

Melissa Marie Bruno

August 1 2009

Double Down: An Analysis of Medium and Message in Rita Wong's "XC-Poetics, Or Toward 90 Addresses For A Poem" and Christian Bök's "Crystallography (A Report on Lucid Writing)"

Both Rita Wong's "XC-Poetics, Or Toward 90 Addresses For A Poem" and Christian Bök's "Crystallography (A Report on Lucid Writing)," are exercises in creative reading in which both poets play with the structure of their poetics to accentuate their own poetic voice/message. Wong presents her reader with an inventory of quotations which, indirectly, unveil her own political consciousness. As indicated in her title, the quotations are "addresses." As such, the quotations function as examples of poetry which the reader can figuratively visit through interpretation and analysis, and/or literately reference (i.e., the larger work). Moreover, these quotations can also be a means to address and direct the reader, suggesting that there is a connection between them, and that they are in conversation together. It is up to the reader to decide whether or not to mull over each individual quotation, to invent his own narrative voice to unite the fragments together, or to attempt to decipher a message potentially hidden within their assembly. Similarly, the structure of Bök's poetics, his "report on lucid writing," operates on a nuanced and multifaceted level. Inspired by the etymology of the word "crystallography," Bök's states that the text itself "represents an act of 'lucid writing,' which uses the lexicon of geological science to misread the poetics of rhetorical figures" (Voyce, par. 10). Bök uses and "misuses" the linguistic techniques of both science and poetics to conduct an experiment of what it means to write lucidly. As he delineates, "lucid writing does not concern itself with the transparent transmission of a message (so that, much of the poetry might seem 'opaque'); instead, lucid writing concerns itself with the reflexive operations of its own process" (Voyce, par. 10). Therefore, Bök focuses on the process of articulation through the interplay between poetic and

academic prose. As neither Bök nor Wong present a clear unifying message, they defer such a task to their reader. In so doing, both poets use the form, the structure of their poetics, to craftily convey the content, the message itself. Both demand an attentive and shrewd reader(ship) to recognize the subtleties at play in order to understand the creative and nuanced meaning ensconced within their poetics.

In an interview with Larissa Lai, Rita Wong states that her “consciousness [...] of inequity leads [her] to pay close attention to [her] environment [...] Paying attention is a strategy of survival, of course, but it is also good training for [her] writing practice” (79). This acute attentiveness parallels Wong’s opening statement in her poetics, “XC-Poetics, Or Toward 90 Addresses For A Poem,” whereby she cites Myung My Kim’s notion of “‘generosity as method,’ an ‘ability to read subtleties and nuance as to how you affect the systems around you, whether are intimate relationships or work or the poetics you explore, how can we attend to that whole *circuitry*’” (173). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “generosity” is a “[w]illingness to lay aside resentment or forgive injuries; magnanimity,” in addition to being a “[r]eadiness or liberality in giving; munificence” (“Generosity” *OED*). As such, “generosity as method” suggests that one must maintain a magnanimous outlook in order to be aware of and attuned to others. This awareness is not only a [self]consciousness of one’s own “resentments,” but those harboured by others as well—one must forgive others their lack of generosity, intolerance, ignorance. Thus, generosity of method is an *attempt* towards unbiased perception—a lucid vision and attitude. Consequently, the “ability to read the subtleties and nuance as to how [one] affect[s] the systems around [one’s self]” is coupled with an awareness of one’s culpability: one’s contribution to, and involvement in said systems, which, one might surmise, arouses a sense of responsibility. Therefore, one can “attend to that whole circuitry,” first, through awareness and consciousness, and second, in being generous enough to share the gift of consciousness with others, providing them the tools for becoming aware, which, one might hope, they might share with others and raise further awareness. By starting her poetics with the aforementioned passage by Myung My

Kim, Wong strategically provides the framework for reading and navigating through its structure: she gives the reader a generous “number of fragments from various sources that [she] has encountered over the years that speak to the ways in which cross-cultural poetics are urgent in this moment” (173). Wong offers her reader with the tools to open his eyes, extrapolate, and, with any luck, inductively interpret the message she is trying to put forward. The tools provided are found within an inventory of quotations.

