my reading to hers by imitating her inflection as I said my similar phrase.

In a rarer scenario, homographs, which can be pronounced to have different meanings, may be used to relate to the performance. For example, *Asymmetry 157* uses the word "minute," which could be pronounced *minit*, like the measure of time, or *mī'n(y)o͞ot*, an adjective meaning extremely small. A performer can choose which

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] See Appendix A

pronunciation, and as a result, meaning, to use spontaneously in response to the sound of the performance.

Mac Low provided relatively specific instructions for relating typography to loudness in the voice. However, he also included directives in his 1980s instructions that explicitly ask the performer to choose loudness based on their relationship to the performance space and other sounds in the performance.

> Exactly *how* loudly or softly any particular words are spoken is to be determined spontaneously by individual performers within the aural contexts of specific performance moments. In public performances, softer words and whispers should be loud enough to be heard throughout the performance space (when not completely covered by louder sounds), and moderate and loud words should be correspondingly louder.[82]

In Mac Low's description, loudness is primarily a tool for shaping a performance's textures, balance, and legibility. One instance where these choices become especially significant is in the Words Only Method. For longer poems, the Words Only Method can create sustained periods of high textual density. If there are no other spoken words, a performer might use that as an opportunity to highlight their text by speaking more loudly. If there are many voices speaking, a performer might choose to recede into the texture by speaking more softly. A combination of both strategies might be desirable in a performance, or even during the performance of a single poem, to respond to a performance's shifting textures.

A performer's speed of reading also has a significant impact on a performance's density and texture. One of the most legible textural effects of a

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[82] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xv.

performer's reading rate can be used in the Spoken and Whispered Words Method.

For instance, in my February, 2017[83] performance, I performed the Spoken and

Whispered Words Method while another performer was reading *Asymmetry 27*. As a

response to *Asymmetry 27*'s ominous text ("STANDSTILL Things approaches."[84]), I

chose to heighten the tension of the total aural situation by reading my own poem

quickly, so that my whispers created a fast and intense texture beneath *Asymmetry 27*.

Alternatively, slowing my reading in the Tone Only Method created a droning, static

texture for a long portion of the performance, and reading slowly for the Silence Only

Method reduced the density of the performance.

Mac Low's only restrictions on speed are that the reading rate should stay "at a

chosen speed"[85] for each poem, and that silent reading should never be faster than one

would "choose and *be able* to read [a poem] *aloud.*"[86] In his 1980 performance

instructions, Mac Low adjusted silent reading to measure only the *minimum* amount of

silence possible in a performance.

> although *minimal* durations of silence are, in all but Method 10,
> measured by the performer's 'saying' the measuring words silently, any
> particular silence may be extended whenever an individual feels that
> the performance situation demands it.[87]

In practice, these adjustments tend to be small reactions to other performers

rather than large extensions of silence. Allowing this improvisational flexibility

essentially discounts the mechanistic interpretation of objective chance performance,

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[83] See Appendix A
[84] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 50.
[85] Ibid., xvi.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., xxiv.

where the performer would carry out the task of performing the score without managing the sound result. Intuitive extensions of silence allow a performer to respond to other sounds in the total aural situation instead of talking or playing over them and connect the performers in each instance of onset and release.

6.2.2 Relating with Tones

Tones are highly impactful opportunities to relate to the total aural situation and are a parameter where Mac Low gives the performer wide latitude, with the ability to choose pitch, register, timbre, dynamic, and articulation. The most basic of these choices is timbral: when a performer chooses what instrument to play. Certain groups of instruments can have connotations, which, when used in an Asymmetry performance, will shape the poems with those connotations. For example, when Southland Ensemble performed *Five Young Turtle Asymmetries* in January 2017,[88] we chose to use some instruments in higher registers alongside instruments often associated with children or toys: recorder, clarinet, stylophone, melodica, and piccolo. The effect was a playful combination of instrumental timbres that reflected the fledgling journey of the young turtles in the poems. Alternatively, a baroque ensemble might make the text feel older or a bluegrass band might make the text feel like folklore. Beyond instrumental choice, individual performers can respond to the performance by altering the timbre of their chosen instrument's sound. In my performances on cello, I occasionally choose to add sul pont to my tones when I respond to intense words in a performance, or I might play harmonics in reaction to

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[88] See Appendix A

another performer's tone, for example to mimic the flute in my January[89] and

February, 2017[90] performances.

Pitch can achieve a similar effect. Because "e" and "a" are very common

letters in English, they are likewise very common pitches for tones in an Asymmetry

performance. With this knowledge, a performer can choose pitches in a performance

that have a high likelihood of consonances or dissonances. For example, playing a C

or C# is likely to create major and minor 3rds and/or 6ths alongside E or A, while an

A ♭ is likely to create major 3rds and/or minor 6ths or minor 2nds and/or major 7ths.

Shaping consonances and dissonances can be especially effective responsive to a

performer who is playing the Tone Only Method, which creates a pedal point upon

which harmonies or harmonic relationships can be developed over a longer period of

time. For example, a performer might choose to play pitches consonant to the Tone

Only pitch, then change to a dissonant pitch after a dramatic word. Navigating these

consonances and dissonances alongside text can create layers of spontaneous meaning,

as one listener experienced in my January, 2017 performance.[91]

> The phrases occasionally acquired an unexpected intensity – words like
> 'American' and 'Nation' seemed to put a charge into the listening
> atmosphere – especially when accompanied by unusual harmonies from
> the instruments. No doubt this was inspired by the emotional politics of
> the present time.[92]

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Paul Muller, "The Southland Ensemble Performs Jackson Mac Low," Sequenza21, February 3, 2017, accessed April 23, 2017, http://www.sequenza21.com/2017/02/the-southland-ensemble-performs-jackson-mac-low/.

