

**Writings, Readings and Not Writing:
poems, prose fiction and essays**

by

John Hall

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Abstract

This submission of published work consists of a number of different modes of writing that interrelate as the concerns of a poet, essayist and teacher. There are twenty-seven separate publications, presented under six categories headings: (A) poems, including prose-poems, written for the page; (B) prose-fiction, represented through a single work; (C) visual poems; (D) enquiries into aspects of a general poetics, including questions about 'situatedness' or 'implicatedness', genres of discourse and their related modalities, poetics and grammar, and a poetics of reading; (E) critical and celebratory readings, mostly of contemporary poets and poems; (F) meditations on institutionalised divisions and modalities of knowledge and practice and their implications for arts pedagogy. These six categories are intended to open out on to each other, to constitute an exploration of writing and reading that is always more than the sum of its parts.

With the exception of one article published in 1992 all work was published – or will have been – between 1996 and 2005, a period that coincides with the consolidation and development of a field of study and practice at Dartington College of Arts named Performance Writing. The poems and prose fiction exemplify specific practices within this field and the articles are attempts to develop theoretical and critical instruments within it, especially as they apply to poetry. The articles move between close readings of poetic texts and broad enquiries into reading, writing and the operation of texts within their social, spatial and temporal contexts, such as domestic settings or bereavements. Three articles address 'grammar for performance writers'; three others focus on reading and its relation to knowledge, form and setting; another three, including a review, are enquiries into discipline and interdisciplinarity.

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Abstract | 3 |
| List of Contents | 5 |
| Acknowledgements | 10 |
| Author's Declaration | 12 |
| PREFACE | 15 |

PUBLISHED WRITINGS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| A. WRITING FOR THE PAGE – POEMS AND PROSE-POEMS | 29 |
| 1. <i>else here: Selected Poems</i> (separate volume); | 30 |
| Buckfastleigh: <u>etruscan books</u> , 1999 ISBN 1 901538 17 6 & ISBN 1 901538 19 2 | |
| 2. Couldn't You? | 31 |
| <i>Oasis 102</i> , (2001) pp. 8-9 ISSN 0029-7410 | |
| 3. Lyrical Abstractions | 34 |
| <i>CCCP 12</i> (2002) pp. 47-51 (Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry, 26-28 April 2002) | |
| B. WRITING FOR THE PAGE – PROSE-FICTION | 43 |
| 1. From Apricot Pages | 44 |
| <i>Oasis 104</i> , (2001) ed Ian Robinson | |
| C. VISUAL POEMS | 49 |
| 1. Loose-idity | 50 |
| Dartington Gallery, 21 February – 2 nd March 2002 | |
| i. Introduction and title piece | 50 |
| ii. Second Glances | 53 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| iii. | A lone knower's disavowals | 54 |
| iv. | Sticks and stones | 59 |
| v. | Lover's loops | 60 |
| vi. | An alphabet for <i>else here</i> | 64 |
| vii. | House works | 69 |
| viii. | Couldn't you (framed) | 84 |
| 2. | Through the Gap | 90 |
| | <i>Shearsman</i> Gallery, from October 2002 | |
| | http://www.shearsman.com/pages/gallery/john_hall/contents.html | |
| 3. | A Lone Knower's Disavowals | 91 |
| | Poetry Quarterly Review 20 (Summer 2003) pp.15-18 ISSN 1361-2255-20 | |
| 4. | Changing Lines (framed versions) and Illegible, Intelligible, Ineligible | 93 |
| | Phoenix Gallery, Exeter (April/May 2004); Dartington Gallery (May 2004); <i>Illegible, Intelligible, Ineligible</i> also as part of <i>Writing Space</i> in Fine Arts Gallery, George Mason University, Washington DC, USA (November 2004) | |
| 5. | Light Lies | 96 |
| | Exeter Public Library, tEXt04 I-D Writers Platform, 15 th May 2004 | |
| 6. | Changing Lines (web versions) | 98 |
| | <i>Great Works</i> website, from February 2004 | |
| | http://www.greatworks.org.uk/poems/Hall/JH1.html | |
| D. | ARTICLES ON LANGUAGE, POETICS AND READING | 99 |
| 1. | Writing and Not Writing | 100 |
| | <i>Poets on Writing, Britain 1970-1991</i> , ed Denise Riley (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) pp. 41-49 ISBN 0-333-47129-6 (hard) and ISBN 0-333-47130-X (paper) | |
| 2. | Sentenced To | 112 |
| | <i>Performance Research Vol 1, No 1</i> (Spring 1996) pp. 98-102 ISBN 0-415-14687-6; ISSN 1352-8165 | |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 3. Performed Through | 122 |
| <i>Performance Research Vol 2, No 1</i> (Spring 1997) pp. 68-72 ISBN 0-415-16178-9; ISSN 1352-8165 | |
| 4. Missing Persons: personal pronouns in performance writing | 135 |
| <i>Performance Research Vol 3, No 1</i> (Spring 1998) pp. 87-90 ISBN 0-415-18201-8; ISSN 1352-8165 | |
| 5. Eluded Readings: trying to tell stories about reading some recent poems | 142 |
| <i>The Gig 15</i> (September 2003) pp.35-54 ISSN 1481-5133 | |
| 6. Falling Towards Each Other: occasions of elegy | 171 |
| <i>The Paper, Issue 5</i> (October 2002) pp. 36-46 ISSN1454-8037 (to be republished in 2006 in <i>Occasions of Poetry: Elegy, Walking, Spirituality</i> (working title, Exeter: Stride Books) | |
| 7. Time-play-space: playing up the visual in writing | 184 |
| <i>Pores Issue 3: An Avant-gardist Journal of Poetics Research</i> (March 2004) (web journal) http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/3/index.html ISSN 1740-4304 | |
| 8. Reading (Illegible) Pages | |
| i. Reading (Illegible) Pages (main article) | 201 |
| ii. Reading a Polished Page (image of handwriting) | 221 |
| iii. Reading a Polished Page (printed text – DVD only) | 222 |
| Performance Research, Vol 9, No 2 pp. 15–23, p.92 and DVD ISSN 1352-8165, ISBN 0-415-34738-6 | |
| E. CRITICAL AND CELEBRATORY READINGS | 226 |
| 1. Two articles on Peter Riley: | |
| i. On <i>Lines on the Liver</i> and <i>Tracks and Mineshafts</i> and two essays; | 227 |
| ii. Before You Fall | 238 |
| <i>The Poetry of Peter Riley</i> (ed Nate Dorward), <i>The Gig 4/5</i> (2000), pp.35-46 ISSN 1481-5133 | |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 2. | John Riley, Poet | 244 |
| | Tears in the Fence No 20 (Spring 1998) pp. 62-68 ISSN 0266 5816 | |
| 3. | Some Things I Wanted To Say About Doug | 255 |
| | <i>A meeting for Douglas Oliver</i> ed. Wendy Mulford and Peter Riley (Cambridge et al: infernal methods, Street Editions and Poetical Histories, 2002) pp. 10-13; ISBN 0 905795 00 0 and 1 871965 60 8 | |
| 4. | Terms of Engagement in F.T.Prince | 258 |
| | PNReview Vol 29, No 1 (2002) pp. 36-38; ISSN 0144-7076, ISBN 1 85754 603 2 | |
| 5. | Dress and Address: 'John James' in John James | 266 |
| | <i>Salt Companion to John James</i> ed. Simon Perril, forthcoming from Great Wilbraham: Salt Publishing (2005) ISBN 1-876857-96-X (paperback); 1-84471-098-X (hardback) (see Appendix I) | |
| 6. | Karen Mac Cormack's Implexures: an implicated reading | 288 |
| | forthcoming special issue of <i>The Gig</i> , ed. Nate Dorward (Willowdale: Canada, 2005) pp. 87 – 107 (see Appendix I) | |
| F. | ON INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND PEDAGOGY | 315 |
| 1. | Interdisciplinarity: disciplines and arts practice | 316 |
| | Proceedings of CONCEPTS Conference, Oporto, April 1995 | |
| 2. | Issues For Discipline And Context: designing a taught postgraduate programme in performance practices | 334 |
| | Conference Proceedings: : 'Further and Continuing Education of performing artists in the Nordic Countries – a Nordic Task') (Videre og affernddanneelse for scenekunstere I Nordern) Oslo: Norway 12 th – 14 th November 1999, pp.77-85 ISBN 92-893-0578-9; ISSN 0908-6692) | |
| 3. | Review of <i>The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity</i> (ed Alex Coles and Alexia Defert) | 353 |
| | Performance Research Vol 4, No 3 (Winter 1999) pp. 103 –106 ISBN 0415198046 | |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|-----|
| G, H and I. | APPENDICES | 362 |
| G. | APPENDIX 1 | CD |
| | Visual and sound material and links to web publications | |
| | 1. Visual material prepared for viewing through Microsoft PowerPoint | |
| | 2. Offline copy of <i>Through the Gap</i> from Shearsman website | |
| | 3. Offline copy of <i>Changing Lines</i> from Great Works website | |
| | 4. Sound treatments of <i>Couldn't You</i> by Birdie Hall | |
| | 5. Links to works published on web | |
| H. | APPENDIX 2 | DVD |
| | <i>Works in Three Houses</i> (domestic frames <i>in situ</i>); photography, sound and editing by Birdie Hall | |
| I. | APPENDIX 3 | |
| | Evidence of intention to publish two articles awaiting publication: | |
| | 1. Letter from Simon Perril, editor of the <i>Salt Companion to John James</i> , about publication of "Dress and Address: 'John James' in John James" (E5) | 364 |
| | 2. Letter from Nate Dorward, editor of <i>The Gig</i> , about publication of "Karen Mac Cormack's Implexures: an implicated reading" (E6) | 365 |