Wong’s poetic inventory, her list of quotations, does not adhere to any obvious chronological or alphabetized pattern, thus suggesting two things: (1) they are assembled at random, or (2) they have an encrypted message. Without a central organizing principle, one is free to explore and entertain a plethora of analyses, techniques, metaphors, and strategies potentially at play. For instance, one could read Wong’s poetics as a product of her own technique for writing poetry, a process she details in an interview with rob mclennan: “a poem can begin with a feeling, a word, a sound, an experience, an intuition. I tend to write short bits that accumulate over time. There are recurring obsessions and themes, though they are not always conscious when I begin writing” (<http://12or20>). Accordingly, perhaps there is no conscious motivation behind the assembly, and it is simply a miscellany, a smorgasbord of disembodied quotations collected under the banner of cross-cultural poetics. This style of poetics might represent a haphazard list of citations, which should be read independently and not negotiated, understood, or interpreted in relation to the surrounding quotations. As such, is Wong letting each quotation speak for itself? Moreover, one might deduce from the title that this is a series of addresses, (i.e. an index, a catalog, and/or a bibliography) from which the reader could reference the work itself (as each quotation is accompanied with bibliographical information). If so, is she trying to say, “if you are interested in pursuing the matter further, here are some good starting points”? Does this sequence correspond to the chronology in which Wong encountered these quotations? Given that the backgrounds of the authors are considerably diverse, do these quotations represent a multicultural mosaic, one which does not privilege any homogeneous

ordering power/code? Or, is this a social commentary speaking to the fragmented nature of the postmodern condition? Is this a metaphorical manifestation of how, in a Lacanian fashion, through the internalization of language, we have all become fragmented and lacking unity and cohesion? Many of the quotations listed within Wong's poetics speak to the various problems of language. For instance, Marie Annharte Baker describes language as the enemy within (Wong 173); Lola Lemire-Tostevin cautions that we should be suspicious of language's origins(174); Dionne Brand considers it to be violent (Dionne Brand) (178), just to list a few. Perhaps Wong is trying to present the information in the quotations as clearly as possible without any narrativization, analysis, or commentary wedged between them. Maybe, maybe not; maybe all of the above? Or, is Wong simply being lazy? Or is she demanding and privileging an active/attentive reader?

In reading through Wong's poetics, there is one element, a common-denominator, which unites all the disparate quotations together: the reader—the unity within the disunity. Moreover, in addition to being the adhesive, the reader is, ultimately, the highest authority. In “Why Write?,” Jean-Paul Sartre states that

Reading seems [...] to be the synthesis of perception and creation. It posits the essentiality of both the subject and the object. The object is essential because one must wait for it and observe it; but the subject is also essential because it is required not only to disclose the object (that is, to make it possible for there to be an object) but also so that this object might exist absolutely. (1338-9)

Therefore, “from the beginning, the meaning is no longer contained in the words, since it is [the reader], on the contrary, who allows the significance of each of them to be understood” (1339).

As such, Wong provides her reader with the materials (i.e., quotations) from which he can construct his own understanding. In other words, the reader is not only empowered, as he has the authority to make sense of her poetics, he is essential, because without his active and attentive reading, her poetics would merely be a pastiche of diverse quotations.

Furthermore, the reader has the power to approach Wong's text in two ways: (1) reading each quotation as its own microcosm, as its own isolated, independent thought, or (2) to draw connections between the quotations, essentially becoming the narrative voice that reconciles the difference between them. The former style of reading requires the reader to pause and reflect on each individual quotation, privileging and punctuating the autonomy of the cited author's voice. Alternately, in the latter style of reading, the reader must insert himself into the blank spaces in-between the quotations. In other words, when read together, the quotations represent a metaphorical labyrinth through which the reader must figuratively and literally navigate. Thus, Wong "guides [the reader], but all [she] does is guide him. The landmarks [she] sets up are separated by the void. The reader must unite them; he must go beyond them. In short, reading is directed creation" (Sartre 1339). Wong constructs and provides the framework for her reader to find himself, placing himself amid the quotations; essentially, embedding him and including him within any attempt to reflect or critique her poetics as a whole. As a result, the reader is just as much a product of her poetics as the quotations themselves. Regardless as to whether the reader chooses to concentrate on each quotation individually, or extrapolate a unified interpretation, Wong seduces him into conducting a *close* reading of the information and disseminates him within the quotations themselves. Ambivalence and deferred agency might be the ultimate technique to entice awareness and participation—appealing to and inciting individual vanity is the oldest trick in the book. However, one might question how much liberty is bestowed upon the reader to interpret freely considering that Wong strategically selects which quotations are cited, in addition to sequentially escorting him down a specific path.

