GENERATION X - THE OPERA

by

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ABSTRACT

This text serves as the accompanying documentation to Generation X - The Opera, a contemporary spoken word adaptation of the novel by Canadian author Douglas Coupland. The fundamental direction of this research is the exploration of new directions in contemporary North American opera, melodrama, spoken word and musical theatre, through our shared linguistic, musical and cultural vernacular. This paper begins by establishing a theoretical foundation between language and music, and then moves toward the historical trajectory of the use of spoken word in a musical context. It proceeds to present an analysis of the cultural significance of Generation X, as both an age demographic and as a postmodern identity. The documentation concludes with an overview of the project, from its inception through to its premiere performance on March 17th, 2006.

Keywords: spoken word, melodrama, opera, generation X, musical theatre, paralanguage, performance poetry, Douglas Coupland, monologues with music, slam poetry, totalism, contemporary music, postmodern identity, American opera, Canadian opera.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife and life’s love, Mylène Vincent.
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Michael Vincent
Vancouver, May 2006
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PREFACE

Whether I am listening to the bustling restaurant below my apartment in the dinner hours or to a symphony orchestra at the concert hall, I hear them as one and the same; conversations that communicate. My research has been centered on looking beyond the metaphoric relationship between language and music, and extending the relationship as a means to explore speech melody and rhythm composition. My research not only represents the embodiment of my work; it situates me as a contemporary music composer. It also helps me understand the inherent significance of my music as a codified sonic art form within society. *Generation X – The Opera* exemplifies the rhythmic and melodic aspects of the English language and binds them freely within a musical context that develops parallel perspectives surrounding speech and music. In short, it seeks to continue to develop spoken text as a powerful means of expression by exploring the musicality inherent within it.

This text is the documentation of a contemporary opera. More specifically, it is about the codification of present day North American culture, told from the satirical perspective of a contemporary work of musical theatre. This codification enlists my experiences as a member of Generation X, a child of MTV and a composer who has grown up in a world that has grown so big that we have arguably lost our ability to tell stories about it. This text documents my attempt to tell my generation's story, through music and words.
CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

Over the past five years, I have been fascinated with the relationship between language and music. I have frequently heard phrases such as ‘the language of music’ or ‘musical language’ and have thought that perhaps there is something more substantial to this relationship beyond metaphor. This chapter will seek to outline a broad range of ideas surrounding the theoretical context behind my MFA project. It will seek to look beyond the metaphoric relationship between language and music, by exploring the Musilanguage model proposed by Steven Brown (2001), which suggests that music and language originated in a common ancestor. Then, we will consider the role of rhetoric in both language and music, and will suggest that the power behind both music and language lays in this perceptual construct.

Before we begin to look into theoretical relationship between language and music, it is important to address a possible point of contention early in this chapter. We do not propose that music and language are the same, only that they share a common function, which presupposes a shared fundamental. This shared common function denotes that it is only logical to investigate a possible lineage between them. The form and structure within a Chopin prelude and a poem by Milton are only loosely related because their elements are different, yet their constituent phrases and meter share the same hierarchical organisation, pointing towards the possibility that they might share the same source within their evolutions. “Music is an appropriate subject to be united with [...] investigations of
evolution” (Rosenboom, 2000, p. 204). It should also be noted that this chapter by no means represents a rigorous scientific study of the foundational context behind music and language. We intend only to portray a narrow snapshot of the discourse surrounding this new and exciting topic, representing the theoretical foundation of my work.

**Musilanguage Model**

Evolutionary musicologists such as Steven Brown, Steven Pinker and Aniruddh Patel have considered five feasible models to account for the possible lineage between language and music. The first is the ‘parallel model’ that proposes a separate parallel evolution that rejects any shared ancestral features. The second, named the ‘binding model’, accounts for binding processes and similarities arisen from interaction between music and language. The third model, the ‘music as outgrowth model’ stipulates that music could have evolved as an outgrowth of language. Conversely, the ‘language outgrowth model’ accounts for language that could have evolved as an outgrowth of music. The fifth, and what I consider the most probable, is the ‘musilanguage model’, as it is the only model that accounts for both the musicality of language, and the ‘languageness’ [sic] of music (Brown, 2001).

Each of these models analyses the phrase structure and phonological properties of both music and language, and searches for convergence and divergence. The musilanguage model (Brown, 2001) supposes that the many structural features shared between music and language may actually have emerged from a single point rather than in parallel or from one branching off from the other. “Music and language are seen as reciprocal specialisations of a dual-natured referential emotive communicative precursor, whereby music emphasizes sound as emotive meaning and language emphasizes sound as referential meaning” (Brown, 2001, p. 271).
The musilanguage model is comprised of two basic features that permeate both music and language. These shared aspects are what Brown calls ‘combinatorial syntax’ and ‘expressive’ or ‘intonational phrasing’, each of which functions in both music and language to varying degrees.

Combinatorial syntax is the collective use of discrete units that have the power to convey meaning. These units, found in both speech and music, are made up of acoustic elements (elements which can be heard). The arrangement of these discrete acoustic units are composed in such a way as to reflect certain combinational rules that can express referential meaning to socially conditioned groups. Since musical phrases [can] have a hierarchical organisation similar to that of linguistic sentences, they are in effect codified to deliver meaning on a macroscopic level as the collective summation of the individual sonic parts (Swain, 1997). Phonemes to pitches and morphemes to motifs, they jointly form the building blocks to construct meaning. Phonologists describe speech phrasing, and musicologists describe musical phrasing, both essentially identifying the same process with two different terms¹. Brown proposes that referential meaning in language is constructed by using ‘propositional syntax’ and referential meaning in music is constructed by using ‘blending syntax’.

“The hierarchical organisation of pitches and pulses in a Bach chorale is only loosely related to the hierarchical organisation of words in a sentence exactly because the constituent elements, and thus the phrases themselves, are so completely different” (Brown, 2001, p. 272).

The micro-level sonic phrase elements that function to collectively project meaning are what Brown calls ‘intonational phrasing’, defined as the “modulation of the basic acoustic properties of combinationally organised phrases for the purpose of conveying emphasis, emotional state, and emotive meaning” (Brown, 2001, p. 273). Where combinatorial syntax
expresses meaning in terms of semantic reference within the constellation of signs (spoken words), intonational phrasing expresses the emotional meaning. Where both involve complex systems of cultural meaning, emotional context delivered through music engrosses performance and content. (Brown, 2001). Music projects codified emotional meaning through subtle changes in tempo (rubato), pitch inflections (vibrato, slurs), and amplitude dynamics such as ‘piano’ (soft) and ‘forte’ (loud). Articulations are delivered via constituent sonic motifs, or musical units, which amass to make up its combinatorial syntax. Linguists call intonational phrasing ‘prosody’ and note three distinct elements found within linguistic speech: Tempo modulation, amplitude modulation, and register selection (low pitch/high pitch) (Patel, 1998). These are the exact same elements used to project emotional meaning in music. Interestingly these three elements are universal in that they appear in all forms of music and language, despite cultural differences.

This does not suppose that intonational phrasing does not differ across languages and musical forms, where each follows specific cultural codes. For example, western European music shares a cultural and codified form that has projected coherent emotional language over the past six centuries, through certain melodic formulae that are well-defined to project emotional meaning (Cooke, 1959). These systems are codified to share a cultural background, and explain why cross-cultural music combinations are often ineffective and ethnocentrically motivated to project a co-opted and superficial manifestation. Universals within music and language are essentially prosodic and synonymous with ‘speech melody’ (slow variations in pitch contour and rhythm, carrying information), which means that to fully understand a culture’s music, it must be experienced under the cultural codes that assembled it.
Paralanguage

I would like to carry Brown's combinatorial syntax and intonational phrasing in a different direction, which I believe exemplifies a convergence between music and language. This junction is found within the performative aspect of speech and considers how it is that 'rhetoric', defined as "the ability to impress listeners with one's viewpoints or even to manipulate them" (Delisgaard, 2004, sec.2.2, p. 10), can give agency to words.

The performance of language brings with it a wide variety of delivery styles, which depending upon context provide depth to the communication (Truax, 1984). "People usually refer to this aspect of spoken language by such terms as 'voice quality' or 'tone of voice,' or simply 'it's not what you say, but how you say it'" (Truax, 1984, p. 33). These paralinguistic elements are generally found in the intonational components of speech, which allow speakers to impart emotional context behind the syntax of language. The emotive elements of speech found in a preacher speaking create a tonal centre around the speech that imparts a significant 'heightening' effect on his or her listeners, who return unison responses. A similar effect is found in the virtuosic prosody of an auctioneer intoning his or her voice for the attraction and excitation of audience interest (Truax, 1984). "Anything that sustains vocal effort allows the voice to dominate the audience's attention" (Truax, 1984, p. 39). The exaggeration of the paralinguistic elements of speech facilitates a heightened response and a more effective communicative experience. I propose that these intonational aspects of speech are what inform the emotive content of language. These prosodic intonational subtleties in speech have been largely ignored by semiologists such as Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Pierce, who pass off noises of speech as 'iconic simulations' functioning 'indexically' (Silvermann, 1984). Sound never just expresses or represents something; it also affects us emotionally. Prosody, or intonational phrasing, is a major factor to project complex and
elusive performative concepts as 'means that motivate', and complete the successful delivery
of spoken dialogue. I also contend that these intonational elements found within language
are essentially the same ones at work in music, through pitch, rhythm, and metre. Prosody
effectively delivers the same codes that drive music to move deeply, and deliver a message as
convincing and sincere beyond the scope of definitive words within the lexicon. Music says
what words alone cannot.

The rhetorical power of music was articulated as far back as 1533, by Renaissance
theorist Yacopo Sadoleto:

[…] By themselves the words have no mean influence upon the mind,
whether to persuade or restrain. Accommodated to rhythm and metre they
penetrate much more deeply. If in addition they are given a melodic setting
they take possession of the inner feelings and of the whole man” (Palisca,

It is the rhythm and melody within the voice (prosody) that make the rhetoric
convincing as the performed emotion (whether it is sincere or not). The significance of non-
verbal communication in speech was studied by neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks (1985), who
recounts an interesting example in which aphasic patients with damage to the left temporal
lobe were compared with Emily D., a patient with a tumour in the right temporal lobe. The
aphasic patients did not recognize the semantic aspects of speech, but were still sensitive to
its emotional (prosodic) content. In contrast, Emily D. was only sensitive to the semantic
aspect of language. When these patients were listening to a speech by an American president,
noted for his use (or misuse) of rhetorical tricks and emotional appeal, they all sensed that it
was, in some way, wrong or untrue. The aphasic patients sensed that intonation and rhythm
were misplaced; Emily D. sensed that the words were used in a non-standard, incorrect way.
Oliver Sacks’ point is that, interestingly, we as normal listeners are deceived by the
combination of prosody and semantics; whereas the patients, insensitive to one or the other parameter are not deceived (Sacks, 1985). This study exemplifies the extent to which prosody in the voice gives power to the words, which by themselves constitute the building blocks of discourse.  

Divergence  

Now that we have discussed the similarities between music and language (combinatorial syntax and intonational phrasing) and the motivating aspects of rhetoric within meaning via paralinguistic codes, an important question arises: at what point did language and music diverge from their common origin, making language distinct from music, and music distinct from language? The divergence is characterised as "the process by which the analogous and distinct features of music and language evolved" (Brown, 2002, p. 292). It was likely caused by the gradual specialisations of lexical meaning into language, and emotive meaning into music. Language gradually specialised in propositional syntax, illustrated by the huge lexicon of over 100,000 words in the English language alone. This collectively forms referential meaning that "specifies temporal and behavioural relationships between subjects and objects in a phrase" (Brown, 2001, p. 292). Music is specialised on a more "[...] complex and hierarchical syntax system based on pitch patterning and multipart blending, leading to the creation of diverse motivic types, many forms of polyphony, and complex timbral blends" (Brown, 2001, p. 293). The metric pulse of music was exemplified to explore mono- and polyrhythms, which help project the mind into deeper states of emotional awareness (Truax, 1984). To summarize, the extent to which music and language have each specialised in emotive or referential meaning, is what differentiates one from the other.
Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida contends that speech ranks above the 'logocentric' written hierarchy by rejecting the structuralist assumption that language is capable of expressing ideas without changing them (Derrida, 1997). Derrida asserts that the speaker's intentions and delivery of speech affect the number of legitimate interpretations of a text (Derrida, 1997). This effectively challenges the 'Saussurian' theory that text has an unchanging, unified meaning. The speaker's intentions are performed essentially through rhetoric. Though my take on Derrida's idea is not exactly what he intended, his initiative is applicable in that it helps explain why there is no total meaning within small utterable acoustic sounds themselves, where the effect of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This idea reiterates Brown's combinatorial syntax, and substantiates the fact that some rhetoric is convincing and others are not. To abridge this argument, structure does not carry meaning within itself, but when constructed using cultural codes, it is able to convey emotional significance (convincing discourse), and essentially distinguish structure from content by considering more appreciably the performative aspects of semiotics.

**Continuum**

When is language music, and music language? Where is the point when spoken text turns into sung text? Is the distinction clear beyond that which is assured by their opposing definitions? To answer these questions, it should be helpful to look into how we perceive, produce and respond to meaning in sonic communication, whether spoken or sung. The uniqueness of human language is based on three different properties, expressed as the diversity of speech sounds, the combinational property of language and the symbolic structure, enabling reference to past and future objects (Donald, 1991). Each of these three
traits falls into two distinct levels of meaning; these contribute to the overall interpretation of sonic events and are defined as 'emotive meaning' and 'referential meaning'.

The first level, known as emotive meaning, refers to the "immediate, on-line, emotive aspect of sound perception and production" (Brown, 2001, p. 171). Music functions on an immediate level through absolute music and is understood more so on the emotional echelon in that it does not rely on lexical meaning to project ideas. This plane is not concerned with a clear structural Saussurian relationship between signified and signifier, which is what differentiates it from the second level of meaning: referential meaning. This second level results in the influence of human linguistic capacity on music cognition (Brown, 2001); it refers to the literal aspects of language and music, such as the semantic lexical definitions of words, or programmatic sound elements (recurrent themes that signify non musical elements). Convergences between the two points are found within a continuum that oscillates between emotive and referential meaning. The distance between language and music depends on the extent to which sound acts as a reference to a signifier, or on the extent to which it expresses the signified. At their highest level of function, music and language differ more in emphasis than in kind, and are represented by their placement at different ends of a spectrum.
The first point on the continuum model is heightened speech. Pitch movement within speech is closely associated to melody, where ascending motion denotes a more active dynamic, as opposed to descending contours, which look for conclusion. The same is true in speech where rising pitch can energize a listener, and falling pitch can relax a listener. Disc jockeys of top 40 radio stations are well aware of the importance of exaggerated heightened speech, as they must consistently sound upbeat “your sound has got to be a ‘hey let’s get it happening’ sort of approach […]” (Van Leeuwen, 1999 p. 103). The opposite end of the continuum is musical narration, which uses music to colour actions, events and characters in theatrical art forms. This involves the ability of music to move between multiple contexts. An example of this music is clearly explained in the following advertisement for a narration backdrop CD:
[... ] Features music ideal for setting a mood behind voice-overs, narrative content and announcements. Whether crisp, vibrant, subtle or exciting, this music is well suited for documentaries, corporate videos, television and radio commercials, and other projects where these tracks will create interest without getting in the way of the message. (Smartsound narrative backdrops, n.d., 2004).

The midpoint of the continuum is verbal song, as it is comprised of roughly 50% emotive meaning (melodic non-lexical) and 50% referential meaning (lyrical-lexical). It is able to express the equilibrium between the different interpretations of communicative sound patterns that each system exploits. Verbal song is governed by both propositional and blending syntax. The literal aspect of sung words is referential, and the music emphasises emotive meaning.

In conclusion, this chapter has attempted to account for the relationship between music and language beyond that of metaphor. We have walked through the problems surrounding origins and why its search is applicable in regards to music and language, and discerned that the Musilanguage model was the most probable. We have discussed the role of propositional syntax and intonational phasing, which postulate the convergence point between language and music, and explored aspects of rhetoric, and its relationship and misgiving associations with the discipline of semiotics. We have discussed the differences between music and language, each projecting specialisations in referential and emotive domains, and placed specific examples onto their respective positions within the Musilanguage continuum model.
Notes- Chapter 1

1 Phrase in linguistic terms: a syntactic structure that consists of more than one word but lacks a subject/predicate organisation a complete musical idea (Phrasing) The shaping of a melodic line (Harnsberger, 1966, p.97). Phrase in musical terms: a complete musical idea (Phrasing) The shaping of a melodic line (Harnsberger, 1966, p.97)

2 An interesting aside is that Dr. Oliver Sacks' book "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" was adapted as an opera by experimental U.K. composer Michael Nyman.

3 Absolute music: instrumental music that is free of any explicit verbal reference or program (Westrup & Harrison, 1959)
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

My fascination with language and music has lead from the theoretical, as discussed in the last chapter, to its physical application as projected in my project Generation X- the Opera. My project participates in a long history of works by composers such as Robert Ashley and Mikel Rouse, who have aptly noted that the relationship between language and music can create an extremely powerful connection to the audience. So much so, it could be said that there are basically two kinds of composers: those who work with text and those who do not. Although the majority of composers fall somewhere in-between these extremes, the relationship between composers and language has become so universally accepted that the inherent interdisciplinary relationship between text and music has largely been forgotten. Though the history of composers naturally includes both sung and spoken word, considering that my project is a spoken word opera, this chapter will trace the history of spoken word only. We will trace the compositional use of spoken word from its beginnings in 17th-century melodrama, through to its use in singspiel, sprechstimme, sprechgesang, as well as its contemporary usages by the American avant-garde, and leading all the way up to Generation X- The Opera. In short, this chapter will place my project within the canon of the compositional use of spoken word in music.

Melodrama

The technical term for the use of spoken word in music is ‘melodrama’ (also called ‘monodrama’ or ‘duodrama’) (Westrup, 1959, p. 349). The Grove Dictionary of music describes
it as the “technique of using short passages of music in alternation with or accompanying the spoken word to heighten its dramatic effect, often found with opera, or as an independent genre, or as a sporadic effect in spoken drama” (Shapiro, 2006). Though this term was widely used from the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century to the early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century, nomenclature problems existed when the term was also used as a synonym for opera, like the Italian melodrama. These nomenclature problems extended past the 1900’s when the term began to shift its meaning to include the exaggerated sentimentality, sensational plots and life-and-death rescue characteristics of Victorian drama. This is where its current definition remains: an extravagantly theatrical play in which action and plot predominate over characterisation. The etymology of the term was further convoluted from the French ‘mélodrame à grand spectacle’ which was associated with such writers as René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt and the Théâtre de la Porte St Martin, Paris, c1800-30 (Shapiro, 2006).

The first documented piece to use melodrama (herein used to refer to music with spoken word) was found in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s text for Pygmalion, first set to music by Horace Coignet (1770). Rousseau described the process used in the work as taking the “spoken phrase” and using it to announce and prepare the musical phrase first and foremost (Shapiro, 2006). Though Rousseau’s Pygmalion was significant to the genre as the first of its kind, it was the Bohemian composer Georg Benda’s Ariadne auf Naxos (1775) that was the first fully developed melodrama (Shapiro, 2006).

Benda employed Rousseau’s model of speech by alternating passages of music that reflected the rapidly changing moods of the text. The audience reaction to Ariadne was very positive: “stunned by its compelling realism […]” Benda’s epoch-making scores swept triumphantly across every stage in Germany and travelled as far as France and Italy” (Bauman, 1994, p. 81). That same year, Benda mounted another melodrama entitled Menda,
four years later Rousseau’s *Adriane*, and in 1799 *Theone* (later revised and renamed as *Almansor und Nadine*) (Branscombe, 2006). Though Benda also wrote opera and singspiel, his melodrama is what he was most known for. After hearing Benda’s *Ariadne* and *Medea*, Mozart was eager to explore the genre.

Mozart included melodramas in his *Zaide* (1779-80) and *Thamos, König in Ägypten* (no.4) (1779) (Branscombe, 2006), and in *The Magic Flute* (1791). Mozart followed Benda’s method of not notating the rhythm and pitch of the speech in these works, which he set with strong mood and tempo shifts (Shapiro, 2006).

The 18th-century melodrama solidified two primary forms that are described by Branscombe as the French style and the German style (2006). Germans favoured spoken word used directly over the music, whereas the French preferred them to be separated into distinct segments (Branscombe, 2006). In considering my opera, my free use of spoken word directly over the music makes it naturally fit within the German style. In spite of the differences between the styles, both opted to leave the rhythm and pitch of spoken word un-notated, with the durations indicated by the length of each passage as printed in the score (Shapiro, 2006).