Register can be used in a similar way to create dramatic contrasts and shifts in response to text in the performance, but it is also a highly effective tool for responding to other performers' tones. For example, towards the end of my February, 2017 Asymmetry performance, only two of six performers had poems remaining to perform: myself on cello and the flutist. For several of the poems, I responded to this new-found intimacy by playing in a high register that matched the flute. In earlier parts of the performance, I chose to expand the group's overall register by playing my lowest notes, which created a sense of space in the musical landscape.[93]

Registral adjustments can be used as a real-time orchestration tool in an Asymmetry performance, situating tones in similar registers to compete or blend or allowing individual tones to be more audible in contrasting registers. This is true for speaking voices and tones as well. In my 2017 Asymmetry performances, if I were playing tones while other performers spoke in higher registers, I would often move my tones to my low register, so that their words could be legible. Or, if another performer were shouting, I might match their speaking register to give them more emphasis.

Similarly, the loudness of tones can work to change the density of a performance's texture or add emphasis to words in performance. For example, if many performers are speaking text, playing loud tones can create a very dense texture or playing quiet tones can allow more of the text to be legible. In my January and February, 2017[94] performances I would often respond to loud or shouted words with

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[93] See Appendix A
[94] Ibid.

loud tones and sharp articulation; in *Asymmetry 91* playing a loud tone after "<u>Dangers</u> American nations." could imitate the sonic shape of and add intensity to the loud word "<u>Dangers</u>". In response to other loud words, I might play a quiet tone so that its attack could be masked by the shouting and the tone could emerge from within the total sound situation.

6.3   Relating beyond the Performing Group

All of these techniques create a foundation for "relating" to the Asymmetry performing group, but it is more difficult to respond to sounds from Mac Low's further reaching concentric spheres, "that of the performance space, including room acoustics, electronics, etc.; and finally, the larger spaces within which the performance space is situated: the rest of the building, the surrounding streets, neighborhood, city (or rural area), etc., all of which may affect significantly the aggregate of sounds heard by each individual at each moment."[95]

6.3.1 Performance Spaces and Acoustics

Over the course of my six years performing Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries, I've performed them in classrooms, small and large concert halls, small and large theater spaces, and in a Beehive Kiln.[96] At a sonic level, each space's acoustics is an opportunity to respond. For example, UC San Diego's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall's acoustics allow for very quiet performances while its Experimental Theater's digital acoustics require more vocal projection to allow words to be heard.

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[95] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xiv.
[96] See Appendix A

In one special concert, I performed Numbered Asymmetries in the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts's Beehive Kiln #7. Because of the beehive shape of the kiln, the acoustics change drastically as one moves inside the space. Near the outer walls, the sound is almost completely dry, but, in the center, the sound pings rapidly as if it were being performed into a toy echo microphone. For the concert, performers were positioned in the very center of the kiln and the audience encircled us, radiating out towards the walls. In our response to the intense, echoing acoustics we would often articulate our words more sharply to enhance the echoing ping, but each person in the space experienced (listened and related to) slightly different acoustics based on their seat in the kiln.

Each performance space also generates its own contexts, which affect the formality and intimacy of a performance. My experiences performing in large, traditional spaces like UC San Diego's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall were formal with little intimacy,[97] but the candlelit performance in the much smaller Beehive Kiln #7 felt ritualistic and extremely intimate.[98] The biggest impact of this formality and intimacy is the relationship between the performers and the audience. In small, intimate spaces it is often easy to see the audience's reactions and hear their movements because seating is closer to the performers. While changing a performance to pander to the audience's perceived mood would be considered a success driven, egoistic performance, a performer can still hear and relate to the audience. For

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

example, if an audience is restless during any Asymmetry, a performer could respond by prolonging their silence and allowing the rustling, restless audience to be more audible.

6.3.2 Environmental Sounds

Other environmental sounds may find their way into and shape a performance. These are the most difficult sounds to sonically respond to as performers, but are part of the total aural situation and locate it in a particular time and space. The January, 2017 Numbered Asymmetry performance I gave at Automata Theater in Chinatown, Los Angeles took place on the same night as Chinese New Year.[99] Sounds of fireworks, large crowds, and music from local vendors crept their way into the edges of the performance, constantly connecting it to Chinatown as a neighborhood and the Chinese New Year holiday. This concert also included a presentation of Mac Low's *Tree Movie*, a single-shot film of a tree that played for the duration of the concert. *Tree Movie*'s human-less landscape contrasted sharply with the outside sounds of a bustling celebration. The audience and performers were able to move in and out of these contexts by shifting their attention, or to absorb the contradiction all at once.

Tree Movie also played throughout my February, 2017 Numbered Asymmetry performance.[100] That evening, San Diego had a rare, torrential storm. Throughout the Numbered Asymmetries, we left the theater's doors open, and, while the rain couldn't be heard clearly, it could be seen through the doorways. The gentle repetition of the

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[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

rain, nearly invisible pace of *Tree Movie*, and two-hour length of the Asymmetry

performance lent a glacial, often meditative atmosphere to the performance.[101]

6.3.3 Relationships beyond Sound

When we reach the furthest of Mac Low's concentric spheres, "relating"

becomes an act of mentally forming relationships rather than aurally responding to

sounds. Each person in the performance, including the audience, will conceive of their

own relationships based on the context they bring to the performance through their

wider concentric spheres – their city, state, or nation, etc.. For example, when I

performed "nature, 'enjoy'" from *Asymmetry 139* in Helena, Montana, it conjured

images of dry plains and distant mountains in my imagination, but in Los Angeles,

California it suggested a trip outside of the city to one of the nearby wildlife reserves

or national parks.[102] At the January, 2017 Numbered Asymmetry performance in Los

Angeles, California,[103] Paul Muller connected some of the performance's words and

tones to recent U.S. political events.