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Included in the first category are (and this is something of a chronological and also a highly selective list): Andrew Crozier, J.H.Prynne and Peter Riley (The English Intelligencer and, in Andrew Crozier's case, also the Ferry Press)); Tim Longville, the late John Riley, Gordon Jackson and Helene Jackson (Grosseteste); John James and Nick Wayte (Resuscitator); Peter Philpott (Great Works); Tony Baker (Figs); John Welch (The Many Press); Denise Riley (as editor of Macmillan's *Poets on Writing*); Ric Allsopp, Claire MacDonald, Kevin Mount and David Williams (Performance Research); David Caddy (Tears in the Fence); Nicholas Johnson (etruscan books); Nate Dorward (The Gig); the late Ian Robinson (Oasis); David Kennedy (The Paper); Tony Frazer (Shearsman); Anthony Rudolf (as editor of the feature on F.T. Prince in PNReview); Wendy Mulford and Peter Riley (*For Douglas Oliver*); Derrick Woolf and Tilla Brading (PQR); Alan Boldon and Roger Bourke (Dartington Gallery directors); Mark Leahy and Debs Price (curators of the

performance writing exhibition); Simon Perril (as editor of the *Salt Companion to John James*).

The second category is far too large for me to provide anything like an inclusive list and I certainly have not included those fugitive conversations with near strangers that can be so productive. I would want to add to the names above at least the following: David Chaloner, Heather Cowie, the late Paul Evans, Angela Hall, Birdie Hall, Thomas Hall, Lee Harwood, Kris Hemensley, the late Barry MacSweeney, the late Douglas Oliver, the late F.T. Prince, Paul Selby, John Temple; all colleagues in Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts, including Ric Allsopp, Caroline Bergvall, Barbara Bridger, cris cheek, Jerome Fletcher, Peter Jaeger, Mark Leahy, Brigid Mc Leer, Redell Olsen, the late Alaric Sumner; and finally, Tim Allen and others who have met monthly in and around Plymouth to talk poetry as the discussion wing of the Plymouth Language Group.

In the third category are: Edward Cowie, for encouragement and support; Andrew Brewerton, for agreeing to act as my advisor at a very demanding time for him; Ric Allsopp and Caroline Bergvall for advice; all those who attended a research seminar at Dartington on November 30th 2004 for the help they gave me in understanding what I was doing.

Author's Declaration

The work submitted for a PhD by publication is all my own, given the usual and welcome fact that most of it has been prompted by the ideas and work of many others, living and dead. In the essays, specific sources are acknowledged whenever I am aware of them. Some of the more general ones – often the most important – may not be, if only because they are so pervasive. They will be apparent to anyone familiar with the field(s).

Apricot Pages (B) and *Changing Lines* (C.4, C.6 and G.3)¹ both incorporate phrases from other writers and allow them to shape and disturb a quite different textual environment. In the former, the sources were books that happened to be in easy reach of my writing desk. They included, for example, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and the London *A to Z*. In the latter, the main sources were Heidegger, Merleau Ponty and Walter Černý, author of the text of a field guide to British birds.

The main period of publication – or re-publication – is 1996 to 2005. One article, 'Writing and Not Writing' (D.1), appeared in 1992. I have included this as a kind of prologue to the writing activities and preoccupations that were to follow. As I explain in the Preface, this extended period of time represents a distinct phase in my activities as writer and teacher.

¹ A letter and number in brackets refer to the labelling method used in the list of contents and on the leading page of each publication in the proposed submission.

First publication of my work took place in 1966. I started continuous employment at Dartington College of Arts in 1976, having worked part-time in the academic year 1974/5. *Else Here: Selected Poems* (A.1) includes work from two early collections of poems that were written and published before 1974 and from others that, though published in 1978, contain earlier writing. The process of selection, editing and book design took place in 1999, though, and the other work submitted was written, as well as published, within my time of employment at Dartington.

The main publication period (1996-2005) – longer than the ‘normal’ five years – allows me to include publications and re-publications that took place since the launching at Dartington of a discipline named ‘performance writing’, with which they are closely connected. Another factor is that for most of this period my research activity was slowed by my responsibilities as Vice Principal Academic. From September 2002 my revised half-time post as Associate Director of Research has allowed me time.

I have taken the category of ‘publication’ to include exhibitions and web publications. My field of interest is a minority one. By choice I publish in those contexts that promise to be most productive for the development of the kind of writing that interests me.

The submission is made within an institutional research policy that treats theory and practice as equally valid research modes, and as especially effective when working complementarily.

Signed: *John Hull*

Date: *1st August 2005*

Writings, Readings and Not Writing

poems, prose fiction and essays

A preface to the published writings

This collection of publications consists of a number of different modes and modalities of writing¹ and is the manifestation of a set of interrelated conceptual and formal concerns of a poet, essayist and educator. At first sight they could be arranged into two broad categories on either side of a theory / practice divide, or, slightly differently, of one labelled 'expository / creative'. But both these pairs of terms would cut through the very questions about genre, mode, modality and divisions of knowledge that I have tried to address. Both, too, imply a binary pair of first order modes of writing, even perhaps a hierarchical relation, and the troublesome term 'creative' still carries its enigmatic aura².

I have submitted texts in the form of visual and page-based poems that are primarily *made* things whose materials are emphatically linguistic. And I have submitted texts that are intended as 'arguments', many of them examinations of the poetics that might be taken to govern and describe the first broad set – the poems. It remains true, though, that many of the 'poems' can also be read as propositions and that the arguments are also carefully *made* speech acts, fashioned in relation to the topics and texts they address and the social and cultural contexts in which they are implicated.

These problems of category are not incidental to the whole body of work here submitted.

Another division could be along the lines of different modes of sensory and conceptual attention. There are many writings here that invoke Thomas Campion's maxim that 'the eare is a rationall sence and a chiefe iudge of proportion' (Campion 1909, 36); others that give that privilege to the eye; and then there are those discursive writings that play down sensory engagements in hearing and seeing – though not too much so, I hope – favouring *concept* over *percept*. This threefold division corresponds to Ezra Pound's triplet of melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia³, though his definition of phanopoeia as 'casting of images upon the visual imagination' does not catch my own – and his later – interest in the visuality of written marks (or indeed the way that visual marks can work as melopoeic scores).