At the onset the 19th-century, melodramas would increase in popularity and started showing up in major operas all across Europe. Beethoven included one in his *Fidelio* (1805), and Schubert in his *Die Zauberharfe* (1820) and *Fierrebras* (1823). Melodrama can also be found in Weber’s *Der Freischütz* (1821), Berlioz’s *Lélio* (1831), Verdi’s *La Traviata* (1853), as well as Puccini’s *La Bohème* (1896) (Feezell, 2003). Branscombe adds, “indeed, there can hardly be a 19th-century opera composer who did not” (2006).
Besides Germany and France, melodrama was also very active in the Czech Republic with composer Zdenek Fibich\(^1\), whose trilogy *Hippodamia* (1889-91) was very popular in the region. Fibich was one of the first to use leitmotifs in melodrama as an "aid to dramatic and stylistic cohesion", which Benda also used (in an elementary form) to add to the emotional power of the speech (Branscombe, 2006).

Outside of opera, 19\(^{th}\)-century composers applied melodrama to incidental music as well. Schumann used it in his incidental music to Byron's *Manfred* (1848-49), and Humperdinck used it in *Königskinder* (1897, revised opera in 1910) (Feezell, 2003).\(^4\) Melodrama also occurred in the tradition of "chamber melodramas, which combine a single speaking part with a piano accompaniment." (Feezell, 2003, p. xiii). The tradition of chamber melodrama was relatively dim compared to orchestral melodramas. Important works include Schubert's *Abschied von der Erde* (1826), Schumann's *Schön Hedwig* (1849), and Liszt's *Lenore* (1860) and *Der Traurige Mönch* (1872), and Richard Strauss's opera *Enoch Arden* (1897) (Feezell, 2003).

**Singspiel**

A parallel movement, which incorporated the use of spoken word and music, is the genre called 'singspiel'. Singspiel (literally meaning 'sung play') is defined as "Germanic comic opera with spoken dialogue." (Westrup, 1959, p. 504). During the 18\(^{th}\) century, many singspiels were based upon translations of English ballad opera libretti (Westrup, 1959). These include the text of Johann Standfuss' *Der Teufel ist los* (1752) translated from Coffey's *The Devil to Play* (1728), and *Der lustige Schuster* set by Lübeck translated by Coffey's *The Merry Cobbler* (1735).
The endorsement by German Emperor Joseph II in 1778 was a major force in solidifying singspiel in Germany. After the emperor established a special singspiel company dedicated to the performance of this nationalistic genre, Mozart's *Die Entführung* was one of many commissioned specifically for the genre. Incidentally, Mozart later adapted *Die Entführung* into *The Magic Flute* (1791) where he maintained many of the extensive speaking sections (Westrup, 1959).

Characteristically, singspiels tended to be less sophisticated than their cousins the melodrama, due to the fact that many touring companies were simply incapable of maintaining moderate-sized orchestras and a repertory of large-scale works on the road. Another distinction of singspiel is that its touring companies tended to commission works of a vernacular nature, as opposed to melodramas that tended to deal with more serious plots. Another differentiation was the fact that singspiel performers were mainly made up of actors, as opposed to the operatic theatre which hired only trained musicians capable of performing the technically complex musical material found within melodrama (Branscombe, 2006). By the end of the 19th-century the definition of singspiel eventually came to rest as the German equivalent of musical comedy “and was frequently avoided by those wishing to make exalted claims for their works” (Branscombe, 2006). In Austria and Germany, the term singspiel eventually transformed into Viennese operetta in the 1860's, following the French vaudeville and the premiere of Offenbach’s Parisian operettas (Branscombe, 2006), and eventually to the American Broadway musical.

**Sprechgesang and Sprechstimme**

By the early 20th-century, the popularity and overall refinement of spoken word increased. Forms of melodrama continued to be performed in Germany and America, but
during this time a new form of combined spoken word and music emerged from the “expressionist dramas of Schoenberg and Berg”, usually called ‘sprechstimme’ or ‘sprechgesang’ (Shapiro, 2006).

In 1897, the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck devised a new type of “vocal enunciation intermediate between speech and song” called sprechgesang (speech-song) (Griffith, 2006). Humperdinck used his speech song hybrid in Königskinder (1897), but later abandoned the technique in 1910 and rewrote it for conventional singing voice. In 1911 Schoenberg took up Humperdinck’s technique of sprechgesang, and embarked upon his own innovations, which later materialised as what Berg referred to as sprechstimme (speech-voice). This technique reflected a new refinement of spoken word in music in the developing modernist era. In Schoenberg’s Gurrelieder (1911) and Pierrot Lunaire (1912), he used strictly notated pitched speech to explore the musical potential of the spoken human voice. In his unfinished work Die Jakobsleiter (1917-22) he used “relative pitches and precise rhythms” and a “simplified notation system” on Kol nidre (1938), Ode to Napoleon (1942), A Survivor from Warsaw (1947) and Modern Psalm (1950) (Feezel, 2003, p. xiii). Schoenberg mixed both singing and spoken word in his incomplete opera Moses und Aron (1930-32). Feezel writes “Schoenberg’s integration of the full spectrum of vocal performance possibilities freed later composers to approach the voice with a new freedom” (Feezel, 2006, p. xiii).

There is a direct connection from Schoenberg’s innovations in spoken word to Berg, who takes the next step in his opera Lulu (1929-30) and incorporates the full spectrum between sung and spoken text. “In the performance directions, […] he delineates six techniques of vocal performance: unaccompanied dialogue; free prose (accompanied); rhythmically fixed performance (notated using stems and beams without note heads);
Sprechstimme in high, middle, and low range; half sung; and completely sung.” (As translated in Shapiro, “Melodrama,” (as cited in Feezell, 2003, p. xiv).

Shapiro concludes that after the appearance of sprechgesang and sprechstimme, the emphasis between spoken word and music shifted away from the exaggerated sentiment of the 19th-century, and returned to Rousseau’s original interpretation: music announces and prepares for the spoken phrase (2004). This fact is articulated in the later half of the 20th-century, when composers shed the term melodrama, preferring to call their works ‘recitations’ or ‘narrations’ (Shapiro, 2006). It would suggest that this is the point in history where the term melodrama became detached from its original meaning, resulting in the illusion of a broken historical continuity; in light of this shift in nomenclature, we shall henceforth no longer refer to spoken word and music as melodrama.

As the term adopted its new meaning to refer to Viennese drama, Rousseau and Benda’s traditional technique of spoken word forked into two related paths in the mid-20th century (Feezell, 2003, p. xv). The first path departed from traditional narrative use of spoken word to focus upon the timbral elements. These included work from John Cage’s *Aria* (1958), Pauline Oliveros’ *Sound Patterns* (1964), and Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza III* (1966). The second route maintained its connections to traditional melodrama, and include works by Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* (1936), Aaron Copland’s *Lincoln Portrait* (1942), Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), as well as my composition *Generation X-The Opera* (2006).

**Timbral Spoken Word**

Though my project did not explore spoken word from the micro or timbral perspective, I believe it is important to outline its historical use as it represented a significant shift not only in melodrama, but also in music. The move towards timbral exploration can be
traced back to the *Futurist* and *Dada* movements of the early 20th-century. The Russian and Italian futurist movements included *sound poetry*, which began in 1912 with Italian futurist F. T. Marinetti’s *Parole in libertà* (words of freedom) manifesto. It called for the abandonment of conventional syntax and urged for the re-thinking of the printed word for its ‘typographical dynamism.’ This credo set the stage for an abandonment of narrative, allowing for the reproduction of the countless noises of matter in motion (Lane, 2006). The Russian futurists further prompted the goal of freeing word from their semantic meanings:

 [...] Dislocated syntax, lullaby trills, nonsensical word making, children’s rhymes, weirdly ‘drawn’ poems with doodlelike [sic] graphics, startling imagistic juxtapositions, paper collage texts, mirrored lettering, and concrete poetry were among their many common linguistic innovations (Gordon 1992, p. 21) (as cited in Lane, 2006, p. 3).

The Dadaist ‘*sound art*’ movement also played a significant role in the timbral exploration of spoken word. Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, and Henri-Martin Barzun of the Zurich-based Dada group, started a series of performed works of phonetic poetry or ‘*poème simultané*’ (simultaneous poems) at the Cabaret Voltaire. These performances included illogical sound-based compositions emphasized by acoustic – rather than literal – expression. In 1917, Apollinaire’s play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* also sought to expand the use of language beyond the conveyance of semantic meaning with techniques such as “wordplay, accent, timbral change and phonemes (Schiff, 1992)” (as cited in Lane, 2006, p. 4).

In 1922, the line between music and sound poetry grew thinner with the appearance of *Ursonate*, written by sound poet Kurt Schwitters. The work is a performance poem written in the classical sonata form, where a vocal score containing the text is used. This score contains specific letters that denote the duration of specific vowels and consonants. Schwitter described the work as follows:
The sonata consists of four movements, an introduction, an end, and a cadence in the fourth movement. The first movement is a rondo with four motifs, which are especially indicated in this text of the sonata. It is rhythm, strong and weak, loud and silent, dense and spacious, etc. I do not want to explain the delicate variations and compositions of the themes... (Ubuweb, n.d., ¶ 1)

Though Schwitters’ work was considerable in representing the spoken word as sound and arranged in a musical context, it was not until the invention of the variable speech tape recorder in the 1930’s that the boundaries between sound art, poetry and music began to solidify. In the mid 1950’s Henri Chopin used the tape recorder as a tool for organizing the improvised recordings from which he attempts to memorize into a mental score that is the basis for subsequent over-dubs. In his composition Rouge (1956), he creates a dense texture in which the relations among sounds are free from the “forgery caused by man’s inclination to give the aspect of a conscious intuition to the pre-linguistic message” (Carcano, 1995). Until this time, sound poetry was primarily a performance art, but Chopin recognized that technology could enhance the sonic possibilities of the emerging genre. It was this association that linked Chopin with the musique concrète school, as put forth by Pierre Schaeffer. Musique concrète is characterised for its use of the tape recorder, to enable composers to use materials taken from the physical world, and have them function independently and concretely as sound objects (Chadabe, 1997).

By mid-century, composers such as Karheinz Stockhausen, Ernst Krenek, Bengt Hambraeus used the tape recorder as a means to move away from the exclusive use of electronic sources and towards the inclusion of a more balanced compositional form, which included the human voice. Perhaps the most significant example of this balance is found in Stockhausen’s Gesang der Jänglinge (1955-56). Stockhausen uses the recorded voice of a young boy along with electronic materials such as sine waves, white noise, impulses and filters, and
treats the voice in such a way to adhere to the same principles as with the electronic sounds. One can hear this electronic treatment of the voice in the outset of Gesang, which is then broken down into basic parts, vowels, consonants, and flecks of timbre. In an analysis of the composition, Metzer writes “those [voice] bits can easily be transformed and combined to create new sounds [...] the voice proves just as elemental, fragmentary, and malleable as the electronic components” (2004, p. 720). This form of composition was sometimes referred to as ‘sprachkomposition’ (language composition). Ruviazo broadly defines the term as the use of the human voice for its timbral elements beyond that of its semantic significance (2004). Though this term is not widely used, Ruviazo notes it is also linked to the German sound poetry term ‘sprachklang’ (verbal sound) (2004).

Another example of sprachkomposition is Berio’s Thema (Ommagio a Joyce) (1958). Thema uses an excerpt of text from James Joyce’s Ulysses and explores the words as pure sound and the sonic polyphony implicit in Joyce’s original text. Thema joins Stockhausen’s Gesang der Jünglinge as one of the major experiments in musique concrète of the 1950’s, while maintaining Berio’s signature style of vocal composition, using extended vocal techniques (Klein, 2004). These techniques included a derivation of a series of ‘vocalic colours’ from the words contained in the original text as well as the creation of artificial shocks of consonants to attain richer possibilities for musical articulation (Ruviazo, 2004, p. 43).

With the advance of microcomputer processing in the later half of the 20th-century, timbral melodrama developed more complex morphology techniques that were capable of expanding the abstraction of the human voice to levels previously unheard of. In Paul Lansky’s Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion (1978-79), he developed phonetic variations of a poetry reading through computer speech synthesis and analysis techniques
that manipulated the original contour, vocal range, and harmony-timbre of vocal layers, adding reverberation and comb filtering effects (Ruviaro, 2004).

Another significant leap in timbral spoken word was the implementation of 'granular synthesis' as a means to expand upon timbral sound and voice. Canadian composer and theorist Barry Truax was among the first to implement the technique known as 'granulation'. It is a timbral sound synthesis concept that operates on the microsound time scale, based on the same principles as digital sampling. The samples are split into small grains of approximately 1 to 50 ms (milliseconds) in length; multiple grains are then layered, sounding at different speeds, phases and volumes. This allows one to stretch a sound without altering the pitch. The aggregate structure of grains creates a dense texture or 'wall of sound' that removes it from its original context, as well as its original place within the time-space continuum. Truax uses the analogy of quantum physics to explain how granulation can create a sound which is indistinguishable when played forward or backward (Truax, 1988). Truax applies this technique as timbral spoken word in the four-movement work Song of Songs, where the voice is granulated so as to project the timbral elements of the vocal material. The text is read from the erotic Song of Solomon and features oboe d'amore and English horn, juxtaposed with soundscapes featuring birds, cicadas, crickets, a monk singing, and a church bell.9

In respect to my project, I chose not to explore the timbral domain and focus upon the narrative use of spoken word and music. This goal entailed that the lexical information of the text was kept as clear as possible, so as to highlight the overall narrative element of the opera. This more traditional narrative use of text leads us to the next stage in this historical overview.
**Narrative Spoken Word**

Due to a shift in nomenclature that no longer associated melodrama with spoken word, 20th-century composers adopted the terms ‘recitations’ and ‘narrations’. One of the earliest examples of this shift in nomenclature was in Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat* (1918), which called for a *narrator*. The interdisciplinary work was to be “read, played, and danced,” and was described as experimental musical theatre. Composed in collaboration with Swiss author C. F. Ramuz during his so-called “neo-classical” period, Stravinsky based the work on a Russian tale about a soldier who competes with the devil. He organised the structure around “a series of brief tableaux” with the plot “presented mainly through mime and dancing, with continuity supplied by the narrator” (Morgan, 1991, p. 169). Stravinsky carefully constructed the rhythmically irregular phrases of the accompanied music, and juxtaposed them against ostinato patterns that are reminiscent of speech. Like German Singspiel, “the atmosphere of the entire production suggests a cabaret or an informal street entertainment” (Morgan, 1991, p. 169) and parodies well-known popular music forms that include tango, waltz, and ragtime. This element, as well as the use of spoken word, forms a direct lineage with melodrama from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Another early example in narrative spoken word was found in Sergei Prokofiev’s musical for children entitled *Peter and The Wolf* (1936), which also called for a ‘narrator’. He intended the work to represent a child’s introduction to the orchestra, with each character in the story corresponding to a different solo instrument or group of instruments; Peter by the strings, the bird by the flute, the duck by the oboe, the cat by the clarinet, the wolf by the horn section (Westrup & Harrison, 1959).

Nine years later, Benjamin Britten also used the term narrator to describe the narrative spoken word in his *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*. Based on a theme from
Purcell's *Abdelazer (The Moor's Revenge)*, it begins and ends with an overview of the whole orchestra, interspersed with demonstrations of the capabilities of each instrument. Its use of the term narrator was also connected to the fact that it was originally written for a documentary film in 1946, entitled 'The Instruments of the Orchestra', in which the narrator described the roles and characteristics of each orchestral section.

In America, composer Aaron Copland called for the role of narrator in his work *Lincoln Portrait* (1942). Here, the narrator reads excerpts of speeches by the American President Abraham Lincoln, combined with musical quotations from American songs, such as *Camptown Races*. The overall effect represents a celebration of American nationalism, which is ironic considering Copland was also busy fending off a smear campaign against him by the FBI and American anti-communist groups (Kamien, 1997). This work was significant in that it did not use a traditional setting of poetry or prose from a formal literary source, but instead used found speeches uttered by the assassinated American president. This work also represents a significant cultural inspiration and has prompted many celebrities who seek to symbolically represent the 'ideal American' to read for the role. These include James Earl Jones, Gregory Peck, Marian Anderson, Al Gore, Paul Newman, and Fred Child.

This point is significant for my project as it represents the first narrative spoken word example that was inspired by a culturally specific construct. My opera is also associated with a cultural construct, built upon the exploration of the age demographic known as Generation X. I would contend that spoken word works are in a unique position, since they can literally 'tell' a story. It is a powerful means with which to work because of its use of language emphasising sound as referential meaning, thus connecting directly with the audience.
Another example of a culturally significant text with narrative spoken word was by American composer Frederic Rzewski. His *Coming Together* (1971) and *Attica* (1972), depict an emotionally charged letter written by an American prison inmate involved in the uprising at New York's Attica penitentiary in 1971. This work was successful in the effect that narrative spoken word had on the dramatic heightening of the text without relying upon vocal techniques such as singing. According to Kyle Gann, these works represented the American avant-garde's move towards amateur vocal performance, which increased the range and social class of the performers (Gann, 2003). Rzewski's work embodied a new American perspective on narrative works that were “more intrinsically drawn to the music's structure from the text, either as a way of further amplifying the words or in lieu of more traditional structuring devices” (Gann, 2003). This prompted the American avant-garde to negate traditional European *bel canto* singing, which they believed was as a “liability for reaching a wider audience that may dislike classical music or distrust its class associations” in America (Gann, 2003).

In the opera world, the use of narrative spoken word by American avant-garde composers has formed a small post-European movement that seeks to further develop the English North American vernacular through revised operatic traditions. At the forefront of this newly emerging genre that I call 'spoken word opera', are composers Robert Ashley and Mikel Rouse. It is here that I believe my project has the closest association in terms of its use of narrative spoken word, cultural significance, and participation in the development of post-European (North American) operatic tradition.

Robert Ashley’s works were originally developed out of a lifelong fascination with language and music. From the American avant-garde tradition, Ashley began to use timbral and narrative spoken word in a number of works which include his operas *Perfect Lives*
(1980), eL/Aficionado (1987), Dust (2000), Celestial Excursions (2003), and Foreign Experiences (2006). According to Arthur Sabatini, Ashley's works represent an entirely new form of opera he labels 'American opera'. He believes Ashley's work embodies the codified American experience unique to the region (2005). Ashley's operas have emerged directly out of the speaking and storytelling traditions of American speech vernacular, which Sabatini describes as 'American sprechstimme' (2005). He asserts that Ashley represents a post-European operatic tradition unique to North America. This assertion is relevant to my project, as I believe it also participates in this geographically distinct tradition. This lineage is grounded in the sounds and words, which represent narrative themes and practices related to the lives and relationships that surround us as North Americans. European opera does not encompass these criteria, but as Ashley asserts, American opera does, and remains, an urban institution modelled on European systems and its 20th-century repertoire that includes Broadway musicals, and stories concerning the American vernacular (Sabatini, 2003).\textsuperscript{10}

In light of Ashley's compositional approach to narrative spoken word, he has developed a refined and highly personalised system of using speech over an electroacoustic texture, which incorporates pre-recorded instrumental materials such as piano and percussion. Ashley works over a syllable and accent count within the text lines, until they satisfy his search for the inherent musicality within the text. Ashley uses what he calls 'templates' (used as a synonym for speech melody), which contain a mode that dictates a starting pitch pertaining to the emotional state of the character.

In every solo or ensemble part, the singer is given a 'character defining' pitch (that is, a pitch somewhere in the singer's range that, understandably, forces a certain 'character' to emerge). Around this pitch the singer is asked to invent vocal inflections (Pitch changes, vocal techniques, etc.) that express the intent or meaning of the text (Ashley, 1993) (as cited in Ruviaro, 2003, p. 49-51).
Ashley’s system is rooted in microcosmic details that suggest the speech rhythms of the text, by breaking the phrases down into what Ashley calls ‘cells’. Each cell is based on an arbitrary number of syllables, arranged in different rhythmic patterns within the metric structure of the work. In *Perfect Lines*, Ashley describes the process of using a template made up of three or four syllables to arrange in different rhythmic patterns based on specific phrases of text such as “fucking clean”, “the very speed”, “I wanted to”, and “you guys are all” (R. Ashley, personal communication, 2005). While I place my opera historically beside Ashley’s work, his compositional technique is very different from mine in that I followed a more intuitive approach. However, I did emulate Ashley’s resolve to use only spoken text, without resorting to the traditional use of sung text.

