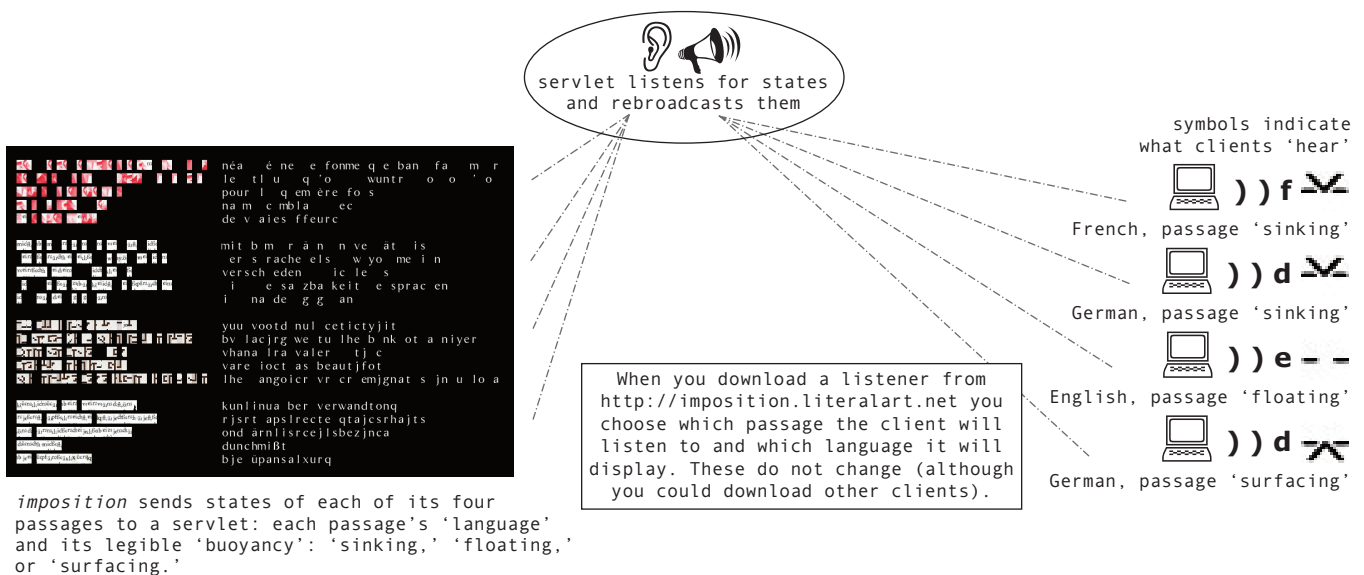# i m p o s i t i o n

John Cayley with Giles Perring

imposition is the networked performance of an evolving collaborative work engaged with ambient, time-based poetics and harmonically organized, language-driven sound.

imposition emerges from *translation,* a series of pieces which were developed, in turn, from *overboard,* our first essay in ambient poetics.[1] *imposition* uses the same texts and procedures as *translation*. It continues an investigation of iterative, procedural removal from one text or language to another. During the performance, four passages from the source texts of *imposition*[2] will be presented in any one of three shifting states: surfacing, floating or sinking. A passage will also be in one of three changing language states: German, French or English. If a passage sinks in one language it may, for example, surface in another.

servlet listens for states
and rebroadcasts them

symbols indicate
what clients 'hear'

)) f
French, passage 'sinking'

)) d
German, passage 'sinking'

)) e – –
English, passage 'floating'

)) d
German, passage 'surfacing'

When you download a listener from http://imposition.literalart.net you choose which passage the client will listen to and which language it will display. These do not change (although you could download other clients).

imposition sends states of each of its four passages to a servlet: each passage's 'language' and its legible 'buoyancy': 'sinking,' 'floating,' or 'surfacing.'

imposition now distributes these states over the internet in order to enable a networked transliteral and musical performance. *imposition's* main display shows the four transliterating passages on a large projection and broadcasts their states via a server on the internet. Anyone with access to a set of twelve distinct QuickTime 'listener' movies[3] may download and play them on their computer (from: http://imposition.literalart.net). So long as the main movie is running, listener movies will track one of the four passages, but will do so in a single language (as selected at download time in each instance) while reflecting the 'buoyancy' of the passage to which it listens. These movies also play looping musical samples of human vocalizations which harmonize both with the main display and with other linked and listening movies. The selection and triggering of samples reflect their linked passage's buoyancy. In performance, any number of participants or audience members with laptop computers may be distributed throughout the audience or performance space. These laptops will each play their listening movie networked with the main display by wireless connection over the internet. As an installation, there may be one or more projections of the main display and any number of clients installed and networked with it. Optionally, any visitor to the installation may choose to download a client movie and join the networked installation.   - John Cayley

