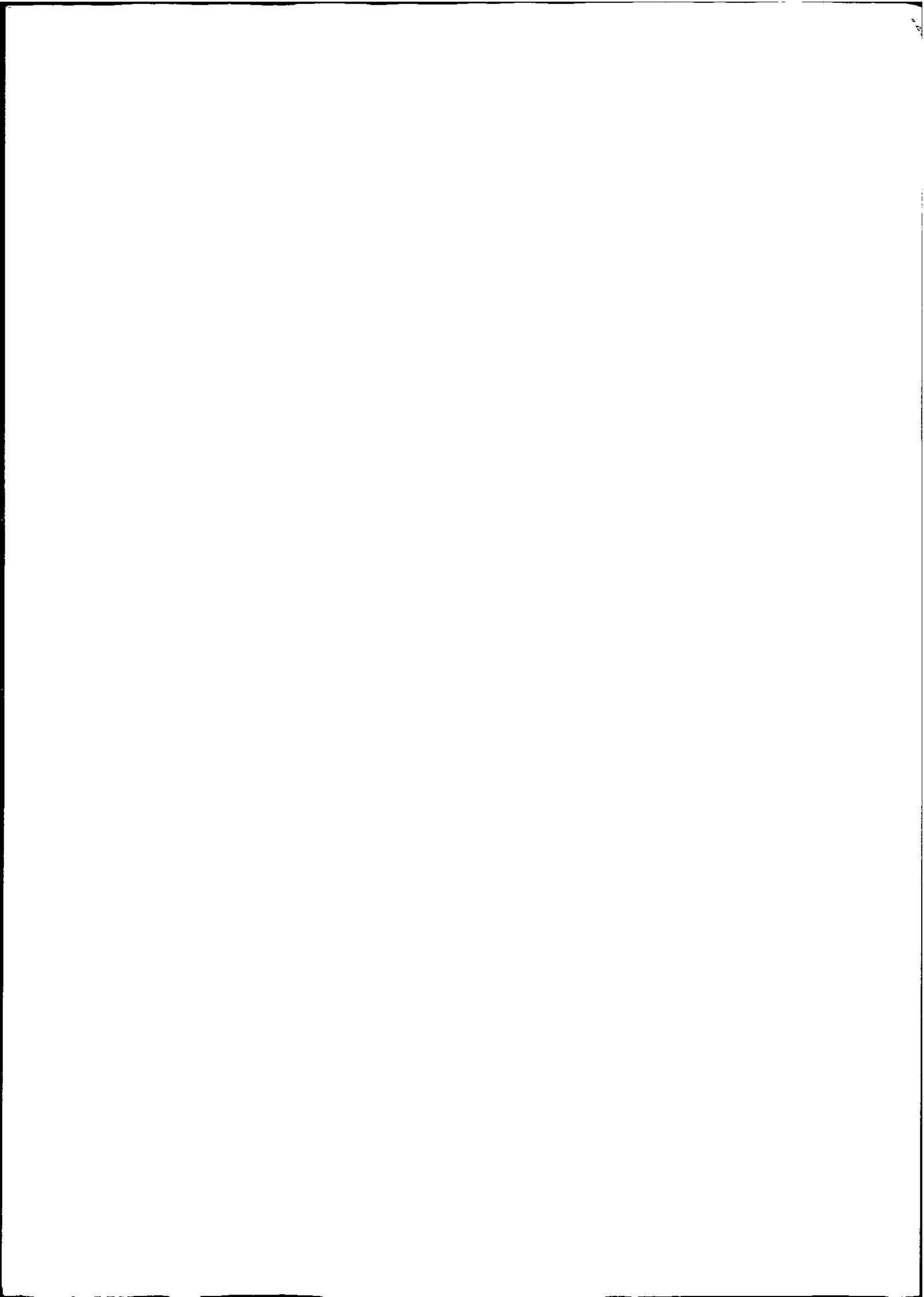


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**THE DIFFICULT IMPOSSIBLE: WRITING, PERFORMANCE
AND THE SUBJECT**

J.P.L. LYNCH

PhD 2009



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The Difficult Impossible: Writing, Performance and the Subject

By

Larry Lynch

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
In partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dartington College of Arts

April 2009

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The Difficult Impossible: Writing, Performance and the Subject – Larry Lynch

Abstract

This thesis summarises a period of practice-led research into relationships between *writing* and *performance*. It considers ways in which *performance* (especially performance art) might serve as a critical and methodological *lens* through which to explore the *practice* of writing – primarily the author's own. It is located in the recently designated field of Performance Writing, whose interdisciplinary approach it adopts.

Responding to a perceived condition of *impasse* (not writing) in the author's relationship to textual production, the thesis charts a process of deploying performance (and subsequently video) art as a research methodology, using its emphasis on temporal, spatial, material and corporeal concerns, to focus on writing as material and physical act – aspects of writing that are magnified by the experience of *being a writer not writing*.

The thesis suggests that the experience of *impasse* was symptomatic of difficulties reconciling the relationship between language and subjectivity, and that this difficulty originates in the author's exposure to certain theological and doctrinal practices. It acknowledges, however, that the emphasis on ritual performativity and embodiment in much Christian liturgy has shaped both his relationship to the written word, and his performance-based approach to challenging the condition of *impasse* itself.

The thesis is divided into two main parts: the first considers context and methodology; the second tracks the *narrative* of the research, from the condition of *impasse* to the production of poetic writing. Sub-divided into three phases (*Performing (not) Writing, Hybrid Practice and Poetry and Performance*), the second part deploys differing modes: fragments of autobiographical narrative, specific theoretical discussions, examples of, and commentaries on, practical experiments, and the inclusion of practical work itself.

The thesis draws on specific theoretical and philosophical perspectives that are themselves engaged with interplay between questions of writing, subjectivity and interdisciplinarity – most notably those of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous.

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

The research was supported with a part-time fee bursary and other financial assistance provided by Dartington College of Arts.

Presentations of Live Work

- 1997: 'In the Image of that Stone': Turtle Key Arts Centre. London.
- 1998: 'Impossible Joys': Dartington Arts. Totnes. Devon.
- 1998: 'N': Institute of Contemporary Art. London.
- 1999: 'Tattoo.Tattoo': Institute of Contemporary Art. London.
- 1999: 'Impossible Joys 2': Expo 99. Bonnington Gallery. Nottingham.
- 1999: 'Impossible Joys 3': In The Event of Text. Utrecht. Netherlands.
- 2000: 'Is What Be.': Mission Gallery. Swansea. Wales.
- 2000: 'A Delicate Figure': The Meltings. Halesworth.
- 2000: 'Rose Semblances': Dock 11. Berlin. Germany.
- 2001: 'Exchange Place': Catalyst Arts. Belfast. Ireland.
- 2002: 'Performances Through Writing (A Catalogue of Actions)': DCA Research Seminar.
- 2003: 'Let me in Let me out': Chisenhale Dance Space. London.

Readings of Written Work

- 1997: Writers Forum. London.
- 1998: Writers Forum London.
- 1998: One in the Other. London.
- 1999: 6 Towns Poetry Festival. Stoke on Trent.
- 1999: With Tom Rayworth. Etruscan Books Event. Plymouth.
- 2000: With Alice Notley. Etruscan Books Event. Totnes.
- 2000: AS (For Alaric Sumner). Dartington College of Arts.
- 2001: Word of Mouth. London.
- 2005: Plymouth Arts Center.
- 2005: BBC Radio Devon.
- 2006: The Language Club. Plymouth.

Publication of Written Work

- 1997: 'In the Image of that Stone.' Published by Turtle Key Arts Centre.
- 1999: 'Is What Be': 2 pages in "In the Event of Text" published by Writing Research Associates.
- 2003: 'Artist Pages' in: Acts of Language and the Liminal Institute. Published by Acts of Language.
- 2004: 8 prose fragments in 'Hardmag - the Plymouth Spectacular' published by Mum and Dad Ltd.
- 2005: Short Prose Piece in 'Blackout' – an exhibition catalogue by Tabatha Andrews, published by Plymouth Arts Center.
- 2006: 'In Deadline'. Published by Acts of Language.
- 2007: 'Prose Fragments' from 'Dellami Heron', in Tremblestone Magazine.
- 2008: 'Plum Wire Prayers'. Published by Acts of Language.

Presentations of Visual Work

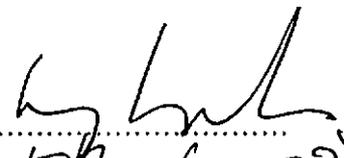
- 2006: 'Three Films of Digging' (in collaboration with David Prior): Barn Cinema. Dartington.
- 2008: 'On What it Might Mean to be Spinning' (in collaboration with David Prior). Peninsula Arts. Plymouth.

Presentations of Conference and Seminar Papers

- 1997: 'Revenging the Oracle': On the writing and performance of Aaron Williamson. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.
- 1998: 'Marked': Approaching Live Text. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.

- 1999: 'Hearing Things': On the performance work of Aaron Williamson. Performance Studies International. Arizona State University. USA
- 2000: 'Grainne of the Voice': On the performance work of Grainne Cullen. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.
- 2001: 'Writing Practice': On my own performance and writing. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.
- 2002: 'Performances through Writing' (Live presentation). Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.
- 2002: 'An Intervention on Integrational Semiology': Partly Writing. Oxford Brookes / Dartington College.
- 2005: 'The Difficult Impossible': A Research Overview. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.
- 2007: 'Speechness': Grammar at play in the writing of Lone Twin. Lone Twin Symposium. University of Lancaster.
- 2007: 'Methodology and Composition in practice led research'. Dartington College of Arts Research Seminar Series.

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Signed.....
Date.....17th Nov 09

Acknowledgement

This research has been undertaken with a view to furthering the effectiveness of my practice as a writer – in terms of both my own relationship to the work, and the work's relationship to wider practice based and discursive contexts, particularly those associated with the emergent field *Performance Writing*. Indeed, making a salient contribution to this burgeoning area of practice and research has another key objective of my doctoral project.

In pursuit of the above I wish to acknowledge the hugely thoughtful and generous support of my supervisors: Dr. John Hall, in the first instance, but also Dr. Caroline Bergvall, Dr. Mark Leahy and Dr. Ric Allsopp. It is also important that I acknowledge the invaluable contributions made to my research by: Gregg Whelan, Ciaran Maher, Cris Cheek, Tony Lopez, Allen Fisher, Mathew Goulish, Lin Hixon, Gary Winters, Jerome Fletcher, Sharon Smith, David Prior, Chris Hewitt, Barbara Bridger, and the members of the Plymouth Language Discussion Group. I would like especially to acknowledge Aaron Williamson, whose guidance and friendship have been of very great significance. And finally I thank Rachel and my family for all their help.

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Introduction

My central question can be summarised as follows: can an enquiry into performance deepen an understanding of writing practice and in doing so make a contribution to ongoing debates and practices around the relationship between language and subjectivity? This question gives rise to two related, more methodologically specific, questions: (1) can the parameters and formal conventions of *performance art* serve as a framework through which to undertake a dedicated exploration of the performative dynamics of writing, and (2) could such an exploration change both the material and conceptual status and function of the *text* in the context of my own writing practice?

My thesis is located in the recently designated field of performance writing, and proceeds through establishing an enquiry into relationships between the terms (and often distinct areas of practice), *performance* and *writing*. In this case, practice functions as both a context and drive through which the research is *led*, and from within which its central question(s) originates. This contrasts with an approach often referred to as practice-based, in which practice is presented as the primary object of study and (by entering into an objective research relationship with the work) its objectives, rationale and processes of becoming articulated within either an arbitrary or inherited critical framework. My practice has been driven by its own apparent insistentcies and preoccupations. It has also taken place within the hearing of specific critical discourses, responding to these and in many ways taking its preoccupations from my readings of them. The practical and critical have not been separable, practice determining both space within which the research happens and the critical allegiances and theoretical narratives that facilitate its being woven into the wider context of writing-related discourse.

The Structure of the Thesis and the Position of Practice

My thesis reflects this period of practice-led research that has sought to respond to my research question(s). Central to the research has been the production of twelve performance works, two video works (combining performance, writing and sound – made in collaboration with David

Prior) and a body of poetic writing. The making of this work, and specific, directed reading have been my primary methods of research. The practice is the main focus of my thesis, and is presented through discursive writing, still and moving image documentation of performance work and, in the case of video work and poetic writing, actual inclusion. Although a number of the performance works are referred to, I have not included documentation of all twelve, nor do I include all of the poetic texts produced during the research period. Rather, I include 3 DVD performance documents¹, 2 of which account for multiple works: *The Difficult Impossible – a summary* (Appendix A), and *A Catalogue of Actions*. Both of these performances were composed through drawing together actions and material from various other works for the purpose of generating documentation of a reasonable length for submission (the combined duration of the 12 works is in excess of 24hrs), as well as providing a context for discussions at Dartington, where both works were presented. The names of the performance works made as part of my research are included in the *Author's Declaration* and those represented in the two collective works are detailed in the DVD titles. The third DVD document refers to the performance (*N*) (presented at the *Institute of Contemporary Art*, London) and includes a number of examples of the types of actions and performed behaviour the work involved. It an attempt to keep viewing time to a reasonable length, and due to the issues of quality already mentioned, I have kept the footage of this work to a minimum, preferring to discuss its part in my research through an extended written commentary.

I felt it important to include full documentation of at least one live work: firstly, to offer the reader as clear a picture as possible of my research as played-out through performance art, and secondly, as in Part 2 (section 15) I focus at some length on the piece (*N*), as something of a short commentary through which to discuss and demonstrate some of the methodological and compositional processes involved in my making performance work as part of an enquiry into writing. I undertake a similar process in respect to my poetic writing in Part 2 (section 26), when I dedicate some time to a close, more detailed discussion than is otherwise the case, on the poem sequence, *The Ascent of Poor Rigging*. This piece is one of two poem sequences included.

¹ I wish to acknowledge that the picture quality of two of the DVD's – (*N*) and *Impossible Joys* – is quite poor. This is largely a result of the technology available to me at the time being considerably less effective than that widely available now. (*N*) was recorded on the ICA's in-house Beta-Cam equipment and the process of transferring to DVD has resulted in significant degradation. Nonetheless, given their status in my thesis, I do not consider the level of image quality in these two recordings to be impinging on their ability to fulfil their assigned role.

With the exception of *Impossible Joys – A Summary* and an additional poem sequence (which are included as appendices), all these *pieces of practice* are strategically positioned as sections within the thesis. They are presented in this way, as I hope for my practice to be taken as fully embedded aspect of my research narrative, rather than its object of study. As suggested above, I intend those aspects of my thesis that are identifiable as either more *practical*, or more *discursive*, to operate on equal terms as articulations of my enquiry. Indeed, I hope the more explicitly discursive sections (particularly those that constitute Part 1) will frame, inform and lead into subsequent encounters with the more practical work in such a way as to facilitate coherence in shifting between different modes of research and writing. This being so, there is a sense in which the thesis is theoretically front-loaded – a number of lengthy articulations of critical perspectives and readings coming in the first third of Part 2. This is necessary: firstly, as it is at this stage in the thesis that I am concerned with the more explorative elements of the research, and secondly, because it is important that the reader be fully versed in the theoretical frameworks that have informed the shift into making actual practice as research, before they encounter that work. This means that the inclusions of practice in Part 2 (phases B and C) are introduced and framed in the context of the research, but are not themselves subject to extensive theoretical extrapolations. It is hoped that the more explicitly theoretical sections that precede them will filter through into their reading in such a way as they remain part of the research narrative, but to an extent, on their own terms.

It should be noted however, that in the case of the DVD performance documentation, the material is included as a representative examples of my research practice, rather than my practice itself. This is an important distinction, for as will become increasingly clear, the performance art work made in the course of my research, despite being presented in professional arts venues, was made in the spirit of laboratory type enquiry. Its inclusion is intended to offer the reader a sense of how this element of my research looked and took place, and to provide a visual frame of reference for its written component. Conversely, the two video works, their texts and the two poem sequences included, are, in the form presented, examples of my work, developed as part of the research.

The main body text of my thesis is divided into two parts: Part 1, *Context and Methodology*, and Part 2, *Performance and Writing*. Part 1 seeks to unpack my research question(s) and position it in relation

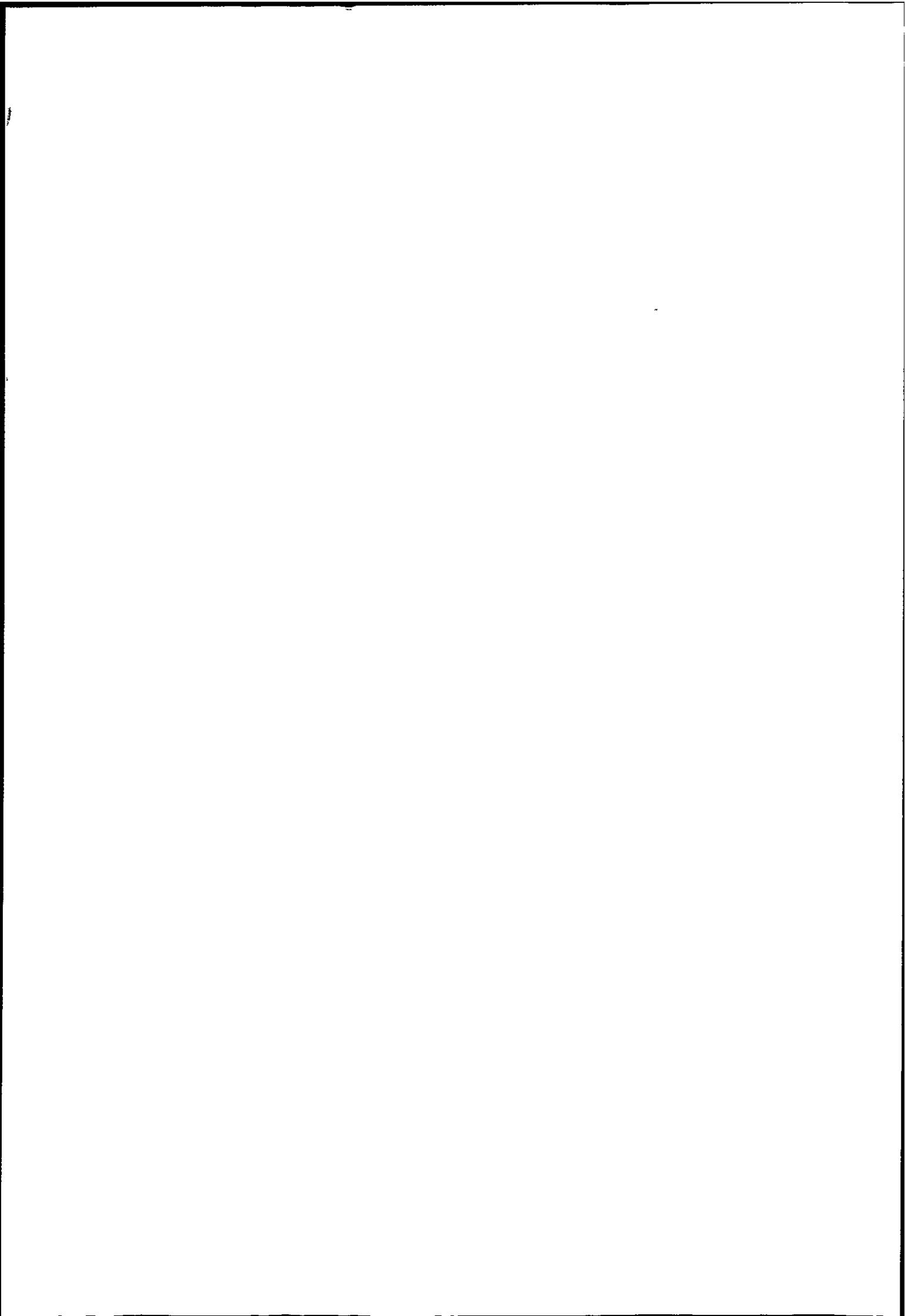
to three related contexts: the wider context of my life and practice as a writer, the more specialised context of performance writing as a field of praxis, and the specific critical contexts that have informed and furthered my research. Part 1 goes on to discuss the central methodological strategies I have employed in pursuit of my research objectives: the primary concern here being the *use* of performance as a means of interrogating writing.

Having established my research question(s), the contexts within which the research has taken place and methods it has deployed in Part 1, Part 2 attends directly with the narrative of my practice-led enquiries, and includes the items of practice and documentation referred to. Also running through Part 2, are sections and fragments of autobiographical narrative, attesting to the fact that my experience of the impasse, has, I believe, its origins in my exposure to certain theological and doctrinal practices and positions. This assertion is reflected in the nature of the critical readings the research has involved as well as some of the performance strategies it has developed. For the reasons discussed above, there is a distinct shift in tone between the two parts.

Part 2 is further sub-divided into three phases (A,B and C) that reflect the narrative of my research. As will be discussed in Part 1, my question originates in my having experienced a sense of impasse in respect to my writing practice – an inability to sustain any viable means of textual production that could adequately respond to my desire for writing to operate as a working through of the philosophical questions around subjectivity and ontology that preoccupy me. My research therefore, aimed to contend with this scenario, and work through its questions and difficulties, developing my practice as a writer from a point of stasis to a scene of poetic production. Phase A (*Performing (not) Writing*) is focused on my performance art encounters with the act of (not) writing, Phase B (*Hybrid Practice – Towards the Page*) discusses the text/video works made and Phase C (*Poetry and Performance*) presents the some of the poetic writing produced in the latter stages of my research. In both practical and methodological terms, Phase B can be seen as providing a bridge between the experience of impasse and the experience of writing poetry.

Practice and Theory

In constructing my thesis, the challenge I have faced is this: How to process the action of an extended period of research, which has deployed a number of related methodologies, and has resulted in a range of outcomes, into a text that remains faithful to the dynamics, digressions, circulations and mysteries of its subject, rather than betray the work by, as Jacques Derrida puts it, 'Reducing practice into the confines of an assumed academic meta-narrative' (Derrida 1974:76). And I do think that there is a real risk of this when writing about practice. We can get caught up in the discursively redundant back and forth movement of justifying practice with theory, or worse still, acting-out theory with practice. I hope my hands are clean in this respect. Indeed, I think there is a sense in which my own project is granted a degree of immunity from such retrograde strategies, by dint of the very specific ways in which practice has functioned as a mode of research – particularly as regards performance. It is a double edged sword though: the working of practice as a genuine methodological approach to the questions posed by a research initiative may well go some way to destabilising dichotomous practice theory relations, but at the same time, it demands that dedicated compositional and methodological writing strategies are developed in respect to any potential thesis - strategies that will enable the complexities of fluid interplay between different modes of thought, action and enquiry to be generative and active components within the fabric of an academically accountable text. My use of the word *text*, and indeed *fabric*, when talking about a written thesis is marked. It refers not only to the etymological root of the word *text*, but also to the way in which Roland Barthes *unpicks* the term when placing it in comparison to what he calls the *work*. *Text* stems from the Greek *texere*, meaning to *weave* or *stitch*. In his essay "From Work to Text" (Barthes 1977)], Barthes exploits the procedural implications of this link to develop a defining of textuality, or *the text*, as distinct from the literary work. The *work* he says, is in the business of *display* – it displays itself to the reader. The text on the other hand is demonstrative. It demonstrates to the reader its mode of production, its methodological and material processes of becoming, weaving them into its very fabric, as threads to be read, read across, picked at and understood in a multiplicity of possible relationships. The reading of a text is by its very nature a generative act. When confronted by the work, we are driven to consume.



So for me there seems to be a methodological correlation between the procedural dynamics of the text, as theorised by Barthes, and the compositional demands of writing practice-led research. Perhaps it could be, that by producing a genuinely textual response to the machinations of research, the pitfall Derrida alludes to could be avoided.

Both of these propositions – Derrida’s warning of academic reductionism, and Barthes’ defining of the text – have been developed in direct response to a set of pressing philosophical and linguistic questions concerning matters of authorship and authority² – matters which have haunted this research and its written outcome at all stages in their development.

Is there not a sense in which the research student, when working towards an assessed academic award or mode of peer appraisal, is in the business of authorising their work, their thought, their reading and in some cases their practice? As I developed this thesis, was I not bound to invest in the text clear evidence of the sense in which *I know*, and the ways in which that knowing is authorised by strategically placed and stabilising academic frames of reference? Through the production of a written thesis, must I *display* myself as being an authority on the subject, who answers its questions, or might I develop a text that *demonstrates* a set of processes through which I am becoming increasingly aware of the state of play within the subject, through which my engagement with the subject is becoming more productive and discursively prosperous, through which the question is not answered (for in my case it can’t be, it is not that kind of question), but clarified, reinterpreted, played across and lit up? It is my hope that the ways in which I have engaged with theoretical material and the ways in which such engagements are reflected in this thesis serve as something of a resolution to this dilemma.

A Note on Context and Rationale

My research has been necessitated by my practice as a writer, my questions emerging from within that experience. It is, therefore, towards the conditions and concerns of practice (not least my own) that my research hopes to contribute. Nonetheless, the nature of the questions asked and the means by which I have determined to respond have required me to engage with a range of critical texts

² I am thinking here of continental philosophy and critical theory post 1968

and theoretical perspectives. Most noteworthy are those of Jacques Derrida, Antonin Artaud; Hélène Cixous and Aaron Williamson. These four writers are introduced and considered as a context in more detail in a dedicated section of Part 1.

It is important to realise that, despite the philosophico-linguistic bias of my theoretical frames of reference, this thesis presents neither as treatise in philosophy (although it is necessarily philosophical), nor as an even vaguely salient contribution to the fields of linguistics, semiology and ontology. Rather, I am concerned with the practice of writing (my own in particular) developing in the recently formalised terrain operative across the contiguous territories of art and literature (performance writing). In addition, this thesis is interested in the matter of the (writing) *subject* as a central concern of the ontological interests of art, and the contributions that a re-conceptualised practice of writing might make to advancing insights into its status and processes.

A Glossary of Key Terms

My research is clearly defined by ways of working and thinking that are overtly interdisciplinary in nature. This is due to its location in the field of performance writing – an area of practice and research that is itself characterised by an exploration of writing and textual practice within and across other disciplinary areas. In addition, my own research focus within this wider field of activity lies in an in depth enquiry into the relationship between performance and writing that often challenges and questions standard understandings of these terms. As explained at the outset of this introduction, the rationale for such a focus is, in part, due to a sense that it will contribute to widening discussions around the relationship between writing and questions of subjectivity. Both the interdisciplinary bias of my research, and its specific methodological approach as regards writing and performance and their relationship to subjectivity, result in some complexity around the use of key terms. In the interests of maintaining clarity, the brief glossary that follows should help. In all cases, the actual context within the discussion in which terms are used should be taken on in combination with the base definitions offered here.

Performance Writing: Refers to the area of practice and research formalised and developed at (but by no means contained by) Dartington College of Arts from 1994 to the present. When capitalised the term can be taken to be referring to the academic field at Dartington. When used without capitals, the term is implying areas of relevant thought and practice in a more general, non-institutional sense.

Performance Art: Refers to a particular trajectory of performance practice as distinct from theatre and live art (see section 1). It is the term I use to describe the performance pieces I have made in the context of this research.

Performance: When used on its own the term *performance* implies a wider understanding of action than is sometimes the case in art discourse. Considered outside of the specifics of any context in which I use the term, it is sufficient to think about it as referring to any action that is in part defined by an awareness of it as an action, that is, as something which is done. John Hall describes this understanding of performance well in his book *Thirteen Ways of Thinking About Performance Writing* (Hall 2008:3).

Performative: My use of this term is consistent with the work of J.L Austin (1962). It suggests an action (often linguistic), or the issuing of an utterance, that actually performs or does something. It should be noted however (and this will become clear), that my use of the term, whilst in keeping with Austin's, also bears in mind the work of more recent thinkers (Derrida in particular (1974)) who are keen to point out the performative dimension of all language activity.

Performic: I use this term to designate performance likeness and/or potential.

Subject: I use this term in a manner consistent with the philosophical discourses my research engages, primarily European post-structural thought, with Cixous and Derrida being key examples. It points to the idea of a *being* with a subjective consciousness that is capable of subjective experience. Given the practice-led (rather than philosophical) focus of my research, the subject in question is the writing subject, usually myself. Indeed, questions of the self are at the root of much contemporary thought around the position and status of the subject.

Subjectivity: Refers to the discourses and questions that arise from a consideration of the subject in the context suggested above.

Ontology: I use this term only occasionally; to highlight the connection between the issues of subjectivity that concern me, and the wider set of philosophical questions relating to the notion of *being*. Taken in a general sense ontology implies a very broad set of philosophical trajectories and discussions. In the context of my research, the aspect of ontological enquiry that is most relevant and warrants the inclusion of the term, is that which comes to the fore in the thought of Martin Heidegger (1949). Heidegger (perhaps the primary influence on Derridean thought) brings ontological debate into the sphere of language, suggesting that our understanding of being in the world is predicated on a range of linguistic assumptions, many of which Derrida picks-up on in his own work. It is ontology in this sense that most directly concerns me; that which relates to the being of the subject as a matter entirely caught up in questions of how we think through language.

These two sets of terms (those that relate to the theme of performance and those that relate to the theme of the subject) are used frequently, often in relation to one another, throughout my thesis. Indeed, as I suggested at the outset, relationships between them are at the very heart of my research. As such, the ways in which these terms operate and are configured together is sometimes complex, particularly as the ways in which I am approaching both writing and performance exceed standard understanding of these terms, taken both alone and in combination. These are necessary complexities however, and should not present a problem from a reading perspective, as the terms outlined above are used carefully and consistently.

Part 1: Context and Methodology

The Genesis of the Question

My research questions, as I have suggested, emerge from within the fabric of my own writing practice, which, at the outset of this research, was characterised by a deepening sense of crisis: despite experiencing a profound and inescapable *drive* to write, I found myself unable to sustain any salient mode of textual production. This is not to be confused with the familiar condition of *writer's block* (as in an absence of ideas) for I possessed an abundance of potential thematic concerns. The crisis was born less of an absence of what to write about, than one of what to write for, and how. Through this pervasive sense of difficulty¹ in my relationship to the written word I found myself unable to get writing to do that which I desired – indeed, to even understand and articulate this desire incurred a state of foreclosure. Yet such a desire was, and remains, very much a reality, and is bound by a deep seated suspicion that it originates within the perennial base-note philosophical question, ‘who am I’ – or, as Derrida re-casts it – ‘who is this I who says who?’ (cited in Dick and Ziering 2006).

Despite (and due to) this impasse and the consequent reduction in textual production I found myself becoming troubled by my status and condition as a writing subject: that is to say, of my being a writer, doing writing. Instead of writing, I focussed upon writing as an activity – that is to say, a performance – and in doing so I found myself inextricably caught up in notions proper to performance: temporality, spatiality, corporeality, materiality and a real time active relationship with the viewer/reader. The shift in focus from the textual products of a writing process to the terms and conditions of the process itself resulted in developing strategies to harness and actively engage with the dynamics of writing as a live act. I looked to the practices and preoccupations of performance art to help with this aspect of the enquiry.

The term performance art has of course come to refer to an increasingly diverse range of practices, many of which are of no particular relevance here and have no significant bearing on my own activities. The performance works I have made in the course of this research and my use of the

¹ A term I use in direct reference to Hélène Cixous' essay 'Difficult Joys', which is reflected in the title of this thesis, and discussed in Part 2.

term in this thesis emerge through my having engaged with a specific performance trajectory: – the later of the two outlined here by writer and artist Aaron Williamson:

The roots of contemporary performance can be traced back through two identifiable traditions. One leads back to traditional theatre, whilst also seeking its validation within contemporary post-structuralism. The centrality of theatrical principles is maintained, alongside the often arbitrary or gratuitous deployment of sensory specific technology, such as video projectors, soundtracks and lighting. The other root of performance can be located in a fine art tradition which is anti-theatrical, discarding surface treatments and staging in order to place greater emphasis upon its three-dimensional (often public) setting. Such work sets out to vigorously interrogate its structure and materials for conceptual resonance. (Williamson 2001: 6)

The final sentence of this distinction points directly at the basis for my having so aligned my practice. Williamson's emphasis on a 'vigorous interrogation of structure and materials' echoes my own directive in respect to writing and an investment in its performic dimensions and capacities. In an essay entitled *Writing Art* he discusses the potential for forging a dialogic interface between writing and those concerns usually deemed properly the stuff of art.

The performative cast of writing, which normally dictates that it is conducted in private, at leisure and in advance of its public reception, is necessarily redefined when the act of writing is confronted by the spatial and material concerns of visual and performance art. By exploring alternatives to the conventional structures of writing, artists can render the written word accountable in ways more usually associated with art. (Williamson 1999. p13)

To 'render writing accountable', has, in a sense, been the ultimate intention of my research - but accountable to what, or to whom? In a fairly generic proposition, Williamson suggests accountability 'in ways more usually associated with art'. In the specific case of my own practice, I suggest that accountability is desired² in respect to the question of the first person, in respect to *I*, or *me*³. The extent to which visual art, in a general sense, attends to such accountability in ways that writing traditionally does not, is largely debatable: the extent to which performance art does, is not.

² *Desire* is in reference to its use in contemporary French thought when approaching issues of language and subjectivity. Key points would be Julia Kristeva's book *Desire in Language* (Kristeva 1980) and Lacan's essay 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious' (Lacan 1989).

³ Central to my enquiry, the question of the relationship between writing and the first person is a complex one. It will be picked up and considered in more detail in Part 2, through reference to Cixous' notion of *the author in truth* (Cixous 1991) and accounts of the ways in which the *live presence* aspect of my performance work is used as a means of *working through* some of the writing issues it provokes.

Performance Writing: Questions of context

The recently designated field of performance writing provides a more localised and disciplinary sense of context for my research practice. The relationship between performance writing as an area of research and practice, and the development of my own research is a significant one, in both chronological and methodological terms. As an undergraduate in the first cohort of students to progress through the Performance Writing degree programme at Dartington College of Arts, I graduated almost exactly ten years before completing this research, the concerns and movements within my own practice having developed through a responsive and dialogic relationship with the dynamism and urgency that have characterised the process of establishing this new field. The sense in which the foci and priorities of performance writing have facilitated and fed the opportunities that have supported this research and the strategies employed in its development is of critical methodological importance and contextual relevance. Key texts by writers central to the development of the field offer some useful insights into the central concerns of my research practice and its position in relationship to performance writing – I am thinking in particular of those by John Hall and Caroline Bergvall⁴.

At the outset of an article that offers a defining of the term performance writing, Hall suggests that it seeks 'to refer to a field of practice and enquiry in which both words are seen as in a necessarily troublesome but productive relationship with each other' (Hall 2006:89). The sense of a potentially awkward or unstable necessity that Hall invokes typifies my own relationship with writing and performance – that a rigorous engagement with their relationship might be productive, clearly echoes the substance of my central research question.