An example of this more mixed approach is the work of Mikel Rouse. Like Ashley, Rouse comes out of the American avant-garde tradition and has dedicated his entire oeuvre to the exploration of the American vernacular as told via narrative spoken word. Rouse’s one-man opera entitled *Failing Kansas* (1995) represents his first foray into spoken word opera. Drawing from Truman Capote’s novel *In Cold Blood*, he adapted the text by using a technique he calls ‘counterpoetry’, which can be described as the use of multiple pitched voices (both live and recorded) in strict metric counterpoint, creating a rhythmically complex texture of words and music. Rouse uses both sung and spoken text, delivered in what could be called a contemporary form of sprechgesang. Similar to Ashley and myself, Rouse writes music based on North American vernacular, and uses a mixture of pre-recorded elements.

Mikel Rouse is not concerned to retell a story which anyone can go and read for themselves. Instead, he uses the book as an occasion for an extraordinary effusion of lyrical riffs which spring from a variety of sources: phrases in the book; songs by Perry himself; contemporary hymns; and fragments of poetry by Robert Service and Thomas Gray. (Croggan, 2004)
As a totalist composer Rouse was attracted to the use of narrative spoken word for its inherently complex speech rhythms, which when layered creates an isorhythmic texture. Totalism, as defined by Kyle Gann adheres to the “something for everyone” approach (Gann, 2001). It is based upon his counterpoetry technique in which separate lines of a song sung by separate characters or groups are set to phrases of differing lengths (such as 9 and 10 beats) and often played over a background time signature of 4/4 (Gann, 2006). This kind of metric sleight of hand is simple in concept but often complex in perception. For example, the basic rhythms of Rouse’s opera Failing Kansas is a five-beat isorhythm (rhythmic ostinato) against which either the harmony or drum pattern reinforcing the four- or eight-beat meter. This five-beat isorhythm, divided 3+3+1+3 in 8\(\text{th}\) notes, is a recurring idea in the work (Gann, 2006).

Figure 2.1: Failing Kansas Isorhythm

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Rouse’s use of repetition is particularly effective as it helps the listener move from a referential to a reflective perception of the text as music.

The more words and phrases are repeated, the more detached they become from ordinary usages; it’s a work in which meaning is located in texture, rhythm, nuance and context, rather than in the semantics of words. It is in this way a profoundly poetic experience. (Croggan, 2004)

The presence of music with speech has proliferated our musical traditions. From Benda’s Pygmalion, to the video operas of Robert Ashley, and the synthesized voices of Charles Dodge’s settings of Samuel Beckett, combined speech and music has brought
together a wealth of styles and forms (Lane, 2006). As outlined in this chapter, the history of spoken word and music is significant, and its roots trace deep into the history of Western European classical music. We have addressed its uses in both the German and French styles of melodrama, to its parallel development into singspiel. We have recounted its maturity into the modernist era used as sprechgesang, and sprechstimme. Through the shift in nomenclature denoting and its varying paths towards timbral and narrative expirations, we have traced spoken word to North America. It was here we discovered the use of spoken word for its rhetoric strength within culturally inspired works by Copland and Rzewski. These have led us to its usage in the American avant-garde movement that has returned it to the work of opera, beyond European recitative, and into the new North American genre I call spoken word opera, from which I assert my project most closely befits.
Notes- Chapter 2

1 “Beethoven’s interest in melodrama extended beyond the familiar example of the dungeon scene in Fidelio. There are melodramas in the incidental music to Die Räuber von Athen and König Stephan, and it is this form he chose for Egmont’s farewell to life, the penultimate number of the Egmont incidental music…” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 3)

2 “Schubert was commissioned by the Theater an der Wien to provide incidental music for a new production, Die Zauberharfe, which was to open in August. The play was a complicated and insipid tale by a successful hack, Georg von Hofmann, and Schubert had very little time to compose the score. Nonetheless, he wrote much lovely, carefully crafted music, which broke new ground in his understanding of thematic development. Die Zauberharfe was poorly received at its August 19 premiere, and most critics showed little sympathy for Schubert’s music—not one even mentioned the overture. The composer was disappointed and hurt by this philistine response—that September, he wrote a poem about those who ‘with wrangling fill these days’—and he was surely angry that the overture in particular went unnoticed” (Huscher, 2004).

3 Zdenek Fibich had a particularly great knowledge of literature and was friends with some of the leading literary figures of his day. This had a huge influence of his relationship with text, as well as his fascination with the sound of the Czech language. “The vowels are very bright and the consonants are explosive, so it’s a particularly good language for this form” (Goodson, 2005).

4 Other examples of incidental music which was used in melodrama are: “Beethoven’s music for Egmont (1809-10), Meyerbeer’s Gli amori di Teodinda (1816), Schubert’s Die Zauberharfe (1820), Mendelssohn’s music for Antigone (1841) and Oedipus at Colonos (1845), Wagner’s song Melodram Gretchen, Berlioz’s Lélio (1855), Fibich’s trilogy Hippodamie (1892), R. Strauss’s Enoch Arden (1897) and Das Schloss am Meere (1899)” (Shapiro, 2006).

5 The musical form of Singspiel is characterised as “…action carried forward from spoken dialogue, normally in prose, with music reserved for introductions and emotional highpoints; dances, marches and narrative songs are frequent” (Branscombe, 2006). Like melodrama, recitative is sometimes occasionally used in addition to the dialogue, but is never in place of it (Branscombe, 2006). The vocal sections of singspiel are described as generally simple and unusually strophic in form (Branscombe, 2006). Occasionally composers have included arias, but uncharacteristically to opera, they are sung by both upper and lower class characters (Branscombe, 2006). Choruses and extended ensembles were not common in early Singspiel, yet straightforward vaudeville finales were regularly found (Branscombe, 2006). Military forms just as marches, recruiting songs were popular in Singspiel and were said to reflect the recent Seven Years War through which Germany had recently concluded (Branscombe, 2006).

6 Examples of the 20th century use of spoken word and music include Milhaud’s les choëphores (1916), Walton’s fauade (1923), Weill’s Happy End (1929), Honegger’s Amphion (1931), Sémiramis (1933) and Mille et une nuits (1937), Stravinsky’s Perséphone (1934), Copland’s Lincoln Portrait (1942), Blitzstein’s The Airborne Symphony (1944-6), Henze’s Das Wundertheater (1948), Boulez’s Le visage nuptial (1948), Floyd’s Flower and Hawk (1972), Rochberg’s Phaedra (1974) and (with taped speech) Reich’s Different Trains (1988). (Shapiro, 2006)

7 Though the expressionist dramas of Schoenberg and Berg are not technically operas, they articulate an important stage in the development of melodrama in the 20th century.
Stockhausen sought to incorporate familiar elements into his electronic music as a means to provide points around which the listener could orient him or herself. He accomplished this in *Gesang der Jünglinge* by combining a large variety of recorded utterances sung and spoken by a boy-soprano and an equally diverse selection of electronically generated sounds. The voice of the boy was recorded reading and singing the text of the *Benedicite*, the song of praise drawn from the biblical story of the three youths thrown in the fiery furnace (Metzer, 2004, p. 696). As Metzer points out, Stockhausen understood that to the average listener, electronic idioms are quite new and alien; and by incorporating the familiar, he could easily accomplish his goal of expanding electronic musical repertoire into realms approaching intricate serial organization of pitch (the twelve-tone row), dynamics, rhythm, and other parameters obviating the formation of conventional-sounding melodic or rhythmic gestures (2004). This composition is of historical significance, as it represents the point where the concrete school merged with the electronic school to create the aggregate school known as electroacoustic; it is also an early example of the successful balance between abstract and representational music. *Gesang* represents the 'precarious undertaking in late modernist arts involving a union of the abstract idioms pursued by modernism with the familiar, recognizable elements it had discarded' (Metzer, 2004, p. 695).

Truax has also used these techniques in his electroacoustic opera *Powers of Two* (1995-99), *Androgyne, Mon Amour* (1997) based of the poem by Tennessee Williams, and on *Wings of Fire* (1996), based on poetry by Joy Kirstin.

Sabatini, stipulates that American opera is identifiable from European opera particularly in its use of speakers and singers which de-emphasise acting, action, emotion, and spectacle (2005). He continues to assert that in contrast to European opera, Americans do not rely upon techniques such as plot, action, nor costume-and-set driven works. American works to deviate from these European traditions include “Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson, Harry Partch, and, after Ashley, Steve Reich, Meredith Monk, Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, and Mikel Rouse” (Sabatini, 2005, p. 50).
CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

Freud doesn’t like schizophrenics. He doesn’t like their resistance to being oedipalised, and tends to treat them more or less as animals. They mistake words for things, he says. They are apathetic, narcissistic, cut off from reality, incapable of achieving transference; they resemble philosophers—"an undesirable resemblance."

Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus

As composer Barry Truax (1994) suggests, it is all too often that composers representing the new complexity of music have negated a ‘real-world context’ in their work, by devaluing the relationships between pitches and themselves, abstracted with little regard for the outer relationships they present to an audience. We see this effect in new music communities across Canada, whose humble concerts are mostly populated with composers and instrumentalists, proudly denoting themselves as ‘musician’s musicians’. As a composer, I deal with the organisation of sound. But as a member of a culture, I also participate in the creation of that culture, and for that reason feel it necessary to incorporate my experiences into my music. When composers focus upon the non-lexical level of pitch relationships, it is impossible to bring in a real-world reference without the help of semiotic devices such as words, spoken or sung. Within music circles, this use of ‘extra musical’ elements as a means to elicit referential listening has led to a debate between the camps of programmatic and abstracted sounds, but I am not interested in reproducing this discourse here. I am interested in how my project represents a reconciliation of the devalued modernist approach to internal pitch abstraction, and how it embodies music that can move beyond the notes, alone among themselves and into a macro-contextual, real-world signification, or an “outer complexity” as
Truax calls it (1994). This real-world significance largely represents the contextual foundation of my opera.

Throughout the composition of my project, I have explored Generation X as both a social construct and a postmodern identity in my operatic adaptation of Generation X - tales for an accelerated culture, originally written by Douglas Coupland (1991). Generation X is defined as a North American age demographic of 75 million in America and 8 million in Canada born between 1966 and 1980 (Holtz, 1995). This chapter will explore an artistic arbitration between subjectivity and social connectivity, as revealed through three characters found within my opera. This premise is expressed through narratives that conciliate the final remnants of a paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernism, as told through characters who unknowingly carry with them the significance of their subjective uniqueness. These narratives "mark the great divide between the historical and post-historical eras – the profound, structural changes in the world economy that mark the emergence of late capitalism as a direct stage in the evolution of how human beings organize their existence on the planet." (Lainsbury, 2003, p. 187) Furthermore, Lainsbury adds, Generation X is a challenge to the “the economically emancipated private self of bourgeois individualism” (2003, p. 186); this challenge is what Coupland’s novel – and subsequently my opera – is responding to.

**Generation X**

Coupland describes our present-day environment as “...a world that has gotten too big – way beyond our capacity to tell stories about it” (1991, p. 5). By weaving interlocking fragmented narratives amid three archetypal characters (Andy, Dag and Claire) who each tell each other ‘bedtime stories’, he symbolically “confront[s] the largeness and complexity of the
postmodern world” (Lainsbury, 2003, p. 187). These fragmented stories form a powerful mimetic statement. Jameson talks about a similar idea in the forward to Jean-François Lyotard’s Postmodern Condition (1984), “the revival of an essentially narrative view of ‘truth’ and the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere locally in the present social system, are accompanied by something like a more global or totalising ‘crisis’ in the narrative function in general” (p. xi).

As a surveyance of space between the subcultural connotation of Generation X and the mere demographic division of the term, a burning question arises as to whether Generation X in actual fact does exemplify a new “hybrid” (Hall, 1996) postmodern identity into itself, or if its only unifying identity feature is its diversity. My hypothesis is that Generation X is the personification of the first authentic postmodern identity, and in point of turn represents the exemplar movement from modernism to postmodernism and the subjection of a new North American identity. How might Generation X embody this novel identity? Perhaps one of the most unifying traits affecting Generation X’ers is their shared sense of cynicism toward democratic capitalism. This shared belief is based upon a system they perceive was built to perpetuate the shallow materialistic gains and empty extracurricular enjoyments by a select few. Arguably, Baby Boomers represent the generation who, more than any other generation before them, have hoarded and depleted resources, damaged the environment and dominated the increasingly autonomous relationship to the means of production. Generation X’ers seem to have developed a de-centering narrative all their own, as a reaction to this duplicitous boomer mentality and towards the changing effects of technology, economic and familial structures.

Revolutionary idealism has been a major cultural element within Baby Boomer subculture. From the Generation X perspective, they believe this idealism was inevitably
doomed, as a perceptual flaw surrounding a naive view of a world unequivocally focused on commercial and industrial progress. This caused a period that incubated many of the problems facing their – and following – generations. This same generation helped usher in the fragmentation of old modern narratives through the heroic gradual dissolution of socially oppressive and struggling dynamics, and replaced them with a culture in moral decline. The pace towards a perpetual need for capitalistic growth conflicted with the social advancements made by the Boomers. These same advancements that called for the 'free love' spirit of the 1960's, which promoted sex without consequence, also resulted in the realization by Generation X that they were the babies adults were trying so hard not to have. Divorce rates in the 1970's increased to a level that was previously unheard of, which later had serious de-centering consequences for the modern family in all social and economic backgrounds. Conversely, alternatives to traditional marriage began to materialize, and include a new found social freedom allowing individuals to remain single, enter common-law relationships or pursue same-sex relationships. Generation X dealt with feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and isolation that resulted from the continual bombardment of images of the nuclear family via media outlets. Television became the day care of choice for the children of baby boomers, whose parents were hard at work juggling careers and families. Generation X came of age in a society arguing about curtailing the rise in youth crime and escalating high-school drop-out rates, and heard themselves being described as so out of control that they would “put the country at risk”. They were the first technology-savvy generation, born into the age of the Internet, which has had a hugely significant impact on identity as a whole via its effects on human interaction, and the democratization of information. As the generation most closely associated with slackers, they were nevertheless widely credited with a new growth of entrepreneurship and the resulting dot-com boom.
Generation X, perhaps more than any other age demographic, encapsulates a culture of hybridity that theorist Stuart Hall describes “has had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of ‘lost’ cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism” (1996, p. 598).

As we have explored some unifying characteristics in the Generation X discourse, I would now like to explore three historically significant works that have responded to Generation X as an identity, and have effectively articulated via a real-world, culturally significant methodology. These three works through their historical trajectory will also provide clues mapping out the changing etymological definitions of the term ‘Generation X’, leading from the post-WWII generational connotations, to the catchphrases media co-option of the term following Coupland’s book.

The first recorded use of the term emerged from a photojournalism project by the Paris Magnum agency in 1949. The founder of the agency, Robert Capa, made a series of pictures and interviews about a ‘global’ group of youth he labelled “Generation X” accrued from around the globe. Capa essentially sought to provide a thoughtful characterization of a generation collectively uprooted regarding the prospect of participating in World War II (Whelan, 1985, p. 276). Capa describes:

We named this unknown generation, The X Generation, and even in our first enthusiasm we realised that we had something far bigger than our talents and our pockets could cope with. Still we were deciding to spread around the world and choose a young man and young girl in each of twelve different countries, on five different continents, and try to find out their present way of life, their past history, and their hopes for the future (as cited in Farova, 1969, pp. 36-37).

Capa found that many of the subjects were dealing with the impending war by turning away from politics and world affairs and focusing on immediate concerns surrounding their personal lives. In her interview with Capa, Sylvia Andrews of England
stated she “is not interested in politics, international affairs, or the United Nations” (Picture post, 1953, p. 4) Nancy Arnold of the United States said she “has few interests outside” of her work (1953, p. 20). Louis Pasquier from France “knows little about the world in general” (1953, p. 12). Gerda Schwemmer from Germany assured she felt did not have “…belief in anything very much beyond herself” (1953, p. 6). Burhan Jarobi from Syria said he has “turned his back on politics” (1953, p. 6). All these statements represent a mood of helplessness. They are a global generation overshadowed by a social construct significantly bigger than itself. A Generation X placed in the shade by World-War II, with the X functioning as a placeholder for what the generation would later become after the war subsided. Capa (1993) identified the effects of a generation in crisis: a generation that seemed to feel they had little choice as to stand up and sacrifice themselves for the sins of their forefathers, and the future of the free world.

During the 1960’s and 70’s, the subcultural undercurrents of the term began to develop in the 1983 publishing of a book by Paul Fussell entitled Class: A Guide Through the American Status System. The book acted as a handbook for how to navigate within the western sociological caste system, and ironically concluded with a curious chapter subtitled The X Way Out (p. 179), which introduced what Fussell believed was a new subcultural identity resistant to traditional class distinction. This X category, represented those who “earn X-personhood by a strenuous effort of discovery in which curiosity and originality are indispensable” (1983, p. 179). Fussell’s chapter maintains a mildly sardonic wit as he recounts various examples of X people’s ironic behaviour: Their tendency “to eschew the obvious kinds of pets, leaning instead towards things like tame coyotes, skunks, peacocks, and anteaters (p. 185)” (Ulrich, 2003, p. 17). Entering category X requires one to flee from parents, flock to the city and devote oneself to art, writing, creative work, – “anything,
virtually that liberates them from the presence of a boss or supervisor – are aspirant X
people, and if they succeed in capitalising on their talents, they may end as fully fledged X
types” (Fussell, 1983, pp. 179-180). Fussell’s chapter suggested the recognition of a
subculture of youth, who in reaction to the superficiality of the culture industry and to the
Western European caste system, were effectively attempting to drop out of it. Though
Fussell’s book contains humorous illustrations outlining the typical living rooms of the high
proletariat classes ‘prole’, and the significance of the consistency of an upper-class gravel
driveway, it should not undercut Fussell’s insightful observation about X category people:
that they have managed to “disencumber themselves (...) from the constraints and anxieties
of the whole class racket” (1983, p. 187). Though many pass off this tendency as laziness,
Ulrich points out that this “ideal is a playful, ironic freedom from commoditized experiences
of consumer society, a freedom that forges an alternative, deliberately marginal space for
everyday life-a kind of fluid, (sub)cultural space with constantly shifting boundaries between
the marginal and the mainstream” (2003, p. 17).

In consideration of both Capa’s 1950’s ‘unknown’ global demographic on the cusp
of world wide change, and Fussell’s 1980’s “X” subcultural representations of a group
exercising the negation of class distinctions, the term developed its third and current nuance
from Coupland’s famed 1991 novel Generation X: tales for an accelerated culture. Coupland
has merged these two definitions by typifying an entire generation of North Americans
across class, race, and gender boundaries. “Coupland’s novel depicts a generational identity
in the throes of negotiating the shifting boundary between the margin and the mainstream
through a combination of irony, insolence, intelligence and spirit” (Ulrich, 2003, p. 17).

The social implications of Coupland’s novel prompted great interest from the media,
launching the term into our common vernacular. This was further affected though a large
number of derogatory editorials written by baby boomers complaining about a new Generation regarded as “The Unromantic Generation” (The New York Times), “The Blank Generation” (The San Francisco Examiner), “A Generation of Animals”, “The Doofus Generation” (The Washington Post), “a generation without a soul” (radio talk show host), “generation of self-centered know-nothings” (Pollster Andrew Kohut). Alongside a handful of American publications (Time, Newsweek, Atlantic Monthly, New Republic, Business Week, and Fortune)¹ (as cited in Ulrich, 2003), Alexandre Abrams argues in his book Late Bloomers that Generation X was subjected to this stereotype by journalists projecting their fears about “what success would mean for the country onto [sic] young people. Were we becoming a nation of the soulless, driven only by economic and material passions?” (1994, pp. 35-36). This disappointment in the successors of Boomers during the Reagan-era commentary arose from the view that Generation X’ers were more concerned with material wealth than with the enrichment of their characters, and that they were too lazy to work. “It was easiest to believe that if young adults weren’t working, it was because they no longer wanted to work” (Lipsky & Abrams, 1994, p. 36). Lipsky and Abrams showed that this perception was perpetuating itself in that it was “reported, repeated, and finally returned to the country as truth” (1994, p.20). This ‘truth’ was adopted in a number of advertising campaigns such as Pepsi’s “Generation Next”, and the university clothing line SweatX, and in ESPN’s new show “X Games” Thomas Frank confirms in his book The Conquest of Cool, that the marketing of cool consumerism has been a particularly effective form of advertising, in exploiting their ‘detachment’ as cool new ‘hip irony’. (1997, p. x). Though in a study of Generation X’ers’ attitude towards the job market, they were not recognized as being hip or ironic at all, but were seen as desperately “disappointed pragmatists” finding success “difficult to achieve” (Frank, 1997, p. 151).
Given the social interest in the plight of the new postmodern Generation X by popular culture, it is no surprise that Coupland’s book, being so instep with this emerging cultural construct, made such a large impact. In the opening scene, Andrew Palmer, the story’s lead character, travels to the great Canadian prairie to witness a total eclipse of the sun. But after witnessing the eclipse, he experiences a “mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination – a mood that surely must have been held by most young people since the dawn of time as they crooked their necks, stared at the heavens and watched their sky go out” (Coupland, 1991, p. 4). Here we have a representation of Generation X’ers’ sense of lost innocence, where the sun – once a source of life – is now merely the major source of skin cancer and a primary quotient in global warming. This loss of innocence is a significant trait in the Generation X identity, which is further exemplified in the title of the novel’s opening chapter “The Sun is Your Enemy”.