> The words and phrases were in no particular order and so the listener
> was continuously engaged in assembling the poem from the fragments
> being received. The harmonies created when two or more instruments
> sounded together was quite moving at times, and added an eloquent
> coloration to the poetry. The phrases occasionally acquired an
> unexpected intensity – words like "American" and "Nation" seemed to
> put a charge into the listening atmosphere – especially when
> accompanied by unusual harmonies from the instruments. No doubt
> this was inspired by the emotional politics of the present time.[104]

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[101] Timothy M. Clark, "Audience Response to Jennifer Bewerse's February, 2017 Jackson Mac Low Performance," interview by author, April 22, 2017.
[102] See Appendix A
[103] Ibid.
[104] Paul Muller, "The Southland Ensemble Performs Jackson Mac Low."

Muller's national context and current political events distinctly shaped relationships he gathered in performance. One can imagine that these same words might have elicited relationships to the Vietnam War when they were performed in the mid-nineteen-sixties.

These individual relationships and interpretations are the most infinite variations on Mac Low's poems and tie each one to its performance place and time. However, with all of these variations, are there limits to what makes an Asymmetry an Asymmetry?

CHAPTER 7

LIMITS IN MAC LOWIAN ASYMMETRIES

In a series of interviews with Mac Low, Gill Ott posed the question "when you set up limitations, even on yourself, as when you choose a particular source text or method, is this a means toward achieving greater freedom?"[105] Mac Low responded, saying

> It may be that when performers are given a specific group of procedures and materials to use, they're freed from their habits, to some extent. This is also true of very strict chance operations. That's a major reason why Cage – and after I began to understand his work, I myself – have used chance operations: to free ourselves from our habits and tastes.

Similarly, an exploration of the limits throughout Mac Low's Asymmetry generations illuminates their many freedoms and points towards the fundamental identity of the Asymmetries. Each parameter of an Asymmetry can be explored to determine where these boundaries might lie.

7.1 Hierarchies and Shared Roles

The broadest of these limits deals with how participants engage with the many generations of an Asymmetry: the Asymmetry System, Printed Asymmetry, and Asymmetry Performance, both individually or as a simultaneity. Shaped by Mac Low's Buddhist and pacifist-anarchist ideals, Asymmetries resist traditional performance hierarchies and allow each participant to assume multiple, shared roles.

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[105] Gil Ott, "Dialog: Interviews and Correspondence," 22.

Mac Low created a situation where the traditional roles of poetry and musical performance – the author/composer, performer, and reader/audience – are intertwined.

The classic author is the master of meaning. As Roland Barthes describes, "A classic narrative always gives this impression: the author first conceives the signified (or the generality) and then finds for it, according to the chance of his imagination, 'good' signifiers… the classic author is like an artisan bent over the workbench of meaning and selecting the best *expressions* for the concept he has already formed."[106] It is precisely this type of authorship that Mac Low hoped to evade by utilizing his chance systems; in fact, Mac Low's primary act of authorship is the creation of his Asymmetry System – the reading-through process that is the first generation of an Asymmetry – not the creation of the poems that result from this system. Because this system is purposefully absent "authored" meaning, Mac Low's creation of the Asymmetries might be better described as a system of reading that results in a poem; Mac Low's authored Asymmetry System is the first generation of an Asymmetry, and each individual poem is the second generational result of his performance of that system. Mac Low was then, not the author, but the first reader of his poems.

By musicalizing his poetry through his extensive performance instructions and Ten Performance Methods, Mac Low conflates the roles of author/composer. The Asymmetries are poems, but they are also scores for public performance using distinctly musical features like tones and dynamics. But the extensiveness of Mac Low's instructions actually serve to minimize his authority. As George Quasha

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[106] Roland Barthes et al., "The Mastery of Meaning," in *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 173.

describes it, by giving us such elaborate instructions, "the poet gives us *all* we need to know about his system, and this command of the vehicle (putting us on equal footing with the poet, who is not withholding anything) restores us to the zero point of the text, driverless and neutral, where the performance happens."[107] Mac Low is both the author and composer of his system, but, by removing all exclusivity or mystery surrounding the processes underpinning the Asymmetries, he also positions the performer as a potential co-creator.

Performers must find their own kind of Asymmetry system by developing a performance practice, a series of skills and attitudes that guide each performance. These skills allow the performer to activate the openness of the poem score in performance. Rather than the frictive reading-against one might experience when reading a musical score for which processing information is conceptually important (Tom Johnson's *Failing* for example), processing information through reading in a Mac Lowian performance "[invites] individual consent to ground rules that establish the basis for alert interaction of participants. Freedom is not the result of pro-gress but perhaps con-gress, a state of awakened interactivity of participants through practice."[108] Through a thoroughly developed performance practice, the performer primes themselves to become an active participant in the live performance scenario, their first reading of a new Asymmetry Performance.

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[107] George Quasha, "A Concrete Dialog with Myself On, and for JML," ed. Gil Ott, *Paper Air* 2, no. 3 (1980): 56.
[108] Ibid., 57.

Several poets have described their experiences of performing with Mac Low, including Carol Bergé in a volume of *Paper Air* dedicated to Mac Low.

> …participation in a Mac Low event is an immersion, an environment,
> you enter and you become… the Poet being both you and Mac Low
> neither complete without the other, the whole being a substantive
> dimension more beautiful and revealing than the components, the piece
> itself providing the unity.[109]

All parts of a Mac Lowian performance – the performers, the performance space, the broader environment, and the interpenetrating influence between them – have the potential, through the unifying structure of Mac Low's poem, to be both sound-makers in the total aural situation and generators of meaning by shaping, interpreting, and reacting to the sounds they hear.

