

fred wah

articulations







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Articulations / Fred Wah.



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0.1 (Rilke)

Looks like the Angel got through. Wrapped.
Swaddled. Between the rock and the river.

Seen speaking as having held to mere fact.
Mirroring on the wall, not me, *begründen*.

Watch who'd turned us round, turned and stopped.
Just for taking leaves from the bottom of the tree.

Of which the years build up their larger mounds.
Pudenda'd down moss, "the smell of the heat is..."

Spectacle of Mrs. Erickson's totem. Private parts.
Thread round desire like a crack through the cup.

Stare, stare — nothing there. Camp. Earth. House.
Poof! said the beak. Not a ripple. By a hair.

0.2 (Rilke)

As if I came back leafless...
As if those were the actual master times
and the cold mirrored so often
even so, souls might act alone.

Linger as the morning tries to
shine upon the ocean floor,
canopy of cloud and raven
squawking for her bones below,

white. What are they those birds out there
hoots, whose sometimes
visible glances are lost?

Oh, I know the earth.
That curriculum of the song sung
the parched heart, so small along the coast.

1. (*nameless times*)

If
these are the nameless
“times” bound together
just waiting around
then listen to them
or shut up,
say nothing
of their names
anachronic
stormed and broken
limb thinking
repeat sentient
sky to break
open find what
lies ahead is this
the place what if
that means you
are there already
“hold that”

2. (*bell theory*)

Are you in the neighborhood?
Scissors at hand.

Is this the blank for disaster?
No, the shot for the plan.

The rip that erases the target a rose?
That's the temptation.

Do you really melt in fiction?
Indifferent to meaning.

Is a bell wood?
That is the theory!

3. (*lesson*)

With my thee I give
living *the* life marked
these chalk lips
a little give and take
sorry, not ivy
lapse nothing more
of myself but you
you're not the first
tug
promise

4. (*singing lesson*)

carefully carrying
while chattering

rarely touching
nearly lulling

noting fully alone
quiet no talking
nothing

but screaming
care for that

5. (*that cottonwood*)

Orifice foreignicity
some "it" at stake
unrecognizable for the distance
or "if" is dying
beyond meaning
truth or rust
just one call gets through
in fact they started singing
the ospreys flew off
and then a raven landed
in that cottonwood office
door thresh
holding "that"

anaphylactic history
marbled, as intended, rigorous
pneuma falling in snow, in love
you can say "I penetrate
I remember myself." Temperature
at the mirror
's ok just
make
breathing

8. (*Nancy!*)

Nancy! beyond
stones, but within reach
furniture murky

head at the controls
children blocked
no neighborhood

Paris you could almost say
meubles, anthropological

pebbles and mud
could never be cultural
determined girls

we won't disturb the lake
please, so late in the day.

9. (*about to be*)

About to be a runner
About to be a manner
About to play the clarinet
About to be a lover

About to be alone
About a sack of bones
About that smoke around your neck
About to be unknown

10. (*Noli me tangere*)

First the hot and dry
Crossed up middle
By right cell strips
Down to craving, gravel
Elbows on the wing
Brushed with taste
This damp phant'sy
Lured by the sentence
Left or between
Noli me tangere
Voilà! quite contrary

11. (*stoma*)

or exia
sfumat your
fat as soft
simil voom
rader will
sive gee
tit get rex
lulu itate
bin begin
ianat calor
um xia give
nt cannot
get at "h"
simaf ing
near for
rain music
mning it
to myself

12. (*no hay paso*)

the steps
for flavour

little sleight of tongue
impossibly meant itself

punte questo

the "you" that shadow-
crosses every cloud

but it's possible
nothing will happen

is it not it
the storm the mind

some trill remembered
the one that crests
your labial beach

no hay paso

13. (*rice*)

Stick to you like pasture
Broken foreign chances

Writing more disaster
A tract of surplus bookings

Opacity in marching
Faking naked truth

Breathing through your toes
Climbing up the stairs

Forever playing thoughtful
Repeating disappearance

Stuck to you with patience
Breaking foreign changes

Waiting for disaster
Attracting back the meaning

Facing all the numbers
Sighing by the stove

Obeying all the stars
Taking off your clothes

Rather let this murmuring
Remember all the prayers

14. *(back pack)*

they say short fall
talk back
they say back up
say back breed
they say half out
or fight flight
some say worm
back bone and sleep tight
they say fall back
and give up
back door
some real true
blood back bone
then turn 'round
just drop back
for camouflage
some say clear cut

they fire back
they back fill
they say detour
down under outback
full of back off talk
and back lash
the wrong word
the back space
a hose job
to back track
they said that
way back