In the second chapter “Our Parents Had More”, Andy states, “We live small lives on the periphery; we are marginalized and there’s a great deal in which we choose not to participate. We wanted silence and now we have silence” (1991, p. 11). The periphery Andy refers to is the desert setting for the novel located outside of Palm Springs, California. “We know that this is why the three of us left our lives behind us and came to the desert – to tell stories and to make our own lives worthwhile in the process” (1991, p. 8). The desert background for the novel brings interesting parallels to Jean Baudrillard’s ‘postmodern desert’. Baudrillard described his ‘desert’ as a metaphor for American culture, where “you are delivered from all depth... a superficial neutrality, a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture... with no origin, no reference-points” (1988, p. 124). The desert represents “the inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic from here, ...an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance”
(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 5.) With its expansive sandy surface extending beyond the horizon, devoid of any landmarks, and defeating the distance downwards by its ever-expanding surface features, the desert represented a triumph of lucidity over profundity. Baudrillard notes that the desert also signifies "the whole of America" (1988, p. 99), its past, present and a future that he believed would inevitably be overtaken by the apocalyptic 'desertification' leading to the end of all natural resources, depth of meaning, and cultural variation. Coupland's desert, on the other hand, functions in a more optimistic light by acting as a sanctuary for the novel characters, who relocate there in hopes of seeking sanctuary from the superficiality of city life. Dag explains how he yearned for a "clean slate with no one to read it" (Coupland, 1991, p. 31). Andy describes how he simply "needed less in life. Less past" (1991, p. 59). Claire, states how she sought a place to "just empty her brain, read books, and be with people who wanted to do the same thing" (1991, p. 36).

Coupland's characters satirize the general loss of faith, experienced by Gen X'ers in the face of modernist meta-narratives. Francis Fukuyama discussed this effect in his end of history hypothesis, brought about by a paradigm shift away from romantic idealism and its systematic replacement with a competing version of utopia through "economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands." (Fukuyama, 1998, p. 18). Fukuyama argues that Baby Boomer liberalism has won the dialectic end-game against metaphysical European meta-narratives. The cost of winning is the end of history and the end of social implications of individual political action in the face of something larger than the self. Lyotard (1984) reminds us that capitalism does not need legitimization and that political and geographical distinctions are meaningless in the post-historical globalized world. "The future only exists as commodity, onto which people project a putative sense of ownership" (Lainsbury, 2003, p.
This Western capitalist trajectory is what has lead to the first instance of the end of history, embodied within a Generation X subject trying to make sense of the disconnect many older generations are intent upon upholding.

Coupland’s book shows us how identity – in this sociological conception – bridges the gap between the ‘inside and the ‘outside’, between the personal and public worlds. This is articulated in the characters internal subjectification of their identities — a reflection of North American culture, which is projected upon the outside world as the manifestation of their internal subjectification. The fact that we project ourselves into these cultural identities while internalizing their meanings and values, making them part of us, helps align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. (Hall, 1996). Identity weaves the subject into the form. It negotiates both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making them both reciprocally more unified and predictable (Hall, 1996). Traditionally, sociologists and phychologists have only looked at age, race and gender as the significant elements constituting identity. Yet Generation X – as we have seen in Capa’s, Fussell’s and Coupland’s works – is an identity in itself whose unique place in history makes them worth paying attention to.

In an interview for Elle magazine, Coupland recounts how a young man from Chicago wanted his permission to produce Generation X T-shirts. He told him:

There is nothing less Generation X than a Generation X T-shirt. I get lots of offers to speak to liquor distillers, or whatever, for ridiculous amounts of money. It's just horrible. That's why I do this. Maybe in a few years when I'm broke and derelict, I'll regret having done it. But I just can't (France, 1993).

The irony was not lost on Coupland, whose novel expressed a “great refusal” within the “commodification process that encourages individualism over solidarity” (Cornett, 2003, p. 180).
In the final scene of Coupland's narrative, Andy drives towards the top of a hill to find a large cloud he mistakes for a nuclear cloud. Instead he finds a large open field where farmers are burning the remnants of the previous year's crop. As Lainsbury (2003) points out, "careful readers will recognize this scene as an ironic reworking of a scene from John Steinbeck's novel The Grapes of Wrath." There, the Joads, coming over the crest very much like the one that Andrew Palmer crosses, "stops their truck to stand, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley" (Lainsbury, 2003, p. 192). This valley represented the 'Promised Land'; yet when Andy stops his car at the valley's summit, he finds a big black cloud that looks frighteningly similar to a nuclear mushroom cloud; an apt metaphor for the direction in which the Western world has been heading. Comparing Coupland's reworking of a Steinbeck ending, we can see the embodiment of two identities: One identity exemplifying the hopes of a prosperous future, and the other, which has had to deal with the results of that "awe and wonder," with the realization that this romantic optimism is no longer enough to distract the new generation from recognising the approaching end of history.
Notes - Chapter 3


CHAPTER 4: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Introduction

Up until this point, we have outlined the theoretical context, the historical trajectory, as well as the cultural significance of my project. This chapter will more directly address Generation X – The Opera as a whole through its compositional process. This will include a general description of the project, structural representation of the opera, description of the adaptation process, presentation of the stylistic elements contained within the work, and a portrayal of the stage lighting and sound design. Then, we will conclude with some closing comments concerning my experiences in telling the story of my generation.

Description

Generation X – the Opera is a direct adaptation of the novel by the same name, written by Vancouver author and visual artist Douglas Coupland. The novel was adapted into a 52-minute interdisciplinary spoken word opera in one act for three spoken word artists (actors), alto saxophone, trombone, piano, cello, percussion, visual projections and pre-recorded soundtrack. The story takes place in North America in the early 1990's (Palm Springs, California) and revolves around three archetypal characters (Dag, Andy, and Claire), who collectively represent the age demographic known as Generation X - consisting of those born between 1966 and 1980. In the story, each character moves to the desert to get away from the overly commercialized world that subjugated their former lives. "We live small lives on the periphery; we are marginalised and there's a great deal in which we choose not to participate [...] we wanted silence and we have silence now" (Coupland, 1991, p. 11). They
form a bond with each other based on their rejection of capitalist North American culture and share hopes of rediscovering themselves in the process. Throughout this experience, they tell each other a series of semi-autobiographical stories, containing snippets of their lives that metaphorically represent the personification of a generational identity in crisis.

As outlined in chapter two, the precedent use of melodrama within opera is well confirmed, and I feel that the term ‘opera’ is an appropriate classification for my project. As such, my opera participates directly in the newly emerging North American operatic tradition that challenges the perpetuation of European cultural codes outside of their originally intended geographical context. This project directly follows a precedent set forth by American composers such as Virgil Thomson, Robert Ashley, Mikel Rouse, John Adams and Philip Glass, who each incorporate North American cultural experiences within the musical and narrative fabric of their operas.

Structure

The opera’s structural format is parodied on the typical Generation X mass media experience of accelerated culture (popular music, MTV, children’s cartoons, and radio and television advertising). This is exemplified in its use of a ten-scene format with five brief interludes that occur cyclically between specific scenes. Each scene is comprised of a brief ‘bedtime’ story that acts as unique pearl; when juxtaposed alongside each other, they combine. The interludes act to segment the scenes into blocks of four primary sections that include a prelude, exposition, development and conclusion. The prelude establishes the central conflict affecting the main character Andy, who struggles with his general inability to find a sense of fulfilment within an overly commercialised world. The exposition functions to develop not only Andy’s conflict, but also the essential information behind the story.
which includes the time, location, primary characters, and the central premise of the opera. This premise is carried through the development section and is comprised of a series of seemingly unrelated stories, each with their own exposition, development, and resolution. These stories combine to create an overall impression of the conflicts plaguing the central characters, who seek resolution through their telling them. It concludes with a postlude scene ten, which carries a structural antithesis to the prelude, and a resolution to Andy’s central conflict.

Table 4.1: Content and Plot Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenes</th>
<th>Principal Character(s)</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Plot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: The Total Eclipse</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>Establishes lead character Andy and his general outlook on life (ambivalent, unfulfilled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Low Pay, Low Prestige, Low Future</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>Establishes characters, plight, location, central conflict and theme (telling stories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neologisms 1</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Brings momentum to plot structure. Terminology acts to as a microcosm projecting the satirized experiences of Generation X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: What’s Your Takeaway</td>
<td>Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Establishes the first ‘bedtime story,’ and allows audience to develop rapport with Claire and Dag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Thinking of the Sun</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Establishes Andy’s contention with commodified American culture, and establishes why Andy ended up in Palm Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neologisms 2</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Develops Claire’s past, and functions to provide an element of real tragedy to story beyond the world of the three primary characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Mr. Takamichi</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Portrays Dag’s anxiety towards the erosion of American culture through consumerism and the depletion of natural resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Hummingbird Eyes</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Functions as a metaphor for the bleak future of youths living in rural North America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neologisms 3</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Represents Dag’s anxieties surrounding the direction of American capitalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: An End of the World Story</td>
<td>Dag</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Resolves Andy’s experience of ambivalence, and searching as stated in Scene 1. [Catharsis]: Andy finds happiness lies with his friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: A Texlahoma Story</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neologisms 4</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Mushroom Clouds</td>
<td>Dag</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neologisms 5</td>
<td>Andy, Claire, Dag</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Grow Flowers</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Postlude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Collectively, the aggregate design acts as a social satire surrounding the early 1990's Generation X culture, and is further inspired by the book's original magazine-style assemblage, which comprises of double columns peppered with various pop art style images. Like the book, the five interludes are constructed from specific neologisms, listing one for each letter of the alphabet (i.e. A- Air Family, B- Bambification, C- Clique Management, etc.). These structurally function to break the momentum of the narrative and are imitative of the commercial breaks found within television media formats such as the American sitcom.

The scenes are accompanied by one projected image per scene onto a large backdrop, forming the visual component of the production along with the lighting design and live performers. During the neologism interludes, the text is projected, thus allowing the audience to read along with each character, like a subtitle at the opera. This multifaceted structure is intended to instil a strong sense of surface complexity and to create a sensibility that appreciates complexity, rather than seek to escape in traditional modernist narrative fantasies of individual fulfilment and closure. It is in many ways a metaphor for the post-modern Generation X media sensibility.

The slam-style spoken word text structurally fits into the opera, much like the use of traditional European operatic recitative. Slam poetry is defined as a form of performance poetry that occurs within a competitive event, called a 'slam', where poets perform their own poems (or, in rare cases, those of others) that are 'judged' on a numeric scale by randomly picked members of the audience. There are natural parallels between recitative and spoken word, as they effectively blur the lines between music and speech by enhancing the rhythmic and melodic tenets of the speech act. By having each character perform the text in a heightened manner, they effectively perform both their character roles and the text in a
musically significant way. In terms of balance, traditional opera uses sung *aria* sections that function to address moments of reflection and dramatic content, I assert that emotionally driven sections of my project, were able to provide an adequate amount of reflective and dramatic content. Furthermore, the neologism sections allowed the narrative room to breathe though there resulting fissures within the linear narrative structure.

**Process**

The idea for the project arose from my search for a project that incorporated my interest in narrative spoken word rooted in North American vernacular. Upon reading Coupland’s novel, one character in particular vaguely reminded me of a spoken word poet that I had worked with on a previous collaboration. It was here that I first made the association to the world of slam poetry. A typical evening of slam poetry often features a number of spoken word artists competing with each other based upon the best poem and delivery. This element parallels the novel in that early in the story, the characters initiate a policy of telling each other semi-fictional stories that represent aspects of their lives.

The libretto was adapted directly from the novel over a four-month period, specifically for slam style spoken word artists. I utilised a two-step process, beginning with the basic transfer of the text from the original novel into a ten-scene structure (as discussed above) and reducing it down to its most essential narrative elements. First, I wrote a general reduction of each chapter’s essential elements. Then, I began to narrow the text down into a collection of specific stories, which I felt resonated most with me. During this stage, I worked with a theatre dramaturge to efficiently deliberate the overall process of thematic considerations and to deal with the effect of plot issues and the integration of the interludes. The interlude sections were comprised of neologisms located within the book as well as
some written by myself. *(West is Best Coasters', and 'Z Circle Snap'.*) These were arranged to form an *abecedarium*, defined as the use of one term for every letter of the alphabet.

The second stage of the adaptation sought to prepare the text for integration into the music. This was accomplished by first recording my own improvised vocal recitation of the text into a tape recorder. This step enabled me to internalize the text at a strictly musical level and gave me the musical perspective needed to adapt it for (and as) music. Then, I recorded actors reading their parts in a recording studio, in order to establish a working draft of the spoken text, from which I could work while writing the music. Since the actors did not read music, I did not notate the text rhythmically. This fact meant I had to develop a system for integrating the music and the spoken word, while maintaining a certain level of synchronous consistency. Following the notion of 18th-century German melodrama, I chose to use specific entry and exit cue points, which were graphically represented in the score along with the music written below the text (fig. 4.1). The use of a conductor was paramount here, as he became responsible for cueing the actors at the start of each section. Also, this enabled the conductor to control the synchronization with the use of a mechanism for indicating the actors to either speed up or slow down. This method worked very well and created the consistency needed for a reproducible production model for future performances.
In terms of a working score/libretto for the actors, each were given the printed text with a column of line numbers included to facilitate quick references to specific lines during the rehearsal process. This vocal score/libretto also included cue points marked in standard time code that functioned to reference the start and end points of the text. The time code corresponded with the accompanying rehearsal CDs, which were given to each of the actors, and contained all text but their own, like the ‘music minus one’ records of the 1970’s. The CD also featured a full midi simulation of the music, which helped to acquaint the actors with the musical structure of each scene. This system functioned well, as it allowed the actors to prepare for each rehearsal at home, thus enabling the memorization of their text.

In addition to the live spoken word, clips of pre-recorded text from a previous recording session with the actors were mixed at specific points during the concert to enhance the musicality of the text. This element was accomplished by digitally editing
segments selected from the recordings using a software wave editor that isolated specific words, syllables, and phonemes in the text. These were sequenced alongside the dry recording in counterpoint to the live text. This technique is inspired by Mikel Rouse’s counterpoetry technique discussed in chapter two. My technique was not as rigorous as Rouse’s, but essentially used a similar fragmentation method that I call ‘vocal integrative counterpoint’. The technique uses specific clips of words and phrases, which are either rhythmically set in counterpoint against the live text, or simply layered along with the live text. The chorus effect was inspired by rap music and was characterised by the vocal doubling of specific words found on strong beats in the text. These were intentionally left slightly out of synch to expand upon the interesting phase pattern that emerged within each combined live and pre-recorded text section. All spoken word elements were projected via a four channel stereo mix with two left-right monitors at the front of the house and a stereo pair at the rear of the house.

At times, soundscape elements were also played as a means to augment the sonic depth of the performance. For example, in scene eight, which revolves around a fictional planet named Texlahoma, actual sounds recorded from radio emissions by NASA on the planet of Saturn³ are used, giving a cliché sci-fi sound characteristic.

We organized the rehearsals over a span of three weeks prior to the premiere. The condensed time frame was organised to accommodate the conflicting tour schedules of the performers. All rehearsals were held in CAMusic, a large, equipped rehearsal space located in the School for the Contemporary Arts. Rehearsals for the first two weeks were split between the actors and musicians. The conductor/music director was present for both the music and spoken word rehearsals and I acted as the stage director. In lieu of a rehearsal pianist, we used a midi simulation of the music played via CD during the spoken word rehearsals. After
the actors and the musicians were confident with the material, we brought them together for the last three rehearsals leading up to the final tech and dress rehearsals. By the end of the rehearsal process, we were confident that all of the performers were generally prepared for the concert.

Style

The music was composed using the post-modern totalist\(^4\) school of composition, which extracts elements of popular music and incorporates them with the sophistication, complexity and depth of classical music. With its 'something for everyone' approach, the stylistic aspects of the music represented the hybrid culture of Generation X with the myriad influences and directions competing for one's attention. The melodic material is typically comprised of short motives repeated in sequence, reminiscent of those used in jazz, Latin and pop musical idioms. Primarily contrapuntal in texture, some of the accompanying figures are rooted in various musical forms such as the Habanera\(^4\) (fig. 4.2) and Klezmer (fig. 4.3).

Figure 4.2: Habanera rhythm from Scene Six: *Hummingbird Eyes*

![Habanera rhythm from Scene Six: Hummingbird Eyes](image)

Figure 4.3: Freygish (Ahava Rabi) mode from Scene Three: *What's Your Takeaway*

![Freygish (Ahava Rabi) mode from Scene Three: What's Your Takeaway](image)
Many of the scenes contain dense layers of speech-like material, kept together with the use of a persistent pulse. In order to emulate the rhythmic aspects of speech, I used hockets\(^6\) and canons\(^7\) with strong syncopations,\(^8\) which were also inspired by the MTV style 'sound bite'. To break-up the often densely textured scenes, the neologism sections were confined to a specifically identifiable rhythm from around the world i.e.: Mambo (fig. 4.4), Fox trot, (fig. 4.5), Cha-cha (fig 4.6), Rock rhythm, (fig. 4.7), and a Samba (fig 4.8).

Figure 4.4:Mambo rhythm from neologisms 1

![Mambo rhythm from neologisms 1](image)

Figure 4.5:Fox trot rhythm from neologisms 2

![Fox trot rhythm from neologisms 2](image)

Figure 4.6:Cha-cha rhythm from neologisms 3

![Cha-cha rhythm from neologisms 3](image)

Figure 4.7:Rock rhythm from neologisms 4

![Rock rhythm from neologisms 4](image)
Another significant element of the neologisms is the use of rhythmic vocalisation called out by the musicians in counterpoint with each other. This model was used for each neologism, and features an increasing use of mixed vocal and instrumental counterpoint. The musicians each enter with a chanted vocalisation comprised of rhythmic syllables such as “Chi ka”, “ti ka”, “ti ka konk”, “chi chi ka”, “boom ba”, “ho ho”, “huh huh” and “chic chic.” These were inspired by sound poetry, and were onomatopoeic of percussion sounds. Each rhythmic vocalisation entry is staggered and synchronised with the neologisms narrated by the actors. In order to vary the neologism interludes, instruments are added one by one, until the fifth neologism interlude, where each instrument has been represented.

Harmonically, the music was simple, and followed the perspective of the postminimalist school, with relatively consistent voice leading. I chose this perspective, as it would leave room for a more contrapuntal, rather than homophonic approach, which is indicative of verbal conversation.

Rhythmically, the opera was varied with ostinati (or grooves) in the bass and percussion, characteristic of the rhythm sections of pop and jazz music. This was apparent in the frequent close contrapuntal interplay between sax and trombone, from which much of the melodic material is derived. In terms of the work’s metric organization, I was conscious to remain varied enough to maintain perpetual motion, and to use moments of rest to offset the rhythmic complexity, which is mimetic of typical speech. It maintains a free motion from triple and duple metric patterns by utilising 5/4 metres such as 2 + 3 and 3 + 2 as well as 1
+ 4 and 4 + 1 configurations. Flexible metres were also used to create the sense of shifting downbeats. This was inspired by a particular element in slam style performance poetry, which freely shifts from triple to duple metres, and contains a large amount of syncopation carried over the downbeat.

**Staging, Lighting and Sound Design**

The staging of this production was fairly minimal, and relied on lighting effects and visual projections to incorporate a sense of movement to an otherwise static performance. The actors were positioned fairly down stage, standing stage left on a one-foot riser. As this opera takes place in the early 1990’s, each character was dressed in clothing appropriate for the period. The musicians were placed beside the actors, stage right and positioned for the most optimal sightlines from the perspective of the conductor, and overall balance of sound. The conductor was positioned downstage centre as is normal, directly in-between the spoken word artists and the musicians.

Single channel images were projected onto the screen upstage centre approximately ten feet off the stage floor and are synchronised to change at the beginning and end of each scene. Each image was composed using a minimal design aesthetic that included a single colour, and a programmatic image alluding to the content of each scene. During the neologism sections, the image faded to a cool grey colour, and the text of each term and definition was printed in full view for the audience.

The sound design was run from the desk set-up in the rear of the theatre to adequately monitor the sound levels from the perspective of the audience. As the ensemble was quite loud without amplification, we chose to amplify only the actors, with a mixture of dynamic and condenser microphones according to the timbral characteristics of their voices.
We also used a compressor to iron out the dynamic range between the spoken word artists, maintain adequate sound levels throughout the performance and balance out the voices with the pre-recorded text.