Performing participants in a Mac Lowian event are quite literally reading the poems, but are also listening intently to the overall performance. As they listen, they shape their reading – altering their pace, dynamics, or tones – to generate a sound situation which they would prefer to hear. In this process roles converge; the participant is simultaneously a performer, reader, listener, and, because they react to and actively shape the performance, an author/composer exerting influence over the meaning-making in the performance space.

Likewise, audience participants are bound up in the performance through a convergence of these roles. While their primary role may be to listen, they may become unwitting performers as their sounds contribute to the total aural situation. But most importantly, they are final authors of Mac Low's poetry, expected to generate

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[109] Carol Bergé, "Sentience, the Opportunities," ed. Gil Ott, *Paper Air* 2, no. 3 (1980): 47.

their own meaning from the performance. In this final shared authorship, Mac Low's

poetry is a performable form of what Barthes refers to as the writerly text, highly

plural writing that makes infinite space for the reader to "write" their own meaning

onto the text.

> Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by
> any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the
> networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to
> surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of
> signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by
> several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be
> the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*,
> they are indeterminable (meaning here is never subject to a principle of
> determination, unless by throwing a dice); the systems of meaning can
> take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed,
> based as it is on the infinity of language.[110]

Though it is unlikely that Barthes encountered Mac Low's poetry, his

descriptions of writerly texts almost seem to refer to Mac Low's work directly. A Mac

Lowian performance, with all of its interpenetrating parts and many modes of entry is

decidedly nonsensical, but still somehow generates "the sensation of meaning."[111] As

it is beautifully described by Quasha, sensed meaning materializes from "the fact of

certain combinations – not their cause, nor their reason, nor their referential

significance, nor their definable beauty, but their sudden fact. Their simple emergence.

One gets an actual experience of that emergence, not as truth of the text as container

(urn) of intentional beauty, but as a phenomenal truth of reading/hearing."[112] By

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[110] Roland Barthes et al., "Interpretation," 5-6.
[111] Jackson Mac Low, *The Interpretation of Sound and Meaning*, 1983, MS 180 Box 68 Folder 43, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[112] George Quasha, "A Concrete Dialog with Myself On, and for JML," 57.

yielding his control over meaning, Mac Low shares authorship with the listener, who

gathers their own meanings from hearing (or reading) these works "even though the

speech sounds… may fail to cohere into words, or words into complete sentences, or

sentences into complete arguments…"[113] It is precisely the unauthored,

nonsyntactical, unparaphrasable nature of Mac Low's poetry and its ability to

transmute into a performable score that enables the poetry to be accessed by infinite

interpretations and to fluidly amalgamate traditional roles.

But, like the utopian pacifist-anarchist society it allegorizes, the egalitarian

nature of these shared roles is easily disrupted by egotistical interjections in

performance from any participant in a position of power. Having shared and taught

Mac Low's Asymmetries to several individuals and groups of people, I have often

experienced the difficulty of managing that delicate balance of power. In one

experience preparing for an August, 2016,[114] one performer initially read her poems

with a theatrical speaking intonation. I explained to her that the words shouldn't be

exaggerated and that speaking pitch was that of "normal speech,"[115] but that her

speaking pitch and timbre were also free. It was important to both establish the rules

for the performance, and to position her as the final determinant of the "correct"

performance speaking. Though I was more familiar with the Asymmetry performance

instructions and practice, I needed to avoid positioning myself as the dictator of how

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[113] Jackson Mac Low, *The Interpretation of Sound and Meaning*.
[114] See Appendix A
[115] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xvi.

the performance should sound, so that she and I could equally share authorship in the performance.

An Asymmetry's intertwined roles and egalitarian hierarchy are delicately shared through the personal responsibilities of each participant. These responsibilities can be abdicated in any number of ways, for example, by assuming authoritarian roles like the expert teacher, searching for what Mac Low "meant" by his words, or by trying to create a sound that Mac Low, as the "composer," would want to hear. In each of these situations, hierarchical power is shifted to one individual instead of shared by all participants. An Asymmetry Performance is limited to those that can maintain shared roles and egalitarian hierarchies through each performer's dedication to the foremost responsibility and foundational rule of Mac Low's performance practice: to Listen and Relate.

7.2   Scale and the Performing Group

In many ways, the philosophy of Listening and Relating is more important than the literal sound result. Performances do not need to be polished or presented by highly trained performers as long as the performers are able to Listen and Relate. Jerry Rothenberg, Mac Low's good friend who participated in several performances of Mac Low's work, commented that Mac Low never seemed to seek out professional performers; an interest in the work and desire to perform it was enough.[116]

One reason performers can be less specialized is that Mac Low does not require performances to include all Ten Performance Methods or, as a result, to

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[116] Jerome Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

include instruments. One recording from November 3, 1975 includes the entire audience performing the Words and Indeterminate Silences Method while only Mac Low and one other performer (either Sharon Mattlin or Mordecai-Mark Mac Low) perform other methods using recorders.[117] The recording includes Mac Low explaining how to perform an Asymmetry, so it is safe to assume these participants had not developed an Asymmetry Performance Practice. However, all participants could easily perform through the Words with Indeterminate Silences Method. The performance lasted approximately twenty-minutes with many speaking voices, little silence, and occasional tones and phonic prolongations. Though this amateur performance didn't include much textural variety, stunning moments where loud words rose above the rest, recorder tones played, and participants prolonged phonemes show that the total aural situation was viable and able to generate spontaneous and meaningful experiences.

