Ross’s evidence against the WH-island constraint

(1) Chomsky (1964) observed that embedded questions disallow extraction from them, and formulated a constraint that had the effect of excluding such cases. A version of the constraint came to be called the WH-island constraint.

(2) *What did he wonder where John put  [Chomsky's ex. I assume coreference is not intended between 'he' and 'John' as that would violate an independent constraint.]

(3) Ross (1967) explicitly rejected this constraint of Chomsky’s arguing that it is too strong, though he conceded that Chomsky's example is, indeed, unacceptable.

(4) He told me about a book which I can't figure out whether to buy or not.  how to read.  where to obtain.  what to do about.

(5) This seems to be the familiar control clause exemption. In fact Ross pointed out that these involve infinitival embedded questions, but didn't venture a hypothesis about why that should make a difference.

(6) Ross also provided another type of counter-example to Chomsky's constraint:

(7) Which books did he tell you whether he wanted to read why ??when  [The annotations are Ross’s. To my ear all three of these are virtually perfect with coreference, and, as Ross notes, far better than Chomsky’s example.]

(8) About these, Ross said they “differ in no way I can discern from ... Chomsky's example.” p.21

(9) Maybe we can discern a way. These seem to instantiate the bound subject effect.