

Where do you look when you listen? Do you rest your eyes on something particular or let them wander around? What's good about sleeves and booklets that come with records, cassettes or CDs is they allow you to do either. You can be all ears as you zone out gazing at the cover — or divert nervous energy into leafing through a booklet, or fiddling with a cassette's casing. Chances are that this is what you just did and I don't want to interrupt your activities. Liner notes, I believe, work best when they prolong the fun of listening by providing some extra reading to linger with. So I will not coat what you hear on the tapes with extra meaning but try and offer a slow glance around the landscapes Tris Vonna-Michell traverses in these pieces.

Perhaps this is already more than a metaphor because the story Tris tells in fact was and is a medium for travel. It first got him going to different places looking for clues and collecting experiences. Then it also kept him on the road for years as he was performing recitations, or doing recordings of the ongoing tale. As much as he was taking his story out for a ride, it put him on a trip. But the journey doesn't stop with the making of the work. It begins over and anew when you listen to the tape and Tris' words and voice transport you to different places. At times they do so along meandering paths, at other times it's more like jumpy teleportation.

The soul may get bounced around quite a bit on this carrier, but its frailty is acknowledged from the start. Listen out for these motifs: an infant cradled in a shoe-box in wartime Berlin, and decanted quail eggs to be given to a postwar poet but held in a loop for years before the gift may have reached the man days before he departs. Intimate ties connect the pieces of the story. Somehow they don't break even if the parts keep shifting places and riddles are never fully resolved. It can get quite trippy on this ride, as the breath carrying the voice at times edges closer and closer to the point of hyper-ventilation. Yet the funny thing is that the voice that speaks never leaves the body, say to go demonic, angelic, or wholly abstract on you. No, it's Tris talking, throughout, and if I take the liberty here to refer to the artist by his given name, it's only to accentuate the familiarity you'll feel with his presence after surrendering your mind to his recitations for a while. His mode of address gets you hooked because it's as casual as it's incantational. If I were to paraphrase how it sounds to me: Hello, Tris here, your pilot speaking, thank you for choosing psychonautic earways on our flight to the Berlin Lake District Glasgow Leipzig Brussels Tokyo Paris Eggport, un bon vol und guten Flug!

Phorein is Greek for carry. An amphora is a vessel for carrying things within and avoid spilling its contents. There would have been no trade without such containers. And indeed, no matter how far the trip goes, Tris never denies that terms need to be in place for the trading of tales to proceed. 10 minutes tops for a single recitation. An egg timer ensures the contract is not broken. What does it set? A time limit to the love of spoken word? Or the very conditions for this love to go around? In her essay *Economy of the Unlost*, Anne Carson would seem to argue for the latter. She contends that ancient lyric poet Simonides of Keos may have set poetry free from being at the mercy of rich men's charity by being bold about his terms for improvising his verse. Get me a deal, and I give you good lines. That's how he had it. So rather than having his craft condemn him to stay put under one donor's roof, Simonides' words paid for his livelihood and travel, as he circulated among cities. So if you hear Tris fuss over the timer at the outset of a speech, I'd say, recall Carson's thoughts on the matter: for free moderns, there may be no poetry without.

Yes, as Tris is the first to admit, this economy of time is more than a little out of whack. Roadworn as they have become with time, the egg timers tend to malfunction, and not ring. In a recorded event, also the spare goes bad on him. Even if they do work though, the irony lies in their audible ticking setting a pace that the recital ultimately never adheres to. Not that it isn't comforting at first. Like shakers in a rhythm section the timer adds a steady tic-tic-tic to the backbeat of the slides accompanying the performance advancing clic-clic-clic. And for a while it does sound like the rhythm of speech is taking its cues from this machinic metronome track. Yet sooner or later it goes off the rails. Tris speeds up suddenly, if only to eventually recline again into a more laid-back stance when it transpires that time and words is running out. What does, however, clearly come across, in this wild jitter of timing, is the will to beat the clock, not only to fit in more words than ten minutes allow, but to somehow carve out the time the tale needs for it to be told like it wants to be told. Indeed, it is the demands of the tale that step up the tempo when Tris goes faster and faster from this-here-now to there-that-then to transport us from station to station before the ride ends. Likewise, it's memory's own muscle that you feel relax when time's about to be up, and what's been said must suffice, for the moment.

Speaking of circulating memories in economic terms, however, it would also seem vital to point out that Tris is not building his stories on the prospect of fast returns. On the contrary they gain from perpetual losses. His message doesn't come safely bottled up. His stories in fact serve more as a sieve. Memories are sifted through by the syntax of improvised speech in motion. The grains in the texture of memory come out, but, there being no definitive version of Tris' text, no receptacle exists to hold and store what they yield for good. This is not a problem. It's the whole point of the enterprise of performing. Recall it, say it, sift it, and loose it, to the spirit of the moment, like particles of an unwritten text falling through time. Now you got one version of the tale on tape. Flip it, and find another. On one hand, we're indeed talking losses. Bits of the story drop out and go amiss, props break or get nicked, a thief grabs the bag with the camera, the storage is raided, and, before we even come to this, most kit for recording today is anyhow designed for obsolescence. On the plus side, however, elements enter the process that exceed what the economies of genre are fit to gauge and validate. The laws in the house of spoken word don't welcome music. But here it is, ready to amplify or interrupt the mood words may be setting, happy to share a common space where value will never be defined by a single market alone.

Learning over time that no archive is a vault that couldn't be robbed so you can't bank on memories really does indeed give a certain lightness to living with the gradual erosion of tales in the course of their continued recital. Nonetheless, some riddles won't stop bugging you, the weight of certain words remains, as does the pain that particular loss instills. We are, after all, talking about the tale of a lifetime you may inherit to much the same extent that you write it yourself. Speaking for myself, I can say that what propels me towards writing too is as much my desire to get carried away by language, as it is the motor of a warchild mom teaching mnemosyne and an artist dad tripping on the mysteries of poiesis. But whatever the constellation may be under whose sign you follow your favourite tales or spin your own story, I think what Tris gives to listeners by speaking is an incredibly strong sense of becoming a vehicle: the carrier and vessel for a desire to see, show and tell that which no single person can hold, not least because the drive to chase it may have been passed on by the previous generation, together with all of its unresolved riddles. Carson calls it the unlost. It sticks to you

although you can neither grab nor keep it. Only option is to unloose it. How this is wholeheartedly done, Tris' tapes may indeed give you a most lucid sense of, and, in doing so, perhaps inspire a similar desire for recording recitation.