I am interested, as practitioner, commentator and educator, in the different 'language-games'⁴ that writings – and indeed not-writings – can play. It is my hope that the diversity of modes included here is not a scattering of difference but a coherent enquiry through difference. In the end, tempted only briefly by an overriding chronology, I have arranged the work into six categories of writing⁵:

- (A) poems, including prose-poems, written for the page and capable of being read aloud.
- (B) prose-fiction, represented here through a single work, (sections of) the novella, *Apricot Pages*.
- (C) visual poems, designed for the most part either to be framed and seen in domestic contexts or viewed on computer monitors; these have been difficult to represent in a medium that favours the printed word.

- (D) enquiries into aspects of a general poetics, that might be applied to specific writings but whose motivations are generic questions to do, for example, with situatedness or (implicatedness), genres of discourse and their related modalities, poetics and grammar, and a poetics of reading.
- (E) critical and celebratory readings, mostly of contemporary poets and poems, that complement the essays in poetics by starting out from particular texts, and particular acts of reading, rather than from generic considerations.
- (F) meditations on institutionalised divisions and modalities of knowledge and practice and their implications for arts pedagogy.

With the partial exception of the last category, all the publications could be described as enquiries into, within, and around 'performance writing', the name given to a field of enquiry and a range of writing practices in a taught, and subsequently a research, programme at Dartington⁶. My own primary practice as a writer is as a poet. I see poetry as a name for one set of modes of language performance, as interesting for what it shares with other sets as for what distinguishes it.

'By publication'

This collection of writings constitutes the submission for an award 'by publication'. Since the category of publication has different significance and signification in different fields of practice and knowledge, this might be worth a comment. There are at least two inflections to the term 'publication': one, that a work has been made available, by some means, to a 'public'; two, that the work has been validated as worthy of publication by knowledgeable and disinterested parties (and is thereby available too for contestation and peer review). 'Availability' is a deliberately

cautious term that says nothing about the uses to which a publication might be put. There is every difference between a publication entering the modes of symbolic exchange of definable 'communities' and one – perhaps the same one – being placed in the distribution networks of capitalist markets. As for validation, it is an unavoidable fact that such validations are immediately themselves calibrated – for example, through market indicators or through the discourses of reviewing, criticism, teaching syllabuses, conversations between readers and between practitioners⁷. The main consideration for participants in emerging or minority fields is not so much some widely shared measure of 'prestige' as a more localised understanding of the productivity of a context of exchange and reach.

In these terms I am conscious of having worked *across* communities of interest. For example, there would only be a few who read both *The Gig* and *Performance Research*, and yet I have conducted closely related enquiries in each.

There are twenty-seven publications included in this submission. All except two were invited or commissioned⁸. Earlier versions of six of them were given as talks or papers⁹. Most, if not all, of the published page-poems have been read at public readings. Fifteen of the items were published within the small press environment¹⁰ (one as a book; seven in small press journals; five in special themed book editions; two on small press web-sites). Twelve were published in 'academic' publications, including a refereed journal (five articles and a 'reading'), conference proceedings, one web-site and one well known literary journal. Two were gallery exhibitions and one a showing at a book fair.

Few of these categories are secure. At least one publisher, Salt, though established initially as a small press, now has an extensive list that is beginning to include critical texts, presumably for an academic market (E.5). *The Gig*, a Canadian magazine with a special interest in British and Irish poetry, moves between single issues in folded, centre-stapled Letter format of about 64 pages, containing a mix of poems (and prose), critical texts and reviews (D.5), and special issue critical texts with printed spines (E.1 and E.6). In the UK *The Paper* has taken a similar line (D.6).

The refereed journal referred to above is *Performance Research*, whose provenance was the world of international theatre (or 'drama') journals¹¹ but which from the outset included 'performance writing' in its research brief. Its foundation in 1996 opened up a context in which writing could be considered under a broad rubric of 'performance' and in doing so provided a challenge for the framing terms of a page-based poetics. The editors, Richard Gough, Ric Allsopp and Claire Macdonald, established a design format that could promote the page as a visual space – as a space that could itself 'perform' as well as carry a discourse about performance. They have included a supplementary DVD with some issues. A recent issue called 'On the Page' contains two closely related pieces of mine that can respond to this dual format (D.8).

Small poetry presses are, on the whole, motivated by the wish to promote, instigate and disseminate rather than to make a profit for their owners, and free-access websites have provided an obvious alternative and supplementary publishing environment. Importantly, as with *Performance Research* DVDs, the web allows for different qualities of visual production. *Shearsman*, a paper journal that at the time of

this writing has reached Issue 64, is making increasingly enterprising use of its website. This has been showing *Through the Gap* (C.2), a web exhibition of my visual poems, curated by the owner and editor, Tony Frazer, since October 2002.

Pores: An Avant-gardist Journal of Poetics Research was designed as a web journal. My article in Issue 3, on the temporality of visual poems, includes three visual texts (D.7)¹². *Great Works* had previously been a paper-based publisher that had in 1978 produced *Couch Grass* (included in A.1). I offered versions of *Changing Lines* (C.6) to the editor, Peter Philpott, because his website published poems that belonged to the print tradition and at the same time provided possibilities of visual treatment that would be too expensive for a conventional journal. I am interested in work that can move between the page – or page-like settings – and environments designed for *showing*.

More of my poems in the last ten years have been visual than page-based. The publishing possibilities for such work include galleries (C.1 and C.4) as well as websites and DVDs. As discussed in the article 'Time-play-space: playing up the visual in writing' (D.7), many of these visual poems are designed as interventions in domestic space or in rituals of sociability. They need, as it were, to perform in these spaces and not just to be 'about' them. This remains a challenge for me and, I like to think, for the category of 'publication'. The visual poems are included here both on CD and in page-format and Birdie Hall has produced DVD material to give a sense of domestic context. Since they are intended to be seen in sets or clusters, their representation has been particularly problematic. I prefer to produce versions of work for – or in conversation with – particular contexts, whether that context is a particular frame, a card-giving time of year, a space, or a friend or group. The context of this submission requires the reproduction or representation of published material, not the

presentation of what would in effect be new work. This was already a problem with the *Loose-idity* exhibition (C.1), in moving from house (defined as a 'private' space) to gallery.

I want to make three further comments on publication. The first extends the notion of *communitas* suggested above. The first poems that I considered 'published' appeared in a corner-stapled mimeographed circular called *The English Intelligencer* in 1966. Although *The English Intelligencer* now has a status as a 'publication' of considerable specialist interest in relation to the emergence of a poetry that was later to be anthologised in *A Various Art* (Crozier and Longville 1997)¹³, it was not available for sale, being circulated free to a small number of poets. Its purpose was to generate activity and not (yet) to disseminate more widely. Publication-like contexts that are expressly managed to promote dialogue between practitioners are not an alternative to publication but an invaluable adjunct and provide contexts for a form of collaborative research. More recently the series of seminars under the title of *Partly Writing*, initially instigated by Caroline Bergvall and Romana Huk, has applied this principle to live exchange, though making some of the material available on the web¹⁴.

Secondly, a public poetry reading is always a form of 'publication', often providing the first public dissemination and / or reception of a work. Recordings have been made of a number of my readings, though none has as yet acquired the status of publication through publicised distribution¹⁵.

Finally, there is a form of restricted publication that is not directly included here but which lies behind and around some of the articles: the production of institutional

documents associated with the development of a whole new field of academic practice. For example, the planning of Performance Writing as an undergraduate degree was a process of collaborative research and development, resulting in a document that included a full rationale for, and specification of, a new field of study. Although such documents are not 'published', their reach and impact can constitute a significant contribution to knowledge.

Period of publication

This submission is intended to read as a set of related works, deriving some of its coherence from the questions posed or revived by the invention, specification, development and delivery of 'performance writing'. It seems in retrospect that my career as a writer has divided into three 'periods', of which this is the current.

The first could be said to have run from 1966 to 1981. It was a time of relatively prolific poem writing¹⁶. I wrote a few reviews at this time and a memorial piece on John Riley¹⁷, but no other published discursive writings in relation to poetry.