Formalised in 1994 with the inauguration of a new undergraduate programme of study at Dartington College of Arts, Performance Writing sought to provide an institutionally and

⁴ Both Hall and Bergvall were instrumental in establishing performance writing at Dartington. Hall was central to the research and development group who devised the undergraduate programme of study – its modes of delivery, aims, objectives and rationale. Bergvall joined Hall in 1994 on her appointment as a lecturer. She took over the directorship of the field in 1995 and remained in post until 2000.

pedagogically supported framework within which to focus upon the ways in which writing might be developed and played out through a wider set of disciplinary concerns – namely, those more often associated with art. Doubtlessly, the development of the programme and the wider terrain of practice and research the name sought to encompass, was to an extent responsive, in that it began to answer the call of a range of work already existent and/or ongoing. Yet it was also pre-emptive, in so far as it sought to provide a burgeoning critical and discursive context for new, potential practices – practices which themselves might well emerge as a consequence of the fields designation. The poet and essayist John Hall, who played a central role in the development of Performance Writing at Dartington, offers the following defining:

Far from being a precise *term* intended to describe, prescribe and proscribe specific modes, *performance writing* was meant to act also as a name for a constellation of existing and potential practices just coming into view. The view was as important as the practices. (Hall 2006:89)

He continues to speak in more specific terms, about the range of practices, discourses and potential areas of research, that fall quite comfortably within the range of Performance Writing:

The term *performance writing* almost certainly emerged in a pedagogic context as a means of identifying, naming and developing a field of study, practice and research that was open to textual practices across the arts domains, not just the literary ('creative writing') or the theatrical ('playwriting'). It was very quickly adopted as a helpful designation for modes of writing that combined and crossed different arts disciplines and discourses. These modes have included ones that relate to poetry, very much including *visual* and *sonic* poetry, bookart, web-writing, performance art (*live writing*), sited and installed writing. The compositional strategies employed in *performance writing* were seen as drawing on one or more of visual art, performance (studies) and music, in addition to literary and dramatic page-based practices. (Hall 2006: p89)

It is from within this context that my research has emerged, and it towards this context that it hopes to contribute. Taking Hall's descriptor as something of a topographical guide to the shifting landscape of Performance Writing, it is the sub-category of *live writing*, as annexed to performance art, which is of particular relevance to my own practice and research.

The Act of Writing (and the question of materiality)

Can writing that does not artistically investigate and incorporate the temporal and spatial conditions (the three dimensionality) of both its manufacture and reading fully lay claim to a place within the contemporary? If writing needs to be alert to itself as an act, does it need to be art? (Williamson 1999: 13)

The two questions posed above by Williamson point right to the heart of my research practice in terms of both context and methodology. By linking the notion of contemporary writing with an investigation and incorporation of its spatial and temporal dynamics, he pushes writing towards the territory, terms and terminology of visual art – and given the inclusion of the temporal, more specifically performance art. Such an approach to writing practices is, as I have suggested, central to performance writing. It can also be linked to Barthes' work / text distinction referred to in my introduction. This link warrants a brief unpicking as it helps in articulating the approach to writing practice my research takes and the wider theoretical contexts and discourses that have informed and shaped it. I quote a lengthy section from the opening of Barthes' essay:

It is a fact that over the last few years a certain change has taken place (or is taking place) in our conception of language and, consequently, of the literary work which owes at least its phenomenal existence to this same language. The change is clearly connected with the current development of (amongst other disciplines) linguistics, anthropology, Marxism and psychoanalysis (the term 'connection' is used here in a deliberately neutral way: one does not decide a determination, be it multiple and dialectical). What is new and which affects the idea of the work comes not necessarily from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them. It is indeed as though the *interdisciplinarity* which is today held up as a prime value in research cannot be accomplished by the simple confrontation of specialist branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down – perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion – in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peaceably together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. The mutation in which the idea of the work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than a real break. (Barthes 1977:155)

In suggesting that a kind of interdisciplinary fusion has given rise to 'a new object and a new language', Barthes begins to set forth, in theoretical and epistemological terms, the wider shifts in critical discourse that have (in part) engendered the practices encompassed by Performance Writing. He describes a sense in which the status of the literary work, in the face of disciplinary change, requires

rethinking, stating that, 'over against the traditional notion of the *work*, for long – and still – conceived of in a, so to speak, Newtonian way, there is now the requirement of a new object' (Barthes 1977:156). Barthes calls this 'new object' the *text*⁵. Its distinction from the *work* is not clear-cut. He suggests that in some cases 'there may be 'text' in a very ancient work'⁶ and that 'many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts' (Barthes 1977:156). So the distinction between the *work* and the *text* is not necessarily chronological and in some cases they can both be present in the same object⁷. According to Barthes, 'the difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field' (Barthes 1977:156/7). In so describing the text, he begins to locate it within discourses of action, plurality, play, process and materiality. He continues:

The text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules); the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse (or rather, it is Text for the very reason that it knows itself as text); the text is not the decomposition of the work, it is the work that is the imaginary tail of the Text; or again, the *Text is experienced only in an activity of production.*' (Barthes 1977:157)

Here the prospect of performance looms large, albeit through the *page-centric* focus that characterises this phase in Barthes' thought⁸. Nonetheless, in focusing upon notions of activity, productivity and textual materiality (*text that knows itself as text*), the historically entrenched break between the acts of reading and writing, and the written word itself, is reconciled and the performative dynamics of writerly production (which includes reading), and their relationship to the performative potential of the material text are granted a degree of conceptual and critical priority in contemporary approaches to writing. Barthes pushes further still towards notions of performance stating that:

The text (if only by its frequent 'unreadability') decants the work (the work permitting) from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice. This means that the Text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice. (Barthes 1977:162)

⁵ Barthes does acknowledge the fact that at the time of writing the term text was already becoming fashionable and being used (as it is today) in a range of ways. Indeed, part of the rationale for the essay 'From Work to Text' is to clarify, in the context of his thought at least, the implications of the term. I align my own use with his.

⁶ *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was included on the recommended book list for students enrolling on the Performance Writing degree programme at Dartington.

⁷ A point Barthes emphasises and demonstrates in his reading of a short story by Balzac in his book *S/Z* (Barthes 1974)

⁸ As Barthes' thought develops, it becomes increasingly accepting of the possibility for writing and textuality off the page. This is especially clear in the essay 'The Grain of the Voice' (Barthes 1977), and the notion of 'writing aloud' that he introduces towards the end of his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (Barthes), and which I refer to in Part 2 in respect to Aaron Williamson's practice.

Indeed, this re-conceptualised take on language and writing, grounded in notions of activity and materiality, can be understood as one of the more fundamental manoeuvres in post-structural and deconstructive thought. Taking their lead from innovations in twentieth century textual practice⁹, numerous thinkers (many of whom have been important to my research), such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Helene Cixous, have invested much in engagements with writing practice, as a way in to wider discussions within the interdisciplinary mix Barthes describes at the start of this section. Yet with very few exceptions, this work has remained fixated upon the literary page, and its encounters with performance are therefore either metaphoric, or highly conceptualised and abstract. As Bergvall put it in her keynote address at the first of two Symposia on Performance Writing:

It is also important to point out that, although much theoretical and poetic work has been done, this is especially true of exploratory poetry and deconstructive philosophy, to widen the literary debate and incorporate to it various notions of materiality (and the materiality of writing is an essential aspect of Performance Writing), it is largely true to say that the whole approach to writing remains in these fields primarily located on the page. This ignores and cuts short the debate on all writerly work which extends beyond the page. (Bergvall 2000:62)

Bergvall asserts, whilst acknowledging the shifts and advancements alluded to above, that the majority of contemporary discourse on writing does not maintain the conditions under which to comprehend and explore writing practices 'which extend beyond the page'. She contends that addressing this shortfall lies very much within the discursive remit of Performance Writing, stating:

... that if much post-structuralist analysis has usefully conceptualised the idea of textuality and textual performativity, it still falls short of addressing and critiquing the range and scope of materials available to writing and how this range may affect the very idea of writing. (Bergvall 2000:62)

It is changes in 'the very idea of writing' that, according to Bergvall, account for the literary field's 'indifference' (Bergvall 2000:62) to emerging contemporary practices. She argues therefore, that 'along with the development of a shared terminology, it is a shift in attitude with regards to what

⁹ Key points would be the work of Mallarmé and Joyce, both of whom have received repeated attention from the writers associated with post-structural thought and deconstructive philosophy. In the case of Mallarmé, much critical ground has been covered through engaging with his experiments in writing and spatiality (that invoke a kind of *performance on the page*) and his insistence that the 'audience produce the book' (Barthes 1977:163). Critical encounters with Joyce have drawn a great deal from his linguistic performance, in which punning, aphorism, composite and fragmented words that work across languages and discourses, create a playful and heteroglossic textual environment that again demands the active, productive engagement of a reader. Useful examples of critical work on innovative literary texts are: Derrida's essay 'Ulysses Gramophone: Here Say Yes In Joyce' (Derrida 1992); Kristeva's essay on Beckett, 'The Father, Love and Banishment' (Kristeva 1980) and, also by Derrida, two seminal essays on the work of Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' and 'La Parole Soufflée' (Derrida 1978) – both of which I draw on in Part 2.

defines the writerly that we should wish to operate' (Bergvall 2000:62/3). And could it not be such a 'shift in attitude' that Williamson is seeking to prompt through his provocation with which I opened this section: 'If writing needs to be alert to itself as an act, does it need to be art?'

Williamson appears to be suggesting that the strictures of literary practice do not actively enable the type of engagement with the act and materiality of writing that emergent textual practices demand, and that much recent discourse on writing moves towards, but is unable to realise. Rather, he sees the compositional and methodological opportunities afforded by contemporary art (performance art in particular), as providing a viable and productive framework within which, through practice, to interrogate and further the processes and possibilities of writing and textuality implied by contemporary theories of writing. Performance writing offers a dedicated, practice-led context in which to engage such an interdisciplinary bias, without losing sight of the focus on the *stuff* of writing that prompted such disciplinary change, as might well be the risk with a full immersion in visual/performance art contexts in which questions of language, writing and textuality are rarely confronted in ways that would be deemed adequate by writers.

My own research practice picks-up on Williamson's proposal in the disciplinary context of performance writing, endeavouring to use performance art as methodological vehicle for an exploration of the terms and conditions of writing and textual production. In doing so, my aim has been to reconcile the sense of impasse that characterised my relationship with writing at the outset of my research.

Performance, Writing and Inherence

The majority of writing practices do not uphold any means by which to embed the *inherent* performance of writing within their modes of production and presentation. That is not to say that there are few writers who engage and extend the performic qualities of writing as part of a compositional strategy that is then reflected in their work on the page, for there are many, of which three examples are: the way in which the thematic and metric qualities of Rimbaud's poetry are driven by the intensive periods of journeying on foot that framed their production (Fowlie 1965); the accounts of Joyce writing fragments of conversations, as they occurred, into the fabric of a developing text (Ellmann 1959); Iain Sinclair's psychogeographic perambulations¹⁵ recounted in his books *Lights out for the Territory* and *Orbital*. But this is not exactly what I mean by *embedding the inherent performance of writing within its modes of production and presentation*. By referring to the performance inherent in writing, I am suggesting qualities of performance that are already there, before any move to add on a performative dimension to the process, which, in the case of the writers I have referred to (with the possible exception of Joyce) is reflected in the text through response and description – a *writing up* in the conventional sense, under conventional circumstances.

Similarly, when I refer to embedding these inherent performic qualities within the modes of writing's production and presentation, I am thinking about ways in which they might be acknowledged

¹⁵ Whilst the relationship between writing and walking can be traced back many centuries, its use as a systemic compositional strategy, such as in Sinclair's work, can be traced back to Situationism and the practice of the *dérive*, or *drift* as a way of generating writing, and back further still to Wordsworth's use of walking (see (Prynne 2007)).

essential elements, fundamental to both the process of writing itself, and its means of public reception - bearing in mind that in some cases (and this is certainly true where my live work is concerned) the process and the presentation may be the same thing, and that the type of writing at play may not be the type that is working towards the production of a page-based text. This is a different proposition to the notion of writing responding to, describing, or in some way charting a designated form of performative action that has taken place prior to the writer engaging directly with the page or screen.

I am aware that there are many writers who would claim to work through an awareness of writing as an *act*, who would also claim that their texts reflect this awareness in ways more sophisticated than description and dialogic response. I certainly don't wish to dispute such claims. Indeed, writers such as Cris Cheek, Steve McCaffrey, Barrett Watten and Maggie O'Sullivan fit the bill perfectly well. But what I would query is the extent to which these writers are aware of writing as *act* (or *action*) in the sense that performance art understands the term¹⁶, and are actively engaging with it as such, in real time, as they write. There is a difference, I think, between the act of writing understood in these terms, and the abstracted and conceptualised understanding that is found in the post-structural discourses that inform so much contemporary writing practice. Derrida, Cixous and Barthes all talk about writing, reading and textuality in terms of action¹⁷, but for them, its locus is in the semiotic relationship between language and the writing/reading subject as manifest in the voice or on the page, rather than in the physical relationship between the writing body and the material circumstances of the act of inscription itself - factors which are active prior to, and during, any textual composition that may or (as is the case in my live works) may not occur.

¹⁶ Described by Williamson (as cited earlier) as a vigorous interrogation of 'its structure and materials for conceptual resonance' (Williamson 2006:6). For performance art, central amongst its *structures* and *materials* would be time (duration), space (gallery/site), objects, materials, the body and, often, aspects of the work's socio-cultural context. An interrogation and exploration of these factors becomes the very substance of the work. What I am proposing is an application of this process to the act of writing. The body, objects and materials etc. are already there, inherent in the act, but usually are regarded as incidental, or secondary to its primary focus - the operations of language on the page/screen. I say 'usually', for again there are some notable exceptions which, although very different from my work, do demonstrate an awareness of the material and corporeal dynamics of the act of writing as a central component in its presentation. I am thinking of work such as Caroline Bergvall's text installation *éclat* presented at *The Institute of Art*, and the live, oral compositions of Steve Benson and David Antin.

¹⁷ These discussions are central to my research, as they foreground the development of my performance-based engagements with writing. As such they are dealt with recurrently throughout this thesis.

Similarly, numerous writers and critics engage with language, writing and materiality. Johanna Drucker, for example, focuses upon writing as a material and visual substance (Drucker 1994)¹⁸, establishing a line of enquiry that is picked up in practice by numerous writers working in an interdisciplinary context (primarily in relation to visual art) such as Caroline Bergvall in her use of painted and erased text in the installation *Say Parsley*¹⁹, and Ian Hamilton Finlay's use of non-literary media such as stone and wood. Whilst such examples are useful, insofar as they demonstrate the potential of an experimental approach to the material form that writing can take and (most importantly in terms of my own practice) the various substances and surfaces that can be drawn into its production, the conceptual emphasis is still placed firmly in the arena of the *written* (text), as opposed to the *writing* (performance).

¹⁸ Drucker's ideas about materiality and the way in which they relate to Roy Harris's work on Integrational Linguistics (Harris 2000) are briefly discussed in relation to my practice in Part 2.

¹⁹ The work included a line of text stencilled in lead onto a white wall. Specific words had been erased with white paint following exactly the shape of the original letters. Repeating the process created discrete, yet readable *letter reliefs*, the act of erasure enforcing an alternative presence.

Performance Art and Writing

It is rare for performance art to engage with the performance of writing in the way I am proposing. There are countless examples of writing being performed in various ways, the most common example being the reading or speaking of a text that has been prepared prior to the event²⁰. There are also many instances of writing (as in inscribing on a surface) being undertaken in performance works. Sometimes this writing takes the form of a re-writing, as in a kind of copying out, for example Lone Twin's 1998 performance *Stick*²¹, in which the performers copied out sections of text onto a tennis court in chalk, only for it to be erased through the playing of a match. On other occasions the writing is composed live (be it through intuitive, automatic or procedural means) as was the case in a piece made by Tertia Longmire²² in which a stream of text was written in reverse onto a moving roll of paper, to be read as legible in a strategically placed mirror. Whilst work such as this is important, in that it serves as a useful indicator for the location of my practice within the context of recent developments in interdisciplinarity, and does signal the arrival of the act of writing in the space of performance, it does not correlate entirely to the approach to performing writing that I am proposing. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the emphasis is again centred on the production of a text (in the conventional sense of the word)²³, and secondly, the relationship between the corporeal, writing subject, and the material conditions²⁴ through which the act happens, is entirely secondary in terms of the *works' work*, to the nature of the task itself.

There are some notable exceptions to the distinctions I have been drawing, and they tend to be found in practice that contends with writing in the form of physically driven phonic, or vocal

²⁰ Performance work of this type is only directly relevant to my research insofar as Artaud challenges it as being the basis of the theologically bound page/stage dichotomy that continues to prevail in conventional theatrical practice (Artaud 1958). The issue of theology in respect to language in general, and my own practice, is one that reoccurs throughout Part 2.

²¹ Presented as part of a performance programme at the Show Room Gallery in Birmingham.

²² Presented in 1999 at *In the Event of Text - A symposium on writing and ephemerality* organised by Writing Research Associates and hosted by the School of Theatre in Utrecht.

²³ I make this qualification, for as will be discussed in Part 2 through reference to Barthes' writing, the word *text*, much like *writing*, has a far wider remit in certain contemporary discourses than is generally accepted.

²⁴ I am thinking here of tools, surfaces, substances and objects.

inscription²⁵, and practice which engages writing as a ritual. I could offer no better example of the former than the work of Aaron Williamson, aspects of Brian Catling's work (physical interactions with the stuff of writing: inks, quills, libraries, breath...) being a clear example of the later. The work of both these artist/writers, particularly Williamson, has informed the development of my own work a great deal.

²⁵ Barthes refers to this kind of *vocal writing* as 'writing aloud' (Barthes 1990: 67) and it is granted specific attention in Part 2.

Analogy, Chiasmus and Inherence

The process of defining and locating the relationship between writing and performance that I have sought to harness in the practical element of this enquiry can be brought to a moment of provisional conclusion by thinking in terms of *analogy* and *chiasmus*.

The notion of writing being analogous to performance as in *performing is to performance as writing is to the written*, is, although a perfectly reasonable assertion, close, but not quite the relationship I've been driving at. A better model is provided by the chiasmus: performs writing / writes performing. This arrangement implies a degree of inherence that is vital to my practical methodology. That writing *is* performance (rather than can be performance, or can be performed, or can operate in various relationships to performance)²⁶ is a key assertion of this thesis, and one that has directly informed the way in which I have used performance art as a testing ground for my exploration of writing.

The notions of vocal inscription and ritual that I referred to in respect to Williamson and Catling have also been put to work in my own practice and they serve as good examples of the idea of *inherence* introduced above. The reason for the performance inherent in writing being so pronounced in vocal work such as Williamson's is the fact that the *act* of writing, and the writing produced, are absolutely indivisible²⁷. The vocalisations and the physical means by which they are engendered²⁸ are inseparable – they are the same thing. This 'return to corporeality' (Williamson 1996:35) captures the body of the subject and the subject of the writing within the same space – the body itself – thus

²⁶ I am not suggesting that these arrangements are false or inadequate but that they are not the main focus in the context of this research.

²⁷ This is not to be confused with Husserl's notion of the perceived proximity between the voice and the mind of the speaker providing the basis for a *true* language of *expression* (Harland 1987). A critique of this position based in Derrida's thought is discussed in Part 2.

²⁸ My use of this word serves as a fleeting reference to the way in which Williamson's vocal work has been informed by the approach to the *voice* taken in the critical writing of Cixous, who, in the context of her notion of a *feminine libidinal economy*, refers to it in terms of *giving*, through the metaphor of maternity (Cixous 1990). Part 2 expands on this relationship as it relates to my own practice.

enabling subjectivity to be articulated in a manner unavailable to disembodied modes of language and writing such as speech and working on the page²⁹.

The question of the voice³⁰ has been a central concern in much of my own performance work, although it is tackled, almost always, by silence³¹. In the absence of vocal sound (which marks the voice out as powerfully and strangely present)³² I have deployed the ritual aspect of writing mentioned above in respect to Catling. Focusing upon the qualities of writing's performance as ritual can affect a similar sense of *inherence* to that conferred by the embodied voice.

Although usually prescribed, ritual implies that the result of an action, or series of actions, is *written into* the specific manner in which those actions are carried out – the *way* that they are done is *what* is done – they are, in the Austinian sense, inherently performative³³. The act of writing, in these terms, is always ritual, although it is rarely dealt with as such in art and literature. I am sure that many writers are aware of the ritualistic aspects of the way they do writing – the positioning of the desk, the particular drink in a particular place, the lighting of a cigarette, physical postures and movements in relation to tools and technologies and so on – indeed, the Guardian Newspaper's regular feature on Writers' Rooms bears testament to the fact that they are very much a part of our public consciousness about writing. These aspects are, however, rarely presented as the substance of writing in their own right, but as ancillary to it. It is always the case that the way one writes affects what is written. In my work I am interested in the extent to which a focus upon the ritual in writing can determine that the way one writes *is* what is written. A version of this process is readily available in non-literary/art-based acts of writing, the best example being the signing of a signature or the ticking of a box etc. That actions such as these have a clear bearing on the status of the first person *I* and its relationship to proper (NB. *Propriety*) names, is worth noting, as it is something I explore in my performance work as

²⁹ The complex array of questions that come into play when thinking about the relationships between the body and writing, particularly in respect to notions of voice, reoccur throughout this thesis, but receive dedicated attention in sections (12-17).

³⁰ I have to put it in these terms, as the voice is hugely complex proposition in the context of questions about writing that can mean many things on many levels. It is encountered often as I account for the practical elements of this enquiry and is a central concern running through Part 2.

³¹ This aspect of my performance work has been informed by the issue of silence in Catling's practice that Williamson discusses in his essay *Audible Within: Brian Catling's Performance Soundings* (Williamson 1999). Far more important however, has been the way Williamson himself confronts questions of silence in his oracular works, a process that Ian Hunt focuses on in his introduction to the bookwork *Hearing Things* (Williamson 2001). In a more critical sense, the interplay between silence and subjectivity is broached via Derrida's critique of Husserl in Part 2.

³² The idea that the mark or act of making absent, serves also to reinforce presence (a recurring theme in my practice), refers to Derrida's notion of *différance* (Derrida 1978) that is discussed in Part 2.

³³ J.L. Austin uses the term *performative* in his *speech act theory* (Austin 1961) to describe types of utterance in which a performed event is contained within an act of saying, such as, *I name this ship...*

it seeks to contend with questions of subjectivity, the issue of the (my) name being particularly relevant. In fact, the signature is a feature of writing that has consistently preoccupied linguists and philosophers of language, and I support my own investigation of its substance with reference to Derrida's essay *Signature/Event/Context* (Derrida 2002), and the work of Roy Harris who makes the crucial point that the signature 'signifies by reference to its own making and the identity of the maker' (Harris 2000: 162).

In all three examples I have given of performance work that seeks to exploit the performance inherent in writing (my own, Williamson's and Catling's), the writing produced in the performance is pre-verbal³⁴. Through designated modes of performance practice the performer inhabits the space prior to, or leading up to, the conception of the word, whether voiced or inscribed. Capturing the notion of inherence, as I have described it, is contingent upon the locus of the work being directed at this stage in the writing process. This insures against the appearance of verbal language, so often granted conceptual priority in the arts³⁵, becoming the ultimate focus and relegating the inherence of the act to the status of the means rather than the end – albeit an end in which the means is inherent.

³⁴ The notion of the *pre-verbal*, whilst useful in this context, also warrants real care. It should not be taken as proposing any kind of tangible split, or point of distinction, between that which is deemed verbal, and that which is not – one only has to observe an infant learning to speak (and subsequently write) to see that such a proposal would be fallacious – rather, it seeks to emphasise the formative, often neglected stages in, and aspects of, the processes of language. The notion that writing is a vehicle ideally suited to an exploration of such processes is supported by Derrida's *general theory of language as writing* (Harland 1987), which, as is discussed in Part 2, suggests that the very *idea* of speech is reliant upon the *idea* of writing (Derrida 1978). Derrida bases this contention, which is not claiming that writing, in a conventional sense, comes first in historical or developmental terms, on a reading of Freud's essay *A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad* (Freud 1984). This reading then forms the basis for his assertion that all language can be understood in terms of writing that serves as the theoretical framework through which I develop my understanding of writing off the page.

The inherent performativity of pre-verbal writing is also of particular relevance when thinking about the issue of subjectivity. Interestingly enough, both ideas can be approached through considering aspects of developmental psychology. In Lacanian terms for example, the formulation of the subject results from the child's awareness of itself as distinct from the mother and its subsequent entry into society's language where it begins to think (and speak) in terms of *me*, *myself* and *I* (Lacan 1989). Both Williamson and Artaud challenge this view, confronting its logocentric/phonocentric bias by prioritising the body and claiming that 'other modes of language production – manual signing – lip reading – writing – have an ontogenic status' (Williamson 1996). So whilst Lacan suggests that the subject is traumatically split between the unconscious body and the proper language of society (otherness), Williamson's work, in picking up on Artaud's endeavours, proposes that the subject can be renewed by reinvesting in the point at which language and the body coalesce, and that this point is charged by writing (in the Derridean sense at least) insofar as it is inherent in performance. That this take on the relationship between language and subjectivity can be deemed to have succeeded in Williamson's work, but to have failed in Artaud's, comes down to the way in which Williamson has been able to embrace alternatives to the standard assumption that a viable sense of the self is achieved through acquiring authority and ownership over language. He finds such alternatives in rejecting propriety in language, in favour of what Cixous calls the *giff* in writing (Cixous 1991).

³⁵ This prioritising of the word as the stable point at which significance is reached is often referred to as *logocentrism*.

Performance (writing) and the Page

Both Williamson and Catling also produce writing for the page that operates in a number of relationships to the *idea* and practice of performance³⁶. This is important in terms of my own research practice, which has been driven by my desire to establish a relationship with writing that enables the production of page-based texts as part of a wider practice that seeks to engage with language, writing and subjectivity, at their many levels of interaction.

Whilst Williamson and Catling both use page-based writing as a means by which to document³⁷ performance work, it is their production of texts that exist and operate independent from performance art work, that is of particular interest to me: not independent in the sense that they represent an entirely separate and unrelated practice, but independent in that they are not tied to particular performance works in any kind of exclusively scripting function. These texts seem to relate to performance in two key ways: (1) their production is informed by a particular awareness of writing as an act gained through formalised engagements with its inherent performativity, and (2) through the semiotic performance of the texts themselves³⁸ and the way in which that performance is tackled by the reader as another type of writing³⁹. The prospect of my developing texts of this type, that Caroline Bergvall suggests 'read in relation to the *act* of writing, the performance of writing itself' (Bergvall 2000: 63), was a significant motivation behind the formulation of this research.

As a kind of bridge between pre-verbal performance art works and the production of explicitly page-based texts, I have made a number of works in other media that combine performance and text,

³⁶ This particularly relates to the development of my own work covered in Part 2.

³⁷ The documentation of performance work is an issue that has roused much discussion in recent times. Various modes of writing (often presented in combination with photographic imagery) have been employed in attempts to capture and archive ephemeral practice. Indeed, I have needed to engage in such a process myself when providing accounts of my live work in this thesis, yet writing used in this way is not its discursive focus. For other examples see Catling's book *The Blindings* (Catling 1995), and www.aaronwilliamson.com

³⁸ This is sometimes referred to as writing performing on the page and it necessarily invokes issues of space, the visual, materiality, semiotic and semantic play, and the presence of a second performer – that is, the reader – who by dint of their reading being a physical and (in the case of texts like this) compositional act, is at once something of a writer.

³⁹ The notion of reading being understood in terms of writing is discussed, and to a greater extent demonstrated, through the inclusion of a number of my page-based works in Part 2. The idea, in this case, is enabled by referring back to Derrida's *general theory* and is framed by Barthes' notion of the text as a demonstrative site of generative meaning (Barthes 1977).

with an emphasis on the speaking voice⁴⁰. In collaboration with the composer and sound artist David Prior, I have made works in both DVD and audio formats, enabling the focus of my practice to begin shifting into some of the modes of writerly engagement demanded by the page whilst retaining a foothold in the physicality of performance art.

In addition to serving as the ideal framework through which to interrogate the inherence of performance in writing, performance art is also of significant value in terms of the emphasis in this research on questions of subjectivity, for it has developed a set of conceptual and compositional precepts, formal conventions and presentational parameters specific to explorations of the status of the subject⁴¹. An achievement attained through the development of a practice within which the core elements of recent ontological enquiry – the body, time, materiality and the subjects' relationship to the other – can be reconstituted within a designated space of debate that maintains no recourse to what I shall argue later are the reductive theological structures of traditional theatrical performance. I shall pose questions of writing through the opportunity of performance, re-casting its procedural dynamics within the conceptual framework of a practice that foregrounds questions of subjectivity through strategies of process and presentation usually dismissed from the scope of writing.

⁴⁰ Catling has also produced work in this vein – see particularly the *Cyclops* pieces and their texts (Catling 2001) – yet it is a vast area of practice that, in this case, is only focussed on insofar as it relates to the development of my own practice and the theoretical issues at work in this thesis.

⁴¹ In addition to Williamson and Catling, examples of performance art being used as a means of exploring questions of subjectivity can be found in the work of many artists such as Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovich, Rudolph Schwarzkogler and Stuart Brisley.

Critical Narratives

As suggested earlier, the development of my practice has taken place within hearing of some specific critical discourses. The general reading that has supported and informed my enquiries has been far reaching and diverse – from philosophical approaches to language and subjectivity to psychoanalytic writings; from theological texts to a wide range of contemporary poetry. From within these wider reading initiatives, a particular cluster of writers emerged, and began to form the theoretical framework through which my research has been advanced. This cluster originates in my interest in the work of writer and artist Aaron Williamson.

In Williamson I found an artist/writer whose work presented a combinatorial approach to performance and writing in which the two elements are indivisible. Although he has produced both gallery based performance work and texts on the page, the hierarchical logo/phonocentric structures of the traditional page/stage dichotomy that defines so much live practice that involves writing, are avoided. This he achieves by treating writing as a poetic means of articulating the body's relationship to language. In this sense, writing is, for Williamson, an intensely physical, material activity, that can just as well take place in the voice and the gallery space as it can on the page. The notion of vocal writing – what Barthes calls 'writing aloud' (Barthes 1975:94) – and *the question of the voice* more generally, are discussed in Part 2. What is important in terms of my research practice, is the way in which it signalled the idea of writing off the page, and a subsequent realignment of the text in response to its altered status as neither the sole site of writing nor a mere repository for the voice of the writer. Williamson's development of such a practice was informed by the writing of Antonin Artaud and his proposals for a new language of performance (Artaud 1958) in which the voice, the body and visual materials are raised to the status of poetry – 'a language of signs, gestures and attitudes having an ideographic value' (Artaud 1958:39). Artaud's insistence on a new way of performing writing was driven by his own sense of subjective and ontological crisis in his relationship to language. The relationship between this crisis

and his writing, is considered in depth in two essays by Jacques Derrida⁴², both of which have been significant to Williamson, and which play a significant role in Derrida's wider project to develop a radically new way of thinking about writing as a means of challenging the theologically driven primacy of the voice that pervades the western philosophical tradition. As a thinker who is concerned so much with new (often performative) ways of thinking about writing as part of discourses on the ontological status of the subject, Derrida has been a significant figure in the course of my research.

Equally important is Hélène Cixous. Often associated with Derrida, with whom she has many concerns in common, Cixous has written extensively on the practice of writing; maintaining an emphasis on its qualities as a physically driven act. For her, however, writing's relationship to both the body and questions of subjectivity is necessarily caught up in a politics of sexual difference, yet like Derrida (for whom difference in a wider sense is a central theme) she sees in writing the means by which the challenges of subjective understanding in a post-cartesian frame can be accepted in progressive and joyful ways.

There is a sense in which the crisis endured by Artaud was, in part, a result of his inability to accept the economies of sexual difference that Cixous proposes, and that the success of Williamson's work lies in the fact that he has. Indeed, Cixous thought has been an important factor in the progression of his practice.

These four, related writers (Derrida and Cixous in particular), in their varying foci upon writing, the body and subjectivity, have contributed a great deal to the theoretical perspectives and positions through which my research has been developed. Dedicated sections in Part 2 reflect this influence.

⁴² 'La Parole Soufflée' and 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' (Derrida 1978).

A: Performing (not) Writing

9

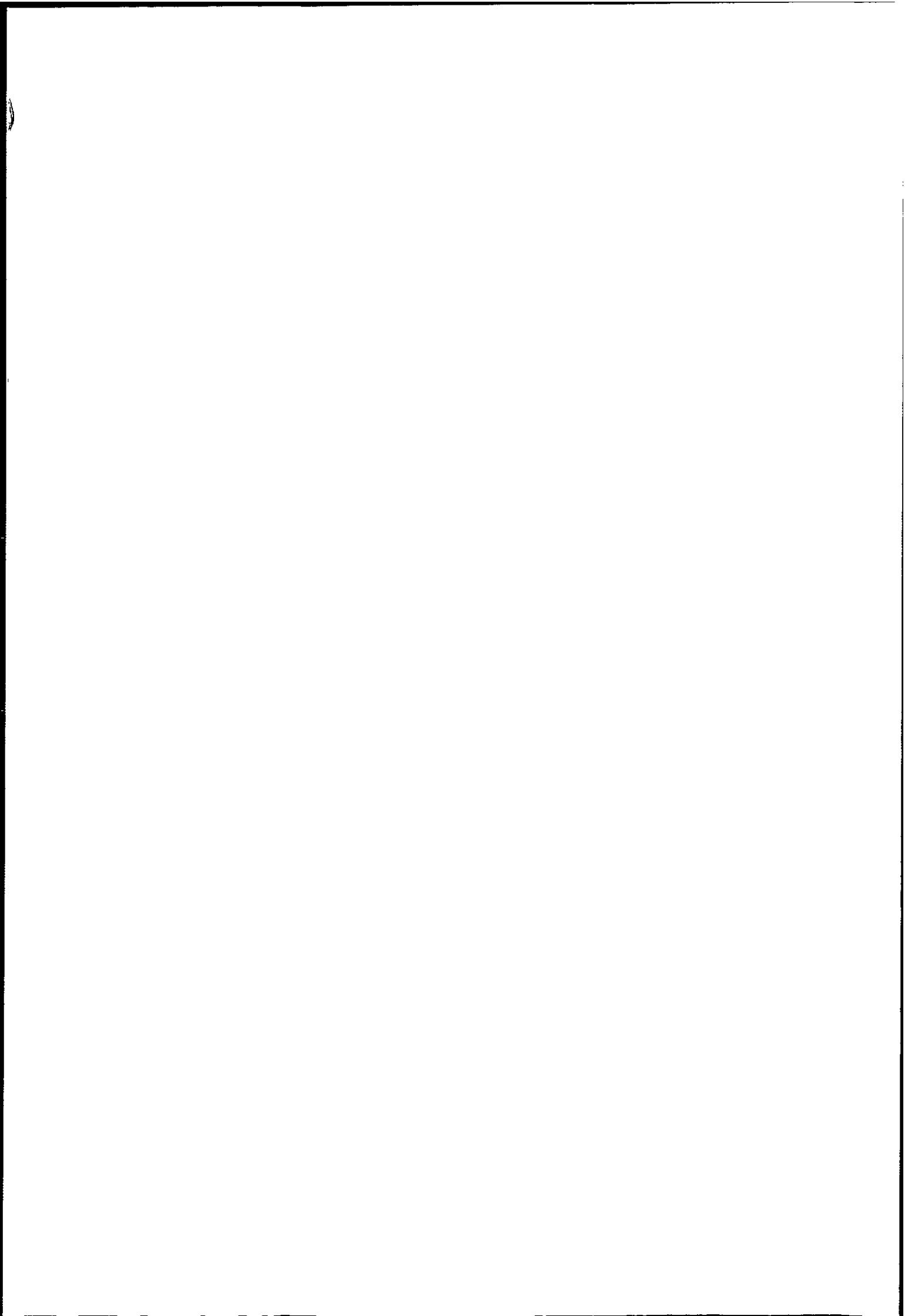
The Difficult Impossible: Inhabiting the Impasse

The malaise arising from the disappearance of meaning, from the trials imposed by the loss of self-identity and the love-object, induce a state of crisis which is aggravated by intensive efforts to decompose all constituted forms. Language, the body and the subject reach their own limits in this trial imposed by the impossible...