**Concluding Comments**

This project has sought to develop a spoken word opera that dealt directly with my generation. Though the opera is socially satirical, there is a mark of seriousness in its portrayal of the cultural codes that run deep through the acceleration of North American culture, and the materialisation of a postmodern identity. This identity is embodied in my opera’s satirical portrayal of the three archetypal characters and is tempered by the shifting of the old modernist traditions. Dag as the morbid, lazy oddball, interested in nuclear proliferation, and an unhealthy fixation on the end of the world; Claire, with a witty dry humour, a scene of sadness for unrequited love, and idealistic times; and Andy, the central character, who is cynical, yet filled with a yearning for a return to a life of substance.

Working with this story was very personal as it represented my attempt to explore my generation’s cultural significance. As I worked with the characters, I saw bits of myself in each of them. Hearing Andy cynically describe how he always knew the end of a movie before it ended rang true for me. Following Dag project his fears surrounding an inevitable catastrophic disaster, as the result of nuclear proliferation seemed all too familiar when I watch the nightly news each evening. After listening to Claire fetishize the past and yearn for the lost promises of the future, I relate to her nostalgia and her fixation on retrograde acuity. I relate to the story’s desert landscape as the poignant representation of the propagation of surface structure and the increasing media attack on substance, in favour of perpetual alarm and attention. The neologisms were particularly affecting, as they portrayed a complexity
represented in their frankness and inherent truths. Each one represented a small facet that embodied the collective experiences of Generation X.

It was perhaps no mistake that as I approach the age of 30, I would be coming to terms with my experience growing up in 1980’s North America. In the present day, members of Generation X have long since found acceptance that they live in the shadow of the baby boomers. As the shared experience of the Generation X identity has continued to mature in recent years, it will no doubt go on to come into its own as the first postmodern generation. For future generations, such as Generation Y (1982-2003), Boomerang Generation (1981-1986) and Google Generation (1986-2000), they too will have their own unique stories to tell.
Recitative: a style used in European operas, in which the text is declaimed in the rhythm of natural speech with slight melodic variation and little orchestral accompaniment (Monson et al., n.d.).

As is the tradition in spoken word performance, the actors preferred to recite the text from memory rather than read it from their vocal score/libretto.

These radio waves are closely related to the auroras near the poles of the planet similar to Earth’s northern and southern lights. The Cassini spacecraft recorded these eerie sounds on April 2002, when Cassini was 2.5 astronomical units from the planet using the Cassini Radio and Plasma Wave Science (RPWS) instrument (Kurth, 2005).

Totalism: refers to the aims of the music, in trying to have enough surface rhythmic energy (often emulating pop) to attract unsophisticated listeners, but also to contain enough background complexity to satisfy connoisseurs (Gann, 2001).

Note that the accent in an archetypical habanera is usually located on the downbeat. I placed it here on the weak beat for no reason other than liking the way it sounded.

Hocket: In music, ‘hocket’ is the rhythmic linear technique using the alternation of notes, pitches, or chords (Sanders, n.d.).

Canon: a contrapuntal composition that employs a melody with one or more imitations of the melody played after a given duration (e.g. quarter rest, one measure, etc.) (Westrup & Harrison, 1959).

Syncopation: the stressing of a normally unstressed beat in a bar or the failure to sound a tone on an accented beat (Westrup & Harrison, 1959).
ANNEX A: LIBRETTO

Generation X- The Opera

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Prelude/Scene One

The Total Eclipse
(Andy, Chorus)

Andy
1 0:24 Back in the late 1970's
2 when I was fifteen years old
3 I spent every penny I had in the bank
4 to fly across the continent
5 in a 747 jet to Brandon Manitoba
6 deep in the Canadian prairies
7 to witness a total eclipse of the sun
8 I must have been a strange sight
9 at my young age
10 being pencil thin and practically albino
11 quietly checking into a Travelodge motel
12 to spend the night alone
13 happily watching snowy network television offerings
14 and drinking glasses of water
15 from glass tumblers that had been 1:06

Andy with Dag and Claire (Chorus)
16 1:06 washed and rewrapped
17 rewrapped and washed 1:12

(Dag and Claire continue chanting both lines 3X while Andy continues over top)

Andy
18 1:10 (segue) in paper sheaths so many times
19 they looked like they had been sand papered
20 the night soon ended
21 and come the morning of the eclipse
22 I eschewed tour buses and
23 took civic bus transportation to the edge of town
24 there I walked down a dirt side road and into a farmer's field
25 I saw some sort of cereal that was chest high and corn green
26 and rustled as its blades inflicted small paper burns
27 on my skin as I walked through them
28 And in that field
29 when the appointed hour minute and second of darkness came
30 I lay myself down on the ground
31 surrounded by tall pithy grain stalks
32 and the faint sound of insects
33 and held my breath
34 there experiencing a mood of darkness
35 and inevitability and fascination
36 a mood that surely must have been held by most young people
37 since the dawn of time
38 as they have crooked their necks
39 stared at the heavens
40 and watched their sky go out 2:13
SCENE TWO

Low Pay Low Prestige Low Future
(Andy, Dag, Chorus)

Andy:
1 0:00 One and a half decades later
2 my feelings are just as ambivalent
3 and I sit on the front lanai of my rented bungalow
4 in Palm Springs California
5 grooming my two dogs
6 smelling the cinnamon night time pong
7 of snapdragons
8 efficient whiffs of swimming pool chlorine
9 drift in from the courtyard while I wait for dawn
10 From inside my little bungalow I hear a cupboard door slam
11 My friend Dag
12 probably fetching my other friend Claire
13 a starchy snack or sugary treat
14 Or even more likely
15 if I know them
16 a wee gin and tonic
17 They have habits
18 Dag is from Toronto
19 dual citizenship
20 Claire is from Los Angeles
21 I for that matter am from Portland Oregon
22 but where you’re from feels sort of irrelevant these days
23 since everyone has the same stores in their mini-malls
24 We’re the three of us
25 members of the poverty jet set
26 an enormous global group
27 and a group I joined 0:58
28 1:04 as mentioned earlier
29 at the age of fifteen
30 Anyhow
31 as this evening was good for neither Dag nor Claire
32 they had to come invade my space to absorb cocktails and chill
33 they needed it
34 both had their reasons
35 For example
36 just after 2:00 AM Dag got off shift at Larry’s Bar
37 where along with me he is a bartender
38 While the two of us were walking home
39 he ditched me right in the middle of a conversation
40 we were having and darted across the road
41 he then scraped a boulder across the front hood
42 of a Cutlass Supreme
43 This is not the first time he has impulsively vandalized like this
44 The car was the color of butter
45 and bore a bumper sticker saying
Andy with Dag and Claire
46 1:38 (segue) WE'RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE 1:40

Andy
47 a message that I suppose irked Dag who was bored and cranky after eight hours of
48 working his McJob 1:47

Andy with Dag and Claire
49 1:45 (segue) Low pay low prestige low future

Andy
50 1:56 You know Dag and Claire smile a lot
51 as do many people I know
52 But I have always wondered if there is something
53 either mechanical or malignant to their smiles
54 the way they keep their outer lips propped up
55 seems a bit
56 not false but protective
57 A minor realization hits me as I sit with the two of them
58 It's that the smiles that they wear in their daily lives
59 are the same as the smiles worn by people
60 who have been good-naturedly fleeced
61 but fleeced nonetheless
62 in public and on a New York sidewalk by card sharks
63 and who are unable because of social convention
64 to show their anger
65 don't want to look like poor sports
66 There is no weather in Palm Springs
67 just like TV
68 there is also no middle class
69 and in that sense the place is medieval
70 Dag says that: 2:45

Dag
71 2:45 (segue) Every time someone on the planet uses a paper clip
72 fabric softens their laundry or watches a rerun of Hee Haw on TV
73 a resident somewhere in Palm Springs collects a penny 2:57

Andy
74 3:13 He's probably right
75 I get the impression
76 while I drive past the gas station at hearse-speed
77 that back in the day say 1958
78 Buddy Hackett Joey Bishop
79 and a bunch of Vegas entertainers all banded together
80 to make a bundle on this place
81 but a key investor split town
82 and the whole place just died
83 The thought is fleeting 3:35
84 3:54 Claire says that it's not healthy to live life as a succession
85 of isolated little cool moments
86 It's simple
87 we come up with stories
88 and we tell them to each other
89 The only rule is that we are not allowed to interrupt
90 Just like AA
91 and that we are not allowed to criticize 4:10
Neologisms 1

(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Andy
1 0:03 Air Family:
2 Describes the false sense of community experienced among co-workers in an office
3 environment

Dag
4 0:10 Bambification:
5 The mental conversion of flesh and blood living creatures into cartoon characters
6 possessing bourgeois Judeo-Christian attitudes and morals 0:20

Claire
7 0:21 Boomer Envy:
8 Envy of material wealth and long-range material security accrued by older members of
9 the baby boom generation by virtue of fortunate births 0:31

Andy
10 0:33 Clique Management:
11 The need of one generation to see the generation following it as deficient so as to bolster
12 its own collective ego "Kids today do nothing They're so apathetic We used to go out and
13 protest all they do now is shop and complain" 0:48

Dag
14 0:49 Down-Nesting:
15 The tendency of parents to move to smaller guest-room-free houses after their children
16 have moved away so as to avoid children aged 20 to 30 who have boomeranged home
17 1:02

Claire
18 1:04 Earth Tones:
19 A youthful subgroup interested in vegetarianism tie-dyed outfits mild recreational drugs
20 and good stereo equipment
21 Earnest frequently lacking in humour 1:16

SCENE THREE

What's Your Takeaway
(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Andy:
1 0:00 After you're dead and buried
2 and floating around whatever place we go to
3 what's going to be your best memory of earth 0:06

Claire
4 0:16 I've got one
5 Snow 0:17

Andy and Dag
6 0:17 she said "snow" 0:25
Claire
0:19 I'll always remember the first time I saw snow
0:19 I was twelve and it was just after the first and biggest divorce
0:19 I was in New York visiting my mother and was standing beside a traffic island in the
0:19 middle of Park Avenue
0:19 I had never been out of LA before
0:19 I was entranced by the big city
0:19 I was looking up at the Pan Am Building and contemplating
0:44 the essential problem of Manhattan
Andy and Dag
0:44 Which is 0:44
Claire
0:45 Which is that there's too much weight improperly distributed
0:45 towers and elevators
0:45 steel stone and cement
0:45 So much mass up so high that gravity itself could end up being warped
0:45 some dreadful inversion
0:58 an exchange program in the sky
Dag
0:59 I love it when Claire gets weird
Claire
1:00 Right then my brother Allan yanked at my sleeve because the walk signal light was
1:00 green
1:00 Then my face went BANG
1:00 right into my first snowflake ever
1:00 It melted in my eye
1:00 I didn't even know what it was at first
1:00 but then I saw millions of flakes
1:00 all white and smelling like ozone
1:00 floating downward like the shed skins of angels
1:00 Even Allan stopped
1:00 Traffic was honking at us but time stood still
1:00 And so yes if I take one memory of earth away with me
1:00 that moment will be the one
1:00 To this day I consider my right eye charmed
Dag
1:35 My take away happened in 1974
1:35 Kingston Ontario
1:35 My dad and I were at the gas station and I was given the task of filling up the gas tank
1:35 a Galaxy 500
1:35 snazzy car
1:35 I was one of those goofy kids who always caught colds and never got the hang of things
1:35 I'd always screw things up somehow
1:35 break something
1:35 have it die
1:35 Anyway my dad was in the shop buying a map and I was outside feeling
1:35 proud of how I hadn't botched anything up yet
1:35 Dad came out just as I was topping it up at which point the nozzle went nuts
1:35 It started spraying all over my jeans my running shoes
1:35 the licence plate the cement like purple alcohol
1:35 Dad saw everything
1:35 But instead of yelling at me he smiled and said
1:35 "Hey sport isn't the smell of gasoline great?"
1:35 Close your eyes and inhale
1:35 so clean
it smells like the future"
Well I did that- I closed my eyes and breathed deeply
I saw the bright orange light of the sun coming through my eyelids smelled the gasoline
and my knees buckled
But it was the most perfect moment of my life and so if you asked me (and I have a lot of
hope pinned on this) Heaven just has to be an awful lot like those few seconds 3:07

Andy
3:08 Was it Leaded or Unleaded? 3:08

Dag
3:09 Leaded 3:09

Claire and Andy
3:10 Perfect 3:10

SCENE FOUR
Thinking of the Sun
(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Andy
0:00 What do you think of when you see the sun?
Quick before you think too much
Be honest
Be gruesome
Claire you go first 0:23

Claire
0:24 Well Andy I see a farmer in Russia 0:36

Claire with Andy
0:27 (segue) and he's driving a tractor in a wheat field
but the sunlight's gone bad on him
like the fadedness of a black-and-white picture
in an old life magazine 0:36

Claire
(segue) and another strange phenomenon has happened too
rather than sunbeams
the sun has begun to project the odour
of old life magazines instead
and the odour is killing the crops
The wheat is thinning as we speak
He's slumped over the wheel
of his tractor and he's crying
His wheat is dying of history poisoning (x2) 1:02

Andy
1:06 Good Claire
Very weird and Dag you? 1:08

Dag
1:11 When I think of the sun I think of an Australian
surf bunny eighteen years old maybe
somewhere on Bondi Beach maybe
discovering her first keratosis lesion on her shin
She's screaming inside her brain and already plotting
how she’s going to steal Valiums from her mother
Now you tell me Andy
what do you think of when you see the sun? 1:38

Andy
1:41 I think of this place in Antarctica called Lake Vanda

Andy with Claire
(segue) where the rain hasn’t fallen in more than two million years *Pause*

Andy
1:48 What I don’t say is this

Andy with Claire
(segue) That this is also the same sun that makes me think of regal tangerines and
dimwitted butterflies and lazy carp 1:58

Andy
(segue) And the ecstatic drops of pomegranate blood seeping from skin fissures of fruits
rotting on the tree branch next door

Andy with Claire
(segue) drops that hang like rubies from their old brown leather source alluding to the
intense ovarian fertility inside 2:15

Neologisms 2

(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Andy
0:04 Ethnomagnetism:
The tendency of young people to live in emotionally demonstrative more unrestrained
ethnic neighbourhoods “You wouldn’t understand it there mother they hug where I live
now” 0:15

Dag
0:16 Fame-Induced Apathy:
The attitude that no activity is worth pursuing unless one can become very famous
pursuing it
Fame-Induced Apathy mimics laziness but its roots are much deeper 0:30

Claire
0:30 Green Division:
To know the difference between envy and jealousy 0:36

Andy
0:36 Historical Overdosing:
To live in a period of time when too much seems to happen Major symptoms include
addiction to newspapers magazines and TV news broadcasts 0:45

Dag
0:45 Historical Underdosing:
To live in a period of time when nothing seems to happen Major symptoms include
addiction to newspapers magazines and TV news broadcasts 0:57

Claire
0:58 Historical Slumming:
The act of visiting locations such as diners, smokestack industrial sites, rural villages --
locations where time has been frozen many years back -- so as to experience relief when
one returns back to “the present.” 1:08
SCENE FIVE

Mr Takamichi
(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Dag
1 0:00 Andy
2  Stop being so quiet
3  it's your turn to tell a story 0:03

Claire
4 0:03 Do amuse us darling
5  you're being so moody 0:06

Dag and Claire
6 0:08 Torpor defines his mood as he sits on the crumbling
7   poxed and leprous never-used macadam
8   Thinking stories to himself and crumbling pungent sage in his fingers 0:19

Dag
9 0:19 prey tell 0:20

Andy
10 0:24 I was working part of a half-year job exchange program with the university when
11   something strange happened 0:28

Dag
12 0:29 Is this a true story? 0:30

Andy
13 0:30 Yes
14  I was on the phone trying to get some pictures from Depeche Mode's people
15   and was thinking about the way cities all have their own signature odour to them
16   Tokyo's street smell is udon noodle broth and faint sewage
17   chocolate and car fumes
18   Milan's smell reminded me of cinnamon and diesel belch and roses
19   Vancouver with its Chinese roast pork salt water and cedar
20   I was feeling homesick for Portland trying to remember its smell of trees and rust and
21   moss when the ruckus in the office began to dim
22   Mr Takamichi the company boss entered the room 1:03

Dag
23 1:01 (addressed to audience) well-known Americaphile with skin folded like a shrunken
24   apple-head person or the bog man of Denmark 1:08

Andy
25 1:10 Miss Ueno the drop-dead cool fashion coordinator in the desk next to mine
26   looked stressed 1:14

Claire
27 1:14 Olive Oyl hair Venetian gondolier's shirt harem pants and
28   Viva Las Vegas booties 1:21

Andy
29 1:21 Mr Takamichi headed over to my desk 1:23

Dag
30 1:23 "you must be Andrew" 1:24

Andy
31 1:26 I knew this was going to happen
32   It was really embarrassing
33   In Japan you get phobic about being
34   singled out from the crowd
35   He shook my hand like a Ford dealer 1:33

69
Dag
36 1:33 "Come upstairs we'll have drinks
37 we'll talk" 1:37

Andy
38 1:37 It was a bad scene
39 I could just imagine everyone looking at me 1:40

Dag and Claire
(whispering, and said at the same time)
40 1:40 Dag: "Who the hell does he think he is?"
41 Claire: "what an ass-kisser" 1:42

Andy
42 1:44 I felt like I was being excommunicated from the shin jin rui 1:47

Claire
43 1:48 defined as "new human beings"
44 what the Japanese newspapers call kids in their twenties at the office 1:55

Andy
45 2:26 We went upstairs
46 walked down the western part 2:28

Claire
47 2:29 (segue) a hallway
48 past small impressionist paintings and tufts of flowers 2:33

Andy
49 2:34 (segue) and into the Japanese part 2:36

Dag
50 2:37 Toko no ma shrine with chrysanthemums a scroll and a gold fan 2:41

Andy
51 2:43 Mr Takamichi asked me to sit down at a table with salty green Japanese tea
52 He talked pleasantly but I wondered what his hidden agenda was 2:50

Dag
53 2:51 "How do you like your job?
54 what do you think about Japan?" 2:55

Andy
55 2:56 He then told me about the time he spent in New York in the 1950's as a stringer for
56 the Asahi newspapers
57 About meeting Diana Vreeland Truman Capote and Judy Holiday
58 Then he asks "what is the most valuable thing you own?"
59 Well well
60 try to explain the concept of sophomoric minimalism
61 to an octogenarian Japanese publishing magnate 3:12

Dag and Claire
62 3:12 not too easy 3:13

Andy
63 3:13 A beat up VW bug
64 A stereo
65 I'd sooner have died than admit the most valuable thing I owned was a fairly extensive
66 collection
67 of German industrial music dance EP records stored for even further embarrassment
68 under a box of crumbling Christmas tree ornaments in a Portland Oregon basement
69 So I told him I owned nothing of any value
70 Mr Takamichi then pulled out a photograph 3:34

Andy with Dag and Claire
72 3:35 (segue) a Black and white 1950's photo like the ones taken at the scene of a crime
73 3:39
Dag
74 3:40 "This picture is my most valuable thing" 3:43
Claire
75 3:44 A photo of Marilyn Monroe getting into a checker cab
76 lifting up her dress no underwear
77 and smooching at the photographer 3:52
Andy
78 3:55 It was an unabashedly sexual frontal photo
79 get your minds out of the gutter- black as the ace of spades if you must know
80 and very taunting
81 I broke out into a sweat
82 and then the words of a Rilke Poem entered my brain 4:06
Dag and Claire
83 4:12 Only the individual who is solitary is like a thing subject to profound laws and if he
84 goes into the morning that is just beginning or looks out into the evening that is full of
85 things happening and if he feels what is going on there then his whole situation drops
86 from him as from a dead man although he stands in the very midst of life 4:32
Andy
88 4:34 I believe that we are all of us born with a letter inside us
89 and that only if we are true to ourselves
90 may we be allowed to read it
91 Mr Takamichi has mistaken this picture as his letter
92 I then had an uncontrollable reaction
93 and ran out of there as fast as I could
94 That night I packed my bags and two days later I was back in Oregon
95 Back in the New World
96 Breathing less crowded air
97 but I knew there was still too much history there for me
98 So I came down to Palm Springs to breathe dust and look at a rock or a cactus and know
99 that I am the first person to see that cactus and that rock
100 And to try to read the letter inside me 5:15

SCENE SIX

Hummingbird Eyes
(Claire, Chorus)