The next period – say from 1981 to 1992 – was a period of 'not writing'. For a number of years I wrote very little and – apart from appearances in anthologies¹⁸ – published only one article, on the poet Peter Riley (E.1)¹⁹. I discuss this period in 'Writing and Not Writing' (D.1). It was a time of considerable learning for me, much of it arising from my close involvement with the Art and Social Context degree at Dartington. The concept of 'social context' has remained a provocation ever since. In particular, perhaps, the development of a notion of 'visual culture' raised questions for me about 'textual culture', and those unavoidable cultural spaces where

the two behave together. Questions about performance and (inter)subjectivity were not far behind.

Towards the end of this period I made a serious attempt to bring these new theoretical considerations to bear within my poem writing. The sequence of poems called *Repressed Intimations* (Hall 1981) tried to take up a language position *within* questions about being embedded in and through 'culture'²⁰. Though the sequence was published as a special issue of *Figs*, a journal edited by the poet Tony Baker, it feels unresolved to this day, and only a few of the poems are included in *else here: Selected Poems* (A.1). I have taken up the issues in different ways since.

The current period perhaps begins in 1992 with 'Writing and Not Writing' (D1). This act of writing about not writing helped me in a number of ways to place myself in readiness to work *with* the silence and loss it describes.²¹

Contribution to knowledge

This submission of published material is required to demonstrate a 'distinct contribution to knowledge in the subject'. In one sense of the term, my 'subject' is poetics, understood as *praxis*, and therefore requiring different modes of operation. 'Poetics' has a long history within the domains of knowledge. The provocations of 'performance writing' trouble this ancient field with new questions, calling for supple theoretical engagements and a readiness to develop appropriate critical responses where there are no or few precedents.

Poetics is the name for a domain of knowledge in the sense of 'knowing about' *and* for a *praxis* that brings together in a dynamic interrelation considerations of *about*,

what, and *how*, driven always by *why* questions. It is, in my view, quite impossible to keep poetics apart from considerations of a philosophy – including a pragmatics and an ethics – of language. In its turn, language is a semantic activity, bound up at every point and level with practices of knowledge²². My interest is in writing as variable modalities of textual knowing – including those modalities of knowing that feel at best uncertain and at worst ignorant (D.5 and D.8). My research is very much intended as a form of action-research: an enquiring performance of textuality, which cannot be constrained to a single modality – that of authoritative knowledge – in its exploration of modal differences. This necessarily formal enquiry is often as much present within my essays as it is in the poems. For example, there has been a thread of enquiry into deixis and personal pronouns – and I am certainly not alone in this – in much of my work. In 1996 I attempted to focus this through some research that produced both the article on personal pronouns (D.4) in *Performance Research* and the poem sequence ‘It’s Stranger’ that appears in the last section of *else here* (A1). Visual versions of the same enquiry can be seen in the ‘house works’ section of *Loose-idity* (B1).

A different example can be found in my most recent discursive publication, a mosaic essay on Karen Mac Cormack’s *Implexures* that presents my own implicatedness in her topics as much through formal tactics as through the substance of the argument (E.6).

Questions from within a phenomenology of knowing (and not knowing) are inseparable from the considerations of modality, mode and genre, that thread through the articles. They relate to J.L. Austin’s notion of performativity (Austin 1962) – the measure, as it were, of a certain *force* in symbolic exchange – and Bourdieu’s term

'symbolic power' (Bourdieu 1992). Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1986), Volosinov (Volosinov 1986) and Halliday (Halliday 1978) help too to understand speech acts and written texts as interpersonal occurrences, situated between particular people in particular situations, and operating in genres that are already meaningful.

Knowledge has material forms and procedures that place it socially and culturally.

As soon as I know something – or how to do something – I am implicated, and although I am forgetful, I cannot *choose* to forget. This knowledge situates me. I try to understand and to speak (write) my understanding (and also my ignorance). I attend to the performances of others, especially their written texts. I have tried to write out of these attentions. Since many of the texts whose reading I try to write are recent (and 'difficult') this is not easy.

As an educator who has enjoyed responsibility for designing new courses in higher education and new organisational frameworks for structured learning, I have had the opportunity to test out the implication of some of the ideas in these writings in concrete and pragmatic ways (E.1 and E.2).

I hope that the modes and modalities of writing that I essay can contribute to the subtle *ways* in which knowing changes.

John Hall

November 2004 / March 2005

3000 words

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¹ I am treating the term 'mode' as reasonably self-evident. An essay and a poem are different modes of writing just as a car and a train are different modes of transport. I am using the term 'modality' to suggest subtler but closely related differences. Differences in 'context of situation', mode, channel, medium, genre, and register can all relate to differences in 'modality', understood as the status of the authority of a text or utterance in relation to its propositions about the world. This understanding of the term derives from the grammatical category of mood but has acquired extra-grammatical associations to do with the discursive status of any text in a given conjuncture and the status and known interests of those engaging with it. I owe this understanding to the 'social semioticians' (Halliday 1978 and Hodge and Kress 1988). Many of my articles use the term, though none as yet has elaborated on it.

² Anyone who has read Macherey 1978 is likely to be wary of the term.

³ See, for example, 'How to read' in Pound 1968.

⁴ Wittgenstein 1958

⁵ The letters given to the categories in this list are used in subsequent references, usually with a number added. The letter appears in the contents list and at the head of each section. A letter followed by a number (there is no number in B, since there is only one item) appears at the head of each item and in the header of each page.

⁶ Performance Writing was initially planned as an undergraduate award in the academic year 1992/3. I led the planning team. By 1999 a Masters award had been added.

⁷ And, of course, research assessment exercises.

⁸ The exceptions are C.5 and F.1. In the case of the latter, a paper on interdisciplinarity, I was pressed by a colleague to offer this for a conference in whose planning he was involved. C.5, the web versions of *Changing Lines*, are discussed later.

⁹ D.3 at the first Performance Writing Symposium held at Dartington in April 1996; D.5 as one in the Talks series held at Birkbeck College, University of London, in March 2003; E.2 at the Wessex poetry Festival in Blandford Forum in November 1996; E.3 at a memorial event for Douglas Oliver held in the Swedenborg Hall, London, on 22nd October 2000; F.1 at the CONCEPTS conference in Oporto, April 1995; F.2 at a conference on postgraduate arts education in Oslo in November 1999.

¹⁰ An article by Nigel Wheale called 'Uttering Poetry: Small-Press Publication' appears alongside my own 'Writing and Not Writing' in Riley 1992.

¹¹ Perhaps The Drama Review (USA, ed. Richard Schechner, founded 1955), PAJ – A Journal of Performance and Art (USA, ed. Bonnie Maranca and Gautam Dasgupta, founded 1976) and Theaterschrift (international, thirteen issues between 1992 and 1998 in four languages, chief editor Marianne van Kerkhoven) indicate the intellectual territory.

¹² This article was one of two that were commissioned by editors who had read D.5 (or had heard the paper), my piece on 'eluded readings'. These three now form a set, though each was published in a very different context. The third is D.8, 'Reading (II)legible Pages'.

¹³ This anthology included my sequence 'Couch Grass', first published as a pamphlet by Great Works (Hall 1978a) and two poems from *Meaning Insomnia* (Hall 1978b). There is an *English Intelligencer* archive as a part of the Avant Garde Collection at Fales Library, New York University.

¹⁴ I have not included any material that has been exclusively published in these environments of restricted exchange. Notes signalling an intervention at the first Partly Writing seminar can be found at <http://www.dartington.ac.uk/partlywriting/hall.html>. Poems that were first circulated in The English Intelligencer were subsequently included in *Between the Cities* (Hall 1968) and *else here: Selected Poems* (A.1).

¹⁵ Optic Nerve recorded two recent London readings, one at the Diorama in November 1999, another for sub-Voicive in the Betsy Trotwood in Farringdon in September 2002. These may become available at some time.

¹⁶ All the collections of my poems listed, apart from *else here: Selected Poems* (A.1) were written and published in this period (Hall 1968, Hall 1972, Hall 1978a, Hall 1978b, Hall 1978c, Hall 1981)

¹⁷ 'These lines are to remember John Riley' in Longville 1979, pp.70-75

¹⁸ Joris and Buck 1984, Hemensley 1985, Crozier and Longville 1997.

¹⁹ This article is included in this submission because it was republished, together with a commissioned second article in the form of a postscript, in a collection of articles on Peter Riley in 2000 (Dorward 2000).