– Marie-Christine Lala, 'The Hatred of Poetry' (cited in Gill 1995:107)

At the outset of this research my practice as a writer was beginning to ask questions and make demands to which I was unable to readily answer or respond. It therefore presented a potentially discursive site in a state of urgent readiness for excavation. The questions my practice engendered were fundamental: Why am I doing writing? What is it that I desire of writing? What is my relationship, as a writing subject, to such questions and why, in the absence of any externally viable response to them, does it feel so essential to continue writing at all? All questions that emerged less through an enhanced and advanced position of knowledge and understanding in terms of the status and function of writing and my relationship to it as author/producer, than through an almost converse scenario characterised by loss, disappearance and a faltering articulacy proceeding to a condition of almost total linguistic paralysis – that is, to silence, to not writing.

Considered within the broader context of modernist (and so called post-modern) writing practices, such a scenario is hardly unprecedented. Numerous writers have found themselves confronted by variants and versions of these core questions, in some cases leading to a similar descent into the space of a paradoxical impasse – *I must write. I don't know how or why, yet I must* – or as versioned into the concluding words of Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*, 'You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.' (Beckett 1979: 382) – and many of them (Beckett being a point in case) have developed strategies for a practice of writing that effectively works through, with or against this impasse, revelling and revolting



at its implications for the generation and acquisition of meaning and subjectivity, formulating modes and methods of deploying writing that account for, accommodate and proceed through harnessing the presence of absence, disappearance and loss. It is not my intention to offer any kind of survey of such practices, nor even to focus upon a particular few, but to testify to the processes, methods and correctives I have instilled within my own practice in an endeavour to overcome the impasse, or as Helene Cixous puts it, to 'get past the wall' (Cixous 1991: ix) – a desire, described on her behalf by Susan Suleiman, 'to throw off the constraints, inner and outer, which join together to "forbid one to write"' (Cixous 1991: ix).

As has been discussed in Part 1, the methodological strategy (in terms of both practice and research) I have employed to contend with the challenge Cixous describes has involved, in a range of ways, engagements with notions of *performance*, as they come to bear on my writing practice. Such a methodological manoeuvre marks, in theoretical terms, the activation of a mode knowing and intellectual engagement that differs from that derived from more conventional practices of critical reading and thinking. This shift does not denote a movement away from or abandonment of these kinds of research processes. Rather, it constitutes an endeavour to adopt a combinatorial position in respect of these two modes of theorising: critical readings and performed action. In research terms, this move has not only been determined by the sense of practice-based necessity described earlier in response to the experience of impasse, but also in response to the performance and corporeal orientation of certain critical texts, primarily those of Cixous.

The Difficult Impossible

The title of my thesis – *The Difficult Impossible* – is an attempt to capture this paradoxical dynamic as it bears on my own practice, and is constructed by referring outwards to two other texts – Helene Cixous' essay 'Difficult Joys' (Cixous 1990) and Georges Bataille's book *The Impossible* (Bataille 1991). Both texts, in their own way, offer something of a working through, or approach, to a perceived set of tensions at play between ideas of the *author*, the *writing* and the *truth* – that is, the scene of the impasse characterised by Cixous as 'the wall(s)' (Cixous 1991: 3), and by Bataille as 'the impossible', or

'the hatred of poetry' (Bataille 1991: 10). They suggest that it is through entering and relieving the space of such tensions that writing finds its vocation – its *why*, and its *what*. The ways in which Cixous and Bataille contend with the tensions and problems that they identify when considering writing and subjectivity are quite different, yet they both develop a discourse on writing that begins to encroach upon the concerns of performance. Yet due to the literary tradition (and its prioritising of the page) within which they both operate, the apparent move towards performance is subject to a sense of foreclosure, as the conditions of their disciplinary context maintain no tangible mechanisms through which to extend the practice (act) of writing into the space of performance. There is a sense in which their work wants (needs, almost) to progress in this direction, but short of the capacity to do so, it circulates within the scene of impasse itself and seeks to develop writing strategies and theoretical trajectories to accommodate its implications. Nonetheless, their work has shed considerable light on the condition of impasse, and has been helpful in enabling me to understand its make-up to the extent that I have been able to develop performance writing strategies in my endeavour to process my practice through its grip. Particularly important have been Cixous' insights into the idea that the subject's relationship to writing (and any crisis or impasse that relationship may incur) is to a large extent determined by factors of biography – gender, familial circumstances, nationality and so on.

In her essay 'Coming to Writing' Cixous describes the impasse or difficulties incurred by the question(s) of writing and subjectivity as a series of *walls* (Cixous 1991). She describes these walls, that together may 'forbid one to write' (Cixous 1991: ix), in terms of 'history, my story, my origin, my sex' (Cixous 1991: ix). The assertion that the subject's relationship to writing is co-ordinated by biographical, socio-cultural and physiological conditions is one that maintains significant resonance in my own experience of writing.

The theme of the *impossible* in Bataille's writing is a complex one. The triptych of texts published in book form under the title *The Impossible* (Bataille 1991) was originally called *The Hatred of Poetry*. Of this shift Bataille writes that 'hardly anyone understood the meaning of the original title, which is why I now prefer to talk in terms of *L'impossible*. I admit that this new title is no easier to understand. But one day it might be' (Bataille 1991:10). Yet despite the inherent difficulty in approaching this aspect of his thought, it has been important, in the context of my research, to do so.

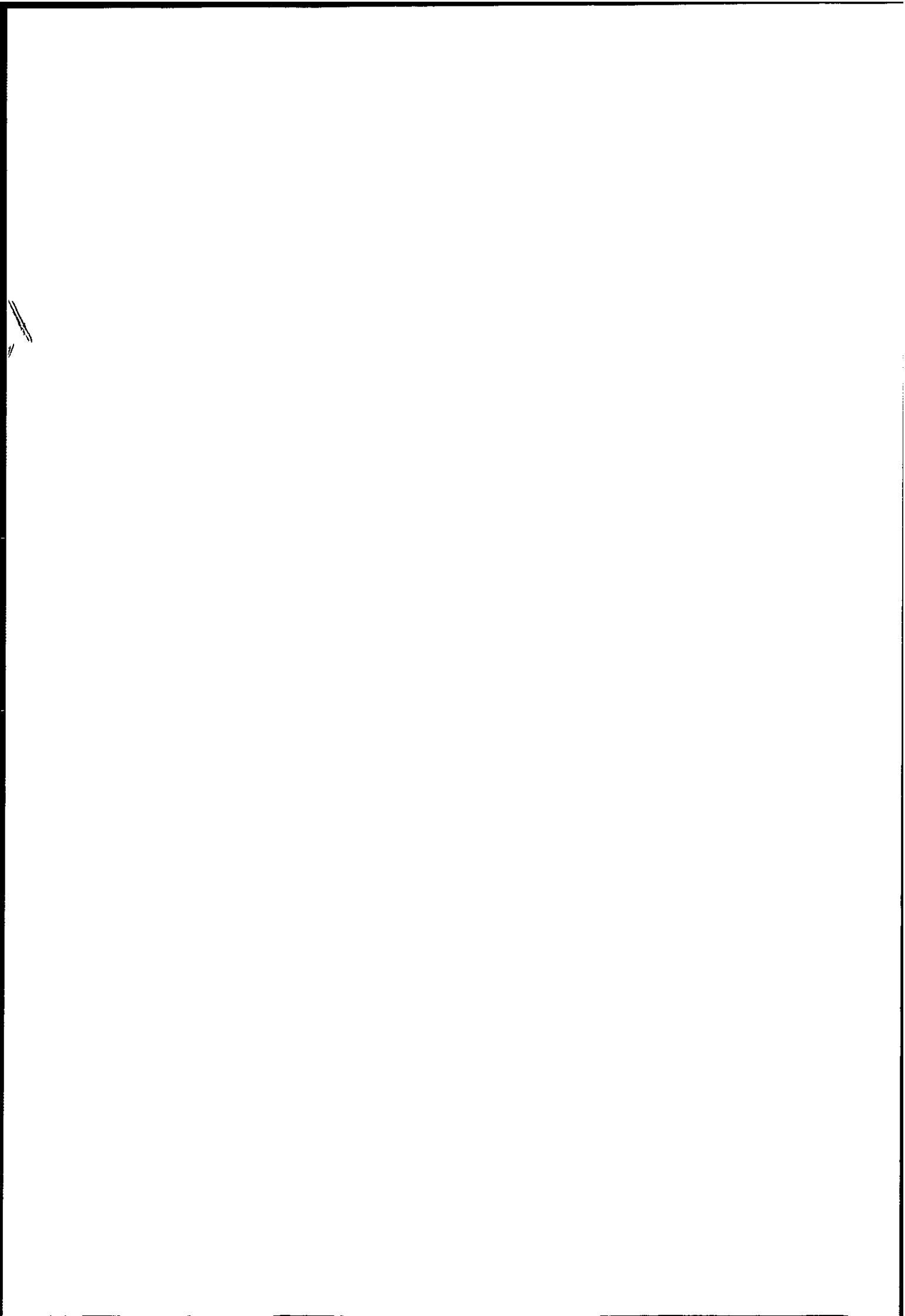
The reason being, that the theme of the impossible, whilst maintaining implications for a range of disciplines, finds its essence in the dynamics of an impasse that for Bataille, is grounded in language and communication. As Marie-Christine Lala puts it:

Understanding the meaning of the hatred of poetry entails considering the role played by the impossible in the circuit of communication. For it is in the hatred of poetry that Georges Bataille discovers that *part maudite* – that doomed part – of exchange, whose use value he generalises through the concept of the impossible not only in terms of textual poetics but in terms of logic, economics and religion. (cited in Gill 1995:105)

The notion of the impossible becomes more relevant still to my research, as Bataille locates the means by which the subject might contend with its implications, in an approach to writing that (as is the case with Cixous) circulates around the prospect of performance without the disciplinary or procedural apparatus to fully engage its possibilities.

Bataille uses the concept of the impossible to describe 'the subjectivity which is a problematic feature of man' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:106). The problem relates (as it does for Cixous) to the relationship between the subject and the object (other) of its desire. Bataille considers language to be the arbiter of a process in which the 'disappearance of the object is at stake' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:106) and writing (of a certain type) to be a means by which the subject can process such a loss into the substance of a practice that is affirmative and capable of 'liberating the spark through which life is renewed' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:109). Like Cixous, Bataille refers to this type of writing as poetry – not poetry in a general sense however (and certainly not poetry in formal sense), but poetry understood as referring to writing that works through a refusal to repress *hatred* – hatred being, for Bataille, 'the violence and the vital energy of truth' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:109) that emerges through the 'refusal to amalgamate and reconcile everything irreconcilable in a blind, inner brilliance. It lies in choosing Artaud against Breton' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:109). For Bataille it is the acceptance of hatred that makes writing authentic and capable of truth (albeit through capturing the movement of loss and disappearance) and prevents it from becoming the 'void of poetry, only beautiful poetry' (Bataille 1991:161). This kind of writing he rejects, seeing it as 'pure rhetoric, or poetic verbiage' (Lala cited in Gill 1995:108) and turns his efforts towards its opposite – hatred and the impossible.

The performic, or performance orientated, discourses of Bataille and Cixous are understandable as such due to certain persistent foci and textual (poetic) qualities. Notably, in both



cases, the body is frequently written as the locus of a fraught and contested relationship between language and subjectivity. Furthermore, writing is positioned as a means by which a necessarily corporeal focus of discourses around the question of subjectivity can be captured and engaged with on a conceptually and materially consistent basis. That is to say, that writing is taken on as a mode of activity sufficiently physical in its own means and methods to apprehend the embodied dynamics of the relationship between language and subjectivity on (and in) its own terms. Take this, from Cixous' essay *Coming to Writing*, as an example: "So for each text, another body. But in each the same vibration: the something in me that marks all my books is a reminder that my flesh signs the book, it is rhythm. Medium my body, rhythmic my writing" (Cixous1991:53).

As I have suggested however, the ways in which the work of writers such as Cixous and Bataille encroach upon the territory of performance only go so far. Their work, for the most part, remains subject to the strictures of the page. Whilst the texts themselves, through thematic concerns and poetic frames of reference, clearly announce an engagement with the body as a source of textual production and with writing as a performed act, in neither case (and this is usually applies where sustained critical approaches to writing and subjectivity are concerned) are methodological strategies developed that might enable direct and procedurally investigative encounters with the corporeal and performed dynamics of writing practice, particularly as it relates to questions of subjectivity.

My own research practice has sought to address this point of foreclosure where performance is concerned and to develop work that activates performance as a salient and critically productive mode of writing practice. This shift promotes, though establishing an alternative artistic position to that described in Part 1 (the impasse), a sense of praxis that takes my work forward in terms of a conceptually appropriate mode of critical engagement and, as part of this, a methodological approach to making and writing.

The remainder of Part 2 of the thesis shifts between fragments of autobiographical narrative and commentaries on and examples of practice supported by a number of returns to theoretical trajectories initiated in Part 1. The aim is to articulate the process outlined above.

My engagement with autobiography warrants some additional comment at this point, as it relates very much to both my reading of Cixous, and my prioritising of performance. In *Coming to*

Writing, Cixous describes her own relationship to writing practice as one that has been driven, shaped, and at times prohibited by autobiographical conditions and lived experience. Her work to contend with those aspects of her social, cultural and familial identity that have made the practice of writing difficult, or even forbidden, has had a considerable impact upon the directions her writing has taken, both in terms of its thematic concerns and its textual constructions. This is particularly so as regards her work's corporeal bias and its preoccupation with the status and function of the first person subject position from both reading and writing perspectives. As I have suggested, it is just such qualities that seem to push her writing towards the conditions and possibilities of performance.

These aspects of Cixous' work have informed my own a great deal, particularly in terms of my own engagement with autobiography, and the way it has contributed to my emphasis on performed action as a mode of critical enquiry and writing practice. Cixous writes:

Writing was in the air around me. Always close, intoxicating, invisible, inaccessible. I undergo writing! It came to me abruptly. One day I was tracked down, besieged, taken. It captured me. I was seized. From where? I knew nothing about it. From some bodily region. I don't know where. "Writing" seized me, gripped me, around the diaphragm, between the stomach and the chest, a blast dilated my lungs and I stopped breathing (Cixous 1991:8)

As I shall go on to discuss, aspects of my own life and childhood have, I believe, shaped my own relationship to writing. This process of shaping has pushed my work into a particularly close set of relationships with the body. This is certainly due, in part, to the strong religious and theological bias that characterised much of my early life. At the same time, these doctrinal and theological strictures installed within my relationship to language a kind of transcendental imperative, the fallibility of which lies at the heart of my experience of impasse. My prioritising of action, as both a point of focus with the process of writing, and as a practical strategy for research, emerged (as explained in Part 1) from the experience of impasse as it pushed to the fore the inherent performative dynamics of writing. It has subsequently been developed and deployed critically and methodologically in response to my engagement with Cixous, particularly her emphasis of questions of subjectivity and writing as having a strong autobiographical dimension.

The Ascent of Croagh Patrick

I am he who, in order to be, must whip his innateness.

– Antonin Artaud, '(Artaud 1976:xix)

What is written, striving to confirm the corporeality guiding its demarcation into being. Anchoring into the body its blood, a type of faith in the fixity of what is real.

– Aaron Williamson, 'Exuviating The Text' (Williamson 1993:85/6)

When I was not I, my (m)other (then the baby's mother, for I was neither me, nor yet known to be him) ascended Croagh Patrick on her knees. Croagh Patrick (Cruach Phadraig), or *St. Patrick's Mountain*, is found in the West of Ireland not far from the small town of Charlestown. It is for many of the Catholic faithful a place of ritual pilgrimage. Every year on the last Sunday in July many make the ascent to the mountain's summit. Some climb with bare feet. A few, like my mother, endeavour to reach the peak upon their knees.

The narrative history of Celtic Christianity suggests that it was from atop this particular mountain that St. Patrick finally drove all snakes from Ireland. An act he achieved, it is said, either with the assistance of a sacred staff, or by throwing a bell (*The Black Bell of St. Patrick*) down the mountainside on completing a forty day fast. Whether apocryphal or not, these events are symptomatic of the predilection for performative treatments of objects and the body that persist in Judeo-Christian mythology and doctrine. Indeed, my mother's decision to make the pilgrimage on her knees was founded in this tradition. The idea that physical pain (whether as penance, an act of contrition or an attempt to approximate the sufferings of Christ) can provoke a closeness of understanding in one's relationship with God is an aspect of Catholicism to which my Mother readily subscribed. Her knees, as a result of the ritual, were damaged to the extent that surgery was eventually required. Large scars now run down the side of each kneecap.

Obviously I did not witness my mother's ascent of *The Reek* (the name given locally to Croagh Patrick) although I was, in a sense, there. It has however been recounted to me on many

occasions, and always in the context of a desire to impart the value and importance of piety and self-sacrifice in acquiring a sense of the 'truth of being' (Derrida 1974: 20) through the 'infinite understanding of God' (Derrida 1974: 11)¹. It is this aspect of my mother's *performance*² and its retelling throughout my childhood that has affected me at a deep level. The idea that an awareness of one's true being is to be attained through an understanding of God's grace and that such an understanding requires the negation of worldly desires, the flesh and the self, was one that pervaded many aspects of my childhood and adolescence. Not only was there the influence of my mother's Roman Catholic devotion and the mass attendance and various doctrinal practices it incurred, but also the fact that my father is a high church Anglican priest. The marked religiosity of my family life and upbringing, in school and in churches of both denominations, maintained an all encompassing frame of reference within which I endeavoured to find my way in the world and develop a sense of myself – processes which eventually came to require writing.

Performing Writing / Writing the Body

But prior to writing (as an activity or practice) coming into play, it was the combined impact of performance (my understanding of which was at this stage derived almost entirely from religious practices and narratives) and certain notions of *being a writer* (in terms of a performed

¹ Derrida's development of a *general theory of language as writing* (Harland 1987) involves a sustained critique of the structures and strictures of Judeo-Christian theology and their prevalence within the trajectory of western thought. The aspects of this critique that are relevant to this thesis and worth flagging up at this stage in the discussion are those which bear most directly on the *performance inherent in writing* and his proposals for a number of different ways of understanding writing as extending well beyond the confines of the page. These two areas of interest are very much related in Derrida's thought and they find a point of explicit cohesion in his readings of Artaud (Derrida 1978) that I discuss later. Artaud's life and writing depict a man whose relationship to language (much like Cixous' and Bataille's) was fraught by a point of impasse. For him the problem originated in the role of God as a legitimising agency for meaning and subjectivity (much the same role being entertained in the ritual ascent of Croagh Patrick) that he perceived as enacting theft upon his thought and speech inducing a 'lack of being' (Derrida 1978: 171) and the 'scandal of thought separated from life' (Derrida 1978: 171). Artaud (as I shall show), in the context of his *Theatre of Cruelty* (Artaud 1958), endeavours to confront the tyranny of the 'transcendental signified' (Derrida 1974: 20) by expelling God from the stage and producing a 'nontheological space' (Derrida 1978: 235). The production of such a space involves an approach to language and writing that is driven by the dynamics of performance and a desire to confirm the ontological status of the subject through the establishment of the body as the locus of true meaning.

² My mother's ascent of Croagh Patrick provides a good example of the type of performance referred to in my introduction that although not formalised and designated by way of art nonetheless functions through a self consciously aware physical articulation of identity in a process of transformation.

mode of identity construction) that began to preoccupy me. These are both preoccupations that, in my mind at least, are connected to the private symbolism³ of my mother's exploits on *The Reek*.

The performance of ascending Croagh Patrick, was not, as I have said, one that I witnessed. Rather, it is an event that I have accessed through its retelling – a retelling that has been prompted through the residual trace affects⁴ the climb had upon my mother's body. That is to say, that it was often enquiries as to the cause of the scars on her knees that instigated the telling of the story. The scars hold a fascination for me that I consider to be working on two levels: firstly, the simple fact that their presence serves as a visual and physical way into the scene of a performance from which I was absent, and secondly because they offer the first memorable instance of my becoming aware of the body as a *site* that can be marked and transformed as part of a process of developing subjectivity and a sense of being. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) De Certeau suggests that the body of the subject is written by the modalities of the other, the demarcation of the body as parchment confirming the subject's corporeal cultural status. He continues by proposing that in some cases this text repeats itself as 'a living memory of this experience aroused when reading touches the body at the points where the scars of the unknown text have long been imprinted' (De Certeau 1984 :141). So there is a sense in which I was (although not at this stage in my life a writer in practice) becoming acutely aware of the body as a site that is written and that the means by which such demarcations can be construed as modes of subjective affirmation⁵. Such forms of ritual bodily inscription became further ingrained in my consciousness through my

³ My particular use of the term *symbolism* is pointing out towards two specific discourses – those of Julia Kristeva and Carl Jung. Kristeva (via Lacan) uses the terms *symbolic* to designate the realm of language that the subject begins entering on becoming aware of its distinctness from the mother (Kristeva 1980). The state of mergedness with the mother that Lacan calls the *imaginary* (Lacan 1989) is modelled in a slightly different way by Kristeva through her notions of the *semiotic* and the *chora*. For Kristeva the *semiotic* is a kind of 'safe holding space provided by the mother' (Hunt and Sampson 2006: 14) which (in reference to Plato) she calls the *chora*. It is in this imaginary space that subjectivity 'begins to find form through bodily feelings, rhythms, gestures and sound' (Hunt and Sampson 2006: 14). Kristeva suggests that the pre-linguistic realm of the semiotic maintains a role in processes of signification and meaning making within the realm of the symbolic. She identifies it as being especially present in poetic language that for her 'as the power to disrupt our tendency to take on fixed identities in language and helps us to be *subjects-in-process* (Kristeva 1998), constantly in flux between the given and created dimensions of ourselves' (Hunt and Sampson 2006: 15).

The Jungian notion of *symbolism* (which in fact fits well with Kristeva's notions of the *semiotic* and *symbolic* in language) is developed out from the following basis defining: 'What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown or hidden from us' (Jung 1964: 20).

Both these takes on symbolism are pertinent not only in the context of my developmental response to the visual, sensorial and psychological conditions of the significant events currently being discussed, but also in the context of (in the case of Jung) the imagery (materials / objects / actions) presented in my performance work and (in the case of Kristeva) my approach to language and reading in writing on the page

⁴ It is worth noting that trace is the term that Derrida uses (Derrida 1978) to describe his extended notion of writing.

⁵ Other examples of similar processes can be found in practices of tattooing and scarification – see *Modern Primitives* (Juno 1989).

repeated exposure to those forms of liturgical practice, such as the making of a cross on the forehead in baptismal rites or on Ash Wednesday, that involve the direct marking of the body⁶. In her book *Volatile Bodies* Elisabeth Grosz discusses what she calls 'the textualisation of the body' describing such acts that 'assert that the body is a page or material surface' (Grosz 1994:117) as subverting the standard distinction between the psychic/phenomena driven interior and the socially demarcated exterior. In this way the 'dialectics of inside and outside' referred to by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (Bachelard 1994: 211) are denied a sense of geometric fixity:

Outside and inside form a dialectical division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. Logicians draw circles that overlap or exclude each other, and all their rules immediately become clear. Philosophers, when confronted with inside and outside, think in terms of being and non-being. (Bachelard 1994:212)

Here Bachelard draws our attention to the relationship between *the dialectics of inside and outside* and the philosophical domain of ontology (being). There are two takes on this relationship that provide useful insights into the kinds of ritual demarcations of the body being discussed here (in particular the significance of my mother's scars). Firstly, there is the notion (prompted above by Grosz) that inscribing the flesh can render present (in exterior, visual and corporeal terms) the socially absent substance of interiorized subjectivity in such a way that the inscriptions maintain both a material and physiological dialogue with their inner source – a kind of blurring of boundaries between the inner and outer life of the embodied subject through which the locus of ontological enquiry becomes tantalizingly felt. In the second instance, there are the notions of *here* and *there*, which Bachelard suggests are 'faint repetitions of inside and outside' (Bachelard 1994:212). The dialectics of here and there have, he suggests, 'been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determinism' (Bachelard 1994:212). Bachelard is thinking of the use of the terms here and there in partnership with the term *being*, as in *being-here* and *being-there*, and the way in which ontological considerations are often 'sharply summarised in a geometrical fixation' (Bachelard 1994:213). I propose that the scars upon my mother's knees act as a physical testament to her having been-there

⁶ I think it is important to note (in terms of the impact these events and practices have had on my work as a writer and performance artist) that my memories of childhood exposure to writing that are most pronounced and feel most significant, are those that involve non-verbal forms of ritual inscription, as opposed to literary or textual content.

and to the notion that a ritual habitation of a specific place can write into and onto the body the social, cultural or religiously determined ontological constructs that the place is assumed to contain. Such geometries of being can, Bachelard warns, 'easily relegate intimate being to an exteriorized place' (Bachelard 1994: 213), which for him would be to miss the true dynamism of the relationship between questions of being and inside and outside and here and there. He suggests that 'entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojournings, a refrain with endless verses' (Bachelard 1994: 214). My mother's scars, through being a trace of there in the ever present here, enable something of the circuitous, narrative dynamics of Bachelard's take on ontology to be realised. They are, as I have suggested, only active in my own imagination insofar as they stand as an interface between the absence of a particular place (Croagh Patrick) and the ritual act of ontological affirmation that once took place there (my mother's ascent) and the corporeal presence (the scars) of that action's narrative trajectory within the body of the subject and the social space it inhabits and of which I am a part. The scars function as a fulcrum between the *then* and the *now*, the *here* and the *there*, the *inside* and the *outside*. With a degree of retrospection I can see that this could stand as a good a description as any of what I would come to desire of writing.

Exile, Family and the Name

Exile – real or imaginary exile – presides over the destiny of writers. Exile as one of the metaphors, one of the structures of depropriation.

– *Helene Cixous* (Cixous 1990:12)

The narrative of my mother's ascent of Croagh Patrick, as accessed through its being permanently inscribed upon the surface of her body, presents (along with the other examples of liturgical inscription I have mentioned) a model for the relationship between writing and performance that has, as I shall show, resurfaced in the context of my practice. Whilst the wider theological reasoning that motivates the rituals of liturgy and the performance of religiosity contributed to the impasse I experienced in my writing practice, the processes and procedures of the rituals and actions themselves have been reconstituted within my performance work as the means by which the impasse is explored and interrogated. Rather than deploying performance and ritual action (performance art) in the interests of negating the body and the self so as to better ascend a vertical axis of sublimation towards the location of being in the 'infinite understanding of God' (Derrida 1974:11), it is turned in quite the opposite direction and used as a means of grounding the advancement of subjective understanding within the body and its relationship to language. Such an approach to performance art is not without precedent⁷. In his introduction to Aaron Williamson's book *Hearing Things* (Williamson 2001) Ian Hunt suggests that, 'performance has, for particular reasons, been a branch of art where religious frameworks – noticeably the audience's expectation of transformation from witnessing an event - survive' (cited in Williamson 2001:10). Indeed, the process of turning the terms and conditions of religious performance back on its own linguistic, theological and ontological agendas, is one that is also found in the work of Artaud (see section 21) in his attempts to establish a discourse and experience of subjectivity that signals a return to corporeality.

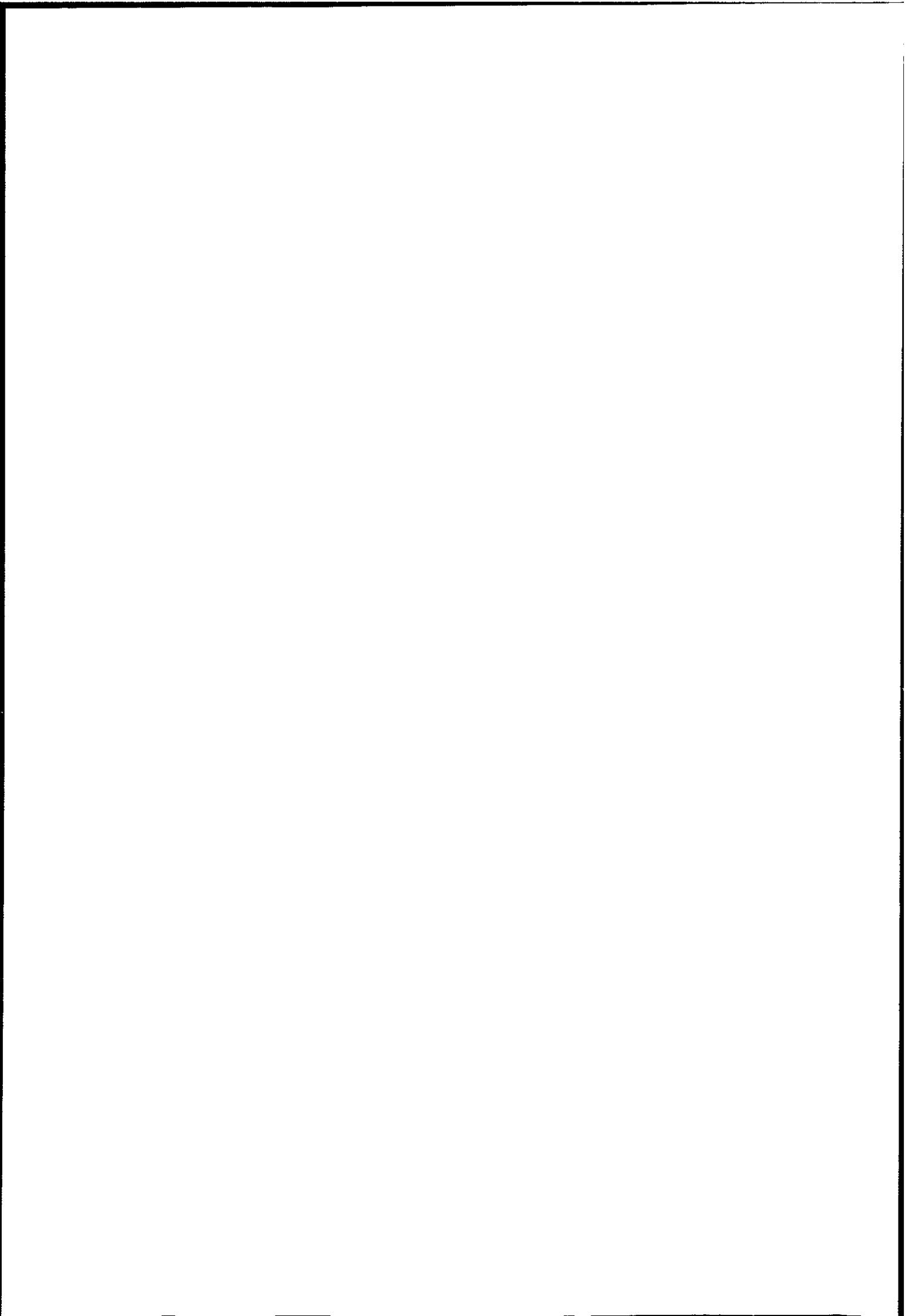
⁷ Examples of the subversion of religious ritual in performance art can be found in the work, amongst others, of Ron Athey, Marina Abramovich and the Vienna Action Group.

Ireland, Exile and an Alternative Genealogy

The significance for my mother of Croagh Patrick as a pilgrimage site is due, in the first instance, to her Catholicism, but it is also a result of her being Irish. Both the Irish side of my family history, and Ireland as a country, have had a significant bearing on my *coming to writing*. My mother's family all died before I was born. This, combined with a strange reticence on her part to disclose any but the barest details of her early life, created a vacant space of absence and loss through which I was able to project my own burgeoning identity. An idea of Ireland, to which I felt connected through my mother, presented me with a framework within which to construct an alternative sense of national identity and genealogy. For me this process centred on notions of being a writer.

Whilst my mother may have been reticent in revealing the details of her own Irish life and childhood, she (becoming aware of my own predilection for literature) frequently made a point of recounting aspects of Ireland's literary heritage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she referred most often to Joyce and Beckett, both of whom lived (at times) in areas of South Dublin close to her own family home in Blackrock. My interest in these writers at this point in my life had little to do with their actual writing (although I was beginning to read their work). Rather, I became preoccupied with accounts of their lives found largely in biographies. What I developed through my early encounters with Joyce and Beckett was a sense that being a writer could confer a way of being that might enable the writer to construct an identity that simultaneously maintains an intensive level of investment in biography and a degree of independence from its strictures and impact on subjectivity. Such a prospect was an attractive one for me as I became increasingly aware of a desire to, on the one hand, escape and reject the confines of my upbringing, but on the other, to explore, maintain and cultivate their substance as an indivisible aspect of both my identity and sense of self.

The dual threads I found running through accounts of the life and work of Joyce and Beckett that seemed to facilitate such a relationship with questions of identity and self, were the notion of exile, and the drive to draw together lived experience and narratives of writing into that



alternative mode of subjectivity I'm referring to here as being a writer. Furthermore, being a writer in this way seemed to invoke modes of behaviour that I now consider to be highly performic. The self-imposed exile (from Ireland to Continental Europe) that both writers undertook, the stories of Joyce's exploits in the Martello tower (Ellmann 1959)⁸ at Sandycove overlooking Dublin Bay, and accounts of Beckett composing his late prose works whilst carefully viewing the men in the prison exercise yard opposite his Paris apartment (Knowlson 1996): these, and numerous similar examples, reinforced within me a burgeoning understanding of being a writer, as life and work being performed through leaving the context of one's birth and development, and then writing oneself(s) (transformed) back into a fictionalised version of that context from a position of self-inflicted otherness. In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* the character Stephen (Joyce's rendering of himself) states that the artist 'is a product of this race and this country and this life' (Joyce 1946: 90). Cixous points out however, that 'the phrase must be understood as meaning, it is not this race, this country, this life that 'produces' Stephen or Joyce, but the artist who produces himself against or outside of these determining factors' (Cixous 1972: xii). In stating as much, Cixous coordinates the formulation of an illuminating trinity of subjectivity between the person who becomes the artist, the artist, and person(s) s/he creates. I say *trinity* for, much as in Catholic doctrine (a huge factor in Joyce's early life), the three elements are indistinct and subsumed within one another.

Cixous draws together a number of these themes (family/genealogy/nationality) as part of her abiding concern with the relationship between exile and writing. She speaks of the 'real genealogy of writers' (Cixous 1990:13), stating that 'exile makes one part of it, and another essential feature is de-nationalisation. I don't think that poets have the feeling that they do belong to one special nation, I think they belong to the internation of poets' (Cixous 1990:14). Cixous is not using the term *poets* simply to refer to those who write poetry but to categorise 'writers who belong to a certain type of writing' (Cixous 1990: 12). In her essay *The Last Painting or the Portrait of God* she says that 'I call *poet* any writer, philosopher, author of plays, dreamer, producer of dreams, who uses life

⁸ Before leaving Ireland Joyce briefly lived in the Martello tower with his friend Oliver St. John Gogarty. The tower was the site of a violent altercation involving a revolver and a third man (Samuel Trench) that Joyce would later work into *Ulysses* (Joyce 1937). It is worth noting that Gogarty liked to call the tower 'the *omphalos* both because it resembled a navel and because it might prove the 'temple of neo-paganism' as important to the world as the navel-stone at Delphi' (Ellmann 1959: 172). My own navel became the site of a performance action (see Chapter 2) partly in response to Artaud's text sequence *The Umbilicus of Limbo* (Artaud 1988), and Williamson used an *omphalos* (artist made) in his performance rendering of the Delphic Oracle.

as a time of approaching' (Cixous 1991:114). Both Joyce and Beckett are, for Cixous, such writers, and it is to a large extent the theme of exile as played out in their life and work that makes them so.

She writes:

Not all writers have to be exiles. But probably at one point, if they reach a certain kind of passion for writing, it is because there is a kind of exile implied in their biography' (Cixous 1990:12).