In part, the 1975 performance referenced above has little textural variation because of its large number of participants. Mac Low never explicitly suggests any limits to the scale of an Asymmetry performance, but this too must be governed by the ability to Listen and Relate. For each performer added to the total aural situation, there is less silence, and correspondingly, the performance has a higher density of words and tones. In my performance experience, this change is audible even from the difference of two versus three performers. With six performers, there is rarely any

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[117] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries, 1975 November 23 Featuring Sharon Mattlin and Mordecai-Mark Mac Low*.

total silence and there are often two or more performers speaking at once. This can be demonstrated concretely using the formula for calculating the possible outcomes of an Asymmetry Simultaneity, where the number of poems is changed to 1 (to remove the differences in outcomes caused by different poems), then the number of possible outcomes with the six methods that include silence is compared to the number of possible outcomes using all ten methods.

In a performance with only two performers, there's a 36% chance of a performance outcome having the *possibility* for total silence, but in a performance with six participants, there is only a 4.7% chance. With less silence, a performance is more continually texturally dense. At a critical mass, this density might inhibit listening and relating. Because of this, Mac Low suggested that performers might prolong silences.

> allowing the readers to prolong the silences would, I also hoped, make
> for more sensitive performances during which participants would stop
> and listen and refrain longer from reading their next words when they
> felt the texture was too thick or it was for other reasons inappropriate to
> add more sounds. [118]

And so, a performance may reach its limits in number of participants when textures are continually dense beyond the performers' potential to intervene ("Relate") and find another "desirable" texture.

Certain large groups may also reach a point where participants have difficulty listening, especially to other participants who are far away. However, performers do

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[118] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 250.

not need to hear all sounds in the total aural situation or may be prevented from

hearing the total aural situation by performance circumstances.

> In many circumstances – as when performers are *dispersed* within the
> space (e.g., around or in the midst of an audience or when performers
> and the audience are identical), a procedure often followed in
> performances I've directed – each performer's impression of the total
> aural situation will necessarily differ from those of the others. What is
> asked for is concentrated attention to all sounds perceptible to the
> individual and an attitude of receptivity and responsiveness such that
> 'choices' are made spontaneously, often seeming to arise from the
> whole.[119]

More important than the number of performers is the character of their contributions.

A large number of performers is possible, as long as all performers are skilled at

listening and relating and are able to concentrate on perceptible sounds. For

performers with less experience, smaller groups might be more conducive to their

ability to "Listen and Relate" to the total aural situation. The number of performers is

limited by each group's ability to sensitively listen and relate to the total aural

situation.

Likewise, a performance's length can not exceed a performance group's ability

to listen and relate. When performers can no longer listen with "concentrated

attention," a performance has reached its limits. Mac Low suggested that performance

endings should be decided by what the performers would choose to hear, and could be

ended by a stopwatch, through a leader, or found by "informal consensus."[120]

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[119] Ibid., xiv.
[120] Ibid., xxv.

In my own performances, performance length has typically been decided by the number of poems in a performance. With this method of ending an Asymmetry performance, performers might not end their readings at or near the same time (as they would if the performance was ended by a stopwatch, leader, or informal consensus). This creates a fading effect at the end of a performance, where, one-by-one, performers finish their set of poems and stop contributing sound to the total aural situation. To prepare for a performance including large numbers of poems, as was the case for my January and February, 2017[121] performances, I practiced performing all of the poems continuously several times, to develop my ability to give concentrated attention for the necessary period of time. Though I knew the final performances would be different in poem order and methods chosen, I could be confident in my ability to manage the scale of the listening task.

No matter the exact method, a performance length must be limited so that it does not exceed the performers' ability to listen with concentrated attention. The concert's scale as a whole – in length and number of performers – is limited only by the participants' ability to listen and relate.

7.3   Performance Place and Concentric Spheres

Mac Low's Asymmetry descriptions do not mention performance space, except to include it in his radiating map of concentric spheres. In UC San Diego's Special Collections Archives, there are recordings of Mac Low performing

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[121] See Appendix A

Asymmetries in classrooms,[122] performance spaces like The Kitchen[123] or St. Mark's

Church[124] in New York, and in personal spaces like his home.[125] A performance

location can be as formal as a concert hall or as informal as a living room, as crowded

as a shopping mall or as sparse as an open field. Certainly, there need not be an

audience – as might be the case in a private performance – or a performance might be

surrounded by people who aren't listening, who would then be considered part of the

environmental sounds of the performance.

Simultaneous performers in a space are linked by their ability to contribute to a

total aural situation; some form of listening and relating must link performers. Mac

Low describes the boundaries of the total aural situation as the limits of concentric

spheres, "best conceived as transparent and interpenetrating – not static shells but

concentric ripples traveling simultaneously out from and in towards each center."[126]

For a simultaneous performance to be governed by listening and relating, these

concentric spheres must intersect; performers must be listening and relating to at least

one overlapping sphere.

In a typical performance scenario, performers will be able to hear many of the

same concentric spheres. The degree to which these spheres overlap will depend on

[122] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries with Class, 1974*, MS 180, Box 256, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[123] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries at Kitchen, 1975 April 17*, MS 180, Box 249, CJ 57, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[124] Jackson Mac Low, *Jackson Mac Low Retrospective, 1982 September 12*, MS 180, Box 263, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[125] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries, 1974 February 21*, MS 180, Box 239, Folder 26, RJ 94, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[126] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xiv.

factors like the performers' dispersion in the space, their loudness in any particular moment, and other sounds in the performance like electronics or environmental sounds. For example, in my January 2015 simultaneity with Rachel Beetz and Batya MacAdam-Somer,[127] nearly all of our concentric spheres overlapped: we could hear each other, the acoustics of the space, the sounds of the audience, and the occasional sound of the building. Because we stood closely together in the performance space we heard very similar versions of the total aural situation and related to them similarly. However, my February, 2017 performance spread the members of Southland Ensemble throughout the same concert space.[128] Many of our concentric spheres overlapped, but these concentric ripples would sometimes slip out of hearing. There were several instances in the performance when I wasn't able to hear the flutist, who was the furthest performer from me. However, shared listening to a total aural situation of overlapping concentric spheres tied our simultaneity together.