²⁰ The most compressed statement within this sequence is perhaps: 'I is the body where the culture rages'. This was by no means my first or last engagement with the problematics of grammatical person. See the discussion below.

²¹ Some of these topics were raised again by Tim Allen in his e-mail interview with me for Duncan and Allen 2005?.

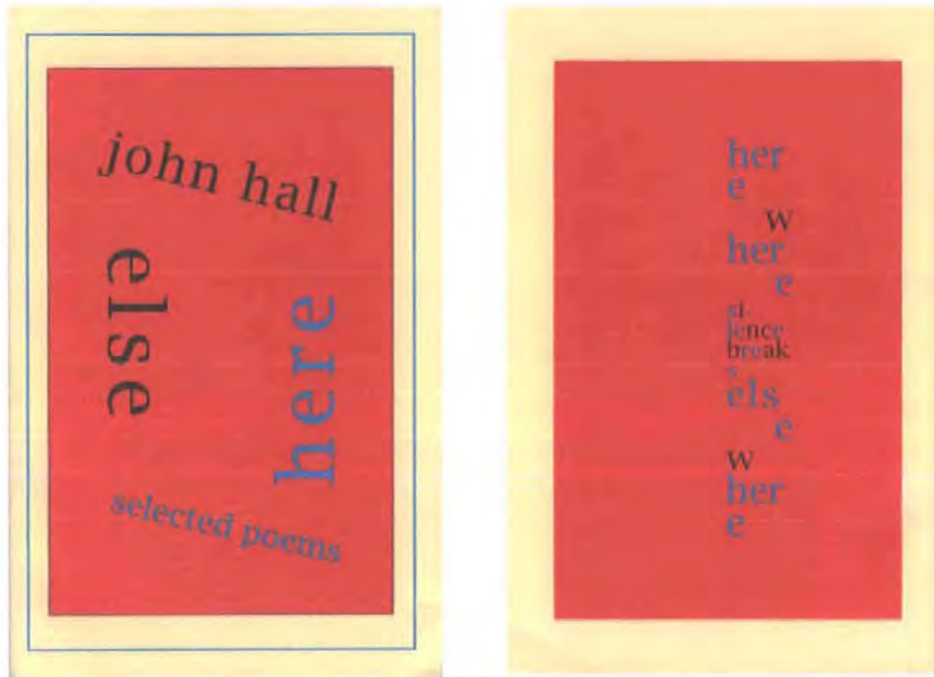
²² One of my early books of poems is called *Meaning Insomnia* (Hall 1978b).

SECTION A

Writing for the page

Poems And Prose-Poems

- A.1: *else here: Selected Poems* (separate book)
- A.2: Couldn't You?
- A.3: Lyrical Abstractions

A.1***else here: Selected Poems***

else here: Selected Poems was published by etruscan books in 1999. A copy of the paperback edition is included as part of this submission.

Most of the poems in the selection were written before 1996. Only the final section called Not Writing contains work from the chosen period. The processes of selection, editing and design – all fully relevant to my practice – took place in 1998 and 1999.

A.2

Couldn't you

oasis

No. 102 / 2001

MICHAEL WILSONG (Aesthete) / Think of a Book
 JOHN HALL / Couldn't you?
 JOHN MORGAN / Two Poems
 BERNY BILTON / Eight Poems
 WENDY MARTIN / Poem / Sound Writing
 GIOVANNI MICHALE (Italy) / Three Poems



Note

As with many of my more recent writings, *Couldn't you* exists in a number of different versions. This page version, using black and white text, was not the first to be produced. The separate sections had first been printed in the framed versions that are reproduced in C.2.viii, from the *Loose-idity* exhibition. The last section has been through a

number of variants. Birdie Hall has also produced a number of sound treatments of a recorded version of the text. Two of these were played at the opening of the exhibition. They were intended to play continuously but were stopped when their repetitive rhythms disturbed some of those working in nearby rooms. These are included on the CD (G.4).

Oasis 102, 2001 ed Ian Robinson, pp. 8-9

Couldn't you?

In those golden days the talk was miniature and barred: under-stated, precise, golden and, when appropriate, just not stated at all. No voice was raised, even in silence. It was then I learnt how various omission and restraint can be and learnt to admire and envy - indeed try to emulate – articulate silence



I could never get past the part in the story where they all left. A loss is not a loss unless it keeps happening. Perhaps there is a time when you are just about to lose the loss and you remember, poignantly. Like waking with a start just before you were asleep. The point is not when they left but repeating to yourself how it will be when they have gone. It will be all right won't it? No it won't. It is because you can't forget that it will happen again. Once is enough but there is no such thing as once. Once upon a time happens all the time and is impossible. It can't happen. The time which never was has gone and what repeats is not the time but the impossibility of its return except as a sense of its impossibility. What repeats is this avoidance of this story of loss. It has to repeat impossibly because it has no history. It is avoided so often it is fully there. Hung by the force of avoidance. And what hangs swings. At every moment returns to itself in order to leave for itself. It is not as though I could tell it once and for all. Though I could try. Couldn't you.



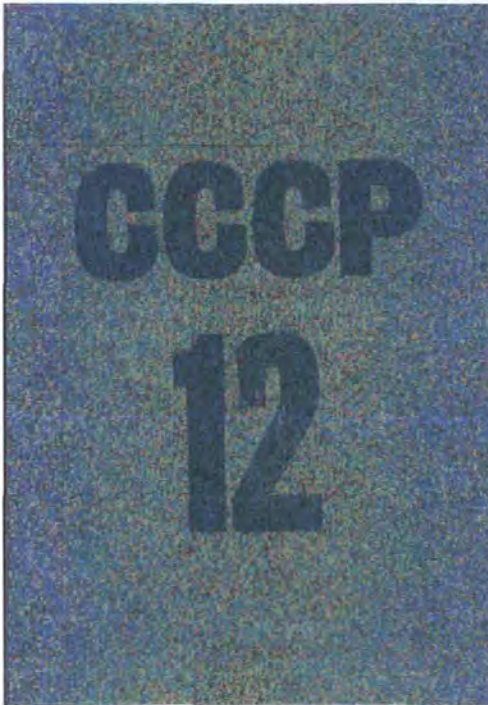
Despite a severance, solemnly to declare veracity and perseverance. Hit verity and back down from teeth on lips to front palate. Suppress palatal terror. Palatial errors, with flowers and vowels free-ranging over the lawns. Parkland commandeered for the purposes of modern myth. Majestic common land. Tell me I'm not wrong. Travel between vowels and prefixes through the oscillations of cut-and-run, of truth on the move. She smiles shyly because that's the way she was stolen. An old trick. If you can't say it sing it. The young charmer. More than half in love with you singing. Repetition of white teeth chanting against red lips. Truth grows delirious. Heaven knows what the doctor got up to meanwhile. Trembling in the face: teeth and lips. Paid to cure. Caring about that. Lying because you care about cure. Of course truth bleeds loss and blossom on the lips. That's the smile that severs. Spit the tooth out to say it. Why not? Truly, you'll smile later through the gap.



There is repetition and there is avoidance. There is avoidance of repetition. The avoidance of repetition is repeated. You don't notice perhaps because your attention voids itself, veering on to the surface of particulars. On to *the* line of events. This is how you love and avoid love. There is no object larger than the imagined world. Its worn corners. Its weary shoulders. Love repeats on itself. This abstraction is a loop out of the real that holes out local meaning by senseless repetition. Say it often enough and it empties. If you empty it carefully enough what is left is a fine abstraction, a void or vacuum pulling back the gravity of particulars. As though a nothing could exert such force. I repeat myself. Of course I don't. It is suspended by a force of insistence. On being nothing.

A.3

Lyrical Abstractions



Lyrical Abstractions was published in CCCP 12, ('published by the Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry to accompany a weekend of readings and performances at Trinity College, Cambridge, 26-28 April 2002').

This publication was withdrawn following complaints about a spoof poem falsely published under the name of a poet living in Cambridge. The format is A4.