Considering that Wong is the creative mastermind behind the structural organization of the quotations, the one who places them in the delineated order, one might surmise that there is a specific intentionality, an overarching message, within their assemblage. Shrewdly, Wong manipulates the voices of the authors' quotations through decontextualization to articulate her own poetics—what one might consider to be her own metanarrative. According to Marjorie

Garber, in her work *Quotation Marks*, “since every repetition is a repetition with a difference, duplication becomes ‘duplicity.’ The ‘same’ spoken again will always be ‘different’” (21). When a quotation is decontextualized, its meaning is altered. In other words, reorientation of quotations revamps and shifts its original message. Simply put, decontextualization and recontextualization is a manipulative resignification. For instance, Wong highlights a quote from Dionne Brand’s poem “No Language is Neutral”:

Here is history too. A Backbone bending and
 unbending without a word, heat, bellowing these
 lungs spongy, exhaled in humming, the oceans, a
 way out and not anything of beauty, tipping turquoise
 and scandalous.... (Wong 178)

Within the context of the poem, this passage demonstrates how Brand “fuses language with the collective history of slavery, physical violence, and linguistic violence” (Gadsby 131). In Wong’s poetics, the aforementioned passage is preceded by a quotation, from the UNESCO website¹, about how water gives both life and peace, and is followed by an excerpt from Weyman Chan’s “Near Milk River, looking for the Sweetgrass Hills” which describes how “[s]ometimes the quiet act of following / your own part will address the future²” (Wong 178). In being recontextualized between these two quotations, one might be hard pressed to guess that Brand’s poem has anything to do with (historical, physical, and linguistic) violence. Rather, wedged between the aforementioned quotations, the excerpt from Brand’s poem seems to suggest that the ocean is a way to escape, and possibly cleanse, history’s effects on the organic/natural. Thus, Wong’s stylized poetics of [re]citation and recontextualization usurps, manipulates, even disregards, the quotations original meaning, and redeploys it to buttress and promote an entirely new meaning.

In strategically placing the quotations together, Wong articulates a new message from old sources. Pauline Butling states that Wong “constructs an alternative history to reconfigure the

present moment” (22). In her poetics, one could argue that Wong fashions an “alternative history” from history itself through the use of quotations³. In either reading the quotations, or attempting to decipher the carefully delineated argumentation canvassed and encrypted within their enigmatic sequence⁴, Wong reconfigures the “present moment” by rethinking the past. As such, Wong engineers her poetics from quotations, making hers a genre of poetic *bricoleur*. According to Jacques Derrida, in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,”

[t]he *bricoleur* [...] is someone who uses "the means at hand," that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous -- and so forth. (286)

Therefore, “if one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one’s conception from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, every discourse is *bricoleur*”(286). Wong, however, does simply borrow from a singular text, but a motley of resources: texts, interviews, poems, articles, and websites. Making a slight prepositional alteration, substituting “that” for “to” in Wong’s opening statement, Wong deploys the “fragments from various sources [she has] encountered over the years [*to*] speak to the many ways in which cross-cultural poetics are urgent in this moment” (173). Moreover, Wong states in an interview with Rob McLennan,

I want to understand what it means to act ethically in a globalized world. For instance, as someone who relies heavily on computers, I am implicated in the degradation and eventual destruction of ecosystems (mining for coltan, for instance), and I am also related to the labour of people whom I may never meet, but who nonetheless help make my work and my life possible. How do I reconcile my intent (to work toward peace and social justice) with my consumption patterns as a citizen in North America? Writing offers a space to explore these difficult, uncomfortable questions, and the form that such writing

takes may also be uncomfortable, but I hope that the reading, research, thinking and feeling that I do will be useful to readers who struggle with these questions.