There are endless, semantical variations on this situation. For example, one performer may not have the skills to listen and relate in a performance. They could be seen as giving a personal performance while other performers in the space, who were able to listen and relate, perform a simultaneity that includes the single performer's sounds. That single performer would not be participating in the simultaneity, but their sounds could be drawn into the other performers' total aural situation. The

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[127] See Appendix A
[128] Ibid.

simultaneity would only be legible to participants who could also hear the overlapping

spheres.

However endless these theoretical or semantic speculations can be, the reality

is that Mac Low was a pragmatist in performances. The Basic Method is the one to be

used when "all or most of the others are ruled out by performance circumstances"[129]

and the Words and Indeterminate Silences Method is "a useful variant… especially

appropriate for performances of Asymmetries accompanied by sound continua other

than Asymmetries."[130] Mac Low was acutely aware of the difficulty of listening and

relating in a performance, even under the best performance circumstances. Highly

experienced performers – perhaps deep listeners like Pauline Oliveros, a close friend

of Mac Low's – might create simultaneous performances that they would "choose to

hear" through complicated arrangements of Mac Low's concentric spheres. However,

most performers will find that a more typical performance better facilitates listening

and relating, and it is unlikely that Mac Low himself would have pursued such

variations.

7.4 Performance Material

Mac Low's Asymmetries, as open as they are to variations in performance, are

still performance scores, as opposed to graphic scores or invitations for improvisation.

Tones, duration, and dynamics can all be varied, but the words – the structural

foundation for each poem – are "*unchangeable*, even though the ways of saying them

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[129] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xiv.
[130] Ibid., ixx.

may vary."[131] Through their limits, Mac Low's scores attempt to give performers an opportunity to discover sounds or situations they might not have found through their own tastes and habits.[132] However, there is some room within the limits of an Asymmetry performance to influence the words.

One way to influence the words in a performance, is to choose which poems to perform intuitively, instead of by chance. One may even go so far as to select poems with programmatic or thematic commonalities. Mac Low suggested that performers might choose individual poems which they would prefer to perform and acknowledged that some poems might suggest more specific meanings.[133]

> In some texts, by limiting the word population to words (or phrases) from some particular source, a kind of meaning emerges that may be relevant to – for instance – politics: as when I choose a politically relevant news item as my source.[134]

Collections of Mac Low's Asymmetries could be selected to reflect on nature, Zen Philosophy, politics, and much more. Choosing poems for certain occasions or places is well within the limits of an Asymmetry Performance, but obviously, sacrifices some amount of spontaneous discovery that might arise from decisions governed by chance. The degree to when any performer intervenes to choose specific poems is guided by what they would desire to hear in specific performance contexts.

Some of these contexts may make certain poems undesirable. For example, I would not find it desirable to perform an Asymmetry with curse words, like

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[131] Ibid., xxiv.
[132] Gil Ott, "Dialog: Interviews and Correspondence," 22.
[133] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, xxii.
[134] Gil Ott, "Dialog: Interviews and Correspondence," 25.

Asymmetry 101 which begins with "shit heat," for a mid-day library concert where young children might be in attendance. When I chose poems for my January and February, 2017[135] performances, I excluded any poems that included names or years that might date the performance, giving the impression that it was an historical recreation rather than a germane performance relating to present sounds and current events.

Some performers may choose to connect their performances more explicitly to current events or politics. To some degree, a performance of Mac Low's Asymmetries is always political, as it allegorizes a pacifist-anarchist community. But, an Asymmetry performance could also have more overtly political implications. In the earliest Asymmetry recording available in the UC San Diego Special Collections Archives from 1966, Mac Low records himself performing *Asymmetries 21-28* with a radio broadcast about the Battle of Danang.[136] The poems' text become highly political when contextualized within the broadcast's description of the brutality of the Vietnam War. The end of *Asymmetry 23* vividly evokes wartime destruction with its words: "grief-scourge returns, imperiled energy FLAME SUFFERING "consumed." overcome unconcealed repeal."[137]

Mac Low often performed in a way that related to politics and current events.[138] As David Antin described:

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[135] See Appendix A
[136] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 21-28, and the Battle of Danang, circa 1966*, MS 180, Box 236, Folder 22, RJ 23, Jackson Mac Low Papers 1923-1995, University of California San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library.
[137] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 48.
[138] Jerome Rothenberg, "Pre-Face," ed. Gil Ott, *Paper Air* 2, no. 3 (1980): pg. 53.

> Jackson the modernist at an avant garde festival in the early '60s,
> treating us to a formalized prophecy of the death of our cities; Jackson
> the pacifist, at an anti-war rally, reading Aeschylus' tirade against war
> to his fellow pacifists – in Greek; Jackson the concrete poet at Bryant
> Park, where we had been expressly forbidden to read 'sexual or
> political poetry' reading his 'non-political poem,' which he explained
> 'expressed no attitudes or opinions or ideas of a political nature,' and
> nearly causing a riot with a simple litany of names.