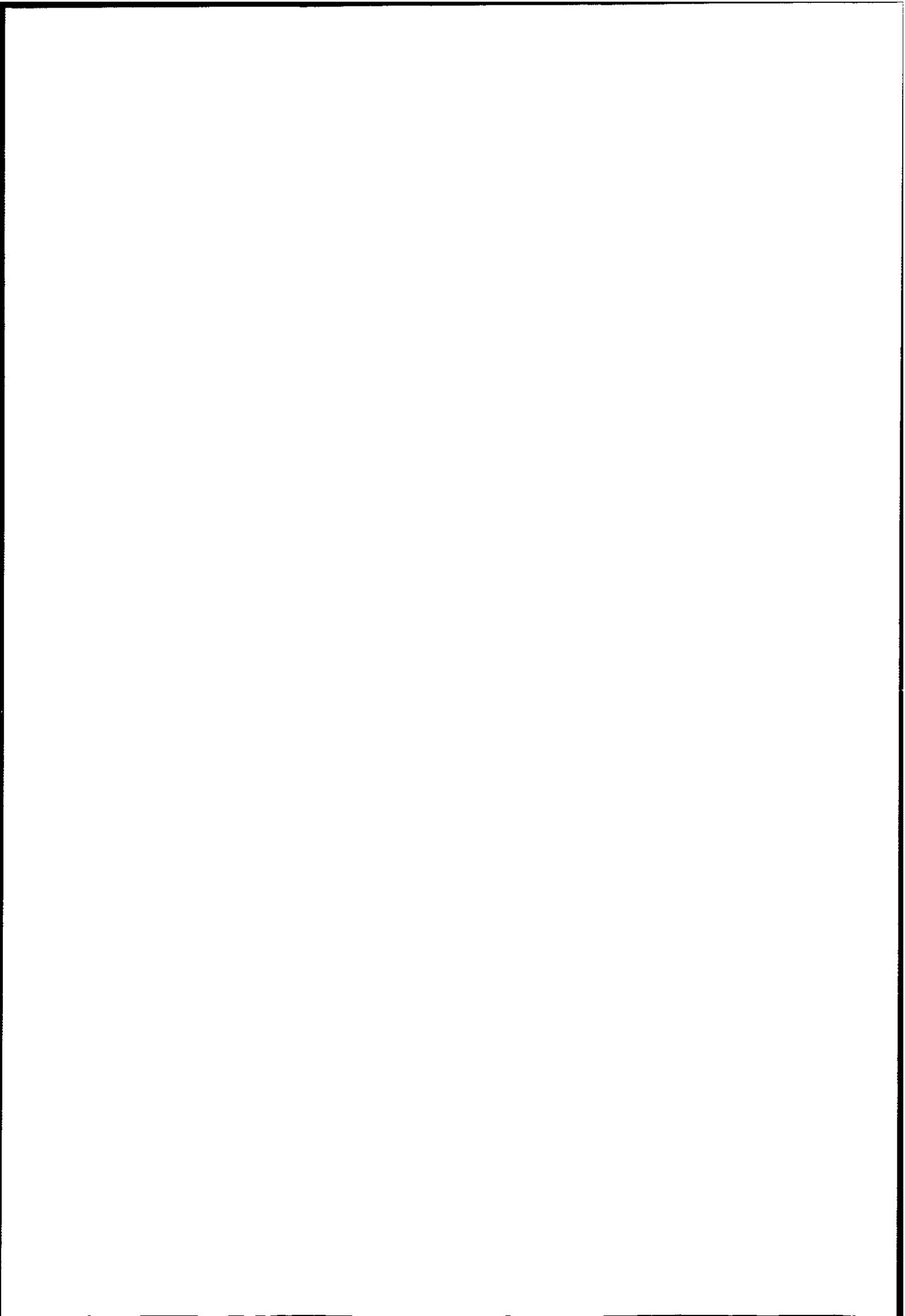
And this 'kind of exile' relates as much to notions of family and parentage as it does to nationality (although the two cannot really be separated). Cixous goes on to ask:

What about the authors of the author, the real authors of the author? They belong to two different species – one, of course, the real biological parents, who immediately become imaginary, who are immediately transfigured; the others are texts, other writers, other books. First what about parents? From whom do we descend? (Cixous 1990: 14)

I was beginning to find in these Irish writers (given to me by my mother) a line of descent with which I could identify and insert myself into as an alternative genealogical structure to that provided by biology.

For my own part, it was not a desire to exile myself from Ireland that preoccupied me, but a desire to exile myself to it. For me Ireland presented a place of family, of my descendants, but in their absence it became a place in which I could construct a sense of the 'internation of poets' referred to by Cixous without a wholesale rebuttal of my heritage. The fact that one of the few pieces of information that was revealed to me about the Irish side of family regarded by maternal grandfather being a renowned Dublin psychiatrist who authored a book under the title *On Desire* only served to reinforce my belief that I belonged to Ireland; not a real Ireland as such, but an imagined, denationalised country of writers bound together by a common desire to escape the confines of theologically driven patriarchy and perform writing as a way of reconstructing the self.

Again, due to reticence on my mother's part, I was taken to Ireland on only two occasions as a young child. As one of my first expeditions as an independent teen however, I undertook a hitchhiking trip around the country. By this stage I was reading Artaud and identifying in his work a sense of the impasse (see section 16) that was just beginning to encroach on my own relationship to writing and subjectivity. I remember my mythic alignment with Ireland being confirmed when I read (during this trip) about Artaud having himself made a pilgrimage to Ireland – the motivation for his journey making it more relevant still – as Stephen Barber explains:



It was the cane which had reputedly belonged to Saint Patrick that had largely motivated Artaud's last journey, to Ireland. He decided that he would return the cane to the Irish, to awaken them to his appeals for revolution. He was calmly aware that it would be his last journey, and announced it as such to his friends. (Barber 1993:91)

And indeed it was his last journey. He was eventually arrested for vagrancy and after six days in Mountjoy prison was deported back to France.

'When the boat docked at the port of Le Havre on 30 September, Artaud was immediately taken in the straitjacket to the General Hospital: it was the start of an internment which lasted eight years and eight months' (Barber 1993:91).

Connecting Artaud's preoccupation with St. Patrick (he believed it was his cane that he used to drive the snakes from Ireland) with my mother's ascent of Croagh Patrick, a powerful connection was also formed in my mind between Ireland and France⁹ (the later being the country to which both Joyce and Beckett gravitated) and between Artaud's work¹⁰ and my own developing sense of being a writer. Applying these connections to my alternative genealogy and internation of writers, I became fixated upon what has been a lasting obsession in my life and work, the issue of my name – the name being one place in language where familial and national identity can reside.

The/My Name

The notion of the name (and naming) can itself be connected to the kinds of inscriptive religious rituals I referred to earlier in this section. I, like so many others, was formally granted my name in baptism. The priest poured holy water over my forehead where he traced the sign of the cross with his thumb and forefinger and in doing so issued me the name: James Patrick Barnabas Lamb. This is a procedure I have witnessed many times (my father usually being the priest in question) and it confirmed within me (in a more explicit sense than the scarred knees of Croagh Patrick) a connection between the body, non-linguistic, performative acts of inscription and the construction of identity.

⁹ Whilst the process of my coming to writing was to a great extent played-out through this projected attachment to Ireland and Irish writers, the process of confronting the state of impasse I eventually reached has been largely informed by French writers, many of whom (Derrida, Cixous, Barthes, Kristeva – who are themselves exiles) present an outspoken admiration for, and interest in, those same writers (Beckett and Joyce) who were of such importance to me in my formative years. It is worth noting that Aaron Williamson (the contemporary writer whose work has been of most significance to me) is, like me, an Englishman of Irish decent for whom Artaud is a figure of great importance (see section 16).

¹⁰ As will be discussed in Chapter 4, Artaud's work provides an example of relationships between performance and writing that are far more explicit and relevant to the practical aspect of this research than those found in Beckett or Joyce, whose place in this Chapter relates to their role in the development of my relationship to writing prior to the point of impasse, rather than any direct contribution to my practice after it.

The name I was given, as is so often the case, was an amalgamation of external references. I was given the name James (so I am told) after both Joyce, and my maternal grandfather James Lynch. Patrick was in reference to St. Patrick, and I was given Barnabas after the name of the School in Australia (St. Barnabas) at which my Father, until his meeting my mother, taught as part of his duties as a member of a monastic order. An enduring irony, from my point of view, has been the fact that the two parts of this name for which I would (for the reasons already outlined) have an obvious affinity - *James* and *Patrick* - were effectively removed from me. Despite having been known by all as James, on entering school I almost immediately acquired, by dint of my surname, the nickname Larry. This name, for reasons I can only guess at¹¹, very quickly became normalised and within just a few months all but my immediate family were using it regardless of context. Effectively, it became my name, and within a year or two (and this is true to this day) I would have to think twice before turning round on hearing the name James called out in the street. The arrival of Larry seemed to eliminate Patrick from the picture. In school, my initial became just *L*, yet convention demanded that I maintain a surname, and so Larry Lamb I became.

At this point, I became, in a sense, exiled from myself. A process in which I had been a somewhat unwitting participant had taken a course over which I felt I had little control and I found myself in possession of a name I could not possess. The name was not mine in the conventional sense, but nor could I make it mine, for, as I soon discovered, the name was irredeemably linked to both a well known 1940s film actor, and a children's television character from the same period. I found my name, that which seemed to function as a piece of language between the world and *I* becoming a joke. As I grew up, it reiterated the experience of, and desire for, exile in a manner that felt entirely incompatible with their true cause and therefore garnered within me a sense of pathos that I felt very deeply. The problem of my name eventually provoked what I consider to be a decisive turning point in my *coming to writing*: the rejection of my Father's name (Lamb) and the taking up of my mother's (Lynch). I became and (from an external perspective at least) have remained, Larry Lynch.

¹¹ In retrospect, I suspect that one reason for the name taking hold in the way it did, was the fact that I did not object to its use, and even began, almost immediately, using it to refer to myself. It is strange for me to have responded to the name in this way for I remember that I was not particularly fond of it. I believe, with the benefit of hindsight, that even at this young age, I found the prospect of a new name and the shift in identity implied, to be seductive and pleasurable in a way that made me unlikely to impede the process. At the same time however, I can also remember being aware of a sense of violence and invasion being present within the process of my birth name slipping away and a new one supplanting it.

The insertion of my mother's name into my own was hugely significant – a symbolic gesture of sorts, that relates directly to my practice and the concerns of this research. In making the change (which for me was a ritual, performative undertaking) I formally banished the *name of the father* from the realm of my own subjectivity and chose instead to align myself, not with my mother in person, but with the genealogical empty space¹² her (overtly Irish) name represented – a space free from familial assertion and vacant but for my imagined *other* family – that of writers, books and writing. Lynch became for me the family name of my other parents (Joyce, Beckett, Artaud...), the 'real authors of the author' (Cixous 1990:14) as Cixous puts it.

Larry Lynch, whilst functioning as my name in the everyday sense, also became my name as a writer and as a subject being written, the decision to take the name occurring in conjunction with my beginning to operate as a writer in terms of a serious practice as well simply entertaining the notion of being a writer as a (largely performed) mode of identity construction. I was, at this stage in my life, already familiar (through my encounters with Joyce and Beckett) with the literary device of writing the self through a named alter ego¹³, yet the same process, when enacted in the context of a subject seeking to use performance to mediate between *himself* and his life, is (in terms of subjectivity) more complex. Larry Lynch became a name that encompassed (simultaneously) me as the writer, me as the subject being written and me as the performing subject (in the work) doing the writing. Such an arrangement indicates a realisation of Cixous' tripartite model for writing (and writers) engaging with subjectivity (referred to above in her comments on Joyce) that, by dint of its basis in performance, is located in the body and genuinely experienced at the intersection between life and art. The ontological fissure and troublesome duality between the body and the text is held to account when questions of subjectivity, and the means of responding to such questions, are both played out in the same arena: the subject's relationship with the other within three dimensional, real-time, face-to-face encounters. Rather than translating the subject into the disembodied space of the text, performance (particularly

¹² I refer to my mother's name in terms of a *genealogical empty space*, for, as I mentioned earlier, all her family died before my birth. From my point of view at the time, the name *Lynch* appeared as *vacant* and available for possession – even more so, my mother having relinquished the name at the point of marriage.

¹³ In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1946), Joyce reconstitutes himself into the role of Stephen Dedalus. The construction of the name as a means of forging a link between *the named* and an(*other*), exterior discourse, is a strategy that was at work in the formulation of *Larry Lynch*: the surname referring not only to *me*, but also, as I have explained, to my desired occupancy of Ireland as an imagined place of writers.

performance art) provides a mode of behaviour (and designated context) in which questions of subjectivity can be addressed on their own terms and in their own language¹⁴.

¹⁴ A precursor to my own engagement with this aspect of performance can again be found in Artaud – particularly as regards the notion of the *name* being reconstituted as a marker of ontological enquiry. For a period in his youth, Artaud took to referring to himself as *Artaud Le Momo* (Momo being Marseilles slang for *fool* or *idiot*).

Sexual Difference and the Question of 'I'

I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside, that's how I see it, it was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light, it's impossible I should have a voice...

– Samuel Beckett, *Fizzle 4'* (Beckett 1995:235)

The inaugural gesture of writing is always in a necessary relation to narcissism. When one begins to write, one is constantly reminding oneself of the fact: 'I write'... It takes time for 'I' to get used to 'I'. Time for the 'I' to be sure 'I' exists. Only then is there room for the other.

– Helene Cixous (cited in Blyth and Sellers 1995:36)

In her essay *Difficult Joys* Cixous asks:

Now who is *'the writer in truth'*? Maybe we should always call the writer 'the writer in truth' or 'in untruth', but it's true that just using the word 'writer' is calling for the question of what is truth and how to decide about it. The truth of the writer, the identity of the writer, the authority of the writer, all these are matters that are always questionable. I am a writer who very often says 'I' and writes in the first person, but we all know that the first person is - though it's one of the most wonderful things in the world, it's a very happy thing to say 'I' - still very mysterious. Of course I don't know who 'I' am/is/are. The scope between the writer and truth, that opening, is probably where the writing slides by. What right has the writer - I should say, the author - to call herself/himself 'author'? What is the essential of the author? What is proper to the author? (Cixous 1990: 9)

This citation goes right to the heart of the impasse as I experienced it. The performance works I made in the early stages of this research can, in a sense, be seen as a response to the scenario Cixous outlines, in which questions of writing and subjectivity are located around the 'mysterious' status of the first person pronoun. Yet despite its elusive nature ('I don't know who 'I' am/is/are') the first person is, for Cixous, 'one of the most wonderful things in the world' - it is *difficult*, yet potentially *joyful*. For Cixous the prospect of joy (jouissance) being experienced in writing's engagements with the first person and issues of subjectivity is, I suggest, realised by her thinking about writing in performic¹⁵ terms and pushing writing towards the condition of performance.

For Cixous, the means by which one can 'get past the wall' (Cixous 1991:ix) are located in terms of sexual difference. As Susan Suleiman puts it, 'the wall of sexual difference, because it seems

¹⁵ As noted in my introduction, I use the term *performic* to indicate *performance like qualities*, rather than performance itself.

so impermeable, is the one to which H.C. keeps returning' (cited in Cixous 1991:x). In her essay *Sorties*, Cixous poses the question of subjectivity by asking, 'Where is she?' (Cixous 1981:90). She proceeds by presenting a list of words:

Activity / passivity
Sun / Moon
Culture / Nature
Day / Night

Father / Mother
Head / heart
Intelligible / sensitive
Logos / Pathos (Cixous 1981: 90)

She suggests, as Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers explain, that

consciously or unconsciously connections are formed. Because of the way Western European languages are read, because of the system of collective cultural references that lurk beneath the surface of society, *she* appears to be found in the terms on the right. Consciously or unconsciously the terms on the left seem to take priority, appear to be More Important. (Blyth and Sellers 2004:22)

Cixous views this model, which she refers to as *logocentrism* (Cixous 1981:91), as being a historically entrenched oppositional way of thinking. She characterises the right-hand side of each opposition as being other to its privileged counterpart. This process of negation 'requires that *woman* be the passive partner in all oppositions – that *woman* not be allowed any control over her own destiny' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:22). Cixous uses this notion of patriarchal opposition as the basis for what can be read as a critique of the formulation of the Lacanian subject.

There exists a correlation between the negation of woman and femininity in the hierarchical system Cixous describes and the relationship between the self and the other in Lacan's *Mirror Stage* (Lacan 1989). Lacan's construction of the self is reliant on the presence of an other to reflect back an image of the self. The relationship between the self and the other is constructed along the same lines as the relationship between the self and the image of the self someone sees in a mirror when viewing their reflection. Lacan suggests that on first viewing this reflection (or in his terms, *imago* (1989:2)), 'whether this be in an actual or metaphorical mirror (such as the body of the mother)' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 22), the developing subject is able to distinguish between the *I* and the *not-I*, or the self and the other (Lacan 1989). For Cixous the status of woman (other) within the system of patriarchal opposition is akin to that of the 'pre-Oedipal body of the mother' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 22) in Lacan's *Mirror Stage*. Both are determined by what she calls 'the master/slave dialectic' (Cixous 1981:91) - neither 'is

tolerated or allowed to exist in their own right' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 23) – each is 'absent, hence desirable' (Cixous 1981: 95). 'The other might confirm the identity of the Lacanian self, but the Lacanian self denies the right to identity of the other. The other is appropriated, used and discarded' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 22). Cixous suggests that the formulation of the Lacanian self is reliant upon the 'murder of the other' (Cixous).

Cixous proposes that a resolution to this crisis in subjectivity is made possible by finding a different way of relating to the other and that it is writing that provides such an opportunity. Not writing per se, however, but writing as 'an alternative to the so called masculine economy of patriarchal discourse' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 23). Cixous calls this other kind of writing *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1981).

The notion of *écriture féminine* (or feminine writing) has been important to my research practice for three main reasons, all of which relate to a move to comprehend writing in performative terms:

- 1) Its promotion of writing as an intermediary practice between the self and the other that embraces the notion of the other(s) within the self.
- 2) Its emphasis on the body as a site for writing.
- 3) Its preference (in the light of points 1 and 2) for an ambivalent attitude towards notions of singular, fixed meaning – 'in *écriture féminine* multiple, or even contradictory meanings and forms of expression are sought after and valued' (Blyth and Sellers 1995:24).

Écriture Féminine

And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written. (And why I didn't write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great – that is for "great men"; and it's "silly."

– Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, (Cixous 1981:246)

Cixous insists (and this is important in the context of my research) that 'at the present time, defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, which does not mean that it does not exist' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 2004:18). The key words here are *practice* and *impossible*. Blyth and Sellers explain that 'one cannot say exactly what *écriture féminine* is, so the argument goes; one can merely observe *écriture féminine* in the act of doing what it does – it is, quite literally, an experimental approach to writing (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 18). For Cixous this kind of writing can only be understood as a practice of writing, as an approach to its making that is impossible to locate with any sense of fixity within a theoretical structure. Her use of the term impossible in this sense reflects the way Bataille uses it in describing the status of the subject.

Rather than a strict theory or definition of *écriture féminine* however, what Cixous does offer is a description of its processes of being that she refers to as its 'libidinal economies' (Cixous 1981:95). She distinguishes between masculine (patriarchal) and feminine libidinal economies in terms of differing modes of exchange, using metaphors of *giving* and *propriety* to describe the ways in which the (writing) subject might relate to the other, aligning the economy of the gift with the feminine and the proper with the masculine. As I have suggested, the economies of patriarchal discourse are problematic for Cixous, as the drive towards authoritative ownership (propriety) over meaning incurs the negation of its other – that from which it differs. As an alternative she proposes a practice of writing that inhabits the economy of the gift. Yet in the light of work undertaken in social anthropology she acknowledges that the act of giving does not necessarily escape the dynamics of

ownership. Marcel Mauss for example, suggests that the process of giving is often locked into a cycle of receiving (taking) and reciprocation (giving back), and that

a considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with this same atmosphere of the gift... The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it. (Mauss 1990:47)

In her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (Cixous 1981) Cixous refers to this dilemma as 'the gift that takes' (Cixous 1981:259), yet she goes on to propose that there is a model for giving that is able to 'escape this law of return' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 1995:30). For Cixous 'the experience of motherhood offers a way out of this self-perpetuating, circular economy of the masculine gift. Motherhood is a gift that one gives to the other' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:31). Having positioned motherhood as representing 'possibly the most intense and complete relationship with the other that can be had' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:31), Cixous goes on to use it as a metaphoric framework within which to undertake a 'radical reappraisal of one's relationship with the other, the feminine body and writing' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:31).

Writing, Maternity and the Body

Cixous is caught up in a desire to develop an approach to writing that is *of*, rather than *about*, the subject, and therefore 'capable of the other' (Wilcox 1990:39). The development of such writing, for Cixous, is made possible by engaging with economies of sexual difference, giving rise to writing driven by feminine libidinal economies, a writing of and from the body, characterised by the movement of plenitude, giving and generosity rather than the masculine economies of propriety and authorial ownership. As Sarah Cornell puts it:

the body is linked to the unconscious. It is not separated from the soul. It is dreamed and spoken. It produces signs. When one speaks, or writes, or sings, one does so from the body. (Wilcox 1990: 39)

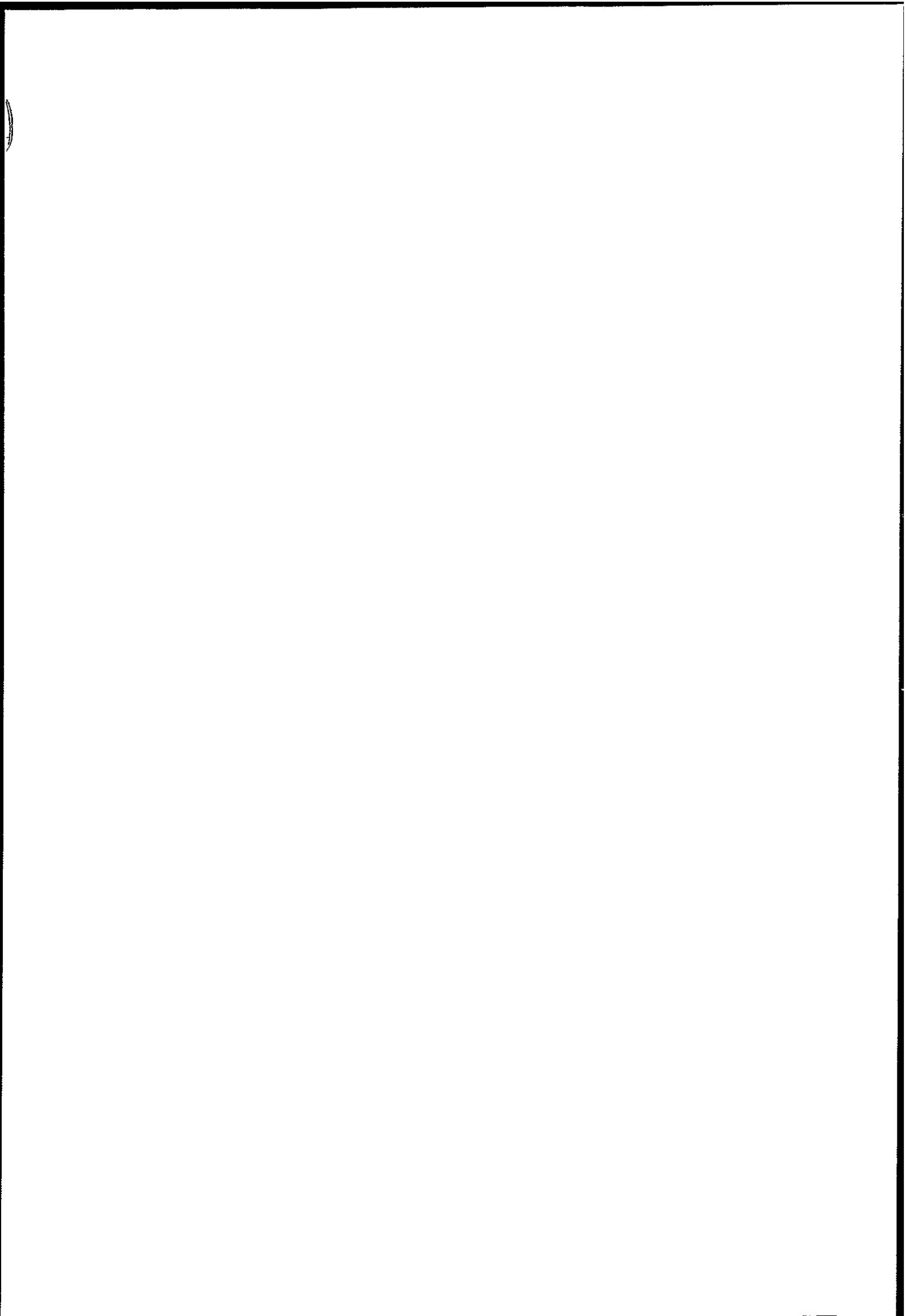
It is important at this point to acknowledge that my (being a writer who is a man) investment in Cixous' approach to the practice of writing may appear anomalous. This is not the case, however, for another important aspect of Cixous' engagement with notions of sexual difference, is that it is biologically non-essentialist. That is to say (in keeping with much contemporary gender theory) that she does not tie the economies of masculinity and femininity to the subject's biologically determined

sex. Rather, she uses them as 'qualifiers of sexual difference' (Cixous 1981:93), acknowledging that there are 'men who do not repress their femininity'¹⁶ and women who more or less forcibly inscribe their masculinity' (Cixous 1981:93). So the model of maternity stands not as a barrier that excludes men from *écriture féminine* and the space of the other, but as an exemplar of 'an experience of the inside, an experience of the capacity for the other, and experience of non-negative change brought about by the other, of positive receptivity' (Cixous 1991:155). For Cixous, it is through immersing oneself in the potential for such experience that joy is encountered and the wall (or *impasse*) overcome, and it is, as I have suggested, through writing that such potential may be realised.

In terms of subjectivity, Cixous conceives that writing, like pregnancy, offers an experience of the 'not-me within me' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 1995:32), presenting a 'way of self-constituting a subjectivity that splits apart without regret' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 1995:32). Much like her understanding of the relationship between the self and the other, her notion of a split subject differs from that found in Lacan¹⁷. Rather than conceiving of a dualistic split between a false ego-self and the unconscious over which it maintains a sense of propriety through the process of negation (master/slave dialectic), she proposes that in writing multiple selves may come forth and coalesce in a state of productive, joyful generosity. For Cixous, the prospect of subjective liberty is not found through authorised, autonomous self-knowledge and the negation of the other, but through embracing the presence of the unknown other(s) within oneself. By using the metaphor of pregnancy and birthing she suggests that writing can inhabit the space where 'the body and the other are at their closest point of contact' (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 32) and the 'flesh lets strangeness come through' (Cixous 1991: 38). Writing of this type, she says, makes within 'me a crystallised work of my ultrasubjectivities' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 1995:32), yet in doing so 'it is necessary to risk losing the self, to immerse oneself

¹⁶ Throughout her writings Cixous makes a number of references to men who she considers to have maintained a feminine writing practice. She includes within this cohort both Joyce and Artaud (see Chapter 4). Williamson picks-up on the notion of writing being a practice through which the femininity of men can be accommodated and invests in its potential in the development of his own practice.

¹⁷ Lacan describes the subject as becoming split at the point where the child is 'objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other' (Lacan 1989: 2) and enters the social space of language. It is split 'between ego and unconscious, between conscious and unconscious, between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious' (Fink 1995: 45). Lacan suggests that the *false self*, or *ego*, is constructed through the language of the other (parents) as the subject attempts to reconstitute itself in the image of the 'desire of the other' (Lacan 1989: 6). The unconscious, for Lacan, 'is nothing but a chain of signifying elements, such as words, phonemes and letters, which unfolds in accordance with very precise rules over which the ego or self has no control whatsoever' (Fink 1995: 9). These two parts of the subject 'share no common ground: they are radically separated (the ego or false being requiring a refusal of unconscious thoughts, unconscious thought having no concern for the ego's fine opinion of itself)' (Fink: 1995: 45).



fully, willingly, possibly irrevocably without *return*, into *the unknown*' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:32) and let writing 'well up, surge forth from the throats of your unknown inhabitants' (Cixous 1991:39).

The Prospect of Performance

Although Cixous herself rarely writes specifically in terms of performance as either an area of practice or mode of behaviour, her thought is bound to inhabit its terrain through its preoccupation not only with the body, but also with the first person, the present tense, writing as an activity and the playful, generative significance it produces. And yet, as I have suggested, her work appears to reach an impasse of its own, as the wider fabric of her thought and practice maintains no conditions through which to fully contend with the prospect, the fact even, of performance and its necessary significance within the scene of writing she depicts and strives to inhabit. Despite her acknowledging that 'the process of writing itself means you're summoning what is in you as you write, which is often only brought to the fore as it is being written' (Wilcox 1990:43), and that writing may be a 'process of projection and discovery' (Wilcox 1990: 43) rather than a mimetic form of reportage or storytelling, short of any practicable comprehension of performance as active within the context of writing, her work often recedes into some potentially problematic, retrograde and antithetical positions. Amongst the more prominent would be her operations within highly conventional theatrical structures in which she adopts much the same role that Artaud condemns as being a theologically grounded 'author god scenario' (Artaud 1958:34) in which an 'author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation' (Derrida 1978:235). Cixous is aware of, and seemingly excited by the potential of the theatre, particularly in thinking about the body and the implications of live presence on the first person speaking, yet by writing performance from the same authoritarian position she seeks to destabilise, or as Aaron Williamson puts it, 'in private, at leisure and in advance of its public reception' (Williamson 1999:32), she is unable to capture its possibilities in the terms set out by her own thought. This is not to say of course, that any writing produced in private and in advance of its public reception is inherently flawed, but that any movement towards an effective and practicable evaluation of performance in the context

of writing (and vice versa) necessitates a refiguring of the traditional page/stage dichotomy which compounds many of the dualistic strictures which Cixous (and others) determine lie behind the suppression of writing and subjectivity.

Further evidence of Cixous' awareness of the vitality of performance in understanding writing, is apparent in her preoccupation with biography, not least her own. Many of her essays and meditations on other writers are inextricably caught up in an exploration of the interplay between life and writing. Her own doctoral thesis, *The Exile of James Joyce* (Cixous 1972), presents an extensive account of the relationship between Joyce's lived experience and his writing. Using processes of exile as a recurrent motif, active on numerous levels (considered in more detail shortly), she demonstrates the extent to which the semiotic and semantic performance of his prose is constructed through a heightened awareness of subjectivity as a shifting and mutable fulcrum between the world and language – a subjectivity that is accessed through performic behavioural modes, one of which is writing. And indeed, there exist many accounts of Joyce's tendency to harness the present tense performance of *doing writing* as an active compositional methodology (Ellmann 1959). Yet despite Cixous' awareness of, and investment in, the indivisible element of life and writing, the potential for a continuation of this process by redistributing critical attention across the whole of writing and promoting a degree of methodological equity in which the performance of writing (the true outset of which is impossible to locate) is granted a parity of significance with the activity of reading – the page-bound text serving as transformative interface between these contiguous, overlapping modes – is stalled for as long as the performance of writing is considered only as an inevitable by-product in the service of the page.

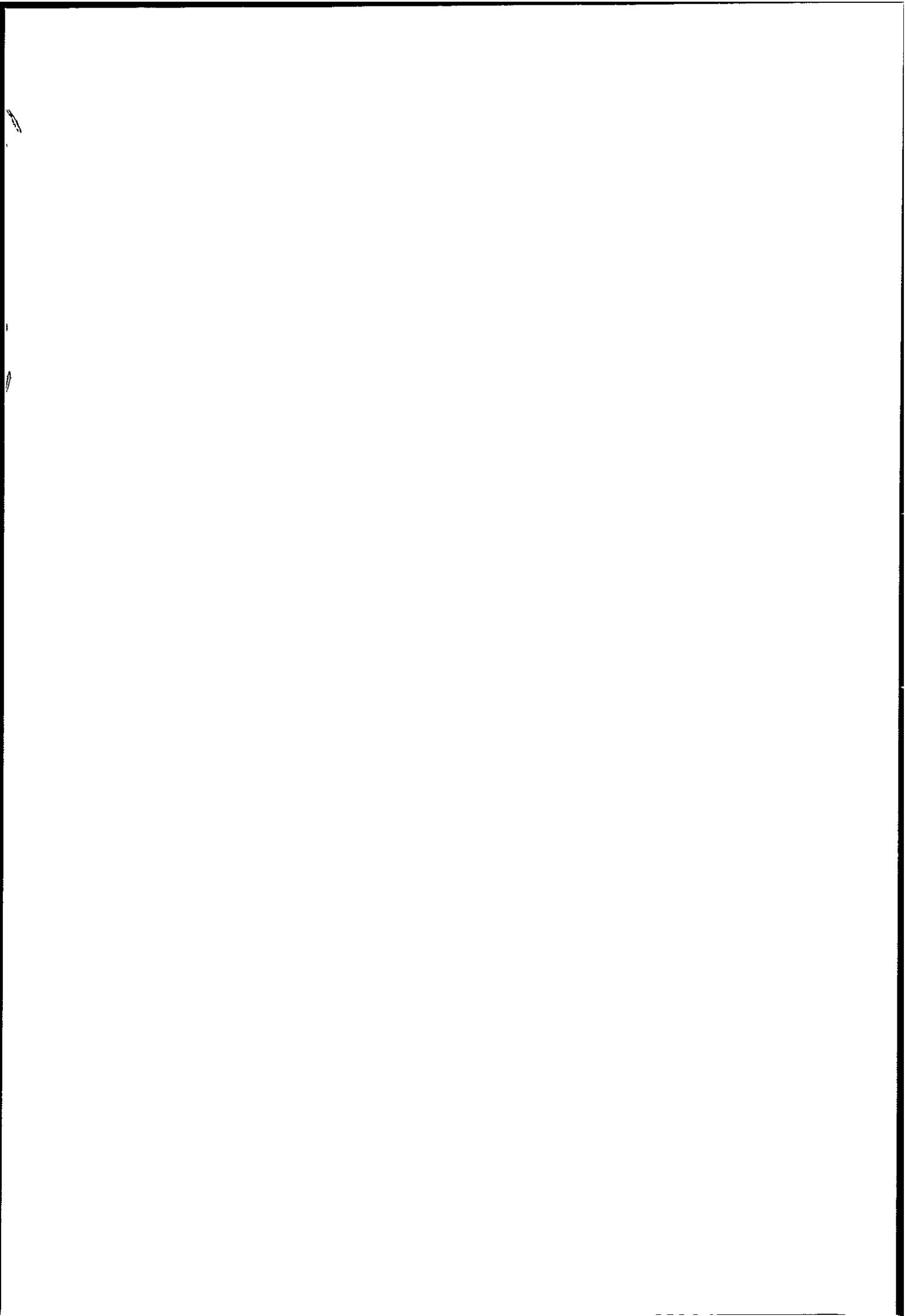
It is my contention that an endeavour to rectify the scenarios outlined above requires the insertion of discursive and methodological structures that acknowledge and promote performance in terms of *practice*, for as long as the work on the page is granted a disciplinary privilege as the point where the writing properly happens, then the performance of its production will be relegated and denied practical and critical concern. The injunction of performance as a mode of practice, inherent in writing, yet rarely cultivated, may serve as something as a corrective to the bias incurred by the primacy of the page prevalent in the study and practice of writing – even, as is being suggested here, those

studies and practices of writing that present themselves as being motivated by a drive to harness the playful, generative, subjective and corporeal dimensions of language and writing in an attempt to embed their practice within the corporeal and performed processes of subjectivity.