Claire
1 0:31 This is a story I call "The Boy with the Hummingbird Eyes"
2 So if all of you will please lean back and relax now
3 I will tell it
4 It starts in Burbank California where I grew up
5 There was a boy named Curtis who lived next door
6 who rarely spoke
7 very athletic hitting baseballs farther than anyone else whenever he got up the will to do
8 so
9 I madly adored Curtis from the first moment our U-haul pulled up to the new
10 house and I saw him lying on the grass next door smoking a cigarette
11 at 15 years old
12 In our war games I was always Nurse Meyers
13 and had to patch up Curtis's wounds
14 wounds which as time passed
15 became suspiciously groin centered
16 and cures with names like 1:17
Claire with Andy and Dag
17 1:17 (segue) "Tripoli Hershey Bar Massage"
18 and the "Hanoi Canteen Slut Mud Rub" 1:22

Claire
19 1:23 Curtis eventually moved away and I eventually forgot about him
20 Then after 14 years I saw him again
21 I was at work at the "Spa de Luxembourg"
22 he had ropey white scars all over him and it looked like he had been to the tattoo parlour
23 a few times
24 Once he recognised me he kissed me on the cheek and said 1:42

Dag
25 1:42 (segue) "I missed you baby doll"
26 Thought I'd be dead before I ever saw you again" 1:47

Claire
27 1:48 (segue) while we were talking he kept bobbing his head around looking 1:50

Claire with Andy and Dag
28 1:50 (segue) to and fro (Dag repeats once rhythmically in a questioning intonation)1:56

Claire
29 1:52 I asked him what he was looking for
30 and he said 1:54

Andy and Dag
31 1:54 (segue) "Hummingbirds"
32 tell you more about it later

Claire
33 1:59 I agreed to meet with him
34 later that evening to catch up
35 Later that night we met at his friend's apartment
36 we had the slow stunted conversation of people catching up with time
37 Curtis started to talk about his friend Arlo
38 from during his days as a soldier for hire in South America
39 One particular story was about how they were out on a shoot and how the fighting got
40 life-threateningly intense
41 They were forced to lie down on the ground covered in camouflage with their primed
42 machine guns pointed at the enemy
43 Suddenly this hummingbird started darting into Arlo's eyes
44 Arlo brushed it away but it kept darting back 2:36

Andy and Dag
45 2:37 (segue) "I didn't know what was happening at first" 2:39

Claire
46 2:40 Arlo explained 2:42

Andy and Dag
47 2:43 (segue) some hummingbirds are attracted to the colour blue2:45

Claire
48 2:46 (segue) and that they collect it to build their nests 2:48

Andy and Dag
49 2:48 (segue) they were trying to build their nests with Arlo's eyes2:51

Claire
50 2:51 At this point Curtis said 2:52

Andy and Dag
51 2:52 (segue) "Hey my eyes are blue too" 2:55

Claire
52 2:56 Arlo began sweeping gestures to keep the hummingbirds away but this attracted
53 enemy fire
Curtis was shot in the groin and Arlo was shot dead. Curtis then recounted 3:05

Andy and Dag
3:05 (segue) "I joined the mop-up crews in spite of this injury" 3:08

Claire
3:08 they returned to the site of the battle to pick up the dead 3:11

Andy and Dag
3:11 "When we got to Arlo's body there we were shocked to find the blue meat of Arlo's eyes picked away from the whites" 3:20

Claire
3:20 Curtis began weeping 3:21

Andy and Dag
3:21 (segue) "You know Baby doll sometimes you can be very stupid and swim a bit too far out into the ocean and not have enough energy to swim back to shore Birds insult you at that point when you're out there just floating They only remind you of the land you'll never be able to reach again But one of these days I don't know when one of those little hummingbirds is going to zip right in and make a dart for my blue little eyes" 3:52

Claire
3:53 Curtis falls asleep and I quietly leave in the morning 4:02

Neologisms 3

(Andy Claire Dag)

Andy
0:08 Japanese Minimalism:
The most frequently offered interior design aesthetic used by rootless career-hopping young people

Dag
0:16 Knee-Jerk Irony:
The tendency to make flippant ironic comments as a reflexive matter of course in everyday conversation

Claire
0:26 Lessness:
A philosophy whereby one reconciles oneself with diminishing expectations of material wealth "I've given up wanting to make a killing or be a big-shot I just want to find happiness and maybe open up a little roadside cafe in Idaho

Andy
0:43 McJob:
A low-pay low-prestige low-dignity low-benefit no-future job in the service sector Frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never held one

Dag
0:52 Native Aping:
Pretending to be a native when visiting a foreign destination
Obscurism:
The practice of peppering daily life with obscure references (forgotten films, dead TV stars, unpopular book, defunct countries, etc.) as a subliminal means of showcasing one's education and one's wish to disassociate from the world of mass culture.

Option Paralysis:
The tendency when given unlimited choices to make none.

SCENE SEVEN
An End of the World Story
(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Claire and Andy
The end of the world is a recurring motif in Dag's bedtime stories. Eschatological You-Are-There accounts of what it's like to be bombed told in a radio announcer voice.

Dag
Imagine you're standing in a line at a supermarket, say the Vons supermarket at the corner of Sunset and Tahquitz, and you're in just a vile mood because driving over you got into an argument with your best friend over a road sign saying "Deer Next 2 Miles" and you said "Oh really they expect us to believe there are any deer left" which made your best friend who was sitting in the passenger seat curl up his toes. And since you've said something that struck a nerve and it was fun you pushed things further. "For that matter" you said "you don't see nearly as many birds these days as you used to. And you know what I heard the other day? That down in the Caribbean there aren't any shells left anywhere because the tourists took them all. And haven't you ever wondered when flying back from Europe five miles over Greenland that there's just something don't know -inverted- about shopping for cameras and scotch and cigarettes up in outer space". Your friend calls you a dink and says "Why the hell are you so negative all the time?". You say "you mean to tell me we can drive all the way here from LA and see maybe thousand square miles of shopping malls and you don't have maybe just the weentsiest inkling that something somewhere has gone very very wrong?". The whole argument goes nowhere of course and possibly you are being accused of being unfashionably negative. The net result is you standing alone in Vons checkout line counter number three with marshmallows.
38 and briquettes for the evening barbecue
39 and your best friend sitting out in the car
40 But part of you is also fascinated with the cart contents
41 of the by-any-standards-obese man in line up ahead of you
42 Plastic magnums of diet colas
43 butterscotch-flavoured microwave cake mixes
44 complete with their own baking tins 2:29

Claire and Andy
45 2:30 ten minutes of convenience; ten million years in the Municipal Sanitary Landfill 2:36

Dag
46 2:39 Suddenly there is a power surge
47 The lights brighten return to normal dim then die
48 Next to go is the Muzak
49 You see your best friend enter the store
50 "The radio died" your friend announces
51 "and look" Out the front windows you sense
52 something big's going on
53 That's when the sirens begin
54 the worst sound in the world
55 and the sound you've dreaded all your life
56 It's here the soundtrack to hell- wailing flaring warbling and unreal- collapsing and
57 confusing
58 both time and space
59 The parking lot is now about as civilised as a theme park's bumper cars
60 But the fat man remains as does the cashier
61 They your best friend and you remain frozen
62 speechless
63 and your minds become the backlit NORAD world map of mythology 3:30

Claire and Andy
64 3:30 how cliche 3:31

Dag
65 3:34 it's only a matter of moments now isn't it
66 "I always promised myself" says the fat man
67 "that when this moment came
68 I would behave with some dignity
69 in whatever time remains and so"

Dag with Claire and Andy
70 3:48 (segue) "Miss-" he says turning to the clerk
71 "let me please pay for my purchases"

Dag
72 3:52 Then comes the flash
73 "Get down" you shout
74 but they continue the transaction
75 and just then before the front windows become
76 a crinkled liquefied imploding sheet-
77 and just before you're pelted by a hail of gum and magazines
78 and just before the fat man is lifted off his feet hung in suspended animation and bursts
79 into flames while the liquefied ceiling lifts and drips upward
80 Just before all of this
81 your best friend cranes his neck lurches over to where you lie and kisses you on the
82 mouth
83 after which he says to you
84 "There I've always wanted to do that"
85 And that's that
86 And then they all die4:38
SCENE EIGHT

A Texlahoma Story
(Claire, Chorus)

Claire
1  0:00 It’s time to tell a Texlahoma story 0:03
Claire with Dag and Andy
2  0:04 Texlahoma is a mythic world
3  It’s on an asteroid orbiting the Earth
4  where the year is permanently 1974
5  the year after the oil shock and the year starting from which
6  real wages in the US never grew again 0:18
7  0:40 It’s a sad everyplace where citizens are always getting fired from their jobs at 7-
8  eleven
9  and where kids do drugs
10  and practice the latest dance crazes at the local lake
11  where they fantasize about being adult
12  and pulling off welfare scams 0:54
13  1:09 The atmosphere contains oxygen wheat chaff and AM radio transmissions 1:13
Claire
14  1:14 One afternoon an astronaut named
Claire with Andy and Dag
15  1:17 (segue) Buck
(Claire says once continues with next following lines, while Andy and Dag chanted it 5x along with
bead in music)
Claire
16  1:18 (segue) had a problem with his spaceship
17  Buck’s ship wasn’t programmed to deal with Texlahoma gravity
18  He was forced to land on Texlahoma
19  in the suburban backyard of the Monroe family
20  A Mrs Monroe greeted him in the backyard
21  She was glad to have company
22  her three daughters were at work
23  and her husband was out on the thresher
24  Right then something went wrong
25  Buck began to turn pale green
26  and his head began to turn boxy and veined like Frankenstein’s
27  he’d developed space poisoning
28  and would start to look like a monster
29  shortly he would fall into an almost permanent sleep
30  Mrs Monroe offered to take him to the clinic
31  but he declined
32  He asked Mrs Monroe to take care of him
33  She agreed
34  One by one the three daughters Arleen Darleen and Serena came down to stare at Buck
35  who was sleeping in their old bed amid the clutter of their childhood
36  Arleen who had recently been fired from 7-Eleven was put in charge of taking care of
37  Buck first
38  she rushed inside the bathroom
39  applied alluring cosmetics
40  and dashed to the kitchen
to whip up a platter of Vienna Franks
These she arranged on a platter in the shape of a C
just like the local Crest Wood Mall shopping mall logo
Arleen raced down to the basement with the food platter
and sat near him
Buck woke up to see Arleen
in spite of Buck looking like a Frankenstein monster
her heart had a romantic little arrhythmia right on the spot
Arleen offered Buck the Vienna frank kebabs
From that moment on love bloomed
just as Buck awoke
he said
"Arleen I love you very much Do you love me?"
Arleen replied "yes"
to which Buck said "would you be willing to take a big risk and help me?
We could be together always and I could help you leave Texlahoma"
Arleen was thrilled at both thoughts and said "Yes Yes"
Buck then told her what she needed to do
Apparently the radiation waves emitted by a woman in love
are of just the right frequency to boost the rocket ship's engines and help it to lift
off
And if Arleen would just come with him in the ship
they could leave
and Buck could get a cure for his space poisoning
at the moon base
"There's just one catch" said Buck
"Once we take off there's only enough air
in the ship for one person
and I'm afraid that after takeoff
you'd have to die
Sorry
But of course once we got to the moon
I'd have the right machines to revive you"
Arleen stared at Buck and a tear came down her cheek
dripped over her lip and onto her tongue where it tasted salty like urine "I'm sorry Buck
But I can't do that"
Darleen the youngest sister
got fired from her perfume sales job
and was next to take care of Buck
It was only a matter of minutes before love blossomed
Days later Buck was making the same plea for help to Darleen But when Buck's plea
came to the part about
Darleen having to die
like her sister before her
she said No
Need I say it
history repeated itself again
Serena the middle child got fired from Woolworth's scent counter and was next to be in
charge of Buck
Serena told Buck of her dreams of being a painter
and how she hoped that someday someone would rescue her from Texlahoma
Well if Buck thought he was in love before
he realized Serena was the real True Love
Buck asked her for help and instead of saying No
she simply said "I understand"
The next day when Buck awoke
They went to the ship to get Serena's love waves to boost the engine and the ship took off. Below on Texlahoma, Arleen and Darleen meanwhile were both returning home from their jobs from which they had both been fired just in time to see the rocket fire off and their sister vanish into the stratosphere in a long colonic and fading white line. "You realise" said Arleen "that that whole business of Buck being able to bring us back to life was total bullshit". "Oh I knew that" said Darleen. "But it doesn't change the fact that I am jealous" 6:00

Neologisms 4
(Andy, Claire, Dag)

**Dag**
1 0:07 *Poverty Jet Set:* A group of people given to chronic traveling at the expense of long-term job stability, or a permanent residence Tend to have doomed and extremely expensive phone call relationships with people named Serge or Ilyana Tend to discuss frequent-flyer programs at parties

**Claire**
6 0:28 *Pull-the-Plug Slice the Pie:* A fantasy in which an offspring mentally tallies up the net worth of their parents

**Andy**
8 0:34 *QFM:* Quelle fashion mistake "It was really QFM I mean painter pants that's 1979 beyond belief" 0:40

**Dag**
11 0:40 *Recreational Slumming:* The practice of participating in recreational activities of a class one perceives as lower than one's own "Karen Donald let's go bowling tonight And don't worry about shoes apparently you can rent them" 0:57

**Claire**
15 0:58 *Safety Net-ism:* The belief that there will always be a financial and emotional safety net to buffer life's hurts Usually parents 1:07

**Andy**
18 1:08 *Tele-Parabolizing:* Morals used in everyday life that derive from TV sitcom plots: “That's just like the episode where Jan lost her glasses." 1:19
SCENE NINE

Mushroom Clouds
(Dag, Chorus)

Dag
1 0:23 Once upon a time there was a man named Otis
2 who moved to Palm Springs
3 because if Los Angeles was ever hit with a nuke
4 the fallout would never reach Palm Springs
5 since it hardly ever rains there 0:36
6 0:45 One day Otis receives a postcard from a friend
7 that had a picture of a nuclear mushroom cloud on the front 0:51

Andy
8 0:52 Aerial view 0:52

Dag
9 0:53 He was disturbed by the picture
10 because the scale was all wrong
11 The cloud was too small
12 Otis thought the cloud was
13 supposed to fill up the whole sky
14 Otis panicked
15 as he might have been worrying
16 about a mushroom cloud for nothing 1:07

Andy and Claire
17 1:07 Maybe he can free himself from bomb anxiety 1:10

Dag
18 1:21 Otis then decided to check it out for himself
19 and drove to nuclear test sights along 1:26

Dag with Andy and Claire
20 1:26 (segue) "Nuclear road"- southern Nevada south-western Utah
21 and then a drive down to New Mexico 1:32

Dag
22 1:33 After his trip he realised that he was correct 1:36

Dag with Andy and Claire
23 1:37 (segue) Mushroom clouds really are much smaller
24 than we make them out to be in our minds 1:41

Dag
25 1:43 Otis' comfort was short lived
26 He was driving past a mall
27 then past a new housing development
28 then realised 1:49

Dag with Andy and Claire
29 1:50 (segue) "Hey these aren't houses at all- theses are malls in disguise"1:54

Dag
30 2:03 Otis developed a shopping mall correlation
31 Kitchens became the food fair
32 living rooms the fun center
33 the bathroom the water park 2:12

Andy and Claire
34 2:13 God, what goes through the minds of people who live in these things?
35 Are they shopping? 2:18
Then he thought—and here he lost his new sense of comfort—that if people are capable of converting their houses into shopping malls then these people are equally capable of mentally equating atomic bombs with regular bombs. Before you know it you'd be able to buy atomic bombs over the counter or free with a tank of gas. Otis' world was scary once more.

Neologisms 5

(Andy, Claire, Dag)

Dag

0:04 Underdogging:
The tendency to almost invariably side with the underdog in a given situation. The consumer expression of this trait is the purchasing of less successful sad or failing products "I know these Vienna franks are heart failure in a stick but they were so sad looking up against all the other yuppie food items that I just had to buy them" 0:29

Claire

0:29 Veal-Fattening Pen:
Small cramped office workstations built of fabric-covered disassembled wall partitions and inhabited by junior staff members. Named for the pre-slaughter cubicles used by the cattle industry 0:46

Andy

0:46 Virgin Runway:
A travel destination chosen in the hopes that no one else has ever chosen it 0:53

Dag

0:54 West is Best Coasters:
Aging baby-boomers from harsh weather communities who relocate to western coastal cities and soon develop a pseudo-bohemian style which revolves around fleece yoga and copious amounts of free-trade coffee 1:16

Claire

1:16 Yuppie Wannabes:
An X generation subgroup that believes the myth of a yuppie lifestyle being both satisfying and viable. Tend to be high in debt involved in some form of substance abuse and show a willingness to talk about Armageddon after three drinks 1:37

Andy

1:38 Z Circle Snap:
A motion where usually a girl snaps into the shape of a 'Z' and then into a circle moving her head along with it. Commonly used when two girls get in an argument. Sticking out your lips can increase the attitude 1:50
SCENE TEN

Grow Flowers
(Andy)

Andy
1  0:25 Years ago after I first started to make a bit of money
2  I used to go to the local garden center every fall
3  and buy fifty-two daffodil bulbs
4  Shortly thereafter I would then go into my parents' backyard
5  with a deck of fifty-two wax-coated playing cards
6  and hurl the cards across the lawn
7  Wherever a card fell I would plant one of the bulbs
8  of course I could have just tossed the bulbs themselves
9  but the point of the matter is I didn't
10  Planting bulbs this way creates a very natural spray effect
11  the same silent algorithms that dictate the torque in a flock of sparrows or the gnarl of a
12  piece of drift wood
13  also dictate success in this matter too
14  And come spring after the daffodils and the narcissi
15  have spoken their delicate little haikus to the world
16  and spilled their cold gentile scent
17  their crinkly beige onion paper remnants inform us that summer
18  will soon be here
19  and that it is now time to mow the lawn
20  Nothing very very good
21  and nothing very very bad
22  ever lasts for very very long
23  I wake up and it's maybe 5:30 or so in the morning
24  The three of us are sprawled on top of the bed where we fell asleep
25  The dogs snooze on the floor next to the near-dead embers
26  outside there is only a hint of light
27  the breathlessness of oleanders and no cooing of doves
28  I smell the warm carbon dioxide smell of sleep and enclosure
29  These creatures here in this room with me
30  these are the creatures I love and who love me
31  Together I feel like we are a strange and forbidden garden
32  I feel so happy I could die
33  If I could have it thus I would like this moment to continue forever
34  I go back to sleep 2:35
ANNEX B: PROJECTED IMAGES

All images composed by Narimari Mousavi.

Scene 1: The Total Eclipse

Scene 2: Low Pay Low Prestige Low Future
Scene 3: What’s Your Takeaway

Scene 4: Thinking of the Sun
Scene 5: Mr. Takamichi

Scene 6: Hummingbird Eyes
Scene 7: An End of the World Story

Scene 8: A Texlahoma Story
Scene 9: Mushroom Clouds

Scene 10: Grow Flowers
ANNEX C: PROGRAMME NOTES

LaboVal Pharmaceutical Laboratories,
Simon Fraser University, The School for the contemporary Arts and
La Scene MusicaI/The Music Scene present a workshop performance of:

Generation X – The Opera
A Contemporary Spoken Word Opera

Music composed and text adapted by MFA candidate MICHAEL VINCENT
Visual images by NARIMAN MOUSAVI
Based on the novel by DOUGLAS COUPLAND*

Director............................................................ Michael Vincent
Conductor............................................................. James Coomber
Lighting Designer .................................................. David Balfour
Costume Designer ................................................... Yasmine Wasfy
Dramaturge .......................................................... Olivia Delachanel
Stage Manager........................................................ Chris Walts
Theatre Manager/Graphic Designer............................... Heather Blakemore
Business Manager.................................................. Mylène Vincent

SYNOPSIS:

Place: Palm Springs, California
Time: Spring, 1991

Generation X - The Opera is a social satire about three members of Generation X - Dag, Andy, and Claire, who have moved to Palm Springs, California to escape the superficial and overly commercialized trappings of North American society. In the process, they tell each other stories, some about their lives and some made up to represent aspects of their lives.

Through the stories the characters tell, we see examples of how life is for members of Generation X. Stuck with their only career choices being in the service industry, being forced to live with the commercialism that is all around them, and being unable to afford housing, their generation lives a bleak life that is only getting bleaker. The only hope for the characters is to leave behind the lives they live and find new ones without the trappings of modern society.