(<http://12or20>)

Considering her “reading, research, thinking and feeling” to be of use to her readers, perhaps Wong, instead of privileging and articulating her own voice within her poetics, given that she is still haunted and undecided as to “how to reconcile [her] intent” with “her consumption patterns,” prefers to address the problem of “what it means to act ethically in a globalized world” by offering her readers the “inspiring” “knowledge and wisdom of *many* thinkers, writers, and activists” (<http://12or20>) (my italics) as opposed to being hypocritical and offering up direct advice. As such, Wong, generously, shares her own inspirations as opposed to trying to be inspirational within her poetics. Christian Bök, too, shares a similar generosity.

Bök, in “Crystallography (A Report on Lucid Writing),” caters to the individuality of his readers, providing them with two different narrative techniques from which to approach his work. Bök uses a combination of poetic and academic prose to articulate and construct his analysis. Considering that Bök explores the difficulty of “lucid writing,” perhaps, in using both narrative techniques, he is raising the question as to which method is more effective in communicating clearly. Is poetry, despite its ambivalence, the medium to convey a clearer depiction? Does poetry’s ambiguity speak to the enigmatic nature of life itself? Alternately, is the precision of academic writing clearer, or is it too distinct and suffocating? As such, perhaps Bök is highlighting the tensions between poetry (being personal and subjective), and academic prose (being impersonal and objective)? This dualism speaks to two kinds of readership: a reader who prefers to have a plainly drawn picture presented out before him, having the interpretative the work done by somebody else; or a reader who likes to handle the tools of interpretation himself to paint his own. Either way, in deploying both poetic and academic prose, perhaps Bök is suggesting that lucid writing is an interplay between both techniques of narrative.

In addition to being an interplay between the two techniques of writing, Bök also structures his poetics as a metaphorical interplay between crystals and language itself. Looking at the structure of Bök's poetics is like gazing through a crystal—it refracts a spectrum, an inventory of arguments, each of which is articulated by both academic and poetic prose. Like a crystal, depending on which way you look at and through it, you can see a different image/representation/vision. As Bök describes, a crystal is a “catalyst for the terminal architecture of both seduction and simulation, [...] initiat[ing] an interplay of special effects of appearances” (n.p.). Within his poetics, these “special effects of appearances” are produced by his uses of language, the combination of poetry and academic prose, as well as their division.

Similar to the various fractals of a crystal, Bök's poetics is divided into various sections. Each section comprises of an academically structured paragraph (i.e., argument, supporting evidence and analysis, and conclusion) which is followed by either a couplet, or a singular poetic line. The reader has the freedom to read this structure in a variety of ways. The poetics can be read in: (1) isolated fragments, treating the poetic and academic prose as independent from one another; (2) chronologically, tracing the unfolding argument as it is delineated on the page; (3) strategically, combining the academic prose sections together (forming an essay), and the poetic sections (forming poem); (4) selectively, reading each section as its an isolated unit (as punctuated by the asterisks). Considering that the poetic lines follow the academic prose in each unit, one might deduce that: (1) the poetic lines serves to summarize, rearticulate, clarify and/or crystallize the aforementioned arguments delineated, explored, and examined within the academic prose, suggesting that it is either significant, or redundant; (2) despite the fact that one might start with academics prose, what one finds, the research one uncovers, resonates with a poetic form. This form traces the path from the impersonal, rigid, formulaic, structured, academic prose to the personal, the poetic. As such, this sequence is a commentary on how information is processed. As we experience the world, we encounter it on other peoples' terms, we witness what they say, what they take as evidence and facts, etc. and all these factors are internalized, ingested and digested

in the self, personally, poetically; (3) it is demonstrative of a hierarchy of thought/medium/writing, privileging academics over poetics (potentially making a subtle social commentary about how, in our technology obsessed western society, poetry, oftentimes, is considered to be ancillary and/or a leisurely past-time), and relegating poetry to a ornamental after-thought. To examine the implications of this third structural proposition in more detail, I turn to Elaine Scarry.