15. (*bird's mudra*)

Eyes closed
Ch'i chatters
Many-mouthed birds

Bird mudra
Heart sutra
Mind love's thirst

Hand over
Fist traces
Six lucky words

16. (*snow tonight*)

Until the rice ripens
'til the shadows cast

If there's snow tonight
and the dimes march

'Til the strike's out
and the leaf's over

The bait's cut
devil speaks

Heart thinks
turned tables

Deep six
the hat drops at

How his mind minds
to rule the bend

Breath's baited
with cheeky tongue

When the slate's clean
the letter's open

Until the music limits
the faceless sky.

17. (*thread stone*)

O you thread stone writing.

But I can't say I asked for sleeping driftwood or breathing us as children fishing continue to go in one direction.

For me, a shore seems infinite.

I know. While you do all that chipping along the ramparts I have the impression that we understand each other perfectly.

Really?

Yes, really, really.

Once, in an old camp, I accidentally discovered the remains of a note. The top was charred but I could make out the words: "You are moving inside. Inside the stillness. Its slowness makes almost imperceptible the movement." The message ended with "Mother, I am hungry. I want to come home." It was signed but I could only determine the first two letters as "B" and "e" – "Be—".

Who was it, you think?

I don't know. We seem to depend heavily on small game, even in the summer.

Oh, I don't know. A shoreline isn't a coast line. Especially if it reminds us of Van Gogh or any artist who uses a boat.

But do you see him at this moment? This question is meant to show that light is a medium fit for travel. I don't think I should ask it of myself, though.

I understand. Perhaps stone paper scissors is, like that creek
mouth ahead, one of those little parentheses around an
absence, a matter missed.

Do you know where I was before I came here?

But you've always been here. That's missing spaces means.
At least that's what's missing.

Yes, I often wonder about it myself. Somehow these pieces
of driftwood have always reminded me of the missing.

18. (*chin wag*)

easy winded
china wages
rattle antler
jaw-bone

chickasaw eyes
by the hair of
my nv s ble

truck

human motor
taboo rate
blooded vowel

intestinal weld
aver truth chalk
on auto bile

gloss n' murmur
carbon gut
rocks bottled

up
or bearing grease
at a distance
or any
hearing
from you you're
such a chin wag

19. (*piggyback*)

Remember the ratio of axe to handle?

No soft chances here, so don't say a word.

Knees, knives – keynotes too far off.

Knowing the rhyme you're on the edge.

Tender reason whispers Nothing's name.

Watch the river from the bridge

you move,

river stays.

20. (comet)

the eclipsing embrace, coma
extended

in advance of the imagination

probes the last gasp
in a taut chain
of the self's self

neck-and-neck
its "it"
allows an observer
writerly activity

the patter of a pen
that becomes a slowly plotted path
might resist this new cut in the fold

novel
for its having deployed
a rather serrated "knife-edge"
between the word and the page

deep sleep could register this strangeness
as a poetics of the Cross
"a sort of blind-man's [comet]"

six of one and half
a dozen of the other

21. (*cavity*)

Plato's pathway
and the lone messengers
cavity cooked
some endosoma
dry toast
tandem to the semiotic candida

won't call it the syntax of diving
abridge the raw throat
taut as a "b" string

no genetic mantra either
but a full cup of semi-vowels
caught between nature and culture

silkworms for fish
crickets for phonemes
the pure for the empty

22. (*wrds*)

I miss
mind you
in Indiana
grammar
and seminar
drinking w/ him
some skag
middled up

conditions
ham strung
past towels
upper lip
topple uh
still one
smart indian
past plural
laws come
in widths
summer serves
mind dugout
pst string
growls psi
dot dot dot
missing drive
mindful tension
psm ing
of you
a head

23. (*sweet uttering*)

the necessary distance
of sweet uttering
needs no lips,

if you can form the adjective
from the noun,
if the answer is sudden

and interrupted,
deferred from the neck down
to the liver for an answer,

stumbling-mouth of myth
forgot you could cycle through
suspicious aminos of rhyme

yet marching to the roll of drums,
apples Warburg carried tiptoe

24. (*rip*)

Loss empty
anima vowel

just a "rip"
in the self

a little snack
with patience

a little cut
for the throat

need to

find the wound
for the bandage

25. (*return swimming*)

To climb is to return swimming into the signal of floating
neutral above the drift not of words but if a stroke's
borrowed it will come back animal sobbing a stage a territory
the bones rhyming elephant memory along that hide of shore
writing itself down into Asia the shoulder of the tear

26. (*He(r) it*)

He(r) it knew the city promised an epistemological river like
"lucky you" they would say but don't reach past the next
answer that part of the game is to look back into the cast
path robbed and turned around no name no ink flow cut
out meaning riven to those ol' Confucian straits.