CCCP 12, 2002 ed Andrew Johnson Cambridge: Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry, pp.47-51

Lyrical abstractions

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mordant
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SECTION B

Prose fiction

Four 'pages' of a longer prose fiction called *Apricot Pages* are the only inclusion in this category of prose fiction. Other 'pages' were published in the 1970s and the late Ian Robinson, editor of *Oasis*, was keen to re-publish more, even perhaps the whole of it in serial form. I preferred to await the possibility of a book publication of the whole. The publishers Reality Street have now agreed to publication, though not in time for this submission.

The following note appears in the manuscript sent to the publisher:

These pages were begun some time in the middle 1970s. Some of them appeared in specialist magazines of the time. In about 1984 they were prepared for publication and were about to appear from Grosseteste Press as the *Little Grey Code Book*. In the event Grosseteste stopped publishing and there were other things to think about. The text lay in a file, being shown every now and again to individual readers who showed an interest.

I have retained the Garamond font for the excerpts from *Apricot Pages* and have not applied double spacing.

from *Apricot Pages*

PAGE NINE

The use of the heater is quite simple. Or so was claimed for it in the instruction manual. The single round knob beside the grille acts as a rheostat which controls the speed of the fan (Its *rotational velocity* the first writer of the manual had said).

Rheostat, Francie spat to herself, that's a fancy word. It sounds like the phrase Clifford always uses when he's asked what line he's in. Real Estate, she finally got out of him but only after she had persuaded him to PLEASE SLOW DOWN. What's the hurry? REAL: She said. Clifford will you please slow down.

The heater would not work for Francie any more than for Clifford. Where's your rheostat, Clifford? I'm going to turn it down. Giving his scrotal sac a faint twist anti-clockwise in her imagination.

No work could get done that night though the citizens of Judhael's town of Totnes were more fortunate. There the milder weather and the nature of the local industry (each woman, someone had told Francie, stooped over raw buffalo hide, kneading it, and only at night) precluded the use of heaters of quite this kind.

She tweaked the label still in place on the matt black handle. It was torn. She read, *Are you getting all the warmth you deserve? Women of today have too a wonderful variety of...*, and there the tear occurred. She kicked it, with a damaging pendular velocity into the wall. The force of popular fiction nearly made it work but not quite. Instead it squatted there, a singular concavity in its shiny grille, an alert uselessness about its angle of posture. She kicked it again - from the ankle, this time, a flick of the foot. It rose up against the wall and dropped again silently.

Hegel said that the Roman state was the prose of the world. The wealthy within that state were warm, making use of cunning systems of underfloor heating. Recent far-reaching discoveries in the biological sciences have raised no proposals for tackling the problem of cold radically, tackling it at the level of the body's primal metabolism. So far as Francie knew, no major work had been done in this field; neither by the Romans, nor by their successors the English, nor even by the Americans.

She turned dispiritedly to her dressing table and to keep her mind off the cold fiddled with the wonderful variety of cosmetics that, variously contained, crowded

its top surface. And there leaning up against the unopened bottle of Lanvin's Arpege that Mr Tibbet had given her eighteen months before was the mail she hadn't dared open. She did so now.

First was a card from her cousin Judhael in Totnes. The little bitch, hissed Francie to herself. It showed a picture of a young woman looking wonderfully like Francie, stooped over something resembling raw buffalo hide. Underneath was a caption reading, Women of today have, too, a wonderful variety of occupations. Mark Tibbet (Mayor).

Mayor, mouthed Francie. Buffalo mare's piss.

The next two letters she couldn't read because they were of a different language. The third she felt between the first two fingers and thumb of each hand. She looked into space. No, she said quietly and put it down.

The next said, Please come round soon. I need you. Mark. She was about to throw that down when she saw on the back, PS Please come wearing Lanvin's Arpege. I'd be grateful and, in time, so would you be. Hmph, said Francie, intrigued despite herself.

The next card was as simple as the heater to use. In clear blue print it was headed, The New Woman's Ethical League (affiliated to the Council for the Use of Normal Thinking). In mauve ink its message read, There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers. Francie opened her underwear drawer and pulled out a half-bottle of Teachers from beside her first edition of *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. She took a slug, a long one. No work could get done that night, that was for sure, especially as the last envelope frightened her most. It was huge. She slit it open with a long eye-liner brush and slipped out a heavy concertinaed card. On the front in clear blue ink was printed, ... far reaching discoveries in the biological sciences. She opened it out with shaking hand. There were eight photographs of men she knew well. All of them are there except Clifford, my darling rheostat. Lance, Henry, Charles, Edwin, Anthony, Cedric, Sidney and Lance. All of them in the last two months had expressed LOVE but their features in the photograph were vicious. In the first square, instead of a photo, were the words, Each of us liked you. (Liked: That hurt her.) and on the last square were the words, And where are we now'.

Francie swallowed more of the Teachers. It is strange how much I need them now. She threw herself down on the bed, her whiskey breath in the pillow. Oh God: only Clifford and Mr Tibbet. Muffled through her pillow she heard the telephone ring. She clutched the bedclothes tightly until it stopped. Then she fell shaking asleep.

The next morning she would drive up to Mr Tibbet's place.

PAGE TEN

Voices from the past, from the future. She turned in bed, alone, and was helpless. Each of us like you. Faces in photographs monotonously paraded across her nightmare screen, entering on blurred left, passing through a horrible clearness, on their way to blurred right. Her eyes beneath their lids flicked left each time for the next.

Each of us like you. At the same time the words kept flickering and jumping. In her torn sleep she tried to control them. The images are clear. Why do the words jump? It was as though, if she could get past these, other words would follow, more kindly to her rest. It's a terrible affliction. Two screens, like a viewing of Chelsea Girls, though the drama here is personal. Outside, light began to press against the thick drawn curtains. When in the narrative had she drawn her curtains? The cafe entertainment stopped as dawn broke and below her window the musicians headed for home, a Lance among them. For aubade he gave her a blare on bass clarinet, at which she started in her dreams.

And into her room, while she dreamt, a boy entered, with an innocence beyond her horror. He replaced the cap on the Teacher's bottle. He took the unopened envelope from the dressing table. He drew the bed-cover from either side of Francie and tried to tuck it around her. He thought she shivered in her sleep. The cheek which he touched gently with the back of one hand was not cold but hot and wet.

One, two, three, four, five, six, the boy heard her say in racked voice. This was Arnold, her boyish aubade. As he touched her again her word-lock broke. Or did it? Each of us like you. No. But then by force of her dreaming will, a comma entered, compounding the fault in her memory: Each of us, like you. The photographs blurred out completely as the words took centre: Each of us, like you.

Now there was no movement, but great fixity. She must add: Each of us, like you ... it's a terrible affliction. The boy saw her weep and smile, saw her mouth work and the sound issue, It's a terrible affliction. Under the influence of the new weeping smile, Lance's brother, Arnold, who adored her, tiptoed to the window and drew back the curtain the width of his head. There was lachrymose film in his own eyes as he looked out into the provincial morning. He muttered something there as the light passed him and turned hurriedly to Francie, for he loved her, and nearly spoke, but stopped at once when he saw her face on which now misery was again depicted. These are my first critical assays, he thought with grim pride.

Voices from the past, from the future. In that misery Francie awoke. Arnold!

PAGE ELEVEN

The idea that life arose from time to time from non-living materials - oh yes, like Clifford's shiny heater in its newfangledness. The study of perception could only teach us a 'bad ambiguity'. She had come back so often to that thought - which one of them - probably Edwin, had printed out and stuck to the wall at eye-height in the mauve loo. Later one of the others - and again she had to guess it was Cedric - had added: The terrible affliction. Below that in a different hand (Edwin again? ah crash on crash of great names): The risk. Underneath it all she herself had written, in a garish lipstick she had no more use for: Let me alone.

Few women came to her flat and few men sat on her loo. It was she who had to endure the words. She was aware, of course, of an ambiguity about the word 'could', its conditional quality, with spurious connotations of past aptness. Her sister Bess, on one of her visits to town, had shown her this. Look! she had shouted from the loo and Francie had just said, If you mean the Sign, I know. But it crackles and drops like the fire.