Scarry, in “The Made-up and the Made-Real,” delineates how “understanding the nature of inventing, making, creating” (214) has been divided into two stages: the first stage is the “generation of an ‘inventory’” (215), and the second stage is the “generation of accurate descriptions” (215). She describes how both poetry and art are stuck in the inventory stage and are identified as either “exceptional, nonnormative, or marginal” (218) or “unserious, irrelevant, unreal” (222), both of which are ways of “cordoning the humanities from the sciences, the research and the professional schools” (222). Furthermore, “since art only has the first stage, one can see it as an incomplete artifact, as a truncated or abbreviated artifact, or an adolescent artifact” (223). Alternately,

nonaesthetic artifacts (hence the subject matters of the sciences as well as of schools of engineering, medicine, law), far from being unreal, are precisely and essentially objects that, having been made up, then undergo a second stage where they are made real, a reality-conferring process—such as “ratification” in the law or “verification” in science—radically alters the “invention,” “proposal,” or “hypothesis” that was its starting place.
(221)

Similarly, Bök describes this process in light of crystals:

the study of crystals does not exist as a science until Hauy defines crystals according to both the constancy of their planar angles and the symmetry of their rotary axes, for prior to this schema the study of crystals exists only as a poetry, whose origins begin in

obscurity with Pliny, when he performs an apocryphal act of misprision by mistaking broken quartz for water. (n.p.)

The language in passage reinforces the premise that poetry is made up and academics made real. For something to “exist as a poetry,” it is “mistaken,” “obscure,” “an apocryphal act of misprision”; moreover, in as a science, crystals are “defined” “according” to a mathematical “schema.” Poetic conceptions, therefore, are usurped, and “made real” through scientific description. As such, the sciences purportedly clarify the ambiguity of poetry. However, in the poetic prose that follows the aforementioned passage, Bök states that “[s]cience begins with the parapraxis of poetry” (n.p). The concision of this one line makes the academic prose sound verbose and superfluous. Thus, the poetic prose both structurally and rhetorically underscores the academic demonstrating how

if poetry cannot oppose science by becoming its antonymic extreme, perhaps poetry can oppose science by becoming its hyperbolic extreme, using reason against itself in order to subvert not only pedantic theories of absolute verity, but also romantic theories of artistic genius. (Voyce, par. 12)

Perhaps, Bök is trying not only to subvert the notion that there is a “literal” (Bök n.p) correlation between scientific/academic prose and lucid writing, but subvert the assumed authority of its discourse as well.

According to Bök, “‘lucid writing’ is a metaphor for science, if not the conceit of science, for science strives in its writing to clarify the ambiguities of language in order to fortify the contiguities of language [...] and yearns to create a system of reference without interference” (n.p.). Thus, one might ask the question is there really such a thing as lucid writing? It is a falsity to think that there is a one to one correspondence between language and things. In this sense, a fidelity to actuality in language is a paradox. Writing is always going to be imperfect--everything is a matter of interpretation. The best that one can hope for is an intimation, approximation.

Looking closely at language in book's poetics, when read chronologically, the academic prose passages becomes increasingly poetic. As the academic argument builds, stylistically, the language is distorted. Towards the middle of the poetics, in the academic prose, Bök introduces Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of music in which they assert that the "refrain is a prism," a "sonorous assemblage" of "rhythm whose repetition generates unorthodox arrays of interrogative heterogeneity" (Bök n.p.). The middle of the paragraph, where one would usually provide the supporting evidence, reads as follows:

the crystal, the refrain, does not simply Xerox its parts in an endless polysyndeton of identical units, each one as the same last one, on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on [...] *ad infinitum*. The crystal instead copies its parts, copies its parts, often with flaws, ofnef wiht fwals. (Bök 5)