27. (*pas au-delà*)

At the height of the dying rumoured to have been against
the law some say is the mouth-watering stammer of *pas au-*
delà or trespass of the body which rends itself into our moist
honeyed groins as a pact falling free of the tight squeeze
outside words ricochet of tongue floor and hunger breaking.

28. (*so soon*)

Cloth that covers now our roof
Latch of friendship locks away the truth
Now of night has emptied into noon
This that's really not has come so soon

29. (*the shears*)

Above the circle of the tree the shears
Shadowed on the ground the shape of all my years
Limbs at rest, feet rooted to the earth
What pronoun's left to demonstrate what worth

30. (*empty I*)

Empty of the "I" I silent spin
This here and now has shifted out the thin
Connection to that stem and part of me
That will no longer say it from the heart

31. (*up the creek*)

left Loki looking
up the creek

minus the barking
an innocent "fake"

words to relieve
the millstone of purpose

without the smoke
the lap of the lake

dancing shoulders
smuggled surplus

stomach's yearning
pasture's burning

read, reading
dog, dying

32. (*rehearsing*)

I must have headed back toward the kitchen. The food that for a very long time now I had been rehearsing in my mind, the very food whose measurement and cooking had both a distant mien and a familiar mien, though one faded into the other, made it happen as I opened the cookbook, remembering that the recipe which I was in danger of repeating was just a few pages away, I stopped with my thumb in the gutter of the book, and what, with a cloud-lit flash of sheet lightning, took hold of me again was the desire to kneel in the garden dirt, I was hungry.

33. (*tightrope*)

Maybe you don't understand after all,
maybe you were walking the highwire
and it wasn't tight enough,
but here,
what was loose was already tight,
what was not walked over was crossed.

You should have gone further for the taut,
stretched out for the straw
hung by the cooked.

34. (*hey sailor*)

what goes up
as they...
Hey sailor
wanna
see me
in the third
person let
the rivers run
let the semen
flower far
out in the open
ranging from
here to kingdom
come around
again some
time we could
try that dance
you know
the one

35. (*swift current*)

If you could put a gopher in this poem
And then a halter strap.
If they could hang themselves in the barn.

Late in the morning.
Sometimes
after church.
A bucket of water.
Next to the horses at the glue factory.

36. (*salmon*)

Oar brushes

salmon. A just cutthroat plows
morning's lake breaks.

Truth's the limit

above the puckered knee,
words for hollow, sourcing
thigh with salt tongue.

By any stretch, empty
to the elbows. Oar flowered
cowslip, pink through,

sluiced, proof's in,
slack's cut, mind
this dip in the creek.

37. (*chopsticks*)

Refuse
the fingered thought.

At most,
lost. Off track

silence
of ear bone. Framed in

its vodou of exclusion
Papa Doc or Bush

's radio's truth
static

across the mountains
"snow tonight"

far enough away
from the rice.

38. (*shine on*)

At face value
the souvenir

of walking
the gilded thought

shouldering the moon
of artifice
a big rock mountain
candida diaspora

cousins' campsite
the dream machine

of collective cooking
and running water

call it the artifake
of displacement

or Caesarian thought
butterfly of climate

this is the book
of harvest and movement

the Ireland
of perfect planning.

39. (*grounded*)

down
between
the toes

just
behind
the left knee

drumming
on
the pelvis
grounded
in
the qi

humming
through
the breastbone

grounded
through
the head

grounded
down
the tailbone

ground
around
the dead

40. (*sentenced*)

is not
the string
of words
a sentence

is not
the voice
comes out
another's

is not
the thought
complete
before it

speak
is not
the mind
a knotted

string not
words that

only seem
not meant

to mean
or sent
not strung
to end

but tied
to cradle
each
to each

41. (*fetch*)

the puppet
has no shadow

forget the fetish
about the braids
the shoes
of denizenship
the fake object
refugee
from the sentence

Fetch!