And Bessie was nearly always right, bless her. She reminded her sister of something it was often pleasanter to forget: the landscape near an aerodrome. To security? No - there is no time left for that. But its opposite. Not her own insecurity, which Arnold knows is real enough. Real: Rheol. A flowing insecurity. But Bess's - a - um beautiful natural base-zone for unpredictable travel. This tickled Bess, mildly exasperating her. What fake ambiguity? Willed insecurity. That journey is unpredictable only to the hi-jacked and those who don't read the timetable. But in your case life arose from that landscape. That langue-scape, said Bess. My arse!

PAGE TWELVE

She drove out with Bess but not to the airport. No matter what, she just couldn't steer the Herald in that direction. Bess laughed, understanding. Why not Battersea Park, she said, invoking a sisterly joke of their teenage past. Near tears, Francie managed a snort that was nearly a laugh. That comedy of errors dolorously dedicated to the ageing of our mum, she thought, but not aloud, this. I wonder if she ever understood, she did say. Who? asked Bess. Our mum, of course. What? The comedy of errors, I don't follow you. Weren't you listening? You weren't talking. Francie looked blank. Are these the errors you mean? Bess asked, gesturing at the space of misunderstanding between them. Francie just looked blank. How can I, she said, with all my family.... Go on, said Bess, I mean... Francie's driving now mechanical: either she in command at a sensory-motor level quite beneath her felt turmoil or the Herald itself in command, gliding the two sisters over the black road into the hills, carrying them just ahead of the random projectiles their feelings were. At least this may be true of Francie and the car. After all, it was her car, an intimacy rather than possessiveness of two years now. Its engine buzz passed into the sound of breathing in her senses not Bess's. For Bess it was all a very mild irritant. Francie was of course in the driving seat.

As so often the rhythms of a motor-car engine intercepted a blank conversation. The two women sitting blankly forward now stared straight ahead and 'ahead' is a word hovering between adverb and preposition, leaving them and you in some uncertainty about a noun. It's none of our business except that the two are in many ways what is called attractive. As they sit there Francie pitches some misery to the tune of her engine and her mouth is down at the corners, But it is a full mouth. Even now you can imagine kissing it. I don't know why this makes a difference but it does. And we are no more voyeurs than Bess, whose eyes are browner than Francie's, who breaks her forward dream to look across at her sister. She smiles, despite Francie's unhappiness and as a result we can't apply the classical distinction of form. Her smile is not cruel but that life continues as the Herald does.

But the Herald didn't for long. Francie began to slow down deliberately and then pulled off on to the springy grass verge. I'm supposed to go to Mr Tibbet, she said when it had stopped, the motor idling. Oh, said Bess. Well, shall I? Why not? said Bess, and of course I'll come with you. That'll scare him. Francie stretched across Bess to the glove compartment where she had in an early set of intentions put the Arpege and Bess watched her as she shook some on to her fingers and then stroked it on to her neck just below the ears. Do you want some? Why not, said Bess, and did the same. I think I'm going to enjoy this. Poor Mark Tibbet!

Hmph! said Francie, who found that she was going to enjoy it too. Though she pursed her lips out - we could say 'in determination' if we were surer of the context - there was a play at the edges.

SECTION C

Visual Poems

- C.1: Loose-idity (gallery exhibition)
- C.2: Through the Gap (web exhibition)
- C.3: A Lone Knower's Disavowals (double spread in magazine)
- C.4: Changing Lines & Illegible (inclusions in gallery exhibition)
- C.5: Light Lies (exhibition as part of small press book fair)
- C.6: Changing Lines (inclusion in web journal)

C.1

Loose-idity

an exhibition of visual poems

loose-ity

Dartington Gallery

21st February – 2nd March 2002.

A note on *Loose-idity*, an exhibition of visual poems

The exhibition consisted of a selection of the visual poems I had been producing from the time I had easy access to an inkjet printer that could print in colour, a period of about five years. Initially it was a matter of principle that they should be doubly – and in some cases, triply – domestic: that the equipment, including software, used for their production be designed for domestic use and easily available; that they should take up a place alongside other domestic objects of display, such as, especially, photographs; and that they might also play their part in the rhythms and practices of domestic and family exchange – as gifts or cards, for example.

This exhibition was the first occasion that any of them were moved out of the relatively confined and cluttered space of homes into a larger space dedicated to the exhibition of imagery. This change of context had many implications for their scale, positioning and for their status as objects – indeed, for their modality.

The documentation of the exhibition presents a further removal from the original context. I have not attempted to represent the images as they were hung. Dartington gallery is a rectangular space. Three of its four walls are interrupted by doors, a recess, and window glass. The one uninterrupted wall is the length of the gallery. The spatial divisions were used to mark the division of the work into separate sets.

Working clockwise around the gallery from the foyer entrance, these were:

A lone knower's disavowals

(Shading into ardour)

Lover's loops

Second glances (a clock)

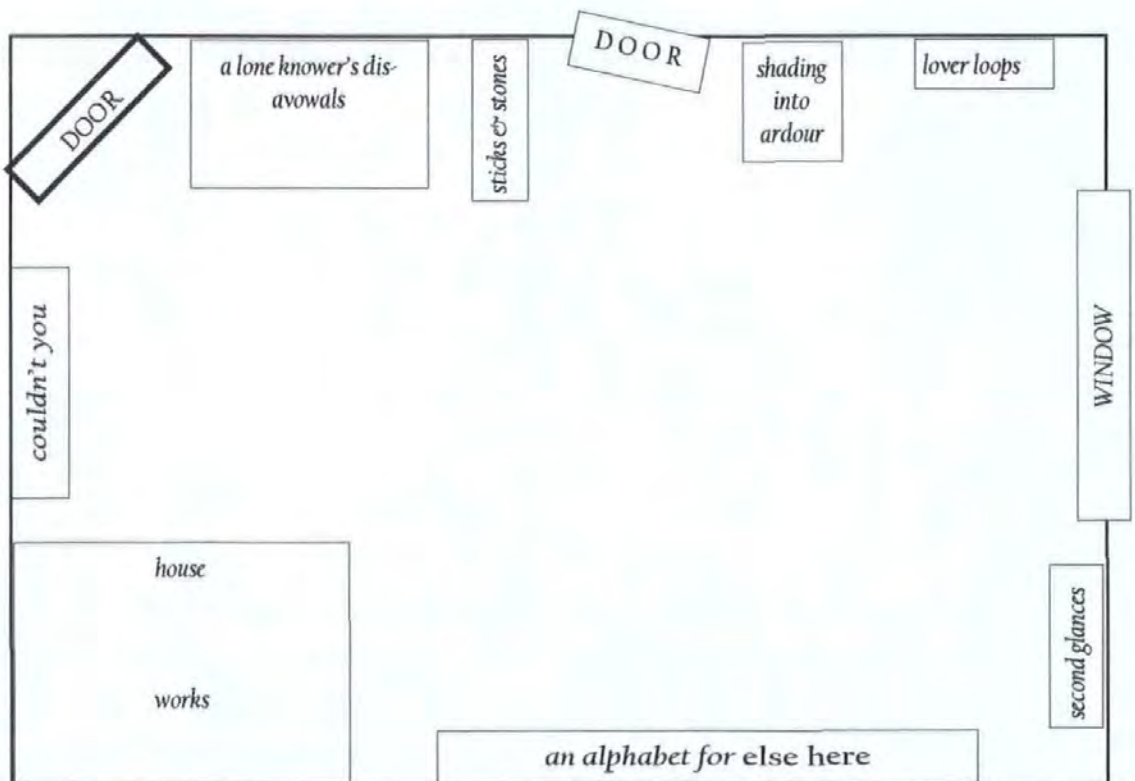
An alphabet for else here

House works

Couldn't you

'Shading into ardour' is placed in brackets above because the three variants are framed in perspex and are printed on translucent paper. So, although they 'belong' with *House works*, they were placed on a stand with their backs to natural light. A photograph of them can be found in the *House works* section of these pages (C.1.vii).