Stylistically, the phraseology replicates the content and subject matter. Bök typographically transcribes the monotony of a Xerox machine producing the same copy over and over again to no end, allowing the words themselves to mimic that process: "[...] on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on *ad infinitum*." In rearranging the letters of "often with flaws," Bök syntactically creates a flawed copy linguistically: "Ofnef with fwals." Another example is in the second last academic prose section. Here, Bök cites Roger Caillois's observation that modern painters have not only given up trying to represent models exactly, but have "abandon[ed] models altogether," "eschew[ing] any kind of representation" (13). Without any kind of representation, each "sentence eventually begins to drift off into xzastyfhazkxykjaqurquafqirqfrifriqfjasrajstroiouac fjoaeox [...]" (Bök n.p), thus, typographically miming the modern artist's refusal to replicate identifiable models. As such, the suggestion is that there is no concise system of reference, no formula to apply in order to write lucidly. Perhaps, one must be more creative and infuse poetic elements academic discourse. Concordantly, Bök is subtly intimating that there is a place for poetry within academics, or at least there should be. Perhaps lucid writing needs to be ambivalent. Perhaps, in writing about

something concrete, one must be able to stylishly incorporate the concrete into dialogue itself--- for “what is most lucid is most opaque.” (n.p.)

In choosing to read Bök’s poetics chronologically, one can note subtle transmutations in Bök’s academic language as it slowly metamorphosizes into poetic prose. Considering that this is a “report on lucid language,” the message surfaces that academic and poetry are intertwined. In the final paragraph, Bök describes how “crystallography [...] strives to achieve a birefringence, offering two perspectives simultaneously from the focal point of a single lens, if not from the acute angle of a perfect world” (n.p.). Therefore, considering that everything perceived through a crystal is, in a sense, splintered into two, this suggesting that to write lucidly one needs to write both ways. As Bök continues,

a luminary beam of meaning passes through the crystal so that the meaning bifurcates into an incidental ray and an accidental ray, the latter beam apparently deviating from any theory of optics, deflecting the law of the linear and refracting the art of syntax. (n.p)

This deviant accidental ray which resists linearity and splinters syntax is a metaphor for poetry. As such, Bök makes an argument for poetry within the final academic passage suggesting that the two need to cohabit as opposed to being segregated from one another. They need to infiltrate each other’s discourse. If one were to reverse path of the incidental and accidental rays, they would both be the same.

According to Bök,

The future of poetry may no longer reside in the standard lyricism of emotional anecdotes, but in other exploratory procedures, some of which may seem entirely unpoetic, because they work, not by expressing subjective thoughts, but by exploiting unthinking machines, by colonizing unfamiliar lexicons, or by simulating unliterary art forms. (Voyce, Par. 8)

By inviting their readers to colonize unfamiliar empty spaces—in between the lines of her poetics in the case of Wong, and in the interplay between poetic and academic prose in the case of Bök—

both poets compel the reader to think in new and creative ways. As such, a new interplay arises between the possible intentions of the writers and the predilections of those reading these writings. Ultimately, both reader and writer are burdened with the responsibility to articulate some kind of meaning, whether it be given or created.⁵

Works Cited

- Bök, Christian. "Crystallography (A Report on Lucid Writing)." Toronto: fingerprinting inkoperated, 1995. np.
- Butling, Pauline. "(Re)Defining Radical Poetics." *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radial Poetries in English (1957-2003)*. Ed. Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2005. 17-28.
- Caillois, Roger. *The Writing of Stones*. Trans. Barbara Bray. Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 1985.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1978. 278-294.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Quotation Marks*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Gadsby, Meredith M., "I Such Coarse Salt: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada—Language, Location, and the Politics of Transcendence." *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration and Survival*. Missouri: U of Missouri P, 2006. 121-140.
- "Generosity." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 26 July 2009. <http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/cgi/entry/50093596?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=generosity&first=1&max_to_show=10>
- Lai, Larissa. "Interview with Rita Wong." *West Coast Line* 33.3 (Winter 2000): 72-82.
- mcLennan, rob. "12 or 20 questions: with Rita Wong." *rob mcLennan's Blog*. 5 Jan. 2008. 28 July 2009. (<http://12or20questions.blogspot.com/2008/01/12-or-20-questions-with-rita-wong.html>)
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Why Write." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 2001. 1336-1349.
- Scarry, Elaine. "The Made-Up and the Made-Real." *Field Work: Sites in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Eds. Marjorie Garber, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, and Paul B. Franklin. New York: Routledge, 1996. 214-224.
- Wong, Rita. "XC-Poetics, Or Toward 90 Addresses For A Poem." *XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics* 20 (2008): 173-179.
- Voyce, Stephen. "The Xenotext Experiment: An Interview with Christian Bök." *Postmodern Culture* 17.2 (January 2007). 22 July 2009. <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.107/17.2voyce.txt>>