some cord
the for in foreign
might get lost
in the grammar of *nuevo*
mimicry

venue that in the last thirty years has challenged how its productive agency has only been granted, according to our neighbor Bob, through an act of colonial line-snapping. But what's certain in this rope-a-dope debate is that you can't always get it just right. The desire for the perfect simply produces another object, a *fait accompli*, the repetitive delirium of rusted strands of wire cable, the invisible knot in a piece of sewing thread, the tattered and exploded end of a shoelace, a cauterized umbilical cord. This is not at all a polarization. We see that the ligament, like transcendental silk, is what remains of the tension when, at the end of a long haul, it is stripped of all its strength and fiber. The nexus of this spiritual experience of the line as a trace of thought has been described by an Arab mystic, Al-Ibn: "the string is the string, nothing else; the string is the string, all of it...the string is the pure subject of the verb." Framing the cradle does not mean that you can't read it. The sub-muscularization of the braid seems to be as caught within the progressive dynamic of Tourette's Syndrome where motion and action by a sort of sensorimotor mimicry involves, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, "a staggering proliferation of tics, involuntary spasms and mannerisms that can be defined only as a generalized catastrophe of the gestural sphere." (*Infancy and History*, 136). This string is no cyborgian extension of the body. It is itself, its own nervous system allowed talking back through the permutations of an ever transmorphic screen saver. Metaphor is not easy to come by in describing this locus: binding twine, floss, packthread, leader, hamstring, lace, and so forth. Caught in the velcro. Catgut is tempting as a forceful interpellation. But who will answer? We can find no spider's ethic here. What is held by the two hands is not meant to measure, particularly the fingers. I think we need to get wounded, down to the nemo-fibers, the ciliolum,

the yarn, the thong, the rigging, the ribbon, the bandage.

Yes, the wound. The interstitial space of a stage, a balcony, the trace, finally of a scar that has borrowed its outline from an imprint of the domestic. This is a track, for me, not to the realm of the spiritual (what an illusion) but to an inheritance heretofore stifled by the intentions of sacred or economic models. I want to be free to use the crumbs and scraps for the crumbness and scrapness in them, for nothing else. Time is, etymologically, according to Heraclitus, "a child playing with dice." If this is true, that is, if this is true for the cat's cradle (and mine), that string is a yoke to the spinal marrow, to the breath, to the body and its threaded thought. I want to be there in the heat of their trans-, crossing, why not, through the residue of meaning me metis many midst mingle miscegenate mangle magma mongrel melange mess melt...

44. (*nipple*)

say
pine needle
brittled dry & yellow-rust
in the sand after a long winter
or in a photograph
settled and etched on the white snow

nipple
say milk tooth
say lips tongue salt kiss
shingley smooth & pebbled beach
now say delta storm finger tip and badge

45. (*crutch*)

No gear in the shift
I am the hostage

No wine no country
No rain today
Another September
The unpractice of words

Not to answer is the rule
To think could this be the precipice

Or the detour of the anecdote
Listen, day breaks its fiction

The drum, the thunderstorm
Even the grinding traffic

Will pass to a blue sky
The unnecessary failure of morning

I was not kept in the castle
Nor felt an incandescent mark

46. (*dead man*)

Did it help your journey
for the tongue
to be the barrel of a gun

Whose aperture
captured earth's rapture

What's faster
than growing to death

When's the last time
you talked about your wounds

Who said if
dying means
you are dead already

"hold that"

47. (*towel*)

So what if the neutral remains. Don't get left pumping the brakes without dearth and ruse. Any interruption includes the present participle dying, breathing in through the nose. Meaning doesn't pass through action all the time. Nothing is in the bag, the bag is mesh, the other is always left.

48. (*leg to stand on*)

the deal is this
normal arc

potatoes
under the frozen earth

not worth
the digging

a month
in which to stay warm

phantom calisthenics
shadow eyes

calendar empty
the tumblers unlocked

a limb
to go out on

a leg
to stand

Articulations is a series of texts written for a collaborative project of paintings and textual transcreations. Calgary artist Bev Tosh and I intended an intertextual and generative dialogue that explores not only gesture and reading but also the textural surface of human figure, typed letter, and artifact. The original project, a series of fifty paintings, incorporates both installation and performance, elements utilized as extensions and repetitions in the making of conversational art. *Fred Wah*, March 2007

ALSO BY FRED WAH

Lardeau

Mountain

Among

Tree

Earth

Rooftops

Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.