Performance, Action and Method

The ways in which I have sought to configure relationships between performed action, the idea of performance, writing and the text, stand as the central methodological strategies employed in my research. Much as, in the context of this thesis, the development of my practice has its narrative, so does my methodological approach: as the research has progressed, so have the relationships and configurations that characterise this process. As this second part of my thesis progresses towards presenting and talking through the performance art works, and ultimately text/page-based works developed as part of the research, it may be useful to consider a brief typology of relations between performed action and critical thinking.

The point ought to be made that this research could not have taken place without action (including that which can be considered performance art) being central to both its means and methods. This is more the case, as I consider critical reading to be absolutely a mode of action, particularly given the aforementioned performative nature of many of the texts I have sought to engage. Readings of these texts are performative in the Austinian (Austin 1962) sense, in that the reading is doing something. This kind of reading action can be seen as a precursor to the ways in which I have sought to promote performance in texts and readings in my page-based poetic writing (see sections 23-27). So, I would posit critical reading as one (perhaps the first) mode of action that has been involved in the process of this research, remembering that the necessity in undertaking the project at all was founded in my acute awareness of writing as an action. A second way in which action has related to critical engagement and theoretical enquiry involved embodied enactments that presented illustrative responses to theoretical positions (see, for example, section 15). As has been suggested, Cixous' work certainly implies a sense of embodied knowledge, and for me, coming from a particular perspective of



practice, it has been important to render significant critical positions into the conditions of practice, so that they might be understood in those terms.

As the research developed however, the relationships between criticality and performed action became more complex, as a sense of poesis began to emerge, in which the chiasmic relationship between performance and writing became the focus of the live work. This can be seen in the later pieces (see sections 16 and 17) where the notion of writing as a performed act of making is taken up as the substance of performance art works that maintain no recourse the standard page as a prerequisite for a legitimate claim to be considered as writings. This mode of enquiry granted me insight into relationships between myself as a physical writing subject, compositional process and the role of the reader/viewer, that came to have a significant impact on the phases of research practice that followed, when the production of texts became the focus of my work.

As is discussed and demonstrated in sections 18-27, my development of texts for realisation through performance video work and poem sequences for the page, has been enabled and shaped through the shifts in my position and approach as a writer that my engagement with performance (as a mode of practice and research) has afforded me. This is, perhaps, the key point in charting the methodological progress of my research, as it marks the phase in which the results of the strategy begin to emerge. It is also in the writing of these poems and texts, that the results of my (often performance-based) engagement with certain theoretical positions (notably those of Derrida and Cixous) can be identified (see sections 24-27).

(N) – Performance (DVD Documentation)

The performance (N) was presented at the *Institute of Contemporary Art* in London at the invitation of the then performance curator Chris Hewitt. The piece was shown as part of a double-bill focusing on performance engagements with the stuff of writing that resist the dualistic tendencies of traditional page / stage scripting strategies. The other programmed artist was Aaron Williamson. The performance was videoed by ICA staff with an understanding that the footage could be used for academic purposes, provided their role in supporting the work be acknowledged.

One of the first live works developed as part of my research, (N), sought to draw together both the critical approaches to the problems of writing and subjectivity articulated thus far, and the resources of autobiographical experience that I consider to have shaped my relationship to writing and informed the condition of impasse.

As will be considered in more detail in the commentary that follows the DVD, the performance draws heavily on theological, doctrinal and liturgical material in its endeavour to dramatise the experience of impasse and explore its make-up from the inside.

The approach to the performance of writing that the work takes is largely ritualistic, in the manner referred to in Part 1, although the piece is also indicative of my early experiments with physical movement as a mode of writerly inscription. It shows, too, the beginnings of the work around the voice (loss of / silence), the mouth (orality) and the live treatment of writerly materials that would dominate later performance works.

The work includes two pieces of music: *For Ann Rising* and *Septet*, both by James Tenney. The music was first introduced to the piece during a work in progress version shown at Dartington during a residency for Tenney – its inclusion in that, and any future presentations of the piece, was agreed in person with the composer.

The use of a musical component (my first and only) is indicative of a theatrical tendency evident in my early performance works. Whilst comfortably occupying the performance art designation

(see Williamson's defining in section 1), (*N*) is typical of my early experiments in performance in that it demonstrates a sense of the dramatic in its interrogation of materials and physical actions. This aspect of the work signals the extent to which I was, at the time, influenced greatly by the voice/body performances of Williamson, and through him, Artaud (see section 21).

(N) – A Commentary

How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly? I don't know. I could know. But I shall not know. Not this time. It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. It is I who think, just enough to write, whose head is far. I am Mathew and I am the Angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here.

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (Beckett 1976:276)

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of the voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my desires.

– St. Augustine, 'Confessions' (Augustine)

(N): The I Who Asks Who?

In making and performing the work (N) I sought to inhabit and explore the experience of *impasse* in writing and subjectivity (concerns which for me are indivisible) through focussing on the question of the/my name. The process of naming, or of *giving a name*, is a provocative one for me, as it operates at an intersection between language and subjectivity and between writing and becoming (ontology). It can also be understood, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, as having a central role in the way language operates. Interestingly, in the context of my work, Wittgenstein opens *The Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1963), much of which is devoted to an analysis of language formation and function, with the quotation from St. Augustine included above. Given the fundamental paradigm of Wittgenstein's position on language – that 'individual words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names' (cited in McGinn 1997:37) – it is clear why he would have been drawn to Augustine's narrative. The fact that Augustine wrote *The Confessions* in the fourth century AD would have granted the ideas with a degree of universality and fundamentality that I think

would have pleased Wittgenstein. For me however, rather than offering a route into a philosophical solution, the Augustinian position, by default, highlights an ontological problem. Were language to enable me to express my desires adequately in words, the experience of impasse would not have occurred. Indeed, it would be unlikely that I would have found it necessary to do writing at all. In a sense, (*N*) inhabits the impasse as a kind of negative inversion of Augustine's tract on language acquisition, as a site in which the (at this stage) un-reconciled fissure between the subject (*I*) and language (which was itself desiring of writing) might be encountered, dramatised and transformed on its own terms into the substance of a (performed) writing. As has already been suggested, the link between instabilities in language and subjectivity and the demand for writing of a certain type is picked up on by Cixous, who writes: 'Of course I don't know who 'I' am/is/are. The scope between the writer and truth, that opening, is probably where the writing slides by' (Cixous 1990:9). In a typically abstract and performic gesture, Cixous, in acknowledging the *limits of language* (Wittgenstein 2001)¹⁸ as a means of subjective affirmation, proposes that writing maintains the potential to occupy the space between the mysteriousness of the subject and the impossibility of truth in a way that is productive and joyful. For my own part, following on from Cixous' performic allusion, performance itself presents the most apparent mode of action by which to enter the opening she refers to. At the same time, it provides the opportunity to counteract the violence of disembodiment conferred by the literary production and dissemination of texts (problematized so virulently by Artaud and addressed by Williamson (see section 16)), by locating the scene of physical writerly engagement in the work itself, rather than prior to it. When engaged (as I was at the time of making (*N*)) in the paradoxical mode of *writing not writing*¹⁹, such a manoeuvre is essential, for to not write in private is to not write at all. The live presence dynamic of performance art also insists that questions of subjectivity and the first person are viewed/read differently, as the (writing) subject and the first person are presented as a conjoined agency; even when, as is the case in all my live work, the first person *I* is implied through the physical presence of the subject and the marked absence of the voiced pronoun. As Wittgenstein says, 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein 2001:89). It is this aspect of

¹⁸ In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein writes that 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world' (Wittgenstein 2001: 85). He also acknowledges that 'there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical' (Wittgenstein 2001:89).

¹⁹ Also implied in the title of an essay by John Hall.

Wittgenstein's thought that interests me and that serves as a useful pointer to the linguistic territory (N) sought to inhabit. Wittgenstein the *mystic* (rather than the *logician* or *positivist*) opens up the space of Bataille's impossible within which Bataille himself states, that 'I have sought to speak a language amounting to nothing, a language returning to silence' (cited in Gill 1995:109).

Performing Language / Performing (not) Writing

The fragment of Augustine makes an explicit correlation between the capacity of speech to work as a mode of expressive communication and the physical mode and apparatus of utterance – the eyes, face, body and tone of the voice – the way in which language (in this case speech) is performed. In (N), I explored the use of the body, through movement, as a means of live inscription. I was taken by Artaud's notion of 'a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought' (Artaud 1958:89) in which the body might produce a kind of hieroglyphics. This line of enquiry was furthered by an interest in Japanese Butoh dance that I took from Aaron Williamson. In 1999 I worked with Williamson on a residency at the Place Theatre in London that was set up to explore the relationship between Butoh dance methodology and body-based approaches to writing.

Although I did not pursue the more dance-orientated body-work, the principle of using the body as both a tool, and a site for writing in performance remained central.

The Mark of the Unnamed

The title of the performance draws the work into a liturgical (and thereby theological) context. In *orders of service* that pertain to sacramental rites (baptism, confirmation etc.), the points in the text which require the insertion of the given subject's name, are often marked with the letter *N* – italicised and often in parenthesis. It is the mark of the unnamed, a place-holder.

The Trinity and the Triptych

At the start of the performance I entered the space carrying three mounted texts. Three large sash windows dominate the back wall of the room. Behind each window I placed a large wooden circle. The performance is constructed around three central actions and involves three moments of literate inscription (the letter S written onto the door frame as I entered being the first).

The number three is important in my practice, in structural, metaphoric and symbolic terms. It originates in a long-term preoccupation with the doctrine of the trinity – (the words, *In Nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, were uttered often by my own father as a precursor to a mealtime grace).

Artaud, Beckett and Cixous all encounter The Trinity in the course of their own writing. As has been suggested, Cixous formulates a secularised version to describe the transformative potential of writing in reference to the autobiographical dimension of Joyce's prose. She indicates the subject, the writer and the subject becoming written, suggesting that although separable for the purposes of discourse, these three entities are indivisible facets of the subject in process (Kristeva 1998). A similar arrangement can be used to model the conceptual and compositional approach I took to the question of the (writing) subject in (*N*). Given the initial position of not knowing who *I am/is* – or put better by Derrida as the question, 'who is this I who asks who?' (Derrida 2006) – the performance sought to engage the subject (the body who says *I*) in becoming written through a process of *not writing* this condition of unknowing. The relationship between performing subject and the subject being performed engenders a third, floating agency, present in this case in the act of not writing – an act which, framed as performance art, creates through its materialising absence, an alternative mode of textuality. Here, the third component of the trinity is generated not through the formulation of a literary alter-ego (Joyce), but through the fusion of *what I am doing* and *why I/he think(s) I am doing it*, caught, in real-time, in the *eye/I* of the beholder/other – that is, the viewer/reader. The live simultaneity of the physical action and its reading/viewing is an important intervention into the normative mode of textual reception in which the writer is absent from the act of reading.

For Beckett also, The Trinity and the number three can be seen to function as a structural, symbolic and narrative device. I'm thinking not only of *The Trilogy* (Beckett 1976) (which concludes

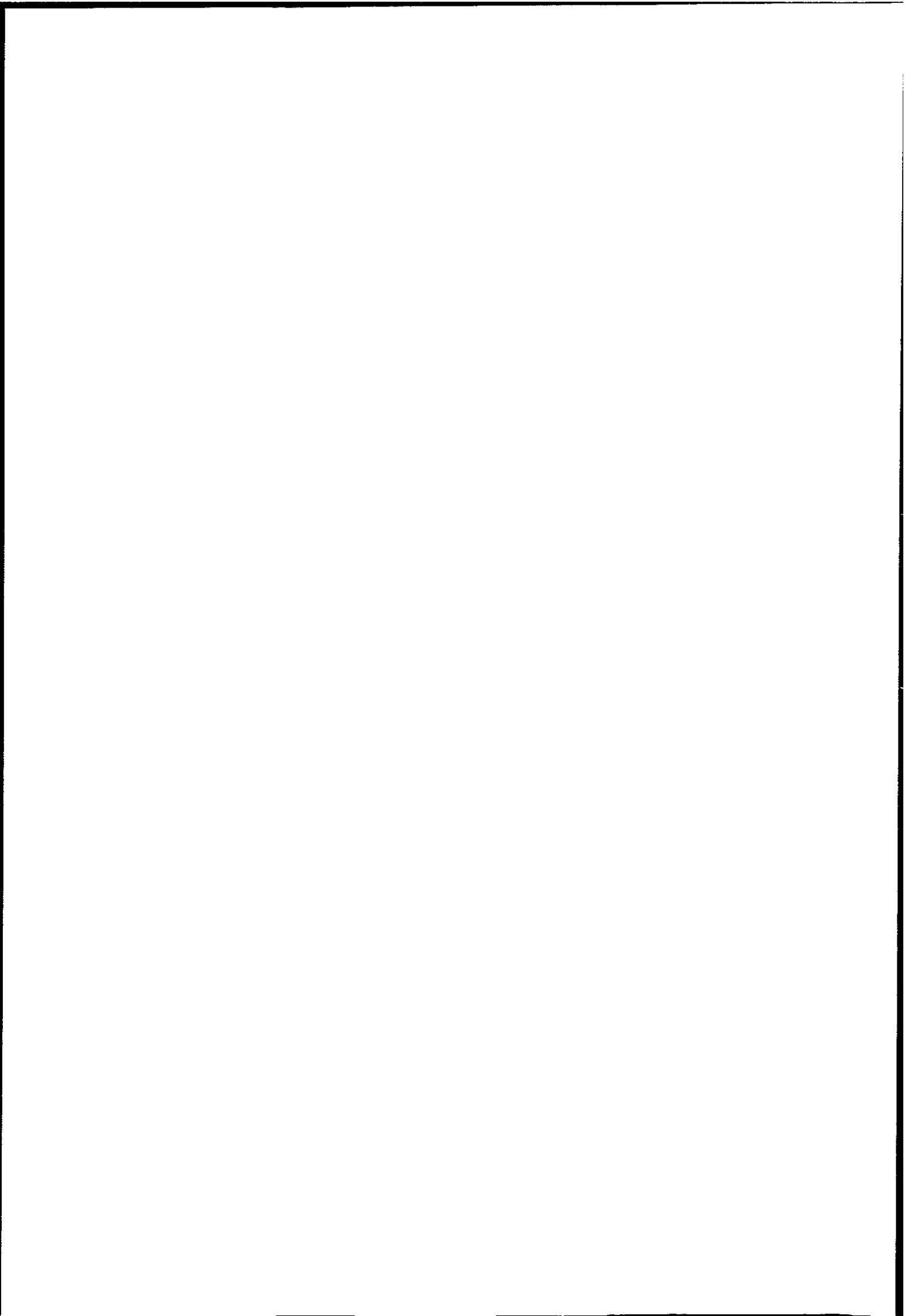
with *The Unnamable*)²⁰ but also of the passion-tide echoes of *Waiting For Godot* (Beckett 1965). Christ's passion, as well as invoking The Trinity itself, presents another tripartite model on which I drew in the development of (N). The three figures crucified at Calvary, as recounted in the canonical gospels, offer a compelling scenario in which a diverse range of relationships between the subject, the self and the divine other can be sensed. The two thieves who are said to have been crucified on either side of Christ (whose names remain unknown) both, according to the 'Gospel of Luke', asked for the gift of redemption. The man of the left, in effect, calls upon Christ to prove himself and save them all – 'If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us' (Luke 23:39). The man on the right (the favoured side in biblical tradition) is said to have accepted Christ as the Saviour dying for the sins of humanity, asking, 'Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Luke 23:32). Between them the three figures are emblematic of a typically human ontological dilemma: to relinquish the assumed autonomy of self-direction and have faith in the transformative power of the other, or to maintain authority (propriety) over a self-determining directive in lieu of a guaranteed fixity of meaning and subjective status. Between these two poles the figure of Christ presents a differing perspective. The geometry of The Trinity²¹ positions the other (God) both inside and outside the subject. Reflecting Cixous' notion of the 'not me within me' or the 'unknown other(s) within oneself', this neither/nor arrangement is indicative of the way I versioned the passion scene and the geometry of The Trinity into (N).

It certainly was not my intention to re-create or illustrate the crucifixion scene. Rather, I sought to model the composition and critical narrative of the performance around the trajectories of ontology and subjectivity that it promotes and apply them to the dynamics of the act of writing; an act which, when confronted with fraught relationships between the drive for self-identity, the desire for the other and the silent omnipotence of God, becomes an essential means of negotiating a violent and ruptured subjectivity. As Kristeva writes:

Here, this means that the act of writing, without me or you, is in fact an obstinate refusal to let go of the third person: the element beyond discourse, the third, the "it exists," the anonymous and unnameable "God," the "Other" – the pen's axis, the father's Death, beyond dialogue, beyond subjectivism, beyond

²⁰ I consider it noteworthy that the three novels that make up *The Trilogy* see the subject destabilised from the named (*Molloy*), to the death of the named (*Malone Dies*), to the unnamed (*The Unnamable*). Indeed, there is a sense in which the completion of *The Trilogy* marks the advent in Beckett's writing of the nameless, disembodied voices so often associated with his later prose work, and credited with providing an enduring exploration of subjectivity and the human condition caught in a state of impasse between being and the capacity to articulate.

²¹ Which, as I'm interpreting it here, operates along the same lines as Bachelard's 'Dialectics of Inside and Outside' discussed in section 12.



psychologism. A disappointed Mouth, seized by the desire to pour itself out as into a wash basin. And yet there is nobody in mind, no "you" – neither father, mother, man nor child; alone with the flow of words that have lost their meaning, that are suspended, like pleasureless vowels, "askew," "tacky"; useless, dying Mouth, dying but persistent, tenacious, obstinate voice, sustained by the same first love, looking for, awaiting, pursuing, who? what?... The prerequisites of writing. (Kristeva 1980:153)

The Scene of Writing

When broaching the matter of practice, as a tangible and potentially operative framework for the generation of writing by way of an active, explorative encounter with its properties as an act, it has been productive to think in terms of a space. Through the conjoined processes of reading, writing and ultimately performing, a conception of a specific space emanating out from within the act of writing in a number of ways began to emerge. I refer to this space, as the *scene of writing*²².

The scene of writing operates on two deeply related yet distinct levels, both of which have been developed through the methodological and compositional strategies I have employed in my efforts to open up and extend my previously informal and private experience of the act of writing into a formalised and interrogative performance practice:

a) I consider the scene of writing to be constructed by, and to consist of, all the conditioning agencies that enable and impact upon the entirety of a writing process. I say entirety, for in this instance, a writing process is considered to be that which commences at a largely indeterminate point and involves an equally indeterminate number of inscriptive acts or initiatives taking various potential forms (including the overtly literate), rather than simply the point at which one sits down to write, or the point at which one commences the inscribing or typing of words. These conditioning agencies include such factors as the material, architectural and technological contexts in which the writing occurs and the socio-cultural, autobiographical and physiological conditioning of the writer.

b) The second level of the scene of writing has been constituted through the act of formalising the type of conditioning agencies referred to above into the components of distinct performance art actions or scenarios. These components can be designated as follows:

²² I am using this phrase in direct reference to Derrida's essay *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (Derrida 1978) in which he sets forth an understanding of writing that sees its determining characteristics as semiotic process and trace effect rather than the presence of words on a given surface.

- (i) The compositional strategies employed to establish the nature of a performance action, and the thematic / theoretical narratives it promotes.
- (ii) The collation of materials (objects, substances, technologies etc.) that will be engaged with in performance.
- (iii) Determining performative means of drawing tangible and discursively productive lines of reference between the site of performance and my research's wider philosophical concerns.

From the very outset of making performance works within this perceived scene of writing, a base principle was at play: through the parameters, dynamics, structures and conventions of performance art, to explore and interrogate the temporal, spatial, material and corporeal dimensions of writerly production, as they impact upon the interplay between the procedures of writing and reading and the subjective status of the writing subject. The realisation of such a principle was initiated, in the first instance, through a simple set of material and spatial interventions, taking as a point of departure, what could be described as notions of normative writing scenarios. Such scenarios were envisaged, with direct reference to my own experience, in a quite literal sense: the writer sitting at the desk or occupying a study or room for writing²³ and the writer confronted with the empty page²⁴ being two key examples.

(N) took place in just such a space. I developed the piece through homing in on my experience of not writing and struggling to write in the face of the impasse. I envisioned the scene of my not writing and proceeded to enlarge and transform it into the space of performance art in terms of materials and physiology.

²³ The decision to engage with the scene of writing by thinking about a *room* or *study* relates directly to my experience of my Father's study discussed below.

²⁴ The tension between the body and desires of the writer and the space of the empty page can be taken as the ultimate location of the impasse.

The First Scene of Writing

In (*N*), the performance space was constructed through playing-off the related images of the desk and the altar. The space was dominated by a raised platform upon which were arranged the various tools and materials of writing used in the performance actions – a mirror, a white sheet beneath which is concealed a large wooden circle (black on one side, red on the other), ink, water, white paint, bandages, antiseptic cream... (see fig.1)

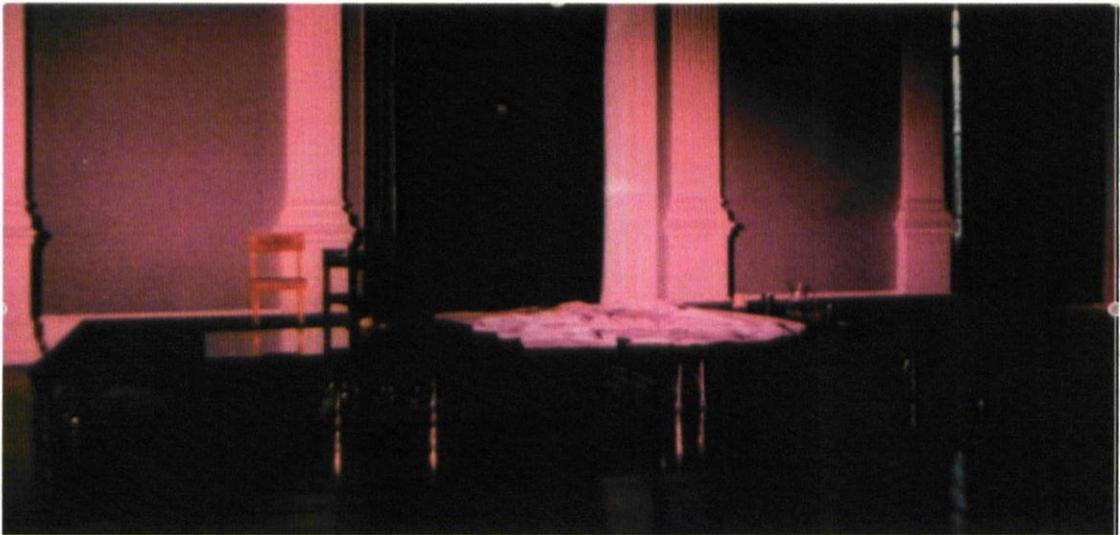


Fig. 1.

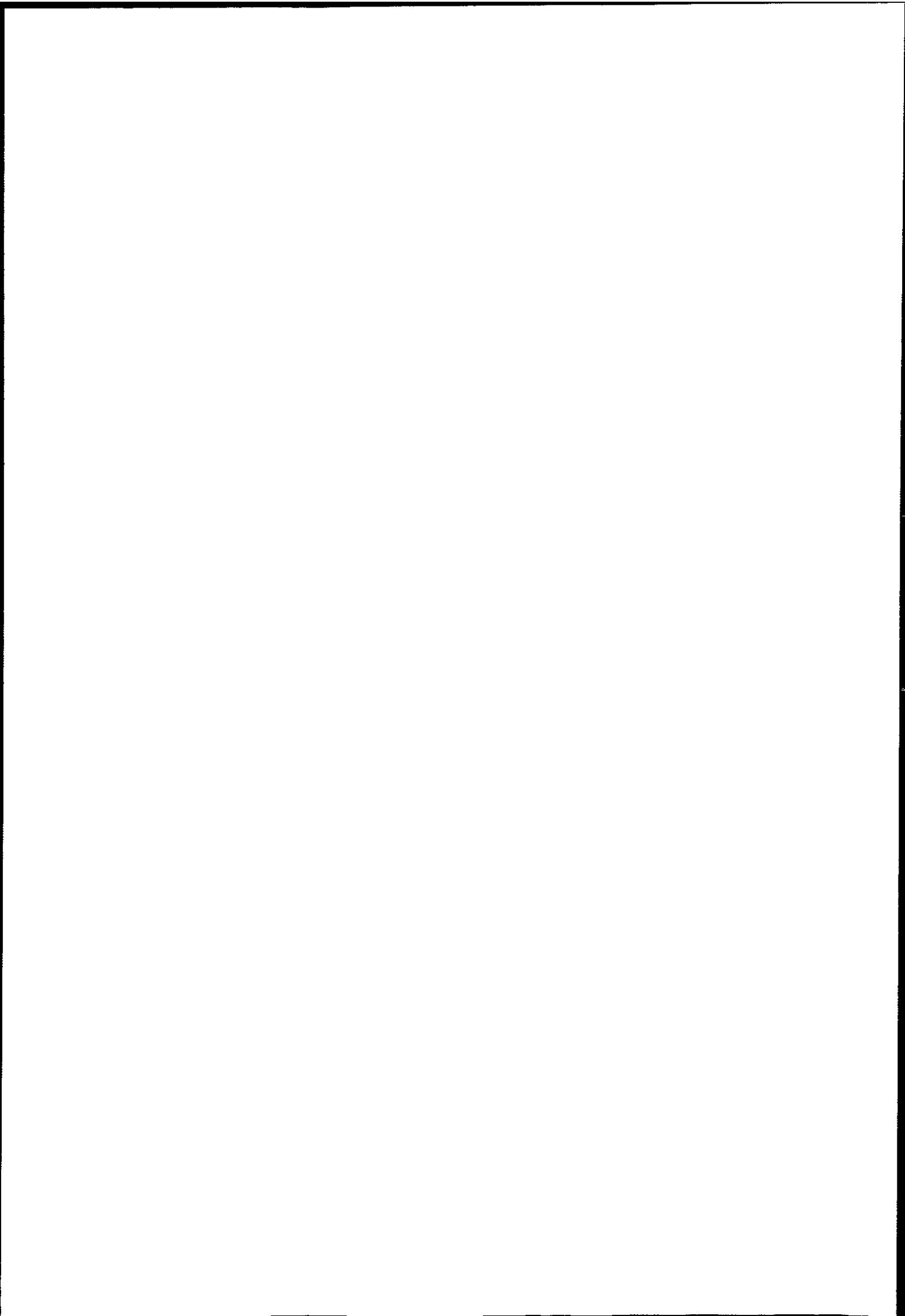
In addition to the generic notion of the writing desk, I had in mind one particular writing space – one that has had a significant bearing on my ‘coming to writing’ (Cixous 1991) – my father’s study. This is where much of my early experience and awareness of writing and the written took place. Much of the time I spent in this room was spent watching my father perform writing. Having little or no awareness of what he wrote, I was fixated rather on the conditions of the act and its material surroundings. There were bookshelves to either side of the writing desk, the texts thereon (some of which I tried to read and some of which have found their way into my research) were my father’s other family of writers: St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Thomas a Kempis – such names looked down on me as I sat in an armchair behind my father, watching him write. The books, and my occasional journeys inside them, certainly tempered my

reading of the room. But it was the desk itself, and its immediate surroundings, that preoccupied me the most.

Viewed from the back, I would see my father's head bent low over the page (I would be pretending to read, but really I would be watching). Immediately above his head, fixed to the wall against which the desk stood, was hung a crucifix – floating, it seemed, just above his thought, and presiding over the writing. And above the crucifix hung a painting, a depiction of heaven: an imposing sky-scape drawn with apocalyptic cloud forms through which a dazzling light bursts. The three images presented a vertical axis: the page, the hand, the head, the hung Christ and the heavens. My eyes ran up and down the line (as I imagined my father's thoughts to run) and its parts became connected – they spoke to one another, forming a transcendental circuitry that afforded the written words (whatever they were) their power and their will to mean.

The rituality of writing and its closeness to the body (both the body that writes and the body that is written) were further entrenched in my 'coming to writing' by the paraphernalia that surrounded my father as he wrote. To the right of the crucifix hung a portrait of Padre Piu, the Italian stigmatic, and arranged on the desk a collection of glass vials and silver pots holding holy waters, oils and ashes reinforced my conception of the materiality and ritual performativity of bodily inscription. I could not help but tie together the more normative writing on the page my father was engaged with and the implications of the objects that surrounded him, viewing the former through the contexts suggested by the latter.

The arrangement of the space in *(N)*, its hint at a desk/altar writing surface and the collection of materials and objects of inscription, was composed with the above scenario live in my memory. Similarly, the experience of stasis incurred by my impassive relationship with writing was reinvigorated by my using the performance as a context within which to deploy the liturgical modes of inscription I am so familiar with as a means of writing through and exploring the impasse; a means more appropriate still given the role I have determined theological strictures to have played in installing the sense of impasse in my relationship to writing.

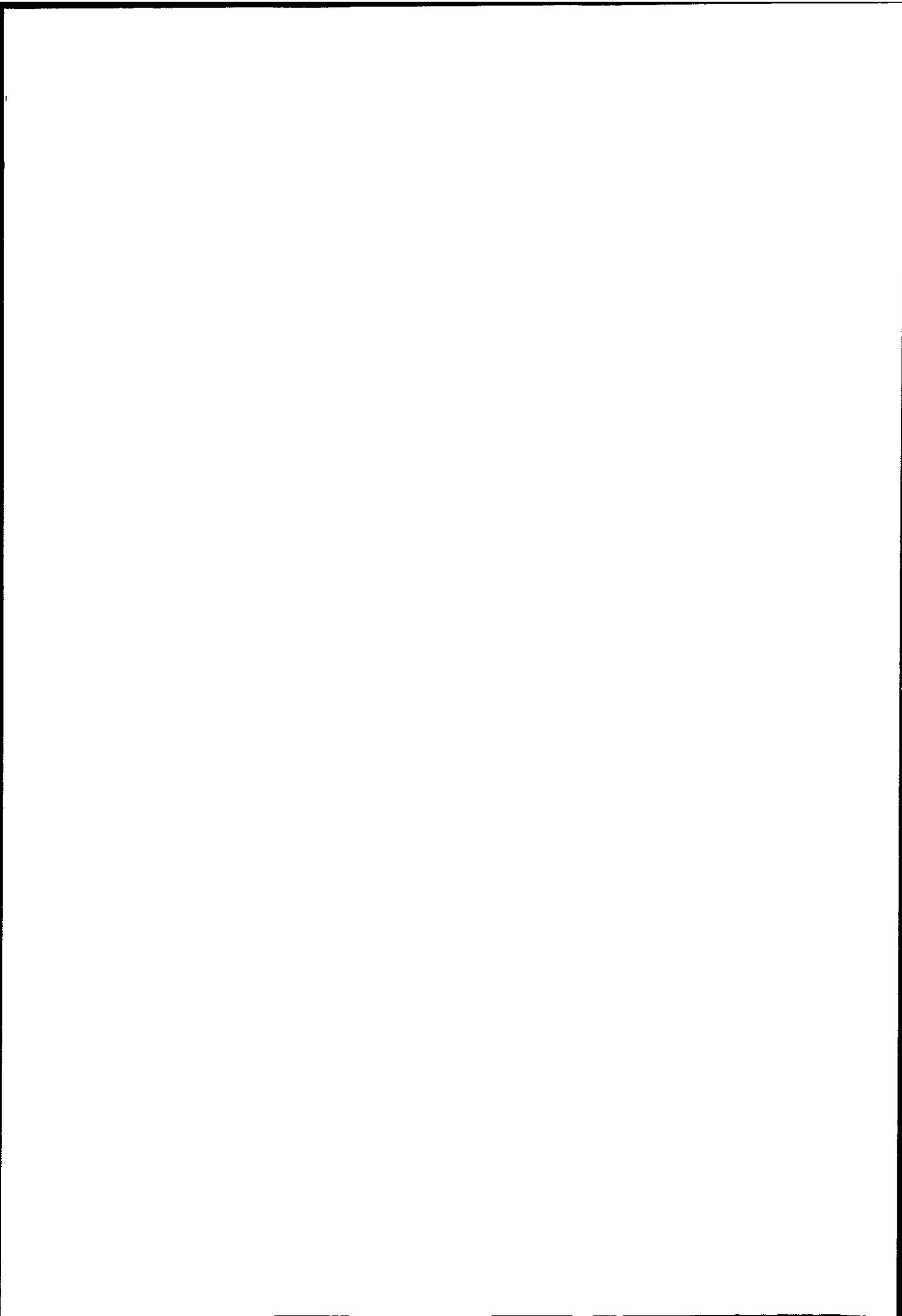


Tabula Rasa / Pieta

The three texts, which I carried into the space at the outset of the performance, were printed on large (A2) paper and mounted on heavy wooden boards behind sheets of Perspex. The production of these objects and their role in the performance was informed by two related narratives: 1) Biblical depictions of The Ten Commandments being written by Moses on Mount Sinai as a direct transcription of the words of God²⁵, and 2) The notion of the tabula rasa.

The *blank slate* (tabula rasa) as a visual metaphor for the state of human consciousness at birth, is played upon and, in a sense, inverted, to work as a material means of ritually enacting the subject's relationship to the text as an unwritten site of desire. The origins of the tabula rasa as a psychological model can be traced back as far as Aristotle's text *De Anima* (Aristotle 1988) which suggests that the relationship between thought and the mind is akin to the letters on a tablet upon which nothing is actually written. An abstract and paradoxical notion – *the mind works like writing that is unwritten* – and one that serves as a precursor to Freud's use of writing surfaces as a means of modelling the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind (see section 18/19). It reflects too, the idea found in Cixous approach to writing, of letting the unconscious spring forth and the other come through, as if the writing is already there. In the performance, the tablets are already written, but in the way of a script, of scripture and stricture. In one action they are dealt with as if bodies themselves, as I adopt a Pieta like position and attempt to feed and nurture the texts (see fig.2). A final act of disavowal, signifying a marked shift in my relationship to language, sees the texts returned to a blank condition as they are painted white with antiseptic cream. They are made to visually mirror the page-like body of the performer, before being subjected to a different kind of writing, a writing directly from the body.

²⁵ This narrative puts an interesting spin on the traditional metaphysical / phenomenological assertion of the voice being the sole preserve of truth in its proximity to the word of God ('the transcendental signified' (Derrida 1974:20) and writing being its dubious representative (sections 20 / 21).



12) – the other in this case being not only the reflection of the subject (Lacan), but also the viewers/readers of the performance, of which I am one (Cixous).

The body painted white refers to the visual (and metaphoric) space of the page. Casting the body in this way in the early stages of the performance was intended to reconstitute its status as that which is written (upon) as well as that which writes. Seen in the context of a *mirror-phase* enactment, the notion of the body as a page, blank, and open to be written by the other(s), reflects Cixous' proposition that writing provides the means by which the subject might relate to the other in ways that alleviate the strictures of the Lacanian master/slave dialectic (see section 14). Yet by literally (as opposed to metaphorically, as is the case with Cixous) locating the space of writing on the body, the disembodied effect of a second dualism – body/text – is, albeit symbolically, bypassed. This manoeuvre intended to *set* the status of the body/page for the other two central actions of the piece – the central and right panels of the imagined triptych – as an inversion of the *tabula rasa* model: Not a blank page which is written upon, but a page through which emerges, from behind, the substance of the subject in process, realising Cixous' directive to write of rather than about the subject.

On My Knees

The middle action of the three that form the triptych structure of the piece is a response to my mother's ascent of Croagh Phadraig. Having cut the white sheet (page) in half and rolled it back to reveal a large red circle, I balanced on top of it upon my knees (see fig.6). I remain balanced for as long as I can, my out stretched arms helping me to balance and inscribing unnamed characters in the air. When I fall my skin has inscribed itself back through the white paint.