Mac Low was a longtime anarchist, pacifist, and political activist. He constantly struggled with the "purity of his politics,"[139] but they are nevertheless thoroughly integrated in the performance practice of his Asymmetries. Though political performances of Mac Lows Asymmetries are entirely possible (as demonstrated by Mac Low himself), they have ideological limits; using his poems to promote fascist or violent ideology would be destructive to the egalitarian structure of an Asymmetry performance, and, I suspect, would have been strongly protested by Mac Low.

In his 1980 publication, *Asymmetries 1-260*, Mac Low contextualizes his creation of the Numbered Asymmetries in his first marriage with Iris Lezak, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, relations with Cuba, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement.[140] He concludes by saying "I could go on a long time with this then-and-nowing without exhausting the meaning implicit in the fact that I wrote the Asymmetries in this book in 1960 but am writing *these* words in 1980. Let me cease worrying this two-decade leap!"[141] Many Asymmetries have references to what would have been current political events and terms, such as "Eisenhower,"[142]

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[139] Judith Malina, "Remembering Jackson Mac Low," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 27, no. 2 (2005): pg. 78, accessed December 5, 2014, JSTOR.
[140] Jackson Mac Low, *Asymmetries 1-260*, 239-243.
[141] Ibid., 243.
[142] Ibid., 35.

"Nixon,"[143] "Negro,"[144] or the "blackball list."[145] As these events and references drift into history, it is now only possible to include current events in Mac Low's Asymmetries through his Indeterminate Numbered Asymmetries or by creating new Asymmetries.

Indeterminate Numbered Asymmetries are abstracted versions of sister Asymmetries, where most or all of the found words are replaced with a placeholder description of the word's type. For example, *Asymmetry 409*'s first words "sing isolation" are translated into Indeterminate *Asymmetry 408*'s abstraction, "verb 1 noun 1." *Asymmetry 408* can be realized through chance or improvisation with any number of new verbs or nouns. In the chance method for realizing Indeterminate Asymmetries, words are found from a "'collegiate' dictionary" using random digits.[146] Mac Low suggests that "poets or composers" who have "undergone the discipline of composition by chance methods or other 'objective' (as against 'ego-centered' or even 'intuitional' methods)" are best prepared to perform Indeterminate Asymmetries by free improvisation, and that those with less experience "think thrice before rejecting the chance method in favor of improvisation." [147] As they avoid "perils" like "cuteness, corny dramatics and other types of posturing," it is conceivable that an improvising performer would find words closely related to their current circumstances.

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[143] Ibid., 65.
[144] Ibid., 41.
[145] Ibid., 207.
[146] Jackson Mac Low, "Jackson Mac Low," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, 73.
[147] Ibid.

Here again, the limits are a performer's ability to listen and relate without egotistically disrupting the performance.

The possibility for new Asymmetries is a more speculative limit based on the conceptualization of Asymmetries existing co-concurrently in many generations, as illustrated in the Asymmetry family tree. As a generation of the family tree, the Asymmetry System is Mac Low's authored form, still able to generate endless Asymmetries. This potentially expands the idea of co-authorship in the Asymmetries' conception of shared roles. Mac Low is still the author of his form (the Asymmetry System), but new realizations would not be "by" Jackson Mac Low. Instead, they are Mac Lowian Asymmetries "by" whoever has realized them. Below are two new realizations of Mac Low's Asymmetry System, which demonstrate its ability to continue to generate new poems.

```
silences into Low exist:
                        never could
        exist:
                silences

into never time original

Low original words

exist:
```

Figure 7.1: New Asymmetry realized by Jennifer Bewerse on April 24, 2017, using text from a draft of this paper and an index word from the paper found using a Random Digit Book

```
countin' Obama up Nobody tastes If
       Nobody

Obama been allowances me allowances

up pray

Nobody Obama been Obama day You

tastes allowances see this tastes extras
       see

If Finesse

Nobody Obama been Obama day You
```

Figure 7.2: New asymmetry realized by Jennifer Bewerse on April 24, 2017, using text from Kendrick Lamar's 2016 Top Ten Billboard hit, *Humble* and an index word from the song found using an online Random Digit Generator

Both of these poems were composed using the Standardized Repeating Form, resulting in poems that contain all of the characteristics of Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries: spatialized found words with their accompanying punctuation and typographic features. The flexibility of Mac Low's Performance Methods means these poems could be realized with all Ten Performance Methods using Mac Low's "Listen and Relate" based performance practice. The second Asymmetry demonstrates how current-events could be referenced within a new series of printed Asymmetry poems and could revitalize that particular feature of Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries.[148]

However, it is likely Mac Low would have been apprehensive about others creating new Asymmetries. Because Asymmetries are so deeply aligned with Mac Low's politics of personal choice and egalitarianism, they are also vulnerable to political manipulations or abuses by others. As with Mac Low's Indeterminate

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[148] See Figure 7.2

Asymmetries, these new Asymmetries are "beset with perils," not the least of which are egoism or interference with the chance results of Mac Low's System. Though new Asymmetries might be conceptually justified within the limits of an Asymmetry, Mac Low's 260 published Asymmetries provide more than enough material for most any imaginable performance scenario.

Having speculated about the limits of the Asymmetries in print and performance, the scope of potentiality in Mac Low's work becomes clear. Asymmetries are ripe for performance in any number of contexts, using an infinite number of possible words combined in a mathematically massive number of possible performance permutations. Where is the identity of a work, whose boundaries are so all-encompassing?

CHAPTER 8

IDENTITY IN MAC LOW'S NUMBERED ASYMMETRIES

Asymmetries are polymorphous works, existing simultaneously as a System for generating poems, a series of printed poems, a performable score, and a scenario for group performance. These formats radiate like concentric spheres, rippling inward and outward so that no part of the work can be disconnected from its other forms.