Loki Is Buried at Smoky Creek: Selected Poems

Breathin' My Name with a Sigh

Waiting For Saskatchewan

Music at the Heart of Thinking

Alley Alley Home Free

So Far

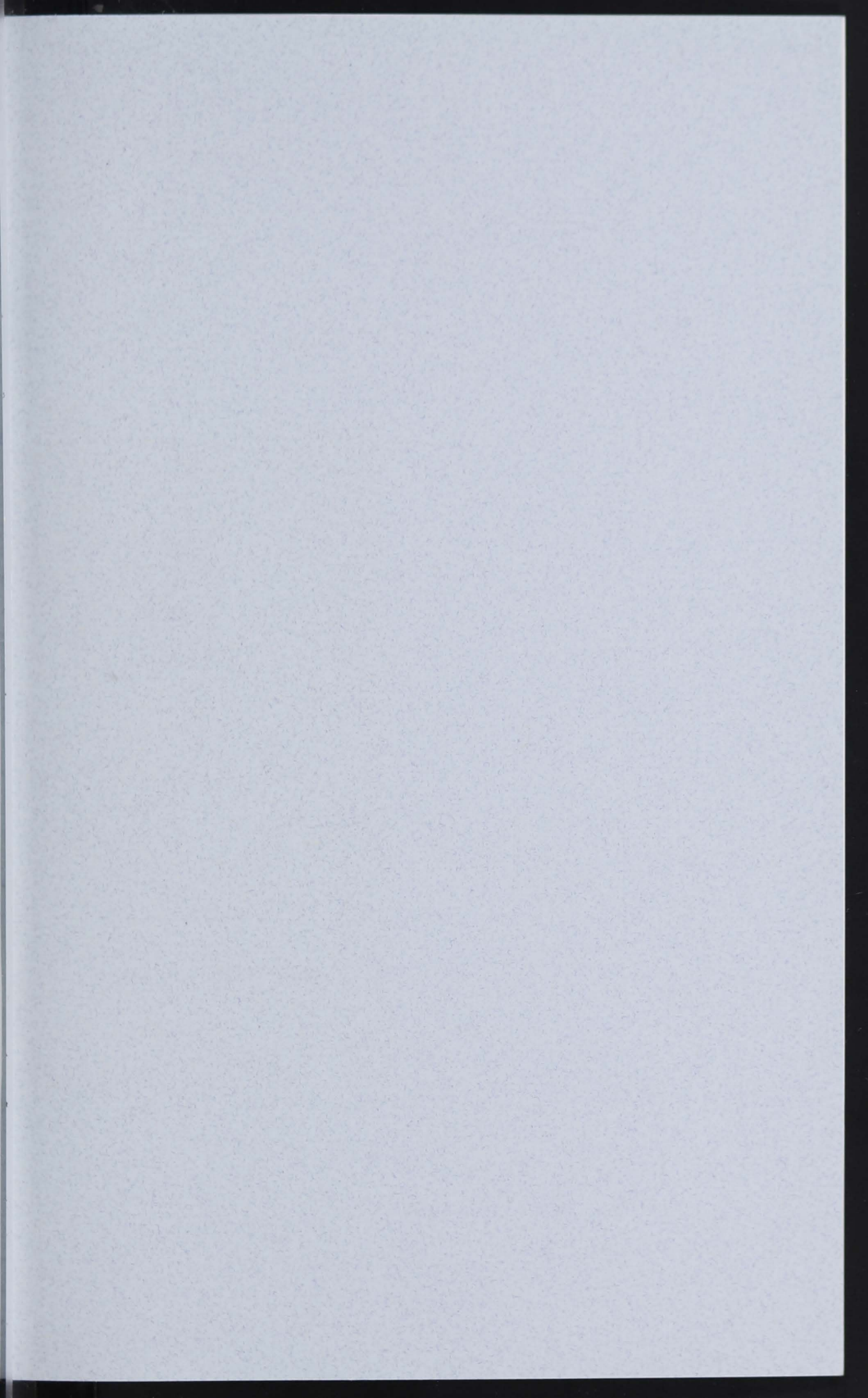
Diamond Grill

Faking It

Isadora Blue



Of this edition of *Articulations*, 26 copies have been lettered and signed by the author.







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Articulations / Fred Wah.

Written as part of a collaborative image/text dialogue for a series of paintings by Bev Tosh, these short poems join the great conversation of poetry by exploring and recasting lyric possibility, relieving words of what one of them calls "the millstone of purpose," yet "tied / to cradle / each / to each." Cherished, then, and before all else *grounded* in language. Disjunct. Attentive. "I want to be free," Fred Wah says, "to use the crumbs and scraps for the crumbness and scrapness in them, for nothing else." The great range of multiple patterning, syntax, and thought, the *openness*, of these poems confirms Wah's place as a major source in Canadian writing.