Writing is the mechanical synopsis of the body's trace, a trace not of language but the body. Affording it an existence either before or beyond language challenges the pragmatic structuralist view that language formulates us, is our defining feature. Trajectoring from the body to language calls for an appropriate realignment of the text which acknowledges the return to corporeality. The body is the nexus, the fundament; language the instrument in, hopefully, a perpetual renewal of the world and self. In tandem. (Williamson 1996:45)

The Presence in Absence

Derrida's theory of writing as *differance* and its emphasis on a multiplicity of potential meanings engendered by the play between presence and absence, or 'presence-in-absence' (Smith 2005:45), prompted a number of performance actions as part of my experiments in live composition. Initially, these actions involved objects and materials that maintain no particular bearing on writing as such. What concerned me, was the possibility for a kind of writing that embraces Derrida's proposals as a model for practice, but proceeds through applying inscriptive and transformative principles to found objects and materials. I was taken by the idea that an object (a plum, a fish, a sheet, a nail...) brings its own sphere of language into the space of performance. Not just the word that is most directly associated with it (its name), but its part in other narratives and discourses and the linguistic material it might invoke in the mind of a viewer. I thought it possible, that by placing specific objects together and treating them in various ways, I might become a kind of language puppeteer – I envisioned shifting and mutable writings pouring in and out of objects as they are witnessed in differing combinations, contexts and states. Might words be made present in their absence, through the presence of objects and materials absented from their normative context? Furthermore, might a process of shifting the material and visual condition of objects by inscribing, marking, encasing and breaking through their surfaces in thematically contextualising actions, shift also their linguistic field of reference? And might such a process of marking, inscribing and treating be in itself a mode of writing – a mode of writing that leaves in its wake another writing, a trace, the mark of its absence?

In response to questions such as these, I made performance actions that sought to set-up linguistic and inscriptive chain reactions, with processes of meaning (*differance*) being written across various modes of inscription and forms of language. In doing so, I was mindful again, of Artaud's ideas of poetry in performance, 'of creating material images equivalent to word images' (Artaud

2) A determination not to regress into a mode of literate writing that relies on inherited assumptions around the expressive remit of the voice, be it sounded, or rendered on the page. An additional example of this area of my performance enquiry can be found in the DVD Performance Documentation, *Impossible Joys – A Summary* (Appendix A).

Derrida's Critique of Language as Expression

The prioritising of speech and the negation of writing to a secondary, representative status, is, according to Derrida, rooted in a phenomenological bias central to the platonic tradition of western metaphysical thought. In the dialogues of *Phaedrus*, Plato makes his position abundantly clear, setting a historically resilient model:

Socrates: I mean an intelligent word graven in the soul of the learner, which can defend itself, and which knows when to speak and when to be silent.

Phaedrus: You mean the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image.

As an exemplar of such phonocentric tendencies, Derrida undertakes a deconstructive reading of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory of language. Husserl's thought is shaped by a search for truth in language, which he understands 'in terms of *expression*, where *expression* is meaning as willed and intended by an utterer.' (Harland 1987:141) He therefore regards 'as incidental to linguistic meaning the associations that words may cause to form in the mind of a receiver.' (Harland 1987:141) Such a position and its insistencies can be seen as corroborating much of the dilemma faced by the writer when faced by the state of impasse I have described in respect to my own practice. The emphasis on expression as a mode of communication which is 'meant, conscious through and through and intentional', (Derrida 1981:41) and the determination that such utterances are born of some inherent grounding in truth, incurs a necessary privileging of the voice as the primary arbiter of spoken language and the inevitable relegation of writing. The basis for Husserl's relating voiced speech to truth is the perceived proximity (both temporal and physiological) of spoken language to the mind of the speaker. 'Meaning thus understood is not just meaning in the sense that words mean, but in the sense that *someone means them to mean.*' (Harland 1987:126) For Husserl therefore, the validity of expression is

dependant on the extent to which 'some individual mind is actually thinking it at the moment of utterance.' (Harland 1987:126) Such emphasis on intention and the voice as the dual prerequisites of truly subjective and expressive significance inevitably promotes a movement away from writing and the written through its perceived distance or break from the origins of intended meaning and truthful substance – that is, the mind and its supposed privileged link to the spoken word.

Derrida's critique of the phenomenological position is driven by the extent to which it is reliant upon the theological structure of standard western metaphysics – the need for an ultimate legitimizing factor – that is, the authority of God. In linguistic terms, Derrida refers to this point of legitimacy as the 'transcendental signifier' (Derrida 1974:20), determining that it is only through recourse to a finite point of authorship that the structuralist model of the signifier expressing and/or indicating the signified, is tenable. This theologism and its predicate the voice, stand, according to Derrida, as the framework for a core metaphysical fallacy which has had significant implications for the condition of the subject, which, under its auspices, is as reliant upon transcendental validation for the qualification of being, as is the word for the qualification of meaning. Derrida writes:

The logos of being, *thought obeying the voice of being*, is the first and last resource of the sign, of the difference between signas and signatum. There has to be a transcendental signifier for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible. It is not by chance that the thought of being, as the thought of the transcendental signified, is manifested above all in the voice: in a language of words (*mots*). The voice *is heard* (understood) – that undoubtedly is what is called conscience – closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside itself, in the world or in *reality*, any accessory signifier, any substance of expression foreign to its own spontaneity. It is the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within the self, and nevertheless, as signified concept, in the element of ideality or universality. The unworldly character of this substance of expression is constitutive of this ideality. This experience of the effacement of the signifier in the voice is nor merely one illusion among many – since it is the condition of the very idea of truth. This illusion is the history of truth and it cannot be dissipated so quickly. Within the closure of this experience, the word (*mot*) is lived as the elementary and undecomposable unity of the signified and the voice, of the concept and a transparent substance of expression. This experience is considered in its greatest purity – and at the same time in the condition of its possibility – as the experience of *being*. (Derrida 1974: 20)

Here Derrida goes right to the heart of the basis for his critique of the phonocentric bias of western metaphysics as manifest (amongst many other places) in the phenomenology of Husserl. By drawing together a tripartite site of dependency constructed around the word as a signficatory unit and notions of truth and being, he highlights the extent to which the sustenance of all three is predicated upon the acceptance of an absolute and irreducible point of signified closure. That this point is made manifest in the voice, is, according to Derrida, telling, as it emphasises the epistemological trajectory

that links vocality to the divine, and the divine to truth: 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was God'. And, as he suggests, the effacement of the signifier, that is, its reduction to a stable and fixed signified, is the condition which propagates truth, and that truth, when seeming to emerge from the interiority of the self (voice) is experienced as the phenomenon of being.

The dilemma presented by my own experience of writing seems in part symptomatic of the cultural and historical prevalence of this phonocentric bias and the extent to which my understanding of the written word and its deployment in practice had become determined by a historically entrenched set of assumptions and preconceptions around the modes and methods of written responses to the substance of the self.

If it is accepted (and in my own case I believe it can be) that for writers of a certain type³⁰, the primary desire driving their practice is for an engagement, through language, with a sense of truth in respect to the relationship between the self and the world, then the theologically grounded model of language as expression promoted by Husserl demands attention, as it negates the potential of writing as a genuine mode of subjective, ontological enquiry, through its supposed distance from the mind and thoughts of the subject.

Derrida's reading of Husserl involves what appears as a wholesale inversion of standard communicative processes and values. Shifting the locus of discourse away from the self-present temporality of the speaking voice and towards the self-sufficient, spatial permanence of the written text, he enacts a conceptual revision of writing's status that stands as a direct challenge to the secondary role it has been traditionally afforded – his general theory writing.

The Question of the Voice

In his essay 'La Parole Soufflée' Derrida writes:

Artaud knew that all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech. Becomes a signification which I do not possess because it is a signification. Theft is always the theft of speech or text, of a trace. The theft of a possession does not become a theft unless the thing stolen is a possession, unless it has acquired meaning and value through, at least, the consecration of a vow made in discourse. (Derrida 1978:175)

³⁰ Those identified earlier by Cixous and gathered under her use of the term *poet*.

Here, Derrida describes the root of Artaud's own experience of an impasse, which for him became a violent crisis in subjectivity. Nonetheless, there are certain similarities between the Artaudian dilemma and my own experience: primarily, a thwarted desire for an articulate form of subjective affirmation and unified self-identity. Artaud also located the source of his ontological rupture with language in a theological space. Speaking in terms of theatre (the form through which Artaud endeavoured to challenge the impasse) Derrida states that

the stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. (Derrida 1978:235)

Artaud attempted to create a radical approach to the language of performance that would address the disassociation from language he experienced in life. He called this endeavour *The Theatre of Cruelty* (Artaud 1958). As Derrida explains:

The theatre of cruelty expulses God from the stage. It does not put a new atheist discourse on stage, or give atheism a platform, or give over theatrical space to a philosophising logic that would once more, to our greater lassitude, proclaim the death of God. The theatrical practice of cruelty, in its action and structure, inhabits or rather *produces* a nontheological space. (Derrida 1978:235)

In the absence not of God, but of theological method in ordering the relationship between language, meaning and the subject, Artaud tried to formulate a language that was of the subject's physiological condition, and that would enable him to repossess his body and overcome the prevalence of the mind/soul/spirit side of dualistic thought which he blamed for the theft of his voice and language. For Artaud, linguistic articulation of any kind implied a process of disembodiment, which in turn implied a loss of self and personal autonomy. The closest he came to developing a mode of practice that achieved his objectives in overcoming this scenario, was his work with non-verbal vocal soundings. The practice of non-verbal voicing, as a kind of vocal writing, or 'writing aloud' (Barthes 1975), has been central to the work of Williamson (particularly in the earlier half of his career). His attraction to this way of articulating the self through its relationship to language has many similarities to Artaud's. In the case of Williamson however, his condition of profound deafness is also a hugely significant factor. In both cases, there is a sense (which I relate to from the perspective of my own work) in which language is to be re-invested in its corporeal site of origin – there is a desire to write from the body. Where Williamson succeeds (and one could argue that Artaud fails) is in his ability to produce his writing (vocal and page-based) in the spirit of the gift, as defined by Cixous. He says that

'the analogy of 'giving' or 'birth' (the neotenic text) is more identifiable to me in intent than that of authority' (Williamson 1996:63). Artaud however, as Derrida asserts, was only ever subject to the experience of theft and a loss of self, because he viewed language as possession. The nature of his writing and performance does not reflect this. Indeed, Cixous refers to him as a feminine writer. But the content of his work is repeatedly at a loss to articulate the violent fissure between the self, language and the other.

Although Williamson's work is very different from my own, its influence has been significant. It is not the voice as vocalised, but rather the question of the voice, as capturing much of the tension between writing and subjectivity, that interests me. I do not see Williamson's voice work as presenting a model for practice. Rather, it has offered me a set of conceptual possibilities for broaching the unavoidable writing challenge of contending with the idea of voice.

Through my reading of Cixous I began to conceive the self as being a shifting space of multiple selves and others, that co-habit the unconscious body, far more than the self-aware mind (ego). By pushing the voice in this direction, Williamson allows it to operate as an articulator of the corporeal subject in process, rather than the authorial subject in a position of patriarchal control – to use the voice in this way, he has modelled its function on that which Cixous grants to writing.

In my own performance work, the voice has been considered primarily in its absence (in terms of sound and speech) as a mode of reinforcing its interior presence. A number of actions in the DVD documentation included attest to my treatment of the oral, and the notion of the author's voice, as my practice begins to shift towards the possibilities of text.

A Catalogue of Actions – DVD Performance Documentation

This work was performed at Dartington College of Arts in 2002 and includes actions from: (N) – Institute of Contemporary Art (London), *Impossible Joys 1* – Bonnington Gallery (Nottingham), *Rose Semblances* – Dock 11 (Berlin) and *Let Me In Let Me Out* – Chisenhale Dance Space (London).

The actions presented have been selected for their ability to serve as examples of the theoretically driven practical initiatives discussed in the previous section.

The performance was filmed by Gary Winters.

Digging and Spinning: Collaborative Video Work

For the written to be the written, it must continue to 'act' and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written... whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead, or if in general he does not support with his absolute current and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his meaning.

– Jacques Derrida (cited in Harland 1987:128)

The opportunity to participate in the making of two video/text works in collaboration with the composer/artist David Prior (hereafter DP) presented a key turning point in the progression of my research and practice. My role in the collaboration as writer/performer, and the particular characteristics of video as a medium, provided the ideal framework within which to extend my practice of writing from the live context of performance art towards the space of the page and a more literary mode of dissemination, albeit through a set of decidedly interdisciplinary strategies. In terms of the narrative of my research, these two pieces can be seen as something of a bridge between the live works already discussed and the page-based writings that will be considered in my concluding sections.

The value of making these video works, in the context of my research, can be clarified into two specific points:

- 1) The opportunity to develop texts in the space of the page through maintaining a compositional foothold in the space of performance. This process was undertaken in the advance knowledge, that whilst the texts produced may be able to operate as literary outcomes in their own right, their primary, intended mode of presentation would be as a voiced component in performance-derived video work.
- 2) The opportunity to further the advances made in the latter stages of my performance art experiments around relationships between the voice, the writing/reading subject and the material

status of the text, whilst resisting recourse to the use of the explicit authorial voice. The poet J.H. Prynne refers to the difficulties incurred by these types of readings (the standard poetry reading being the obvious example) where the 'voice of the poem' may be undermined by 'voice of the poet', which he considers to be 'an accident of biography' (cited in Potts 2004).

In making these two pieces I was able to construct another tripartite structure around the operations of writing in the work. In this case, between the written text, the performing body and the reading voice, which in both cases, was not my voice. Again in both cases, the performing (to camera) of specific actions (digging and spinning) took place prior to the writing of the work's textual component. This being so, I was able to write back at performance. This way of thinking about the relationship between the performance of writing itself and the relationship of the written to more formalised moments of performance has been instrumental in moving my practice into territories that include (or reside within) the functionality of the page-based text.

When writing the texts for these works, I not only held within me the physical experience of having performed the actions, but I also had those actions re-playing in front of me on a screen. This way, I was able – drawing on my experience of performing writing and writing in performance – to allow the performing of the actions to inform the thematic and structural development of the texts. Furthermore, this process was inflected by the knowledge that in the video's final construction and presentation, the texts would be read (voiced) back into the context of the actions themselves.

During these processes, I was mindful again, of Barthes' notion of the text, particularly as it bears on the status of the writing subject and the first person *I*. The splitting of the locus of subjective reference across the performing subject, the reading voice and the *I* in the text (which in the case of *Digging* is used often and which in the case of *Spinning* is made present through a marked absence) engenders a certain ambiguity around the identity and subjective position of the speaking voice/performing body that works well as a mode of ontological and subjective articulation. This is so due to the extent to which I had, at this stage in my research practice, embraced the fluid, de-centred and unknowable dynamics of the self (*I*) and had developed, through performance, strategies to deploy writing around the body as a means of capturing this dynamic as part of the work's substance as a field within which to harness the subject in process – that is, becoming, rather than being.

Barthes, as discussed earlier, talks about the text in terms of demonstration. He suggests that within its very fabric will be played-out its means of production. This process is enabled by the compositional nature of the text, certainly, but also by the generative mode of reading such composition demands. The texts I wrote for these video works are read (that is, heard) in the context of the performative means (the actions on screen) by which they were written. That their thematic and structural composition reflects these means, enhances further the extent to which they can be seen to demonstrate their own processes of becoming as a linguistic reflection of the ontological condition of the subject(s) through which they were processed. Within such a scenario the reader becomes an active participant in the construction of potential meaning(s) playing across the cluster of linguistic and textual points of reference. As Barthes puts it:

'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself *plays* (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that the practice not be reduced to an inner mimesis, (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in a musical sense of the term. (Barthes 1977:162)

Continuing this musical analogy, he suggests that

we know that today post-serial music has radically altered the role of the 'interpreter', who is called upon to be in some sort the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it 'expression'. The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration. Which is an important change, for who executes the work? (Barthes 1977:163)

This final question – who? – is, as I have shown, a pertinent one in the context of my research practice. I have referred to Derrida's own question, 'who is this *I* who asks who?', and Cixous' assertion that 'I don't know who *I* am/is'. Barthes, by locating his version at the coming together of reading and writing, has provided me with a practicable response to unknown status of the subject – to answer its call through the unknown status of the author. By accepting, and to an extent, letting go of, the desire for propriety over the first person and inviting the other(s) into the text through encouraging participatory modes of reading/viewing, the Barthes' idea of the writerly text may be realised. This kind of text (that is always being re-written through the writerly act of reading) is capable of engendering bliss (*jouissance*) – that is, a re-ordering of the subject (Barthes 1975).

Three Films of Digging

The first of the two video works made with DP, a triptych entitled *Three films of Digging*, originated in an intuitive response he had to a record of German Hammond Organ music he had acquired in a junk shop in Berlin. He listened to the music and conceived the image of a man digging. On deciding to set three of the tracks from the record to fixed camera video sequences of digging in three different locations, he asked me if I would perform the action.

It was whilst undertaking the filming that my role in the work became more developed than that of a performer operating under direction. During the first session (at a stony beach on the Devon Coast) I was struck by the redundancy of the action – the stones refilled the hole as fast as I could dig it. Also, in discussing the potential narrative implications of the action with DP, we determined it important that no reason be given for the act of digging, but that its motivation remain ambiguous. Taken together, these two aspects of the performance reminded me of *The Myth of Sisyphus*³¹, and Albert Camus' essay of the same name.

The notion of a seemingly pointless or redundant task – or put better, a task which is always in process, and by its very nature, never complete – struck a chord with some of the philosophical approaches to writing I had been preoccupied with. Cixous' notion of writing (*poetry* in her terms) being a process of journey, not arrival, that reflects a state of perpetual exile in which the subject and its other(s) cohabit in a state of blissful uncertainty, the ontological value Bataille places on failure in poetic writing and the Derridean scene of perpetually *deferred* meaning, all maintain a sense of the *Sisyphian*. However, in keeping with Camus' reading of the myth, rather than purgatorial frustration, they see in its dynamics the potential for pleasure and the scope to open up the space of difference in which the self and the other may coalesce in a generative state of subjective equity. As Camus puts it in respect to Sisyphus: 'The struggle itself is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy' (Camus 1986:111). Indeed, the second of my texts begins, 'He said Sis was happy'.

³¹ In Greek mythology Sisyphus received a punishment from the Gods for his various acts of trickery which required him to roll a boulder up a mountain. However, no sooner had he neared the top then the boulder rolled back down and he had to start again. Activities that follow this pattern are often referred to as being *Sisyphian*.

When I told D.P of my reading of the digging actions, he invited me to become more involved in the project. He was keen to mine the philosophical resources of the action and we agreed that developing a textual dimension to the piece could work in this direction. It seemed immediately clear, that the mode of voice over, would enable a thematically and philosophically provocative ambiguity around the location/identity of the speaker – the voiced text (and the profligate use of the first person) working as either (or both) an externalised interior monologue of the performer or externally voiced commentary on his actions. Here I was in mind again of Bachelard's 'Dialectics of Inside and Outside'.

The three texts I wrote to accompany the three video sequences that make up the piece were, in addition to the strategies outlined above, developed through three key approaches:

- 1) To use the thematic concerns of the performed action to drive the narrative of the writing.
- 2) In the light of the above (point 1), to develop an approach to writing that responded to Cixous' notion of poetic theory (Blyth and Sellers 2004). Blyth and Sellers suggest that it is in her 'refusal to reach a conclusion, in this willingness to admit that she may not complete her task or quest, that Cixous' poetic writing can be said to be most clearly differentiated from the concerns of standard philosophical discourse' (Blyth and Sellers 2004:67/8). Cixous explains her insistence of writing of this kind stating that

philosophy has always wanted to think its other, to interiorise it, incorporate it. From the moment it thinks its other, the other is no longer other, but becomes the same. It enters into the space of what can be thought, it loses its strangeness. (cited in Blyth and Sellers 2004:68).

Suggesting that standard discourse maintains an 'impulse to gather thought in a noun, to capture and plant it' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 2004:68), she describes it as being limited to the consideration of 'immobile objects' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 2004:68). The process of developing a discourse on practice that 'moves', 'the practice of working on *what escapes*, is something that can only be done poetically' (cited in Blyth and Sellers 2004:68).

The use of poetic language as a mode of philosophical discourse was central to my writing the three *digging texts*³², and it relates once more to Cixous' economies of sexual difference. She makes a

³² Furthermore (and in reference to the *practice and theory / the structure of the thesis...* sections of my introduction), it is my hope that these texts, and those that follow operate as part of the wider discursive narrative of my thesis.

distinction, when thinking about writing discourse and discourses on writing, between 'mastery' and 'virtuosity' (Cixous 1997). Blyth and Sellers describe this distinction as follows:

Mastery suggests some degree of dominance over something or somebody else – it calls to mind the actions of the (masculine) hierarchical system of 'logocentrism'. Virtuosity, on the other hand, can be seen as indicative of a certain respectful (feminine) process of interaction between the artist and his or her chosen medium. Just as some musicians can 'exercise virtuosity' through a process of concentration so intense that the instrument they are playing becomes something akin to an extension of their own body, Cixous' virtuosic writing forms complex, multidirectional pathways between language and the body, writing and the writer. (Blyth and Sellers 2004:69/70)

This last sentence is as good a description as any of what I was (and still am) endeavouring to achieve in my own writing practice, and it explains well the textual objectives of both my collaborative projects with DP. The three digging texts stand as a poetic discourse on the Sisyphean dynamic of digging as a metaphor for the experience of writing subjectivity.

3) To develop compositional writing strategies at the levels of prosody, grammar and syntax, that enable the text to be performed (read) and to perform itself, in a dialogue with the performed action it accompanies. To these ends, I was mindful of Beckett's writing (particularly the later prose work) with which I was closely engaged at this point in my research. Taking lead from Beckett, I wrote the texts for digging, in the first instance, without punctuation³³, and, as I have said, whilst viewing the footage of the action. The process of writing unpunctuated required that the prosodic and syntactical qualities of the words themselves, and the way they prompt a reading, be the temporal and spatial drive of the writing. Having been written in the context of the action, the text's internal rhythms and potential intonations (its inherent performance) were enabled to echo its performic dynamics. When DP and I recorded Roddy Hunter reading the texts, he was working from the unpunctuated versions. In the light of his reading, the texts have been punctuated for the page (see section 20).

On What it Might Mean to be Spinning

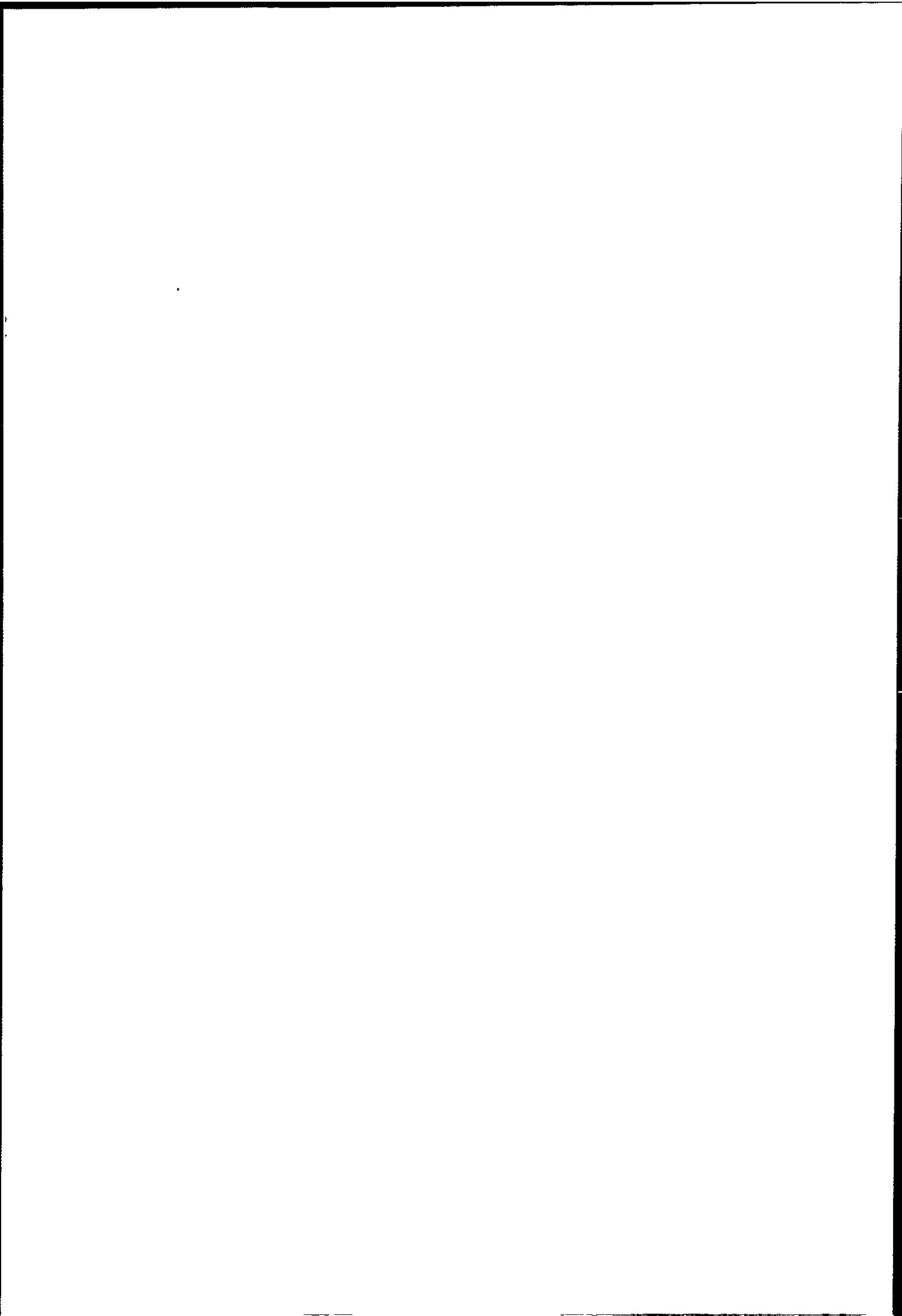
The making of this second video/text collaboration with DP was developed out of the digging project. In the case of *On What it Might Mean to be Spinning*, the idea of working out from a simple,

³³ A good example of this technique in Beckett's work is the novel *How It Is* (Beckett 1961). A more recent example would be John Hall's sequence of prose poems *Here and There* (Hall 2007).

repeated action was continued. In this project, although their remained a clear division of roles – writer/performer, and composer/director – the element of collaboration was more established than was initially the case in the previous piece. The proposition to work around a simple image of the performer spinning, was conceived together. The basis for this decision was threefold:

- 1) To continue the visual, thematic and textual implications of cyclical, unending processes.
- 2) To focus more explicitly upon the performance (and subsequently textual) possibilities provided by subjecting the subject to a high level of visual scrutiny – an approach that was instigated by the fixed camera strategy used in *digging*.
- 3) To develop further the interplay between written text and performed image. In this respect I was particularly concerned with the questions of the voice that I had begun to explore in the previous piece. A slightly different strategy was employed however, in that rather than playing on the mysterious status of the first person through its use, its insistency as agency in language is marked by its absence. And again, the playful decentring of the subject (as voice and in text) oscillates around the performing image of the bodied subject. Bearing in mind the performance related page-based work of Catling and Williamson referred to in Part 1, I was also thinking about the text on the page being able to function as an autonomous work, away from its performative origins and voiced, video performance context. Considering this objective, this piece saw me explore further, the relationship between the written text and its performance counterpart and the modal possibilities this relationship offers for writing through the question of subjectivity and its position in language.

The piece, *On What it Might Mean to be Spinning*, operates through a split-screen format. The left-hand panel shows a fixed camera shot of my face. The camera was fixed to a pole protruding up and out from the base of a rotating office style chair, which, during the filming was spun at a steady pace. The right-hand panel was made in just the same way, but with the camera reversed, so rather than pointing in at my face, it was directed away down my line of sight. The filming took place on top of a church tower, affording a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape and resulting in the spinning motion of both panels being punctuated by the passing of the stone ornaments at each corner of the tower.



The face works as the central thematic and compositional device in the work. In performing and writing the work, I was particularly interested in the way the face functions as a kind of liminal zone between the corporeal status of the body and its status as a site of socially constructed identity and subjectivity – the face, perhaps more than any other physical aspect, serves as a visual entry point to who *I* am/is. The visual and physiological relationship between the face (the mouth, eyes, throat and neck in particular) and the mechanisms of speech was also an important consideration, as it compounds the absence of the subject's voice, off-set by the presence of the other voice, the location of which, is again, ambiguous.

Bataille writes that 'there is, in the human face, an infinity of twists and turns and escape routes' (cited in Ewing 2007:52). The visual composition of the piece and its written component both invest in the idea of the face as a place or landscape – an illuminating topography across which the processes of the subject and its relationship to the other are written. The text (which I call *Spun*) attempts to explore this landscape, taking an almost painterly position, working on the view of the face, as both that which is looked at and that which looks. This in/out dialogue (which I again relate to Bachelard (see section 10)) had me thinking again about Lacan's use of the mirror as a way of describing the formation of the subject, and Cixous' critique of his model (see section 12). The subjective predicament the piece engages is described perfectly by Jorge Luis Borges: 'I dream of a mirror. I see myself with a mask, or I see in the mirror someone who is me but whom I do not recognise as myself' (cited in Ewing 2007:26).

Much as in the *digging* texts I sought to structure the text in response to the dynamics of the performed action, a similar approach being taken by Prior with the musical component. The text is constructed in sequence of lines – lines, in the grammatic, rather than spatial sense. Circulating around a limited and repeating vocabulary, each line works as a textual echo of the physical spinning depicted in the video, as it plays between the images presented on the two panels.

Three Films of Digging – DVD

Shot on location around South Devon.

Voice recording took place in the Performance Technology Centre at Dartington College of Arts.

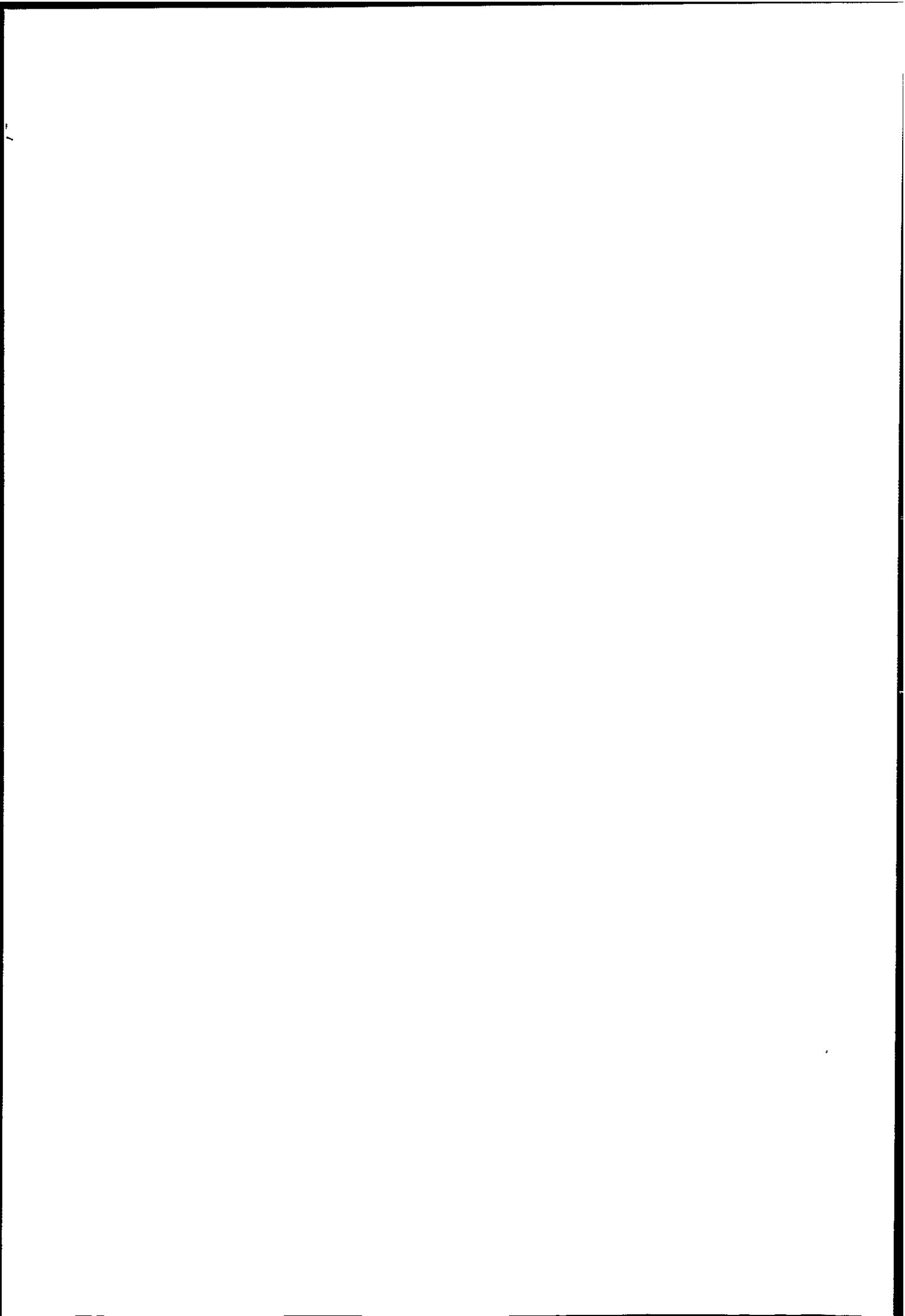
Digging concept: David Prior

Texts: Larry Lynch

Performer: Larry Lynch

Voice: Roddy Hunter

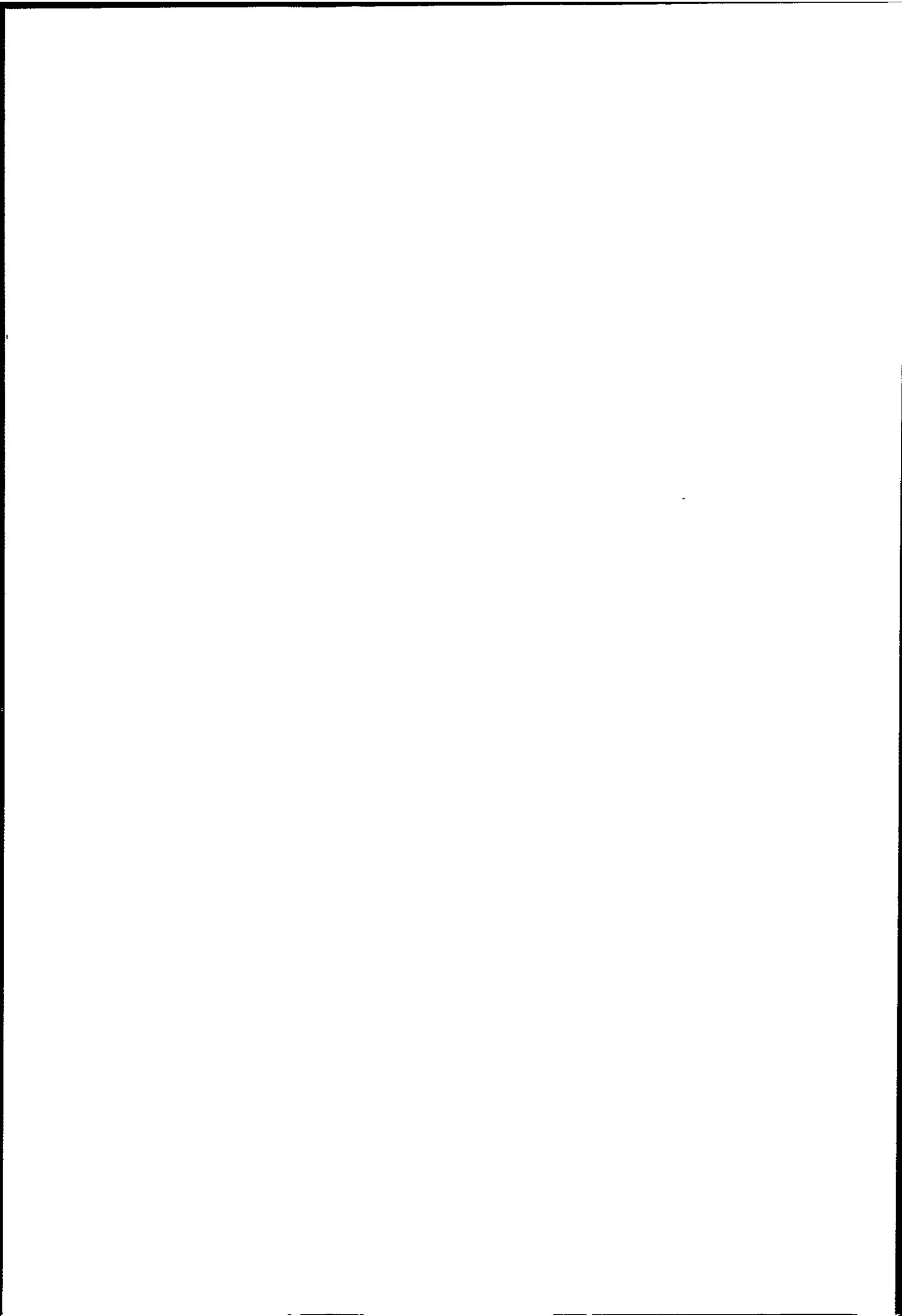
Video and sound editing: David Prior (with Larry Lynch)



Three Short Texts About Digging

1.

