

**SUBVERSIVE VOICES**  
**A STUDY OF TEXT AND PERFORMANCE IN THE**  
**INTERPRETATION AND REALISATION OF**  
**EXPERIMENTAL POETRY**

SUBMITTED BY  
JOANNE MANNING B.MUS. M.A.

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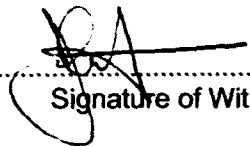
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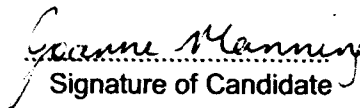


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## SUMMARY

This study considers the text and performance of four Australian experimental poets, Chris Mann, Amanda Stewart, Ania Walwicz and Hazel Smith. My aim is to demonstrate how the genre of experimental poetry uses language and performance in such a way as to rewrite existing dominant discourses. The challenge as an analyst is to find ways into such reflexive texts that use intertextual resources of critical theory as their subject matter. The perspective employed here engages with the theories posited by the texts and allows for a theoretical position removed from the structure and theories informing them.

The study is organised in two parts. First, I consider the subversiveness of the genre drawing on Raymond Williams' notion of the emergent, followed by a discussion of important predecessors in the field of experimentation. I then outline the particular method of enquiry and theoretical framework used here to analyse the meaning potential of such works. Systemic Functional Grammar and Multimodal Discourse theory are discussed and their particular application in this study. The second part of the thesis applies these theories to the experimental works.

I begin explaining my theoretical position by considering the weakness of the commonly used theories of Kristeva's 'semiotic' to analyse such works. I found Systemic Functional Grammar, as developed by Michael Halliday and then Terry Threadgold, to be a useful tool for elucidating the meaning potential behind the fractured grammars in the texts. It also provided a way of conceptualising enunciative positions and the way intertextual resources might be rewritten. From within this linguistic framework I was able to discern subversive messages from the intertwined theories ranging across the texts from Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism and multiculturalism.

The performance posed another challenge as the improvised spoken texts, uniquely performed by these artists, create a subversive listening position for the audience, which engages with both the words and sounds for their sonic and semantic qualities. I consider many ways of addressing the role and behaviour of the performer and listener as well as the performance as a creative process, emerging from the two. I engage the model put forward by Kress and Van Leeuwen for analysis of multimodal texts which provides a functional approach to meaning potential in the performance and its varying



layers. Within this model, I found prosody most useful for its ability to notate intonation, key, disjuncture and stress, exposing the dialogic voices and the relationship between semantics and sound in the performances. This form of communication is equivalent to the indexical entailment of sound and music which forms the basis for communication between performers, and between performer and audience. The dialogic situation is enhanced by both prosody and indexical entailment providing possible meanings. I use some traditional musicological analysis but my aim is to move away from such formalistic descriptions to consider culturally inscribed sounds and their interpretation using a functional model.

Throughout, the complexity of experimental performance is evident but the theoretical frame used here might be applied to other works of this nature as a means of further understanding the semiotic web in subversive texts.

## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

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No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

*Joanne Manning*  
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The work of Amanda Stewart, Hazel Smith and Ania Walwicz is provided here with permission of the composers.

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