There will be no intermission
Please turn off all cell phones and pagers

CAST
(SPOKEN WORD ARTISTS)

Claire Baxter .............................................................. Barbara Adler
Andrew Palmer .............................................................. Brendan McLeod
Dagmar Bellinghausen .................................................. RC Weslowski
ENSEMBLE

Piano ................................................................. Devon Jung
Alto Saxophone .................................................... Colin MacDonald
Trombone ............................................................. Matt Griffin
Cello ................................................................. Fin Manniche
Percussion .......................................................... Martin Fisk

ORDER OF EVENTS

PRELUDE/SCENE ONE
   The Total Eclipse

SCENE TWO
   Low Pay Low Prestige Low Future

   NEOLOGISMS 1

SCENE THREE
   What’s Your Takeaway

SCENE FOUR
   Thinking of the Sun

   NEOLOGISMS 2

SCENE FIVE
   Mr. Takamichi

SCENE SIX
   Hummingbird Eyes

   NEOLOGISMS 3

SCENE SEVEN
   An End of the World Story

SCENE EIGHT
   A Texlahoma Story

   NEOLOGISMS 4

SCENE NINE
   Mushroom Clouds

   NEOLOGISMS 5

SCENE TEN
   Grow Flowers

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Randy and Kathy Small
Claude Gadoua
Linda Bion
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Farrah Costo
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S. Campbell Finch

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to my supervisors David MacIntyre and Barry Truax for their support and guidance. After our long meetings, and challenging discussions, my notions and ideas have been pushed far beyond what I thought was possible, and without them, we would simply not be here this evening. I would also like to thank my wife Mylène for her ceaseless patience and support throughout this project. It truly takes an amazing individual to not only withstand me during the "creative process", but to embrace this project just as passionately as I have.

On behalf of myself, and the cast and crew, we hope you enjoy the show.

*Adapted from the novel "Generation X- tales for an accelerated culture" written by © Douglas Campbell Coupland, 2005, by permission
ANNEX D: POSTER

A contemporary spoken word opera
by MFA Candidate Michael Vincent

Featuring: Leona Metcalfe, RC Westfall and Barrie Adie,
with Ensemble Symposium.

March 17, 8.00 pm,
SFO Theatre (Burnaby Campus).
Free admission, info 604-291-3514.

Poster design by Heather Blakemore, 2006
ANNEX E: CONCERT PHOTOS

Fame-Induced Apathy
The efforts made to actively pursue fame can become very exhausting. Pursuing fame induces apathy rather than pleasure, but it requires much deeper effort.
ANNEX F: DVD

The DVD was recorded live, without editing, during the premiere performance on March 17th, 2006 at the SFU University Theatre in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.

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REFERENCES


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DON'T WORRY, MOTHER...IF THE MARRIAGE DOESN'T WORK OUT, WE CAN ALWAYS GET DIVORCED.
Name: Michael Lawrence Vincent
Degree: Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies
Title of Project: Generation X - The Opera

Examining Committee:
Chair: Title and Name
Associate Professor DD Kugler

Title and Name
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Simon Fraser University

Date Approved: 24 May 2006

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Instrumentation:

Score in C
Duration: ca. 51 min

3 Spoken Word Artists
Characters:
  Claire: (Alto)
  Andrew: (Bass)
  Dagmar: (Bass)

Alto Saxophone
Trombone [mutes: Straigh metal, Plunger]

Grand Piano
Percussion (1 Player)
[beaters: snare drum sticks, wire brushes, soft mallets, rawhide hammer, soft bass drum or tam-tam beater, small metal hammer]

1/ Pitched:
  Vibraphone
  Chimes

2. Drum Kit
  i) woodblock
  ii) bass drum
  iii) floor tom
  iv) gong cymbal
  v) referee whistle
  vi) snare drum
  vii) tom-tom (mid)
  viii) large cow bell
  ix) tom-tom (high)
  x) ride cymbal
  xi) crash cymbal
  xii) hi-hat cymbals

Cello
SCENE 1 - The Total Eclipse

Music by Michael Vincent
Text by Douglas Coupland (adapted by Michael Vincent)

Heavy, Looming
Allegro (M.M. J = c. 120)
ANDY: Back in the late 1970's when I was fifteen years old I spent every penny I had in the bank to fly across the continent in a 747 jet to Brandon.

ANDY: Deep in the Canadian prairies to witness a total eclipse of the sun.
ANDY: I must have been a strange sight at my young age being pencil thin and practically albino quietly checking-

ANDY: into a Travelodge motel to spend the night alone happily watching snowy network television offerings and drinking glasses of water
Generation X - The Opera Scene 1

PTCue 2

DAG: washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

CLARE: washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

ANDY: from glass tumblers that had been washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed in paper sheaths so many times they looked like they had been sand papered
Generation X - The Opera Scene 1

CLAIRE: (cont.) washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

DAG: (cont.) washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

ANDY: The night soon ended and come the morning of the eclipse I eschewed tour buses and took civic bus transportation to the edge of town

© 2006 Michael Vincent
DAG: washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

CLAIRe: washed and rewrapped rewrapped and washed (repeated)

ANDY: there I walked down a dirt side road and into a farmers field I saw some sort of cereal that was chest high and corn green and rustled as its blades inflicted small paper burns on my skin
ANDY: as I walked through them And in that field when the appointed hour minute and second of darkness came I lay myself down on the ground

ANDY: surrounded by tall pithy grain stalks and the faint sound of insects and held my breath
ANDY: they experiencing a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination a mood that surely must have been held by most young people since the dawn of time as they have crooked their necks stared at the heavens and watched their sky go out.
SCENE 2- Low Pay, Low Prestige, Low Future

ANDY: One and a half decades later my feelings are just as ambivalent *(pause)*.

ANDY: and I sit on the front lanai of my rented bungalow in Palm Springs California grooming my two dogs smelling the cinnamon night time pong.
ANDY: - of snapdragons efficient whiffs of swimming pool chlorine drift in from the courtyard while I wait for dawn From inside my little bungalow I hear a cupboard door slam My friend Dag-
ANDY: probably fetching my other friend Claire a starchy snack or sugary treat. Or even more likely if I know them a wee gin and tonic. They have habits. Dag is from Toronto, dual citizenship. Claire is from Los Angeles. I for that matter—

© 2006 Michael Vincent
ANDY: am from Portland Oregon but where you're from feels sort of irrelevant these days since everyone has the same stores in their mini-malls. We're the three of us, members of the poverty jet set, an enormous global group and a group I joined as mentioned earlier at the age of fifteen.
ANDY: Anyhow as this evening was good for neither Dag nor Claire they had to come invade my space to absorb cocktails and chill they needed it both had their reasons.
ANDY: For example just after 2:00 AM Dag got off shift at Larry's Bar where along with me he is a bartender. While the two of us were walking home he ditched me right in the middle of a conversation we were having and darted across the road. He then scraped a boulder across the front hood of a Cutlass Supreme. 
ANDY: This is not the first time he has impulsively vandalized like this. The car was the color of butter and bore a bumper sticker saying -

CLAIRE: WE'RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE

DAG: WE'RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE

ANDY: WE'RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE

ANDY: a message that I suppose irked Dag who was bored and cranky -

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 2

ANDY: You know Dag and Claire smile a lot as do many--

CLAIRE: Low pay low prestige low future (repeated)

DAG: Low pay low prestige low future (repeated)

ANDY: after eight hours of working his McJob

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DAG: Low pay low prestige low future (repeated)

CLAIRE: Low pay low prestige low future (repeated)

ANDY: But I have always wondered if there is something either mechanical or malignant to their smiles the way they keep their outer lips propped up seems a bit not false but protective. A minor realization hits me as I sit with the two of them.
ANDY: It's that the smiles that they wear in their daily lives are the same as the smiles worn by people who have been good-naturedly fleeced but fleeced nonetheless in public and on a New York sidewalk by card sharks and who are unable because of social convention -
DAG: Low pay low prestige low future [whispered] (repeated)

ANDY: to show their anger don't want to look like poor sports There is no weather in Palm Springs just like TV there is also no middle class and in that sense the place is medieval Dag says that-

breath when needed
DAG: Every time someone on the planet uses a paper clip fabric softens their laundry or watches a rerun of Hee Haw on TV a resident somewhere in Palm Springs collects a penny
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 2

ANDY: He's probably right (repeated)

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ANDY: He's probably right. I get the impression while I drive past the gas station at hearse-speed that back in the day say 1958...

ANDY: Buddy Hackett, Joey Bishop and a bunch of Vegas entertainers all banded together to make a bundle on this place but a key investor split town and the whole place just died.
ANDY: The thought is fleeting
ANDY: Claire says that it's not healthy to live life as a succession of isolated little cool stories and we tell them to each other. The only rule is that we are not allowed to interrupt. Just like AA and that we are not allowed to criticize.
ANDY: Air Family:
Describes the false sense of community experienced among co-workers in an office environment
(*cue: Andy: "Air Family")

with voice
chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka chi ka

Improvising, maintaining mambo character

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**DAG: Bambification:**
The mental conversion of flesh and blood living creatures into cartoon characters possessing bourgeois Judeo-Christian attitudes and morals

**CLAIRE: Boomer Envy:**
Envy of material wealth and long-range material security accrued by older members of the baby boom generation by virtue of fortunate births

---

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ANDY: Clique Management:
The need of one generation to see the generation following it as deficient so as to bolster its own collective ego. "Kids today do nothing. They're so apathetic. We used to go out and protest all they do now is shop and complain."

DAG: Down-Nesting:
The tendency of parents to move to smaller guest-room-free houses after their children have moved away so as to avoid children aged 20 to 30 who have boomeranged home.

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CLAIRED: Earth Tones:
A youthful subgroup interested in vegetarianism, tie-dyed outfits, mild recreational drugs, and good stereo equipment. Earnest, frequently lacking in humour.

(*cue: Claire: "Homeowner Envy") with voice

© 2006 Michael Vincent
ANDY: After you're dead and buried and floating around whatever place we go to what's going to be your best memory of earth?
CLAIRE: I've got one Snow divorce I was in New York visiting my mother.

CLAIRE: I'll always remember the first time I saw snow. I was twelve and it was just after the first and biggest divorce.
CLAIRE: and was standing beside a traffic island in the middle of Park Avenue I had never been out of LA before I was entranced by the big city I was looking up at the Pan Am Building and contemplating...
CLAIRE: the essential problem of Manhattan

DAG: Which is

ANDY: Which is

CLAIRE: Which is that there's too much weight improperly distributed towers and elevators steel stone and cement so much mass up so high that gravity itself could end up being warped some dreadful inversion.
CLAIRE: Right then my brother Allan yanked at my sleeve because the walk signal light was green. Then my face went BANG right into my first snowflake ever. It melted in my eye. I didn't even-
Claire knew what it was at first but then I saw millions of flakes all white and smelling like ozone floating downward like the shed skins of angels. Claire: Even Allan stopped Traffic was honking at us but time stood still. Claire: And so yes if I...
CLaire: take one memory of earth away with me that moment will be the one. To this day I consider my right eye charmed.

Generation X - The Opera - Scene 3

FXCue 6

DAG: were at the gas station and I was given the task of filling up the gas tank a Galaxy 500 snazzy car I was one of those goofy kids who always caught colds and never got the hang of things

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DAG: I'd always screw things up somehow break something have it die Anyway my dad was in the shop buying a map and I was outside feeling proud of how I hadn't botched anything up yet Dad came out as I was topping it up.
DAG: at which point the nozzle went nuts. It started spraying all over my jeans, my running shoes, the licence plate, the cement. Like purple alcohol. Dad saw everything. But instead of yelling at me, he smiled and said "Hey sport isn't-"
DAG: - the smell of gasoline great? Close your eyes and inhale so clean it smells like the future! Well I did that I closed my eyes and breathed deeply.

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DAG: I saw the bright orange light of the sun coming through my eyelids smelled the gasoline and my knees buckled. But it was the most perfect moment of my life.
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 3

DAG: and so if you asked me and I have a lot of hope pinned on this Heaven just has to be an awful lot like those few seconds

ANDY: Was it Leaded or Unleaded?

DAG: Leaded
ANDY: Perfect

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Scene 4- Thinking of the Sun

Andy: What do you think of when you see the sun?

CLAIRE: Well Andy I see a farmer in Russia and he's driving a tractor in a wheat field but the sunlight's gone bad on him like the fadedness of a black-and-white picture in an old life magazine and another strange phenomenon has happened too rather than sunbeams the sun has begun to project the odour of old life magazines instead and the odour is killing the crops The wheat is thinning as we speak.
CLAIRE: The wheat is thinning as we speak. He's slumped over the wheel of his tractor and he's crying. His wheat is dying of history poisoning. His wheat is dying of history poisoning.

ANDY: Good Claire.

DAG: When I think of the sun I think of an
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 4

PTCue 35

DAG: Australian surf bunny eighteen years old maybe somewhere on Bondi Beach maybe discovering her first keratosis lesion on her shin She’s screaming inside her brain and already plotting how she’s going to steal Valiums from her mother Now you tell me Andy what do you think of when you see the sun?
CLAIRED: where the rain hasn't fallen in more than two million years

ANDY: I think of this place in Antarctica called Lake Vanda where the rain hasn't fallen in more than two million years. What I don't say is this...

CLAIRED: That this is also the same sun that makes me think of regal tangerines.

ANDY: That this is also the same sun that makes me think of regal tangerines.

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CLAIRE: and dimwitted butterflies and lazy carp

CLAIRE: drops that hang like rubies from their old brown leather source alluding to the intense ovarian fertility inside

ANDY: and dimwitted butterflies and lazy carp And the ecstatic drops of pomegranate blood seeping from skin fissures of fruits rotting on the tree branch next door drops that hang like rubies from their old brown leather source alluding to the intense ovarian fertility inside
Neologisms 2- (E-H)

ANDY: Ethnomagnetism:
The tendency of young people to live in emotionally demonstrative more
unrestrained ethnic neighbourhoods "You wouldn't understand it there mother
they hug where I live now"

(*cue: Andy: "Ethnomagnetism")

Improvise maintaining foxtrot character

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DAG: Fame-Induced Apathy:
The attitude that no activity is worth pursuing unless one can become very famous pursuing it. Fame-Induced Apathy mimics laziness but its roots are much deeper.

CLAIRE: Green Division:
To know the difference between envy and jealousy.
Generation X - The Opera - Neologisms 2

ANDY: Historical Overdosing:
To live in a period of time when too much seems to happen
Major symptoms include addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts

DAG: Historical Underdosing:
To live in a period of time when nothing seems to happen
Major symptoms include addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts

(*cue: Dag: "Historical Underdosing")

(*cue: Andy: "Historical Overdosing")
CLaire: Historical Slumming:
The act of visiting locations such as diners, smokestack industrial sites, rural villages - locations where time has been frozen many years back - so as to experience relief when one returns back to "the present"
SCENE 5-

Mr. Takamichi

DAG: Torpor defines his mood as he sits on the crumbling poxed and leprous never-used macadam Thinking stories-

CLAIRE: Torpor defines his mood as he sits on the crumbling poxed and leprous never-used macadam Thinking stories-

CLAIRE: Do amuse us darling you're being so moody

DAG: Andy Stop being so quiet it's your turn to tell a story

Allegro (M.M. = c. 120)

A: Con brio

B: Dance-like

© 2006 Michael Vincent
DAG: -to himself and crumbling pungent sage in his fingers

CLAIRE: -to himself and crumbling pungent sage in his fingers

DAG: prey tell

ANDY: I was working part of a half-year job exchange program with the university-
ANDY: Yes, I was on the phone trying to get some pictures from Depeche Mode's people and was thinking about the way cities all have their own signature odour to them Tokyo's-
ANDY: -street smell is udon noodle broth and faint sewage chocolate and car fumes Milan’s smell reminded me of cinnamon and diesel belch and roses Vancouver with its-
ANDY: Chinese roast pork salt water and cedar I was feeling homesick for Portland trying to remember its smell of trees and rust and moss when the ruckus in the office began to dim
**Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5**

**ANDY: Mr Takamichi the company boss entered the room**

**DAG:** well-known Americophile with skin folded like a shrunken apple-head person or the bog man of Denmark

**CLAIRE:** well-known Americophile with skin folded like a shrunken apple-head person or the bog man of Denmark

**ANDY: Miss Ueno the drop-dead cool fashion**

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ANDY: -coordinator in the desk next to mine looked stressed

DAG: Olive Oyl hair Venetian gondolier's shirt harem pants and Viva Las Vegas booties

CLAIRE: Olive Oyl hair Venetian gondolier's shirt harem pants and Viva Las Vegas booties

ANDY: Mr Takamichi headed over to my desk.

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

DAG: you must be Andrew
CLAIRE: you must be Andrew
ANDY: you must be Andrew
ANDY: I knew this was going to happen. It was really embarrassing in Japan you get phobic about being singled out from the crowd. He shook my hand like a Ford dealer.
DAG: Come upstairs we'll have drinks we'll talk
CLAIRE: Come upstairs we'll have drinks we'll talk
ANDY: Come upstairs we'll have drinks we'll talk
ANDY: It was a bad scene I could just imagine everyone looking at me
DAD: Who the hell does he think he is?
Claire: "what an ass-licker"

Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

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ANDY: I felt like I was being excommunicated from the shin jin rui

CLAIRE: defined as "new human beings" what the Japanese newspapers call kids

DAG: defined as "new human beings" what the Japanese newspapers call kids

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

CLAIRE: in their twenties at the office

DAG: in their twenties at the office
ANDY: We went upstairs walked down the western part
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

CLAIRE: a hallway past small impressionist paintings and tufts of flowers

DAG: a hallway past small impressionist paintings and tufts of flowers

ANDY: and into the Japanese part

CLAIRE: Toko no ma shrine with chrysanthemums

DAG: Toko no ma shrine with chrysanthemums

© 2006 Michael Vincent
CLaire: a scroll and a gold fan

DAG: a scroll and a gold fan

Andy: Mr Takamichi asked me to sit down at a table with salty green Japanese tea. He talked pleasantly but I wondered what his hidden agenda was.
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

CLAIRE: How do you like your job? what do you think about Japan?

DAG: How do you like your job? what do you think about Japan?

ANDY: How do you like your job? what do you think about Japan?

ANDY: He then told me about the time he spent in New York in the 1950's as a stringer for the Asahi newspapers.
ANDY: - About meeting Diana Vreeland
Truman Capote and Judy Holiday

CLAIRE: Then he asks what is the most valuable
ing thing you own?

DAG: Then he asks what is the most valuable
ing thing you own?

ANDY: Then he asks what is the most valuable
ing thing you own?

ANDY: Well well try to explain the concept of sophomoric
minimalism to an octogenarian Japanese

© 2006 Michael Vincent
ANDY: A beat up VW bug. A stereo. I'd sooner have died than admit the most valuable thing I owned was a fairly extensive collection of German industrial music dance EP.-
ANDY: records stored for even further embarrassment under a box of crumbling Christmas tree ornaments in a Portland Oregon basement. So I told him I owned nothing of any value.
ANDY: Mr. Takamichi then pulled out a photograph.

CLAUDE: a Black and white 1950's photo like the ones taken at the scene of a crime.

ANDY: This picture is my most valuable thing he said.
DAG: A photo of Marilyn Monroe getting into a checker cab lifting up her dress no underwear and smooching at the photographer

CLAIRE: A photo of Marilyn Monroe getting into a checker cab lifting up her dress no underwear and smooching at the photographer

© 2006 Michael Vincent
ANDY: It was an unabashedly sexual frontal photo get your minds out of the gutter- black as the ace of spades if you must know and very taunting I broke out into a sweat.
ANDY: and then the words of a Rilke Poem entered my brain

CLAIRE: Only the individual who is solitary

DAG: Only the individual who is solitary

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

CLAIRE: - is like a thing subject to profound laws and if he goes into the morning that is just beginning or looks out into the evening that is full of things happening and if he feels

DAG: - is like a thing subject to profound laws and if he goes into the morning that is just beginning or looks out into the evening that is full of things happening and if he feels

© 2006 Michael Vincent
CLAIRE: what is going on there then his whole situation drops from him as from a dead man although he stands in the very midst of life

ANDY: I believe that we are-

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ANDY: all of us born with a letter inside us and that only if we are true to ourselves may we be allowed to read it Mr Takamichi has mistaken this picture as his letter
ANDY: I then had an uncontrollable reaction and ran out of there as fast as I could. That night I packed my bags and two days later I was back in Oregon. Back in the New World.
ANDY: Breathing less crowded air but I knew there was still too much history there for me. So I came down to Palm Springs to breathe dust and look at a rock or a cactus and know that I am the first person to see that cactus.
ANDY: -and that rock And to try to read the letter inside me
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 5

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Scene 6- Hummingbird Eyes

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CLAIRE: This is a story I call "The Boy-
CLAIRE: with the Hummingbird Eyes. So if all of you will please lean back and relax now I will tell it. It starts in Burbank California where I grew up. There was a boy named Curtis who lived door who rarely spoke.
CLARE: very athletic hitting baseballs farther than anyone else whenever he got up the will to do so I madly adored Curtis from the first moment our U-haul pulled up to the new house and I saw him lying on the grass next door smoking a cigarette at 15 years old.
CLAIRE: In our war games I was always Nurse Meyers and had to patch up Curtis’s wounds, which as time passed became suspiciously groin centered and cures with names like—
ANDY: Massage and the Hanoi Canteen Slut Mud Rub

DAG: Massage and the Hanoi Canteen Slut Mud Rub

CLAIRE: Massage and the Hanoi Canteen Slut Mud Rub

CLAIRE: Curtis eventually moved away and I eventually forgot about him. Then after 14 years, I saw him again. I was at work at the "Spa de Luxembourg".
CLAIRE: while we were talking he kept-

CLAIRE: -he had ropey white scars all over him and it looked like he had been to the tattoo parlour a few times Once he recognised me he kissed me on the cheek and said

ANDY: I missed you baby doll Thought I'd be dead before I ever saw you again

DAG: I missed you baby doll Thought I'd be dead before I ever saw you again

CLAIRE: while we were talking he kept-
ANDY: to and fro to and fro (repeated)

CLAIRE: asked him what he was looking for and he said -

DAG: Hummingbirds

CLAIRE: he said he would-

DAG: to and fro to and fro (repeated)

ANDY: tell you more about it later

CLAIRE: I agreed to meet with him later that evening to catch up

ANDY: tell you more about it later
CLaire: Later that night we met at his friend's apartment we had the slow stunted conversation of people catching up with time. Curtis started to talk about his friend Arlo from during his days as a soldier for hire in South America. One particular story—
CLAIRE: was about how they were out on a shoot and how the fighting got life-threateningly intense. They were forced to lie down on the ground covered in camouflage with their primed machine guns pointed at the enemy. Suddenly, this hummingbird started darting into Arlo’s eyes.
ANDY: I didn't know what was happening at first.