At their core, Asymmetries are defined by their form: the Asymmetry System Mac Low created to generate all Asymmetries. They are nonsyntactical poems whose words are found by acrostic chance methods and positioned on the page according to punctuation. As an object, they are concrete, but they are also open in that they contain no authored meaning and may be infinitely interpreted by their reader. Each poem is a reflection of Mac Low's System, but has also informed the development of that System, so that they evolved concurrently.

When combined with Mac Low's performance instructions, Asymmetries are transmuted into performance. An Asymmetry performance is dependent on the Printed Asymmetry's form to generate words, sounds, and silences, but it moves beyond the form; the Asymmetry performance is a score-based reading, but it is not the score made audible. Instead, the Asymmetry Performance takes on its own characteristics, becoming a meditative or communal, aural situation that results in and from the spontaneous combination of words, sounds, and silences.

The particulars of these combinations are massively variable, but lie within the limitations of a performance practice: to Listen and Relate. It is through this performance practice that Asymmetries are able to be both spontaneous and meaningful; meaning emerges from the simple fact that each participant finds for it. In this way, the Asymmetries are not a provocation for reinvention – to find new sounds or experiment with different performance methods – they are scenarios for communion, as Quasha said, congress, not progress.[149] They are tools for coming together to experience.

What Mac Low has created is a complex and interlocking, egalitarian ecosystem for shared authorship from spontaneous discovery. The ecosystem is sustained through a series of paradoxes, philosophical checks and balances. The Asymmetry System is self-contained and specific, but results in unpredictable printed poems. Printed poems can only be performed by ten methods, but each performance is unique because of its massive number of performance permutations and variations. Performers are individual, autonomous contributors who create a total sound that they would choose to hear, but those choices must also be derived from the total sound situation through the practice of listening and relating. Meaning isn't authoritatively determined by any individual, but persists, arising from each participant's interaction with the printed poem or performance.

Without these paradoxes, the ecosystem collapses leaving either Mac Low as the hierarchical center of the work, or a work with no center at all. If the System's

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[149] George Quasha, "A Concrete Dialog with Myself On, and for JML," 57.

results can be predicted or determined, then Mac Low becomes the author of his poems and the ruler of meaning; if the System is completely open, then there is no way to distinguish an Asymmetry from any other text, except by Mac Low's authorial signature. If there is only one way to perform the poems, performers cannot become co-creators, so that Mac Low is the sole composer of the work; if the poems can be performed in *any* way, the performance is unrecognizable as an Asymmetry. If performers erase themselves in performance, only Mac Low's preferences remain, centering him as the sole composer of the work; if participants center themselves in the performance by ignoring the total sound situation, the mechanisms for discovering spontaneous relationships disintegrate. If meaning is definitively authored by Mac Low or a performer in the poem or performance, the Asymmetry cannot be pluralistic, so that the listener/reader is no longer co-author of the work's meaning; if the work is meaningless, there is no authorship to share.

The Asymmetry is like an organism. It undergoes a series of evolutions, and exists polymorphically within a balanced ecosystem. Its vitality is derived from its flexibility within a web of paradoxes. As Judith Malina described,

> All of Jackson's work, in poetry, music, theater, and political action exemplifies the extreme of the uncompromising search for pure form, for the miracle of the mathematical in the miasma of uncertainty, for the crystallization and the flow. What he has done is to throw light on the abyss.[150]

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[150] Judith Malina, "Remembering Jackson Mac Low."

As participants, we enter into the ecosystem – the form, the system, the practice, and their paradoxes – and through it, we can see a different way to experience the world.

APPENDIX A

REFERENCED PERFORMANCES

An Anthology Final Presentation. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse. University of California, San Diego, Warren Lecture Hall, La Jolla, December 6, 2011.

Autoduplicity. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse and Rachel Beetz. Center for New Music, San Francisco, January 19, 2015.

Autoduplicity. Performed by Jennfier Bewerse and Rachel Beetz. University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, January 14, 2015.

Autoduplicity. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse and Rachel Beetz. University of California, San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center, Experimental Theater, La Jolla, October 7, 2014.

Bewerse, Jennifer. "Poem as Score: Jackson Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries." Lecture, EUREKA! Musical Minds of California, California State University, Fullerton, February 25, 2017.

CELLO // Jennifer Bewerse. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse. The Boston Conservatory, Houston Hall, Boston, July 11, 2014.

Doctoral Recital with Jackson Mac Low's Numbered Asymmetries. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse. Conrad Prebys Concert Hall, La Jolla, January 29, 2013.

EQ // Diagenesis Duo Recital. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse and Heather Barnes. Lilypad, Cambridge, March 6, 2015.

Liveness: Part III. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse, Rachel Beetz, and Batya MacAdam-Somer. Conrad Prebys Music Center, Experimental Theater, La Jolla, January 26, 2015.

Music in the Brickyard: Diagenesis @ The Bray. Performed by Jennifer Bewerse and Heather Barnes. Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, August 27, 2016.

Southland Ensemble Performs Jackson Mac Low. Performed by Southland Ensemble. Automata Arts, Los Angeles, January 28, 2017.

Southland Ensemble Performs Jackson Mac Low. Performed by Southland Ensemble. University of California, San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center, Experimental Theater, La Jolla, February 17, 2017.

APPENDIX B

PERMISSIONS LETTER

Anne Tardos

42 N. Moore Street, New York, NY 10013

Tel: █████████

E-mail: █████████

5/30/2017

Dear Jennifer,

I hereby grant permission for you to include Asymmetries 87, 147, 188, and 259 and the Asymmetry Mesostic by John Cage in your doctoral dissertation for the University of California, San Diego.

Sincerely,

Anne Tardos

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