¹ The following is the passage provided in Wong's poetics: knowing that you are the great River as it the abundant land it bring to carve its banks then spread its fertile plains and deltas and open its basins its great estuaries even to where it finally joins once again that grandmother ocean's vast and liquid peace.—from "Silwkw," Jeannette Armstrong, 2003 World Water Forum, UNESCO website. (Wong 178)

² The complete quotation is:

Every sound and tree is a hermit
 Not every hermit if a sound or tree
 Sometimes the quiet act of following
 your own past will address the future. And will be
 given back as it began

--from "Near Milk River, looking for the Sweetgrass Hills," Weyman Chan, 2007. (Wong 178)

³ The second something in written down, or said, it becomes a product of the past, of history.

⁴ To avoid being pompous and including my own analysis within the body of my essay, I will offer the following interpretation of what I believe to be Wong's hidden message in her poetics, here, as supplementary and not essential to my own argument: That which "cannot be assimilated" forces the system to "adapt" (Harryette Mullen) (Wong 173). Language, a systematic way of "look[ing] at things," must be exposed. One must work within the system to expose it as a system. (Marie Annhart Bakers) (173). If one is too reliant on a certain language/system, one has a hard time thinking/thriving outside it (Jam. Ismail) (173). However, there is life in liminal spaces (linguistic or otherwise) (Larissa Lai) (174). One can experience feelings of insecurity and solitude, (Claire Harris) (174), and it is "unnerving." But, one must use the resources at hand to unite people (Garry Morse) (174). As language can "consume" us, we can still find ways to use it to our advantage (Rachel Zolf) (174). Language comes from an "other place" and "time," and we must remain "suspicious" (Lola Lemire-Tostevin) (174). Even under a close watch, things can change—the strictest rules can be bent. (David Fujino) (174). As we transgress the known, we cross the threshold into the unknown (Roy Miki) (174-5). We can learn from nature how to read (Mahmour Darwish) (175). As such, one must know better than to think he knows everything (Trinh T. Minh-ha) (175). Thinking one has an elevated sense of privilege and superiority is toxic, and it only gets worse (Elizabeth Grossman). We need to speak up, and not be silent. Life is short (Aundre Lorde) (175). The planet will continue to exist "with or without" humanity, despite our abuse (Alan Weissman) (175). Placing blame does not fix the problem (George Monibot). We are still consuming a manipulated version of man's inhumanity (Vandana Shive) (176). We produce too much excess, despite the stories we tell ourselves (Lisa Robertson) (176). As we inhabit the same space, we should at least be honest with one another. "The commodification of race/ sexual difference/gender does not have equality at its end, but the growth of capital" (Erin Moure) (176). Freedom is to use and recognize things for what they are (Fred Wah) (177). It is still possible to embrace the past while having hope for the future (Rebecca Solnit) (177). Everything is interconnected and overlapping, and we must project ourselves into the future (Walter K. Lew) (177); however, we must not forget the past, lest we forget ourselves (Shirley Bear) (177). Nature witnesses and survives all language (Roy Kiyooka) (177). We are so consumed by consumerism; we are blinded by it (Jeff Derksen) (178). We need to reclaim our heritage (Ranjinder Paul) (178). Water is that which connects all life (Jeannette Armstrong) (178). The ocean is a way to escape, and possibly cleanse, history's a/effects on the organic/natural. (Dionne Brand) (178). Nature is independent of us, but we are dependent on it. If we look to our own nature/roots, we might be able to restore ourselves (Weyman Chan) (178). We might have forgotten our roots, but we are still a part of the land, even if we need a map to find it. (Joy Harjo) (178). While the message might be broken, it can still be repaired and heard. (Wayde Compton) (179). Poetry lives in the defense and conservation of the wilderness (www.rewilding.org) (179); in the restoration, preservation, and remediation of waters (www.keepers) (179); in ceremony and nature (<http://utsam-witness>) (179). It is a poetics which needs "to be continued" (179).

⁵ Perhaps this confrontation between what is given and created is the kernel to overcoming the nihilism of our age, but this goes beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, in my view, it is an important question to tackle.