DAG: I didn't know what was happening at first.

CLAIRE: Arlo brushed it away but it kept darting back. Curtis said.

ANDY: some hummingbirds are attracted to the colour blue.

DAG: some hummingbirds are attracted to the colour blue.

CLAIRE: and that they collect it to build their nests.

CLAIRE: Arlo shouted. The hummingbirds were trying to build their nests.

CLAIRE: Until Arlo explained that.

CLAIRE: some hummingbirds are attracted to the colour blue.

DAG: they were trying to build their nests.

CLAIRE: and that they collect it to build their nests.

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ANDY: with Arlo's

ANDY: Hey my eyes are blue too

CLAIRE: At this point Curtis

DAG: Hey my eyes

CLAIRE: Arlo began sweeping gestures to keep the hummingbirds away but this attracted enemy fire. Curtis was shot in the groin and Arlo was shot dead. Curtis then recounted how
ANDY: - the mop-up crews in spite of this injury

DAG: - the mop-up crews in spite of this injury

CLAIRE: they returned to the site of the battle to pick up the dead

DAG: When we got to Arlo's body there we were shocked to find the blue meat of Arlo's eyes picked away from the whites

CLAIRE: Curtis began weeping

ANDY: You know-
ANDY: Baby doll sometimes you can be very stupid and swim a bit too far out into the ocean and not have enough energy to swim back to shore. Birds insult you at that point when you're out there just floating. They only remind you of the land you'll never be able to reach.

DAG: Baby doll sometimes you can be very stupid and swim a bit too far out into the ocean and not have enough energy to swim back to shore. Birds insult you at that point when you're out there just floating. They only remind you of the land you'll never be able to reach.

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ANDY - again But one of these days I don't know when one of those little hummingbirds is going to zip right in and make a dart for my blue little eyes

DAG - again But one of these days I don't know when one of those little hummingbirds is going to zip right in and make a dart for my blue little eyes

CLAIRE: Curtis falls asleep and I quietly leave in the morning most likely never to see Curtis again
NEOLOGISMS 3: (J-O)

ANDY: Japanese Minimalism:
The most frequently offered interior design aesthetic used by rootless career-hopping young people

with instrument
(*cue: Andy: "Japanese Minimalism")

Improvise around chachacha rhythm

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DAG: Knee-Jerk Irony:
The tendency to make flippant ironic comments as a reflexive matter of course in everyday conversation.

CLAIRE: Lessness:
A philosophy whereby one reconciles oneself with diminishing expectations of material wealth. "I've given up wanting to make a killing or be a big-shot. I just want to find happiness and maybe open up a little roadside cafe in Idaho."

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Generation X - The Opera - Neologisms 3

ANDY: McJob:
A low-pay low-prestige low-dignity low-benefit no-future job in the service sector. Frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never held one.

DAG: Native Aping:
Pretending to be a native when visiting a foreign destination.

(*cue: Dag: "Native Aping")

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CLAIRE: Obscurism:
The practice of peppering daily life with obscure references
(forgotten films dead TV stars unpopular book defunct countries
etc) as a subliminal means of showcasing one’s education and
one’s wish to disassociate from the world of mass culture

ANDY: Option Paralysis:
The tendency when given unlimited choices to make none

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SCENE 7 – End of the World

ANDY: The end of the world is a recurring motif in Dag’s bedtime stories Eschatological You-Are-There accounts of what it’s like to be bombed told in a radio announcer voice.

CLaire: The end of the world is a recurring motif in Dag’s bedtime stories Eschatological You-Are-There accounts of what it’s like to be bombed told in a radio announcer voice.

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 7

DAG: Imagine you're standing in a line at a supermarket.

Flutter tongue w/ rolled "r"
DAG: -say the Vons supermarket at the corner of Sunset and Tahquitz and you're in just a vile mood because driving over you got into an argument with your best friend over a road sign saying "Deer Next 2 Miles" and you said "Oh really-
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 7

DAG: -they expect us to believe there are any deer left" which made your best friend who was sitting in the passenger seat curl up his toes And since you've said something that struck a nerve and it was fun you pushed things further "For that matter" you said "you don't see nearly as many birds these days-

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I DAG: -as you used to And you know what I heard the other day? That down in the Caribbean there aren't any shells left anywhere because the tourists took them all And haven't you ever wondered when flying back from Europe five miles over Greenland that there's just something I don't know -inverted- about shopping for cameras-

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DAG: -and scotch and cigarettes up in outer space" Your friend calls you a dink and says "Why the hell are you so negative all the time?" You say "you mean to tell me we can drive all the way here from LA and see maybe thousand square miles of shopping malls and you don't have maybe just the weentiest inkling-
DAG: "that something somewhere has gone very very wrong?" The whole argument goes nowhere of course and possibly you are being accused of being unfashionably negative. The net result is you standing alone in Vons checkout line counter number three with marshmallows and briquettes for the evening.
DALE: barbecue and your best friend sitting out in the car. But part of you is also fascinated with the cart contents of the by-any-standards-obese man in line ahead of you. Plastic magnums of diet colas, butterscotch-flavoured microwave cake mixes complete with their own baking tins.
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 7

CLAIRE: ten minutes of convenience; ten million years in the Municipal Sanitary Landfill

ANDY: ten minutes of convenience; ten million years in the Municipal Sanitary Landfill
DAG: Suddenly there is a power surge. The lights brighten, return to normal, dim then die. Next to go is the Muzak. You see your best friend.
DAG: enter the store "The radio died" your friend announces "and look" Out the front windows you sense something big's going on. That's when the sirens begin the worst sound in the world and the sound you've dreaded all your life-

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DAG: It's here the soundtrack to hell- wailing flaring warbling and unreal- collapsing and confusing both time and space The parking lot is now about as civilised as a theme park's bumper cars But the fat man remains as does the cashier They your best friend and you remain frozen-
ANDY: how cliché

DAG: -speechless and your minds become the backlit NORAD world map of mythology

CLAIRE: how cliché

DAG: it's only a matter of moments now isn't it. I always promised myself "that when this
ANDY: "Miss-" he says turning to

CLAIRE: "Miss-" he says turning to the clerk "let me please pay for my

DAG: "Get down" you shout but they continue the transaction and just then-

DAG: I would behave with some dignity in whatever time remains and so"
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 7

DAG: -before the front windows become a crinkled liquefied imploding sheet- and just before you're pelted by a hail of gum and magazines and just before the fat man is lifted off his feet.-
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 7

DAG: hung in suspended animation and bursts into flames while the liquefied ceiling lifts and drips upward. Just before all of this your best friend cranes his neck lurches over to where you lie and kisses you on the mouth.

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DAG: after which he says to you "There I've always wanted to do that" And that's that And then they all die
SCENE 8- Texlahoma

ANDY: Texlahoma is a mythic world it's on an asteroid orbiting the Earth where the year is permanently 1974 the year after the oil shock.

DAG: Texlahoma is a mythic world it's on an asteroid orbiting the Earth where the year is permanently 1974 the year after the oil shock.

CLAIRE: It's time to tell a Texlahoma story.

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ANDY: and the year starting from which real wages in the US never grew again.

DAG: and the year starting from which real wages in the US never grew again.

CLAIRE: and the year starting from which real wages in the US never grew again.

with attitude
ANDY: It's a sad everyplace where citizens are always getting fired from their jobs at 7-eleven and where kids do drugs and practice the latest dance crazes.

DAG: It's a sad everyplace where citizens are always getting fired from their jobs at 7-eleven and where kids do drugs and practice the latest dance crazes.

CLAIRE: It's a sad everyplace where citizens are always getting fired from their jobs at 7-eleven and where kids do drugs and practice the latest dance crazes.
ANDY - at the local lake where they fantasize about being adult and pulling off welfare scams-

DAG - at the local lake where they fantasize about being adult and pulling off welfare scams-

CLAIRE: - at the local lake where they fantasize about being adult and pulling off welfare scams-

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Generation X - The Opera - Scene 8

ANDY - The atmosphere contains oxygen wheat chaff and AM radio transmissions

DAG: The atmosphere contains oxygen wheat chaff and AM radio transmissions

CLAIRE: The atmosphere contains oxygen wheat chaff and AM radio transmissions

CLAIRE: One afternoon an astronaut named Buck had a problem with his spaceship. Buck's ship wasn't programmed to deal with Texahoma gravity.

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CLAIRE: He was forced to land on Texlahoma in the suburban backyard of the Monroe family. Mrs. Monroe greeted him in the backyard. She was glad to have company; her three daughters were at work and her husband was out on the thresher. Right then something went wrong.
CLAIRE: Buck began to turn pale green and his head began to turn boxy and veined like Frankenstein's he'd developed space poisoning and would start to look like a monster shortly he would fall into an almost-
CLAIRE: -permanent sleep Mrs Monroe offered to take him to the clinic but he declined He asked Mrs Monroe to take care of him She agreed One by one the three daughters Arleen Darleen-
CLAIRED: -and Serena came down to stare at Buck who was sleeping in their old bed amid the clutter of their childhood. Arleen who had recently been fired from 7-Eleven was put in charge of taking care of Buck.
CLAIRE: -first she rushed inside the bathroom applied alluring cosmetics and dashed to the kitchen to whip up a platter of Vienna Franks-
CLAIRE: "These she arranged on a platter in the shape of a C just like the local Crest Wood Mall shopping mall logo. Arleen raced down to the basement with the food platter and sat near him."
CLAIRE: -Buck woke up to see Arleen in spite of Buck looking like a Frankenstein monster her heart had a romantic little arrhythmia-
CLAIRE: -right on the spot Arleen offered Buck the Vienna frank kebabs From that moment on love bloomed just as Buck awoke he said "Arleen I love you very much-"
CLAIRED: Do you love me?" Arleen replied "yes" to which Buck said "would you be willing to take a big risk and help me? We could be together always and I could help you leave Texahoma" Arleen was thrilled at both thoughts and said "Yes Yes" Buck then told her what she needed to do. Apparently the radiation waves emitted-
CLARE: by a woman in love are of just the right frequency to boost the rocket ship's engines and help it to lift off. And if Arleen would just come with him in the ship they could leave and Buck could get a cure for his space poisoning at the moon base. "There's just one catch," said Buck. "Once we take off there's only enough
CLAIRE: -in the ship for one person and I'm afraid that after takeoff you'd have to die. Sorry. But of course once we got to the moon I'd have the right machines to revive you! Arleen stared at Buck and a tear came down her cheek, dripped over her lip and onto her tongue where it tasted salty like urine.
CLaire: "I’m sorry Buck but I can’t do that" Darleen the youngest sister got fired from her perfume sales job and was next to take care of Buck. It was only a matter of minutes before love blossomed. Days later Buck was making the same plea for help to Darleen.
CLAIRE: -But when Buck's plea came to the part about Darleen having to die like her sister before her she said No Need I say it history repeated itself again Serena the middle child got fired from Woolworth's scent counter and was next to be in charge of Buck-
CLaire: Serena told Buck of her dreams of being a painter and how she hoped that someday someone would rescue her from Texlahoma. Well if Buck thought he was in love before he realized Serena was the real True Love.
CLAIRE: Buck asked her for help and instead of saying No she simply said "I understand"
CLaire: The next day when Buck awoke they went to the ship to get Serena's love waves to boost the engine and the ship took off. Below on Texlahoma Arleen and Darleen meanwhile were both returning home from their jobs from which they had both been fired.
CLARE: just in time to see the rocket fire off and their sister vanish into the stratosphere in a long colonic and fading white line "You realise" said Arleen "that that whole business of Buck being able to bring us back to life was total bullshit" "Oh I knew that" said Darleen-
CLAIRE: "But it doesn't change the fact that I am jealous"
NEOLOGISMS 4: (P-T)

DAG: Poverty Jet Set:
A group of people given to chronic traveling at the expense of long-term job stability, or a permanent residence Tend to have doomed and extremely expensive phone call relationships with people named Serge or Ilyana Tend to discuss frequent-flyer programs at parties

(*cue: Dag: "Poverty Jet Set")

boom ba boom ba boom ba boom ba

Improvise around Rockbeat rhythm

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CLAIRE: Pull-the-Plug Slice the Pie:
A fantasy in which an offspring mentally tallies up the net worth of their parents

ANDY: QFM:
Quell fashion mistake "It was really QFM I mean painter pants that's 1979 beyond belief"

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DAG: Recreational Slumming:
The practice of participating in recreational activities of a class one perceives as lower than one's own "Karen Donald let's go bowling tonight And don't worry about shoes apparently you can rent them"

CLAIRe: Safety Net-ism:
The belief that there will always be a financial and emotional safety net to buffer life's hurts Usually parents

Alternating with instrument to voice
("cue: Claire: "Safety Net-ism")

(Sax) (voice) (Sax) (voice)

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ANDY: Tele-Parabolizing:
Moralism used in everyday life that derive from TV sitcoms plots: "That's just like the episode where Jan lost her glasses."
Scene 9 - Mushroom Clouds

Allegro (M.M. \( \frac{j}{4} = c. 120 \))

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DAG: Once upon a time there was a man named Otis who moved to Palm Springs because if Los Angeles was ever hit with a nuke the fallout would never reach Palm Springs since it
DAG: hardly ever rains there

DAG: One day Otis receives a postcard from a
DAG: friend that had a picture of a nuclear mushroom cloud on the front

CLAIRE: Aerial view

ANDY: Aerial view

DAG: He was disturbed by the picture because the scale was all wrong. The cloud was too small.

Otis thought the cloud—
CLAIRE: supposed to fill up the whole sky

ANDY: supposed to fill up the whole sky

DAG: was supposed to fill up the whole sky Otis panicked as he might have been worrying about a mushroom cloud for nothing

ANDY: Maybe he can free himself from bomb anxiety

CLAIRE: Maybe he can free himself from bomb anxiety
DAG: Otis then decided to check it out for himself and drove to—
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 9

DAG: nuclear test sights along "Nuclear road" - southern Nevada south-western Utah and then a drive down to New Mexico

CLAIRE: "Nuclear road" - southern Nevada south-western Utah and then a drive down to New Mexico

ANDY: "Nuclear road" - southern Nevada south-western Utah and then a drive down to New Mexico

DAG: After his trip he realised that he was correct-

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CLAIRE: Mushroom clouds really are much smaller than we make them out to be in our minds

ANDY: Mushroom clouds really are much smaller than we make them out to be in our minds

DAG: Mushroom clouds really are much smaller than we make them out to be in our minds

DAG: Otis’ comfort was short lived. He was driving past a mall, then past a new housing development, then realised... Hey-

CLAIRE: Hey

ANDY: Hey

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CLAIRE: these aren’t houses at all-these are malls in disguise

ANDY: these aren’t houses at all-these are malls in disguise

DAG: these aren’t houses at all-these are malls in disguise

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CLAIRE: God, what goes through the minds of people who live in these things?

ANDY: God, what goes through the minds of people who live in these things?

DAG: God, what goes through the minds of people who live in these things?

DAG: Otis developed a shopping mall correlation Kitchens became the food fair living rooms the fun center the bathroom the water park era - Scene 9
CLaire: Are they shopping?

ANDY: Are they shopping?

DAG: Are they shopping?

DAG: Then he thought and here he lost his new sense of comfort that if people are capable of converting their houses into shopping malls.

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DAG: then these people are equally capable of mentally equating atomic bombs with regular bombs. Before you know it, you'd be able to buy atomic bombs over the counter or free with a tank of gas.
DAG: Otis' world was scary once more
NEOLOGISMS 5: (U-Z)

DAG: Underdogging:
The tendency to almost invariably side with the underdog in a given situation.
The consumer expression of this trait is the purchasing of less successful
sad or failing products "I know these Vienna franks are heart failure in a stick
but they were so sad looking up against all the other yuppie food items that
I just had to buy them"

(*cue: DAG: "Underdogging:"

\[ mf \]

chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic chic mf

improvise around samba rhythm

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CLAIRED: Veal-Fattening Pen:
Small cramped office workstations built of fabric-covered disassembled wall partitions
and inhabited by junior staff members. Named for the pre-slaughter cubicles used by
the cattle industry.

ANDY: Virgin Runway:
A travel destination chosen in the hopes that no one else has ever chosen it.

Improvise

(*cue: CLAIRE: "Veal-Fattening Pen")
with voice

Shook ka shook ka shook ka ha shook ka shaken ka shook ka shook ka shook ka ha shook ka

ANDY: Virgin Runway:
A travel destination chosen in the hopes that no one else has ever chosen it.

Improvise

(*cue: Claire: "Virgin Runway")

* strike strings with palm of hand to create backbeat

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**DAG: West is Best Coasters:**
Aging baby-boomers from harsh weather communities who relocate to western coastal cities and soon develop a pseudo-bohemian style which revolves around fleece yoga and copious amounts of free-trade coffee.

**CLAIRE Yuppie Wannabes:**
An X generation subgroup that believes the myth of a yuppie lifestyle being both satisfying and viable. Tend to be high in debt involved in some form of substance abuse and show a willingness to talk about Armageddon after three drinks.

(*cue: Dag: “Yuppie Wannabes”)

(*cue: Andy: “West is Best Coasters”)

swing eighths with voice

Improvise

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ANDY: Z Circle Snap:
A motion where usually a girl snaps into the shape of a 'Z' and then into a circle moving her head along with it. Commonly

Improvise

(*cue: Claire: "Z Circle Snap")
with voice

chi chi ka chi chi ka

simile
SCENE 10- Grow Flowers

F XCue 14

Alto Sax.

Trumpet

Vibraphone

Piano

Cello

gently

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ANDY: Years ago after I first started to make a bit of money I used to go to the local garden center every fall and buy fifty-two daffodil bulbs.
ANDY: Shortly thereafter I would then go into my parents' backyard with a deck of fifty-two wax-coated playing cards.
ANDY: -and hurl the cards across the lawn Wherever a card fell I would plant one of the bulbs of course I could have just tossed the bulbs themselves but the point of the matter is I didn't Planting.
ANDY: -bulbs this way creates a very natural spray effect the same silent algorithms that dictate the torque in a flock of sparrows or the gnarl of a piece of drift wood also dictate success in this.
ANDY: -matter too And come spring after the daffodils and the narcissi have spoken their delicate little haikus to the world and spilled their cold gentile scent-
ANDY: their crinkly beige onion paper remnants inform us that summer will soon be here
ANDY: -and that it is now time to mow the lawn Nothing very very good and nothing very very bad-
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 10

ANDY: -ever lasts for very very long I wake up and it's maybe 5:30 or so in the morning The three of us are sprawled on top of the bed where we fell asleep The dogs snooze on the floor-
ANDY: -next to the near-dead embers outside there is only a hint of light the breathlessness of oleanders and no cooing of doves I smell the warm-
ANDY: -carbon dioxide smell of sleep and enclosure These creatures here in this room with me these are the creatures I love and who love me Together I feel like we-
ANDY: are a strange and forbidden garden I feel so happy I could die. If I could have it thus I would like this moment to continue forever. I go back to sleep.
Generation X - The Opera - Scene 10

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