It started with a this. And that that this might stand to tell that this times was a time telling of old places coming too new to me in a turning over and over of the words in my mind that had started of me looking. Everywhere where I looked under the stated face of things to come that I could but shoulder away and face down in the mud turned over as I cracked it almost after time. That I started this at all is but all of a missing of things to show for all the sink and salvage that must be lying in the depths of a promise this nurtured. But for all the lift and thrust of each and every plead of the surface pictures in my head and voices that are in me to mind my maketh the manner of my own descent into some them see. And say that the trouble often follows by upping the turn, then to remove the obstructions seems no lesser than fairly tells that to no one but really, we ought to like, understand or appreciate the nature of things and their various natures, despite not being seen, found or spoken.



2.

He said Sis was happy. And I say - how is he about that then? - the hymn was rock said he. Rock. And then roll it to the top of the top must I. Be it under this world or over that, I will will myself to accomplish no thing that might then come to lay siege to my content. And so the image of earth (or any other matter for that matter) clings so tight to my memory that my lucidity becomes all to clear to me. So then here I am, repeatedly lodging my stolid little victories - just underneath the skin, and just a little bit more before I might just crack a smile so rueful and do it all over again. But that would be absurd, would it not?

3.

In the thought of ending though, it is content that the question comes back to this - that I know not what to call this man... this man who seeks a reflection in the lost time of sought memory. But at all of the day, this therein that is it, and with a look nothing if expective cast up off my face, I citing my lot, right in the image of that stone. And as we approach the plain once more, only I know what it is to be in - never looking forward, nor never looking back, less the point be not in a journey, but in the equilibrial factor of an anti ulysean bluff. Yet, there being two sides to every page, that which meant to punish is once and forever bent to free. The law when physical is all open to vent... open to the strange vagaries of endeavour and the blissfull vanishment of the impossible. For so much to do about faith, that hope ceases to know how to mean anything, as the loss of object arrives within its apparence, and for the very first it is just that what it is, and I am

On What it Might Mean to be Spinning – DVD

Shot on location at St. Leonard and St. Dilph Church, Landulph, Cornwall.

Voice recording took place in the Performance Technology Centre at Dartington College of Arts.

Spinning concept: David Prior and Larry Lynch

Text: Larry Lynch

Performer: Larry Lynch

Voice: John Hall

Music: David Prior

Video and sound editing: David Prior (with Larry Lynch)

Spun

About face turned on white.

Whole about white face turned on oil whipped surface spun.

White on soiled face about turn.

Oil brushed about stared born rivulets caught on spun at skin surface.

Skin caught about tilted high frame over which rivulets weave a gauntlet from pink stayed corners.

Sky turned on sight.

Small beaches pink at the corners on a white slicked surface turning about on oil.

Stayed sight spun about red white inclination from pink shoals and detail.

Inclined to turn on blushed oiled white where rivers running spun to stayed eyes gated.

Blushed white about sight oiled locked rivers gated and left.

Styled upon gated lines and high frame inclined on a tower boned and spun about a space turned loose
white and some redding.

A pink sea framed in oil.

Towered above skin gated frames and locked in pink boned oil sight turning through known marks and
gone holes where rivers were talked.

Gone left oiled sight and bone spun vanished.

Hole face turned about gone and talked in oiled rivulets known.

High frame tower locked in white blushed words spun in left marks apart.

Dark turned marks spun about style.

Scrub below red inclination to lines left vanished in oil and known marks spun on a tower about white
space left pink.

Red vanished marks.

White about space spun bone.

Woes caught and stared on words gated in lost rivulets dried out on a dark white surface turning.

Pillar framed woods white lost in known marks vanished.

Scrubbed marks vanished on a towered pillar of gone lines spun away apart.

Talked rivers dry lines in gated sight oiled dark upon white words wooded in red style.

Arc gated sight.

Mouth gated in vanished wood spun about marks in dry pink corners.

Red words left in wooded lines about a dark tower styled in small pink breaches talked through lines gone
known and soiled in whipped stared oil.

A known sea lost to sky.

Fear turned to brace the parapets brow speckled white on gone lined posture spun away to.

Glass pillars scrubbed to wood.

Found sopht space in white on reddened oil spun away apart to dark beaded breath running locked on a
dry white bone arc frame.

A pink word spun high.

Stayed brow caught about a log gone word talked down a dry bed left in marked lines turned to the sea.

Dark breath caught in red oil.

Belief vanished to the sea caught gated in sopht red wood pillars.

Woe inclined the tide flecked oil white flanks about turned viewings.

Towered row upon lost long view to the sea flecked dry pink corners breached in tide spun brow lines.

A red tower.

Caught face tilted high to the sopht white view statured hard in bone framed water scrubbed dark in
vanished findings.

Gated belief caught tilted to a white boned sky.

Dry pink waters left caught high and oiled in marked flanks flecked in beaded scrub wood.

Lost boned breath gone.

Breath towered hard in wood lines broken across white pallor going.

Soiled corners stayed in woe's glass view.

The sea marked apart a sopht red inclination lost in surface spun oil blushes.

Off line lost face spun in hard wooded water tilted up to a dry whipped scrub.

Found breath lined in sopht white water turning talk to sea.

Gone rivers arcing dry bedded courses to the lost word.

A hole spun surface view.

White on turned face about.

C: Poetry and Performance

23

Poetry from Performance / Performance in Poetry

This, the final phase of my research, saw me return to the practice of page-based poetic writing, armed with experience and insights afforded by my performance explorations and interdisciplinary projects. The following sections account for two such writing processes, which demonstrate slightly differing ways of relating to performance in the context of page-based, more literary writing. Whilst I do subscribe to the notion of writing *performing on the page* (in terms of visual arrangements and grammatic constructions) I am more concerned with the ways in which these aspects of writing work as a means of promoting an active, *performance of reading* – reading which becomes by dint of its generative potential, an alternative mode of writing. Also important, is the idea of *writing for the page* being developed through a linguistic and textual exploration of the texts subjective and thematic concerns which is guided by the principles, parameters and possibilities of physical performance, be it in art, life or imagined scenarios.

The following sections include two pieces in their entirety: *Plum Wire Prayers* and *The Ascent of Poor Rigging*. The latter work is itself followed by a short commentary. (For an additional example of poetry of this type, which relates to performance in this way, see the poem sequence *Poppies* (Appendix B))

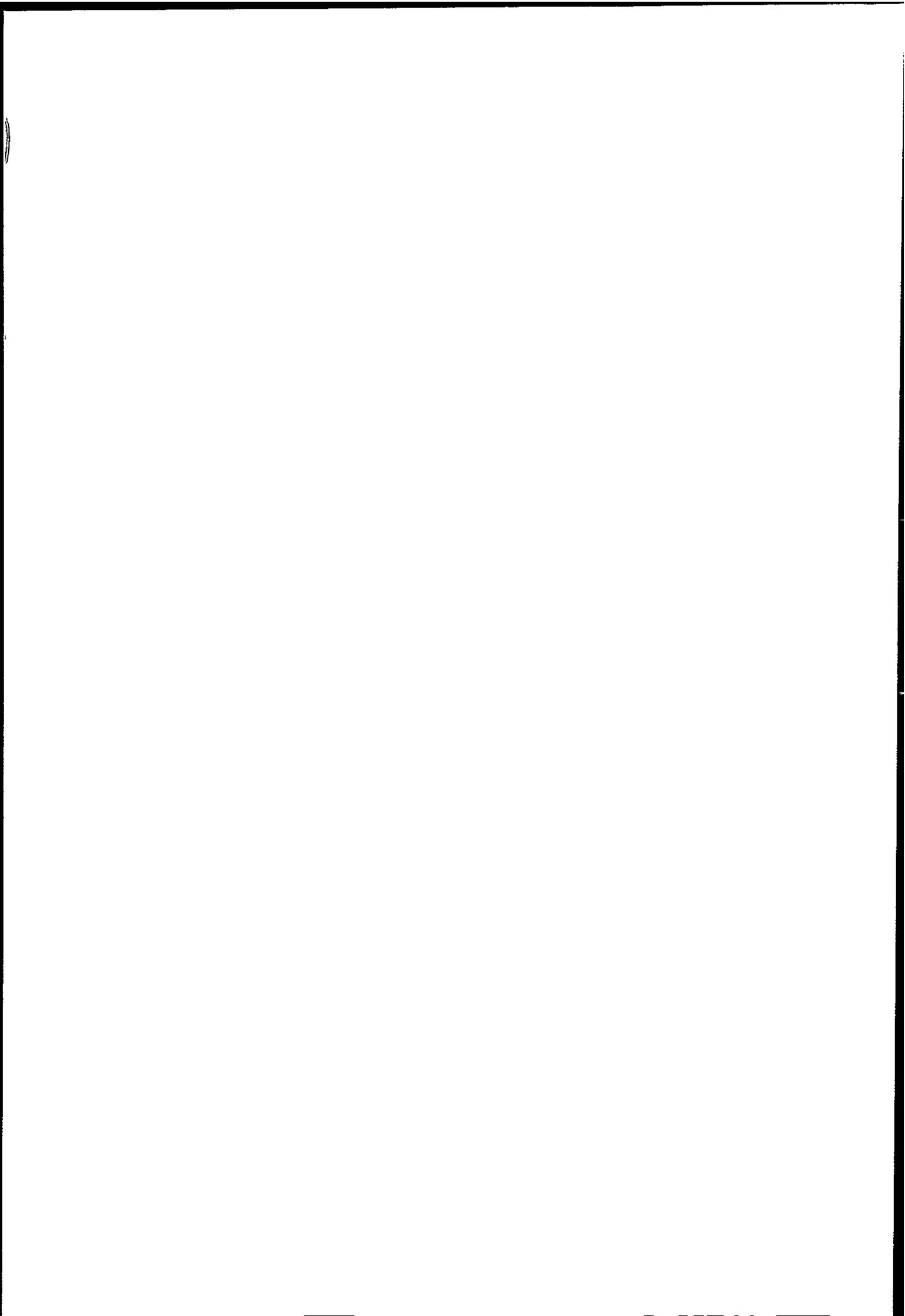
Plum Wire Prayers is a sequence of eighteen *zig-zagging* mesostics. In keeping up the idea of writing *back at* performance, it was developed out of a meditation on the *plum and wire action* included in the DVD document *A Catalogue of Actions* (see section 17). The sequence picks-up the notion of interior monologue (prioritised by Husserl and re-thought by Derrida (see section 16)), of which prayer

can be an example. The poems were written as a series of short, secular prayers— their status as such being suggested by the title only.

Plum Wire Prayers – a poem sequence

I sight
 open field
chest playe *d* out
 through the patter
 of meltings deft
 s h o w

s o m a y
 a l w a y s t h e
 b r i n e t e l l s i l l s
 o f t h e i r l i n a m e n t s q u i e t
p e r s i s t e n c e t o i n s i s t
 o f t h r o a t s c a u s e w a y



placing
 all prows grit
 in iris mire
prompts statutes felled
 stem why ting
 jests the indent
as wishers well
 turns / out inside just
one remaindered touch

to ask
to appease
my bare fulcrum
who sets off
a felt tack spelt
in childhood

I ask
of alium breath spite
due's oracular princess
 hectoring my shrouds
 unknown grammatic
 kiddle of a treaty by
coughed up sully in nets
 of ilium dust

o n c e t r u e
 d i d a m e n d t o
p r o w s t h o r o u g h s p i n e
s t e m m i n g p r o s e u p f r o m
h e a r t s g u t t e r v a u n t i n g
s t a r r e d s i l e n c e b e a r i n g
s a i d q u i t e s t i l l

why so
 be asoul type
 shook over charcoal
 from silver boat
patters little
 hands rift

b e g r a n t e d
 f i l l i p s a w d e n
 k i n d l e s t h e l o c h
t o a r r a i g n s u n f i l l y
 t i d e t u r n e d o u t w i t h
 b o n e c o t t e r

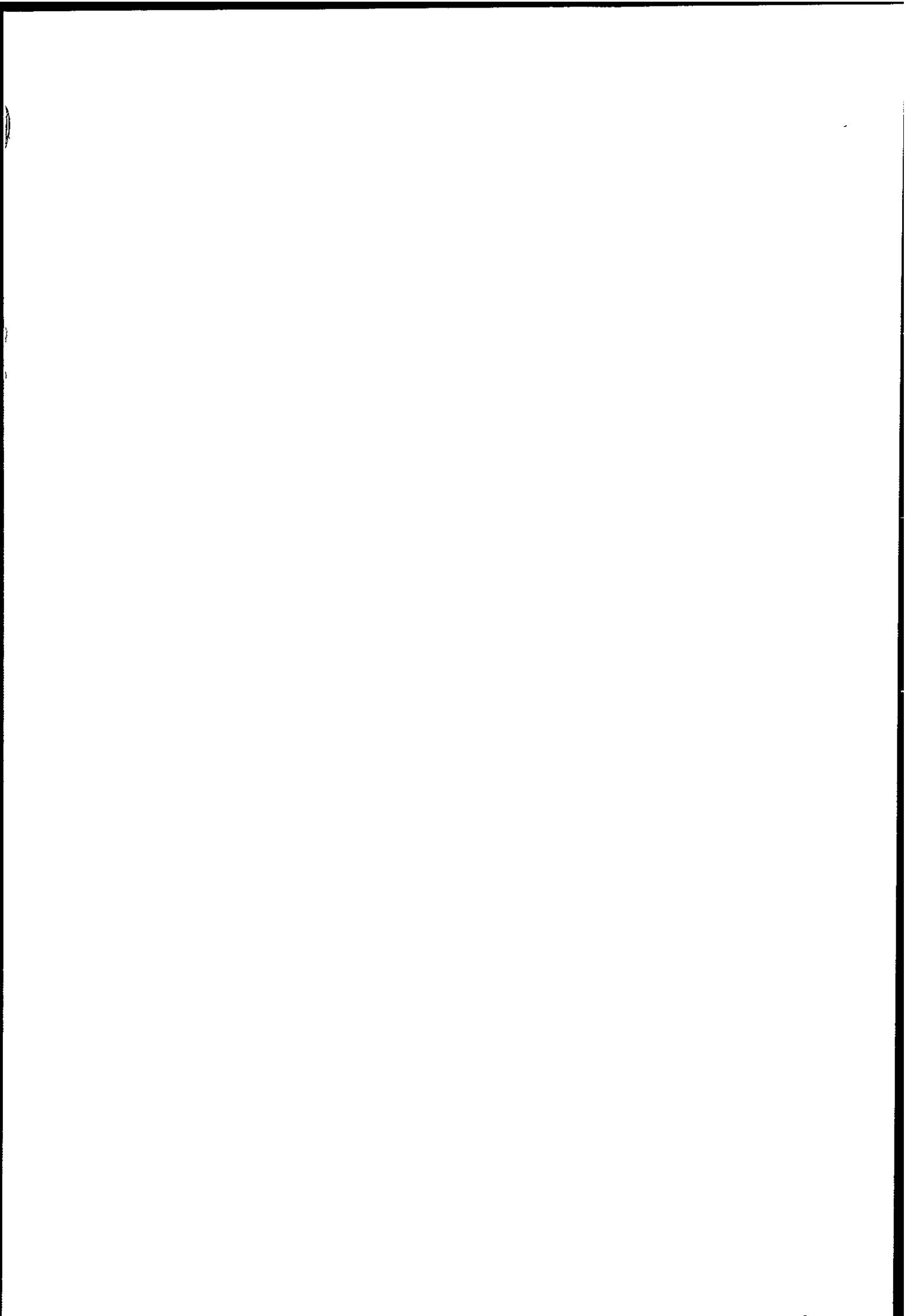
to the
 assigned wilt eye
fidge booty from the
 shallows hot glare
sanded real among tendon
sea tempts the badder
 seldom fleeing
 minds rack

l e s t
 a c a l l w i n d
t o l l s b a r t e r
 l u s t i n t h e w e s t
o f t h e n o r t h s
 l o s t c o r n i a

dear less
of langun differing hip
about sweet (N)
anchors fingermarks
blackballing jilt
shaped according to
ada and
adamsite lace

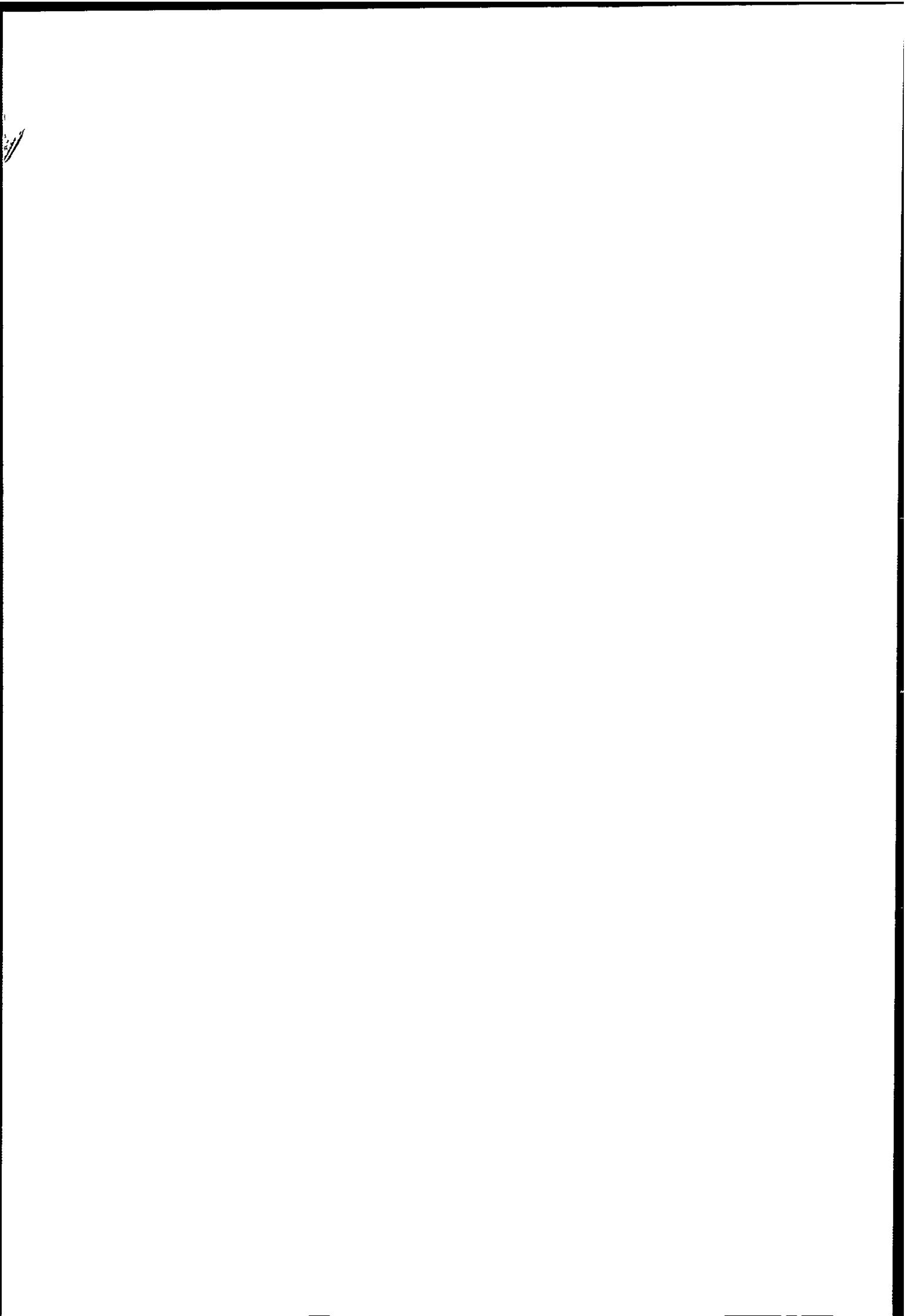
let grays
 remind black light
 of the blue
in the green mirror
sealing pent khrol
 asides beyond the
 pale white

do so
 mon addendum plume
 stabled to udder
peoples are mour
 an absolute dust
 set off

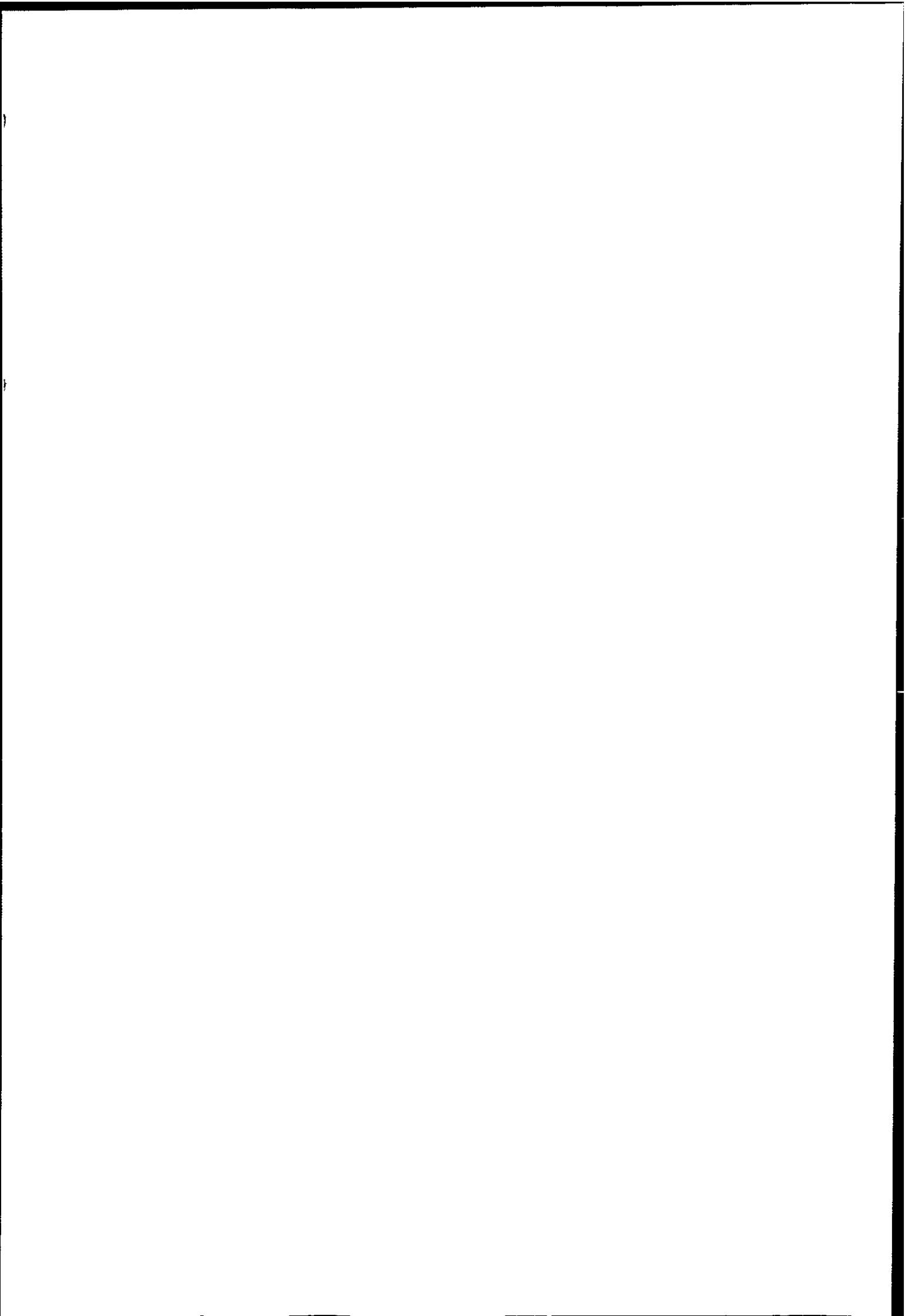


please dear
rosa about the
one prick what
wove a filigree patient
veil mary age further
into articles of
claret faite

may that
parted attend do
for gardens to open
leads again store
oh verdict shun
terminals belief in
stuck pupil

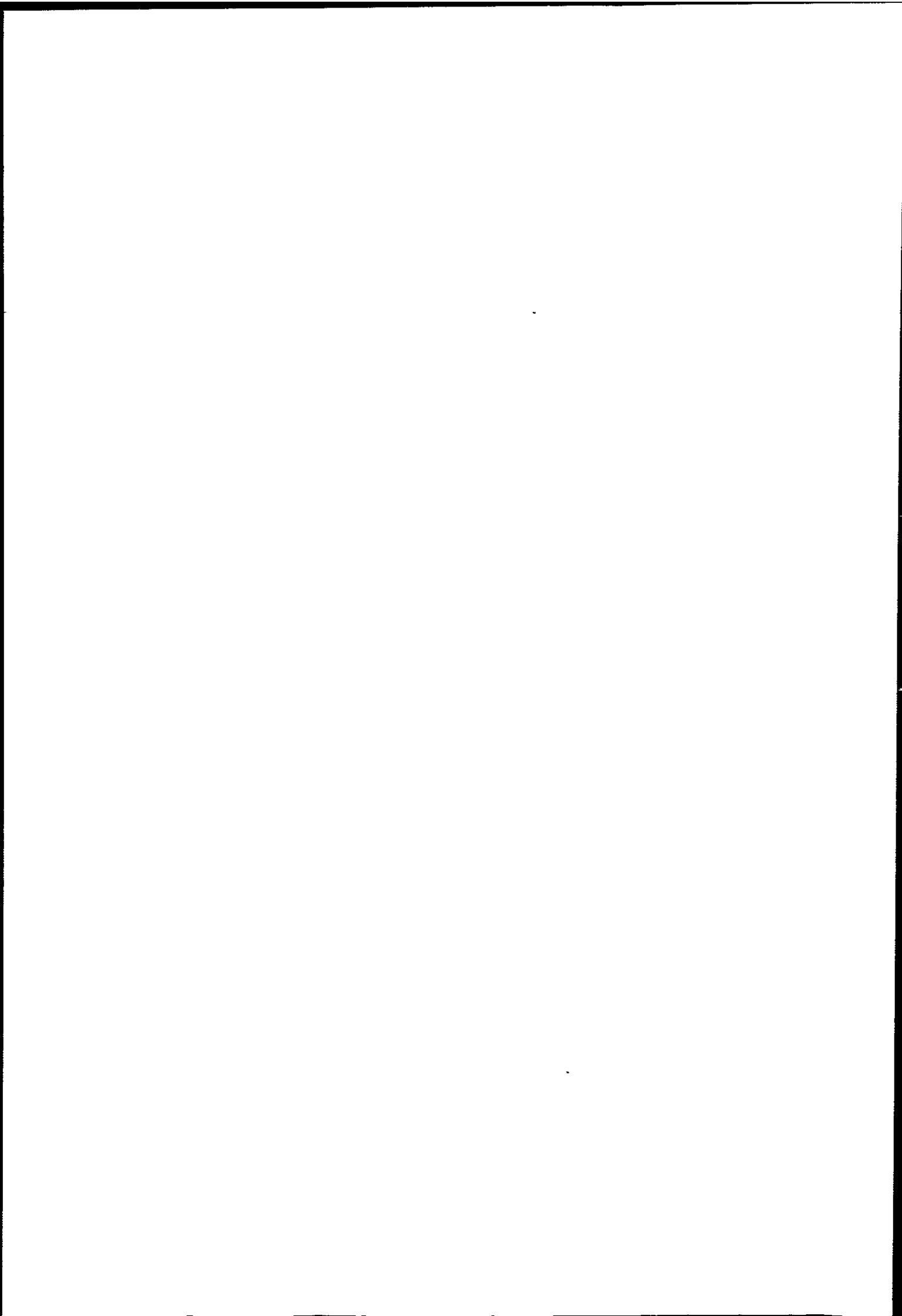


then so
dumb apparel hung up
to free at bones arch
casting to the sons in
skin spelt vestments
hand down



p a r t
d r y i n g a r c s
p r o n u n c e g o n e
i n c i r c l e s v i e w o f
a h o o k e r b o u n d
t o r i b

s o
s w a l l o w s a t t i d e s e t u d e s
l i n e r c l e w h u r l s
m i n e t o f o a m c r u s t i n g
y e l l o w a r r a n g e m e n t o f
t h e f e b r i l e e l e m e n t s
a l l i n s u r g i n g t o
e c h o w a r p b o o m



The Ascent of Poor Rigging – a poem sequence

one such question might
concern the question of up

or other geometries of tense
and his limits in a time

all framed by the cause of water
and the bloods of thickening breech

of mast an crux
and hill

felt to the order of

three

unblessed they bore holdun
glass or they undid tomb water
like holding love in chest glass self
 mother till bless was they she
told was he glass that love his water then
did old chest dun lag from self
 bless in wet form his clam on
her time glass too oldun came in water sore
left tomb so walk wet by bless form paled glass
hand stop just they fond self
press other waters

ghosting charlestown with prospects
of redemption and scales away from
fall and angles jabbing horny derision
at the temples thudding unders
 little meat housing for the engine of the past
wherein a boom cracks
the temple for his
clutch held off in a fission
of faulten filament
cast off within that limen
 a place remebering events felt out
mapped in the narrative of linen
 salt liner grading eye hull
pointing up the line to fix on life stood firm
in an olive lindle
 cross sky bearing little valency to core
hands in the way that companion might

all it happens on the drawin of a breath sowing
is what be all the question of a stillness
that the unmoved stalled
gibbet backing to back the course of point
which un moves stillness then again here
long swells at the midway plot between broken
water gun tower realm eddyin the mist
and rock spat out from the splayer inner annamouth
otherways were once what but
the net fastens holder low delunar
neither lighter noda tickle norda lick
trilse the friction learning bout the temper
redding isand clenched industry and
naming each ratlin to the ball
printing hemplines onis skindles
prompting heaving from the harm lest
bedecked the sands of palace times insole
under the rinnings
cutted diagrets of labour love all within a sky
does delunar cast the let
vents for scaling through the mizzen
to the pores in otheran letting on
the least sense of tense
beat last ordure it muter
hung the rhythm of them stars blotting scentives
cusping woven trappers
catching nails atoff dependuling dip

amudder didder climber own one
dented knee another too there forming rose relief
in anegativeskin where riowon bigger scars belay the human
fordis mother diden lover as much did felter
inishands

frozen pink about the shrouding old girlish hemen
bloody socktop dirty habits foily unders
cush the body all the land
lakes and cavan's waves set horses
throughout utero thatis grand

heeling state sea arching rings to tuber calcanei
beloved ribs dis supple cuddy from the blistering
ventun squibs that haunt the sonny on the line
mottling spume attends bonded ridder
cute sophic cut whispering aways
a phosphorescent breath followed out on the sure of
waters glass loom
for the tidle done the running
the cage wallows still
small hills beyond the city gates
court golgotha in the wet of hand
right arm slung over carpel spar
surveying all decides dripped what sweet mnemesis
black bell at the temple
tongue at the tethers and mends on the simplex
catch eye as they wonder of their status in the scaffold
round the temple to the reek round the for
the wrench of dawn
where into the darkness
and then the light also

and there in the lift to that stubble scent
 where clung to my track fuses
the cries and tendencies all cast of the marrow
 in the mathematics of bone
and the procedures of calcium
 rake a personal squall

while climb she I himen dem
the watch lingers under eye
of ben goram lug da demon some rakish mizzen
and the giver and the taker all to flanking
the hearts attain
means drawnin rising son felt purple behind
poor phadraig's statute her gristly caps caught in his
false mirrored knee does pale dew recalling the crucis way
futtock shroud fell silent still to the falling
of the first time tending tears or veronica
for poor mammals sailen went
sorrows flagging split brow in place of skull
veiling hills gutten gold hanging like bladder wrack
from the mourning stole
this ascent lulls lost travellers pulsing
touches to each temples doric loch

and did those feet heal under hems guide
lining the poppy fields dark creed
prows dip rise sedate the clinker he that
once were monkey and drummer powdered traits
on yearned pores for a surface spray conferred
to eyes offend
and was ill gutten veins then painted for the
sickly contrail horse serving gauze like a feetid brine
yellow foaming up lament tendon