   Overleaf, the music of *imposition* is briefly described by its designer/composer, my friend and collaborator, Giles Perring. For this iteration of our work, Giles has commissioned and produced new vocal performances from Melanie Pappenheim.

The music for imposition *is ultimately generated by events arising out of the transformations that occur within the text. These are the chance operations - themselves composed through John's programmed impositions - which govern how various predetermined features of the audio will ultimately play themselves out.*

In response to the rule-based methodologies that John employs in his text assemblage and manipulation, I developed a set of conditions that would form the basis for an audio interpretation. In not untypical fashion, having established certain rules, I allowed myself periodic license.

In the first manifestation of this work, we focused on the production of alphabets - sung by the human voice in German, French and English - that were triggered by textual events. Using somewhat generalized and unscientific judgments, letters in the alphabets of each language were divided into categories corresponding to the commonest locations for the phonetic production of each linguistic sound within the mouth and throat - a loose appropriation of material that is common knowledge among students of linguistics. This gave me twelve categories which I was then able to map to a series of notes, in this case to a 'just tempered' version of the harmonic series, which I have used as the basis for composition on other occasions. The three series were then pitched at a semitone's distance from one another, depending on the language of the passage being rendered, and the actual note sequences are produced by triggered response to transliteral changes which occur as imposition *plays.*

For this new work, I asked Melanie Pappenheim to sing the alphabets and also some textual extracts from imposition *in its various states. The latter resulting samples of textual music have been arranged once again for the three transpositions of the harmonic series. Selections were made from the text in order to offer representations of surfacing, floating and sinking. They are then distributed across the series so as to imply harmonic rest or unrest, and to ensure some interesting harmonic events.*

Melanie and I made decisions as to how the text should be rendered phonetically based on a set of 'grabs' from an actual played-out version of imposition. *Examining the original and transliterally morphed texts, we were able to determine, for example, a source and target for a particular syllable we were looking at, and thus decide on vocalization. At this point Melanie's performances of the text transform a hitherto dry process, very importantly, into the affecting and beautiful vocal loops that make up the music of* imposition.   *- Giles Perring*

c r e d i t s

John Cayley :	writing, concepts, text-generation, programming
Giles Perring :	composition, sound design, recording, post-production
Melanie Pappenheim :	vocals
Douglas Cape :	advice on visual media, additional recording

Thanks to Roberto Simanowski for early discussion of *translation* as it emerged from *overboard*; to the organizers and sponsors of OPENPORT, Chicago for the opportunity to give the work its first public airing; and to those participants and helpers who will have played the 'demons of *imposition*' on their laptops.

[1] The workings of *overboard* are described in some detail in an article I wrote for *dictung digital*, edited by Roberto Simanowski (http://www.dichtung-digital.com/2004/2-Cayley.htm).
[2] The main source text for translation is extracted from Walter Benjamin's early essay, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man.' (Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. 1979. London: Verso, 1997. 107-23.) Other texts from Proust may also, less frequently, surface in the original French, and one or other of the standard German and English translations of *In Search of Lost Time: The Way by Swann's*.
[3] These are the 'demons of *imposition*' as Judd Morrissey named them: one movie in each of the three languages for each of the four passages.

Giles Perring is a musician, composer, recordist and performer who works, when it suits, in new media. He and John Cayley have joined forces on previous work, notably *what we will* ... (http://www.z360.com/what/). His own recent work includes *The Exchange* (in which John has been a participant), a live work involving performances made by telephone (http://www.exchangeart.co.uk).

Melanie Pappenheim is a vocal performer well-known to be interested in sung linguistic trickery, and is noted for her consummate backwards singing. She writes and performs music for BBC Radio Drama, and regularly works with Jocelyn Pook. She is a member of award winning UK choir The Shout; and has sung on the sound tracks of *Doctor Who*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Gangs of New York* and several of Derek Jarman's films.