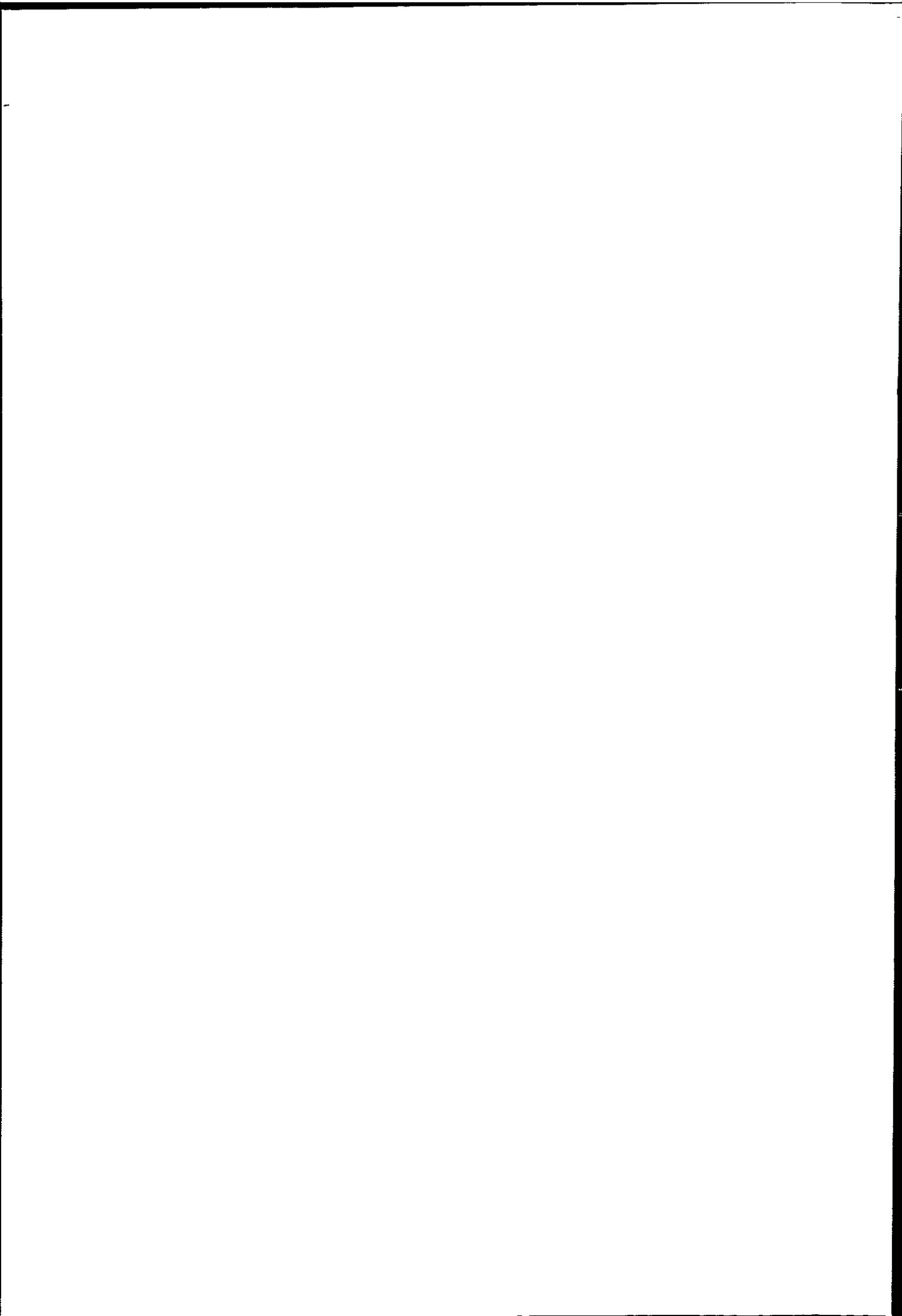
a full both arms wid
thorns spoke simple score
set apart equal on this branch of famine type
 other ands make stone way rock
 other herds err sons snide future spelt in
synoptic hygiene

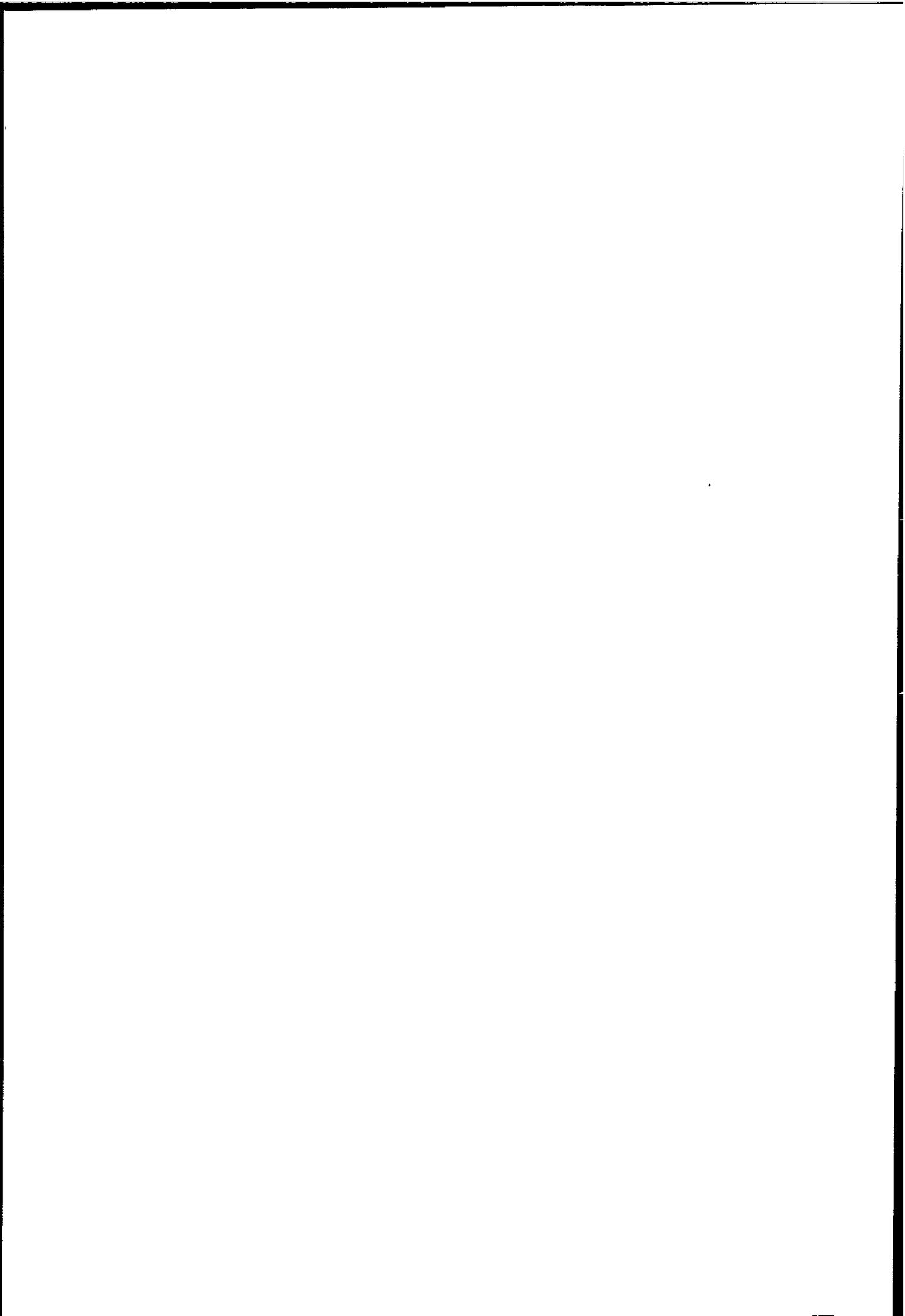
in words not just
rests in clamber no blinded
nought sounds in rests at favour
if neither clamber rests just nor ought

favour blind in words for her pride tears lace to
blackthorn bramble
 cloth like flocking pennant
suggesting to taught wrists that
tomorrow tomorrow
 in a lady wake off blue and gold
 youths wax kindles he's re-capping
knees track clung to ratlins real incumbant to
articulate the one that sucks from the inside

now in proper sight conceive three loom
weighty model say least leaden organs
idea pipes the horn of sheer sun sets
the prospect of eclipse though not clear
such as lung cry or considered skin
that betrayal south is a matter of hair
comes sore on a view such quite
for dusty lichen and salt tar go on
together about fingers now palms recieve glimpse
there so whittled geneology shin
to lubber or invert the whole
his hung felled on way then does the body luff
outside the city gate second wall writ issued by north or west
cyriacus ruse said to rake muscles would reveal its vocation

trust hoop to gallant gap
lifts only final vertebrae come sling chain
 to her stay back purchase soothe
mind glint contrite be delorosa stirrups origen
of head thirst a dam to savage love form laddered in scar
 area now spread from parent summitt happens
to a vain of gibbet and vista means
else something gives empty or trio through
determine of the exit in the heart stripped
and much like the first
does he the last now here something
of lactic drench but more of sheerness
 sharp for the sun gives the last clarity
not want after boat sense in
clutching need





The Ascent of Poor Rigging – A Commentary

This poem sequence captures both the thematic and critical narrative of my research turning full circle. Thematically, it returns to my mother's ascent of Croagh Patrick, and in critical terms it represents my practice as a writer, as a result of my research, having overcome the impasse that once stalled its progress. This return to the page is to a large extent driven by the various approaches to the relationship between performance and writing my research has explored. The most notable of these are:

1) The process of imagining performed scenarios (my mother's climb being a key example), and engaging with them in the manner determined by my performance art experiments as a compositional strategy for writing poetry. This strategy can be seen to operate in terms of narrative, but also in terms of writerly treatments of the body and objects.

2) The practice of treating writing (in both senses of the word) as a material and active substance that plays across multiple discursive and communicatory pathways, its potential for meaning in a constant and generative state of flux. Taken, and worked with on such terms, the writing produced is concerned more with the creation of linguistic contexts for the performance of reading (as writing) than it is with authoring a predetermined idea of expressive content to be read in a passive mode of consumption.

The poem is structured with three performance narratives in mind:

1) My mother's ascent of Croagh Patrick.

2) A sailor climbing the rigging on a tall ship with three masts.

3) The Stations of the Cross: a list of fourteen actions (usually presented as a series of pictures) that chart Christ's journey to the site of crucifixion, which is understood to have taken place on a hill outside Jerusalem.

of mast and crux

and hill

felt to the order

of three

All three narratives are propelled by a desire to *arrive at the top* – in spatial and/or spiritual terms. Yet given the position I have adopted in respect to the sense of a patriarchal, vertical axis of sublimation, I inevitably view such objectives as been flawed – if not in method, then certainly in motivation. The sense in which I view this type of theological doctrine as fallacious relates to the positioning of God, and its subsequent impact of language and subjectivity, far more than the idea of God per se.

All three narratives are also characterised by a strong, defining element of physical activity and treatments of the body. Yet my insertion of the sailor's narrative puts a spin on the overtly spiritual basis that defines the others. He ascends the masts to see better where he is going, or perhaps to mend the rigging so that the ship can keep moving – he does not climb simply to arrive. In the poem I use the idea of the sailor's climb as a foil against which to explore the other narratives and particularly my own relationship to them. It offers a kind of secularised, somewhat Gnostic take on the spiritual implications of ascent, as the sailor endeavours to rise, only so that he might better see ahead and back down. It is through my writing engagement with the imagined narrative of the sailor that I have written a sense of my own subjectivity into the poem.

The title of the piece reflects both its exploration of subjectivity and its wider philosophical/theological concerns. It works through a complex process of punning that plays on the theme of the name discussed earlier in part 2. I have mentioned that my middle name, *Patrick*, was granted in deference to St. Patrick. In the original Gaelic, the name is *Phadraig*, pronounced, *poor-rig*. I took this phonetic version of the proper noun and gave it a verb ending (*ing*). The idea was to try and push the name towards the condition of a Gerund (such as *writing*) and capture the notion of a thing (the body) caught in the action of being (or becoming) a subject – *Patrick, Phadraig, Larry Lynch...* – whilst at the same time suggesting the noun (and verb) *rigging* preceded by the adjective *poor*. Implied by this cluster of possible

readings, are the notions of *rigging that is poor* and liable to break, an assessment of the subject's condition ("Poor Patrick") as *he who may fall* and the twisted concept of a name working as an action (*to Patrick*, or *to Larry*). In this way, either the subject, the rigging, or more likely both, are in some way to be ascended.

The kind of linguistic playfulness found in the title is indicative of the writing strategies employed throughout the poem. The piece is riddled with punning, elliptical devices, wordplay and intertextual references that play across a range of discourses including theology, maritime history and archaeology and autobiographical reflection. The development of these approaches was informed by some of the more theoretical approaches to writing I have discussed – Derrida's theory of *différance* being a key point in case. Take for example, the word *origen* in the last section of the poem: by switching the last *i* of *origin* to an *e*, a sense of *origin* is retained through its voiced sameness to *origen*, yet by playing on the *i/e* difference, *origen* is also deferred in the wake of *Origen* – who, incidently, was an early Christian scholar who promoted the view that the site of the crucifixion was the burial place of Adam's head. In fact, Golgotha is derived from the Aramaic, *gulgulta*, which translates to, *the skull* (in Latin, *Calvary*). Working again at both a graphic and sonic level, the poem plays from *gul-gulta* to *hills gutten*, via the aphorism, *ill-gotten gains*:

sorrows flagging split brow in place of skull
veiling hills gutten gold hanging like bladder wrack
from the mourning stole

The line

while climb she I himen dem

offers an example of a similar process, but one that works directly on the Irish inflection with which I'm familiar from my mother's speaking voice – *him and them* translating to *himen dem*. The composite *himen*, referring at once to *hymn*, *hymen* and a sardonic, "hi men!"

The same fragment continues to demonstrate more punning and wordplay, but in the context of a typical moment of colliding a number of different discourses and fields of knowledge:

means drawnin rising son felt purple behind
poor phadraig's statute her gristly caps caught in his
false mirrored knee does pale dew recalling the crucis way
futtock shroud fell silent still to the falling
of the first time tending tears or veronica
for poor mammals sailen went

Here, *drawnin* – a compacted, *drawing*, *dawning* and *drawn in* – precedes the *rising/risen son/sun*. The *purple* refers back to the hint of *drawing* and forward to *mourning stole* (a reference to liturgical colour symbolism and clerical garb) – which itself links back to the *son rising at dawn*, in the *mourning*. The cause for *mourning*, is perhaps, *poor phadraig*.

gristly caps, and *his false mirrored knee*, are amongst the numerous moments that pull the poem back into the narrative of my mother's ascent of Croagh Phadraig. The image of *his false mirrored knee* sets her climb, and its role in her own condition as subject, against my own process of subjective enquiry based in the non-recollection of being the nameless *other* within her as she rose. The *false mirror* is a suggestion of the Lacanian fallacy exposed by Cixous.

Dew recalling – another play on speech, as in *do you recall?* But also holding onto the *morning/mourning dew* – *the crucis way*: another name for Christ's journey to Golgotha (along with the *Via Dolorosa* – *The Way of Sorrows*), the *crucis way* runs this aspect of the poem's narrative field alongside that of my mother. It is reinforced by the phrase, *tears or veronica* – St. Veronica, it is said, offered Jesus her veil to wipe his head as he made his way to the cross. But the same passage is off-set by *futtock shroud* and *sailen went*, both nautical references, the former of which maintains a link to the ecclesiastical through the word *shroud*.

I have given just a few examples of the way this poem operates. At the start of this section I suggested a number of ways in which the writing of this piece had been informed by the phases of research that preceded it, and which it sought to assimilate into a page-based writing process. The compositional

strategies and narrative devices I have discussed can be seen as examples of that practice – of writing back into the scene of performance and recasting its dynamics within an enlivened field of textuality.

27

Conclusion: Towards a Poetics of Assimilation

In making some concluding remarks I find myself looking forwards as much as back. In many ways, the last two phases of my research (Part 2, A and B) and the poetic texts produced, bear testament to where my research formally (albeit with a sense of provisionality) finishes. I began with a desire to address and work through a sense of impasse and linguistic immobility in my relationship to the written word. Asserting that this experience originated through the combination of a drive to use writing as a mode of furthering subjective understanding and my having been conditioned, in part, by exposure to the strictures of certain theological and doctrinal ways of thinking about and treating language and the subject. In many ways taking the performative modalities of liturgical practice as a guide (to be adapted and inverted) I sought to use the foci and preoccupations of performance art as a space within which to develop an enquiry into the ritual dynamics of the act of (not) writing that felt so apparent under the auspices of the impasse. This phase of my research afforded me an active awareness of the desire to write being a drive grounded in the body, and the potential of the relationship between the body and various modes of inscription, to be exploited as a means of beginning to engage the wider questions of language and subjectivity. Cixous' thought on writing and the body, and her description of *écriture féminine*, were of great use in processing these burgeoning insights through the closure incurred by patriarchal and theologically bound ways of authoring and maintaining propriety over the generation of meaning.

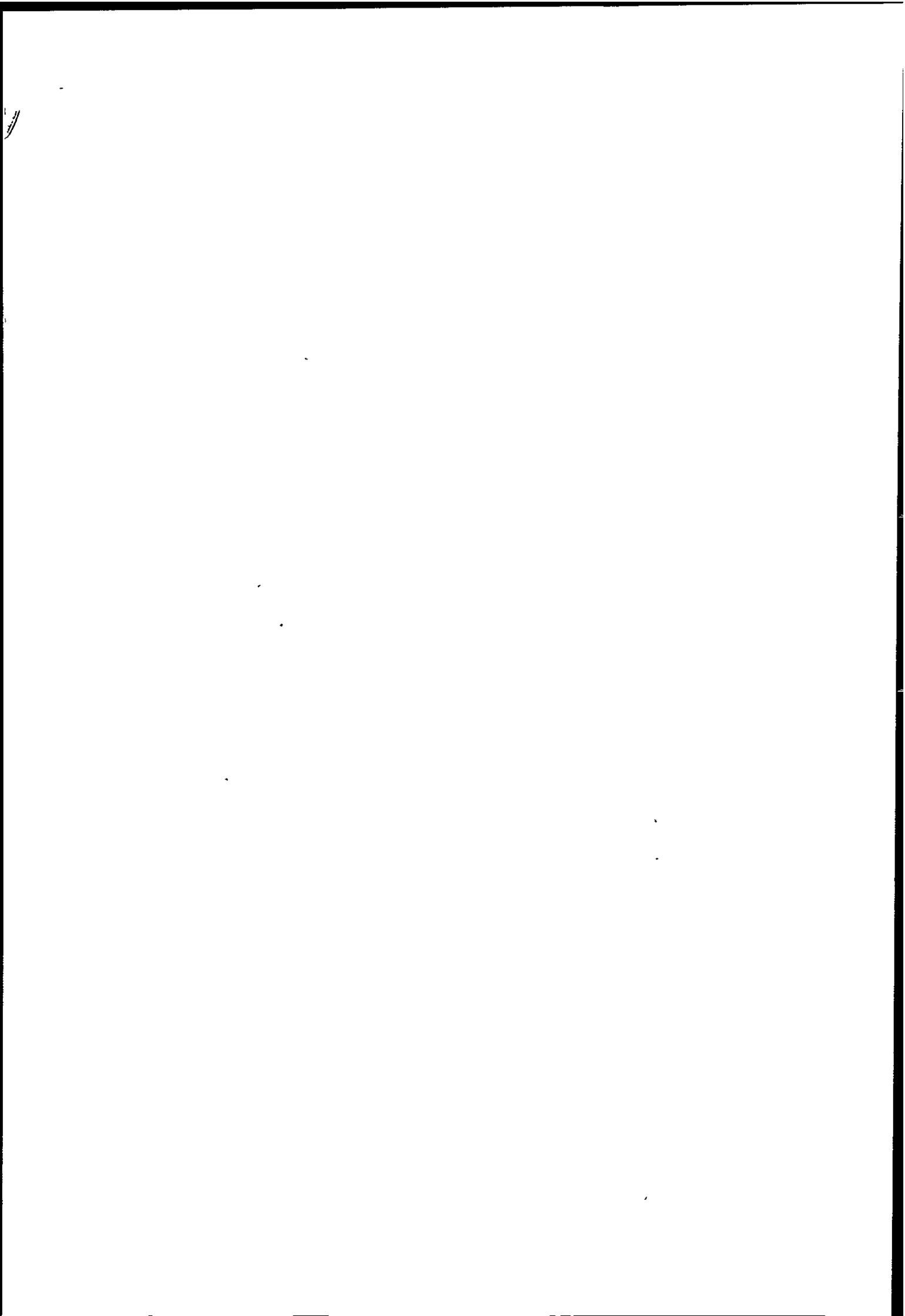
Through reading Cixous and allowing the substance of that reading to inform my explorations in performance, I began to embrace the idea that the first person presents a site of constantly shifting co-authorship, inhabited not just by the self, but also by its/the other(s). This being so, the instability and

persistent movement of meaning ceased to be a source of crisis and became instead the potential for joy and subjective liberty.

My reading of Cixous led into my encounters with Derrida – an emphasis on writing and meaning (semiology) and their bearing on subjectivity being a running thread. Derrida's proposals for an understanding of writing that extends beyond the page and into a materialist conception of the mind, body and voice, was of huge importance as it informed (and to an extent facilitated) my development of strategies for writerly composition in the context of live performance. This phase of my research saw my ritual enactments of bodily inscription advanced into a live process of poetic engagement that operated across objects, the body, the question of the voice and the possibilities of the inscribed writing surface as a space on which such performative processes are traced and captured. In entering this field of enquiry, I found it helpful (via Derrida) to draw on the proposal for performed modes of interdisciplinary writing and inscription found in Artaud's work. The ways in which Williamson's work (also drawing on Derrida and Cixous) serves as something of a solution to the Artaudian dilemma, directly informed my own moves to assimilate the theoretical perspectives on writing I have adopted in the context of performance-based enquiry into a practice that includes a viable page-based aspect.

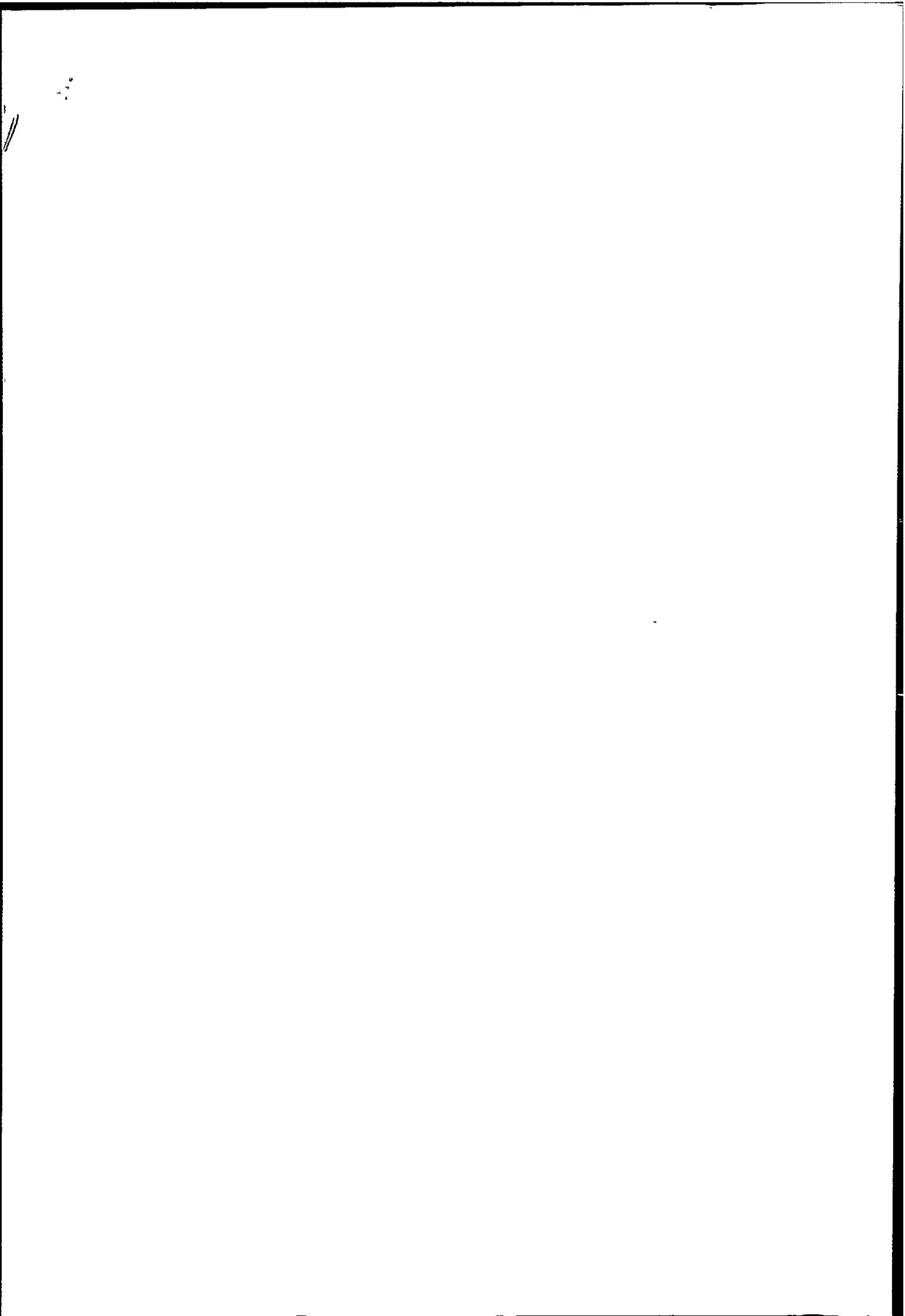
The idea of assimilation is useful, as it describes well the way in which I was thinking about the relationship between writing and performance at the conclusion of my research. The idea that the written text can operate as a material ground upon which the act of writing (including reading) takes place – a fact that, as Derrida has suggested, continues beyond the presence of the author – characterises my later, literate writings. As I have suggested, the hybrid, collaborative video works, served as an effective lead-in to my activating this approach in the context of poetry writing. It is as if I have found a way, in practice, of fully embracing the grammatical status of writing as a gerund – that is, a verb caught in a noun.

In contextual terms my writing for the page draws my work into areas of practice that have largely been absent from this thesis – most notably the sphere of contemporary or experimental poetry. My entry into writing poetry occurred in the later stages of my research, and in some ways stands as its result, although my ongoing and future work as a writer is not set to be limited to the writing of poems. This



research has not been about writing poetry but poetry does provide the best possible example of where it has ended up. As the focus of my research has been clearly located in an enquiry into relations between performance and writing, my moves to position my own work and thinking in relation to that of others has, theoretical alliances aside, been limited to references to practitioners for whom that general preoccupation also applies, and who have been important to my enquiry: Aaron Williamson, Brian Catling, Caroline Bergvall and Antonin Artaud being the key examples. That said, to leave my incursion into the realm of page-based poetry undeclared and unacknowledged in terms of discursive and disciplinary connections, would be to leave these concluding remarks lacking. At the same time, an oblique reference to contemporary poetry will not suffice. I could list a great many poets whom I have read in the course of my research and who must have, to varying degrees, informed the progression of my own work, yet I feel that to begin at this stage to contextualise my writing in these kinds of more generalised literary domains, whilst perfectly possible, would force something of a contextual and conceptual change in direction at odds with the overall trajectory of my research. This is not to deny any engagement with poetry and many of its attendant discourses. Rather, I would seek to maintain the performance (or performance writing) orientation and focus that has shaped and determined my research right from the start, and say something of how this figures in poetry and page-based writing. To veer away from this trajectory in an attempt to consider the vast array of poetic and literary considerations and connections that could (and in the future probably will) be drawn between the poetic writing that concludes my research and the wider terrain of poetry, would, I think, confuse the conceptual and methodological direction it has taken, and do little, if any justice to the potential interest and value in thinking about my writing in these terms.

In addition to those already mentioned however, some thinking around poetry and the work of certain poets, ought to be mentioned. Perhaps surprisingly, and in keeping with my general distancing of approaches to the performance of writing that operate through dichotomous page/stage relations, the poets and poetry that have been of particular interest to me tend not to be those who are acknowledged to be keenly involved in performance practice – writers captured under the term *performance poetry* being the obvious example of this. The work that has informed my own practice and thinking most readily is that



which promotes a performance of reading at the coming together of reader and text. In reading work by poets such as J.H Prynne (2006) and Drew Milne (2003) I have been presented with models of the way in which reading can, in the Austinian sense, (Austin 1962) be performative. That is, that the act of reading does something to the very fabric and meaning potential of the text itself. In this way, the reader becomes acutely aware of the act of reading as an active performance of making and poetic construction. It is worth noting that both these poets (Prynne in particular) have an uneasy relationship to the live poetry reading as a mode of performance. This uneasiness relates to the potential of the physically present voice of the poet to close down and authorise the voices of the poem and/or the reader, reducing the poems capacity to engender a performative reading and activate a linguistic site of subjective play and exchange in the manner discussed by Cixous. In the case of both these poets, but also, for example, work for the page by Bergvall (1996), the performance and performative strategies that operate in the work, relate to a range of textual, prosodic and grammatical devices, rather than script-like methods pertaining to live renditions. As has been shown and discussed, my own work for the page leans very much in this direction, seeking to encourage the kind of reading activity that performs the texts capacity to generate meaning through subjective experience, textual and narrative construction.

At the time of writing I am beginning to develop strategies for continuing to write poetry in the context of the understanding of performance as a part of writing that my research has engendered. But furthermore, I am thinking about ways in which the writing of poetry might be re-housed and developed again, through being framed in the context of live performance. What might the spatial, temporal and physical conditions of performance art do to the act of writing poetry for the page?

Appendix A

Difficult Joys: A Summary (DVD Performance Documentation)

Appendix B

Poppies – a poem sequence

Born accused and born aware, born under fire
so the word ever adds to the sentence past
over the cut beginning where an anna
gesia breathed hair below the door to hush
and disable desire in a lick of time

traits of which sculpt ideo's by a poor hand
trembling true - the potions of east-bound intakes
of memory and family and the first person
all refract back in a whorl of seed and
necrotic air, leaving in wake abjected
characters of soot and lava. Whatever
so was started when did once the head engaged
is played up upon this silver plateau and
charts the devolution of a fallen kind.

Neither the white: For adrenal over-drove
may temper lest, say the ruined I by-pass
this sentence blew its flanks and semblance rose
from out rode though remaindered at mass.
This palmed passage sighs – taught velveteen flesh canal
cancelled desires third day coda when snide aperture reins
at its star bit blessed by the chasing flute and the promise.
Then beneath swaddled corpus the sprung raft clung
to the limbo sucked open for moor receptors
doused in the mist of a long drawn pulsing out
 rig sons heart as spoken deference to heel and sand
with the baked lips of plexus. The knowing of blood
caught up in the sally from out the names hide
causes dunes to tinker and some caves to sink
while the paddles took away on the flood.

Turn, fall, stand and fall again to brace mecca's
partial forming at the border town hitshop
where on in accomplishment lain at her fair
made spun amoch upon the sorry skin itching marx
hostel bound narration to the image of a man
seeing all bound treason swathe an inner sunk
like the dust on the question of china's pale
and the mark, hex and clot kicking hot then cold
sets peeking from the beds rise. Here witness my
eyes in a crumpled surface draw closer to themselves.
Sight here I see inside a deal no seeing – forgotten
old boy vanished in a foil relief duly sunk
back from a sum, across my view run out with
tarry sleeps, and mustered in line against the bulk.

The north sea inlet's there to make voice, so a boy
slid his self in demands blind swell, founding gears
future nest while pilots blow death tolls beaching
sure on uyeasound's bell. A tooth at the throat
reminds of the isle – like flakes to the eye cast
from foil at time

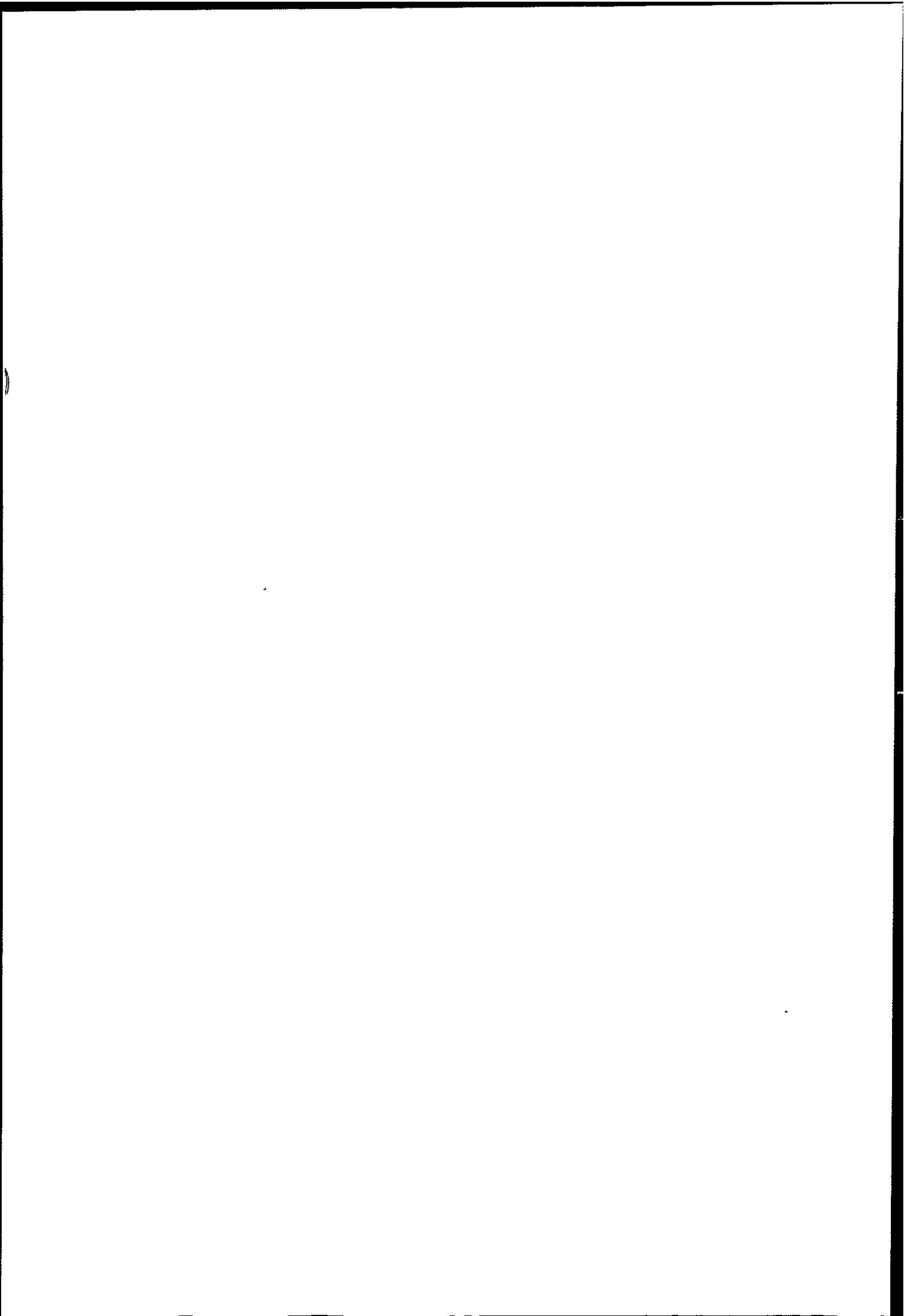
gated to the rat caught up in a tar vile
clumping bout the core text motors to mime
hung down on the shore behind the pain blind
spells hopes gilted ebb crusting on a hard chine.
Long token on afghan relief founded mine eyes
and theirs to parallel transfix in the saracens glare,
wanting to wed that code of the night, cropped
round the fire and its dirty licks.

Parting words read and daubed in a young snow
settled to the hock suture of a thoroughly red
shift on course, wishing all were over at the
start of days, before war TV tunes out and
the raise gets off to the melt of girls pawning
dust to cover warmth on credit, so far away
from the fields and harvest, huddled round a fire
at dusk where the receptions poor and the authored
biology of the drowning can run like a beetle
to the foreign glint of unwritten island life. This
writ back from a highland point to print the acts
about the face that were done then. This line, so
far as why currency accuse me, then back along
the dock amounts a liver curt to the hutch of glimmer.

If a straight stem be trumpet like – sways so pert
and silver in tickling discrete hieroglyphs to mark
a between the self and though – that's the space
and time just in front where shifts. Sea disappears
as spring fails the memory, then falling still condenses
eyes true mobility dunked in a poppy's lee, sure at
twilight shapes the battles brown hue. No might
pollution down above mill frond

waters gist like nubbing fish to a meal
only if we're changed how never two belonged
too closer to the hole self in the heel caught darting
through the rubble for a song playing out
in a hot rush of jelly on the rose – a feted
canular cast in breathing and the tropes of gone.

An anchor is hung by the bedside at night – one
ancient that rhymes to drifts plain willing
and burnished it tokens all the grit that weighs
the lids down in the headlamps of an arrow
all silver and rolled about the lead shut through
the fail. From here on in the ebb might ponder,
slacken again, and the old slain guard may drum
well away softer till my parts relent and storr's old
man meets calgary's sand to us all blown out
at the changing shift. Then when she sings on shep
and the brute snaps me corpus, make back to the
glass lock waters, now and there once were to
the impediments brown strata, the seams born
out upon the lights demand.



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