Layout of exhibition

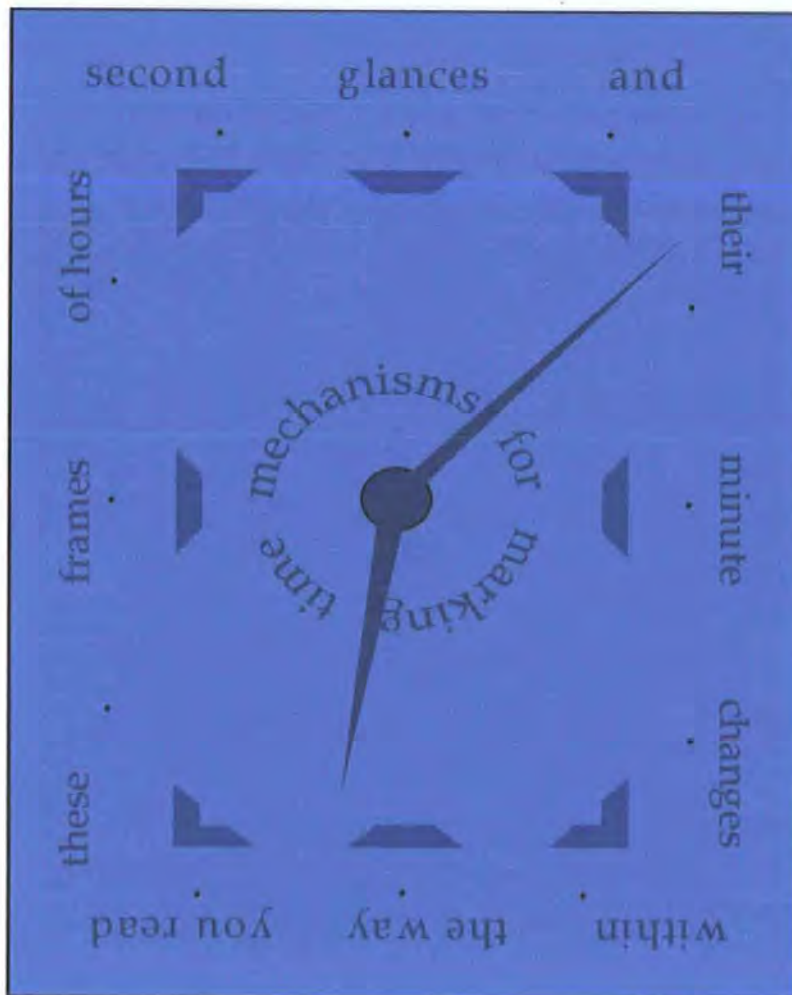


Second glances

'Little Big Time' clock mechanism a gift from Angela Hall; 220 gram card on board. 2002.

As with many of these pieces, a gift was the first move, prompting a response, however oblique. Angela had twice previously given me clocks – small ones, with a hinge and a spare frame for an image. These could insinuate themselves among the other domestic images, where clocks are as likely to be ornaments as monuments.

(label in exhibition)



Page version of clock face

C.1.iii

A lone knower's disavowals

A lone knower's disavowals

Birch frames, from high street chain. Inkjet printing. 1999 - 2002

I am reminded almost every day of the story of King Lear. I am reminded of it more often than I am of the story of Oedipus, though I am a son and father and have no daughters. Others explain me to myself by way of the story of Oedipus and what I hear is Lear howling. King Lear had no sons.

At first he thought he was the only one who could say no. Certainly he thought he could say no to the daughter who could say nothing but nothing. What she said was that she had nothing to say. What he said, in his own way, was: I am the one here who has things to give; if you have nothing to say, I shall give you nothing, and my act will be the giving of nothing. The gift withheld, harboured to augment its power.

He thought he knew. And at that time he was more in control of the now than anyone. Those who know that they control the now are the ones who can strongly say no, knowing that they lose nothing. Like everyone else Lear confused power with love, thought he could give up one kind of power without abandoning the other.

No. That's what he found himself saying. No. Five times. In a row. Each one different. A howling disavowal with a continuo of nasal hum. A hundred knights so that he could retain a sense of power; the English k a subterfuge failing to harden the vowels that detour through the nose. The fool knows no difference between naughty and nought. Nothing hurts and is a bad night. The lone knower, powerless except for what he knows. Disavow knowledge if it hurts; sometimes known as betrayal, each way. This is the howl of know, alone, in the night. Of no, because what is now known cannot be borne. O no. Howl against knowing. Speak of nothing only when you know it.

John Hall February 2002

know
 know
 know
 know



she raves and rolls over and over
 oh they open and opening to no now known knowledge he e
 o now
 no no
 now o
 knows
 he raves and rolls over and over

on no it never now knows how ever fever oh no how



o
no
now
know


nothing
known
nothing

o
no
now
knows

know
know
know
know

(eros)
 peeking
 at loss
 loses
 you in
 show

o
 sh ow
 h
 o vers



shore
 up
 w'
 low
 moans

hover
over
in
sure
waters

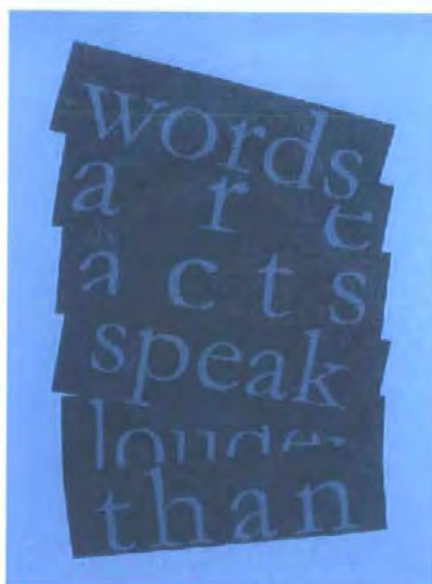
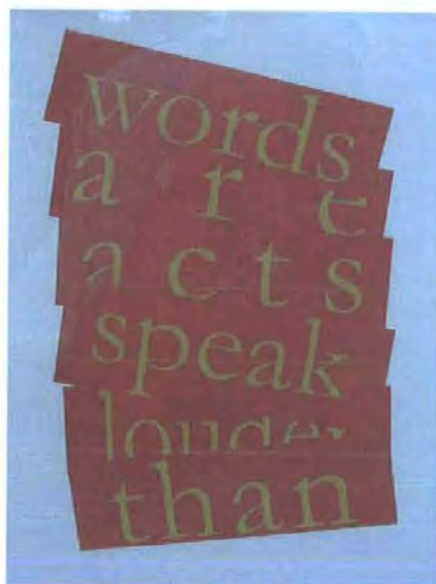
eking
out
loss
in close
shaves

no
know
er
alone

no
nouns

C.1.iv

Sticks and Stones



Page versions of framed images (frames 30 x 12.5 cms)

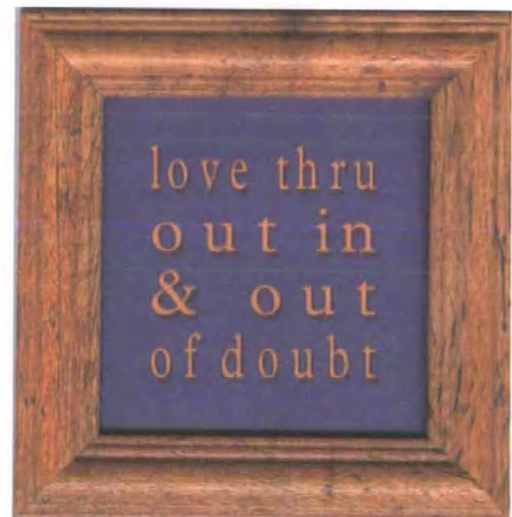
C.1.v**Lover's Loops*****Lover's loops***

Pine frames, from Ashbourne market; others from domestic superstore. Inkjet printing. 2001-2002.

Perhaps these could be thought of as illustrative pages in a much longer (unwritten) story.

(label from exhibition)

This set of visual pieces was always intended for wall mounting. In the *Loose-idity* exhibition they were mounted in a way intended to see off any clear connecting sequence. Rearranging them for the page here inevitably configures their relationships differently.







C.1.vi**An alphabet for *else here******An alphabet for else here***

*Aluminium frames, from high street chain. Inkjet printing.
October 1999.*

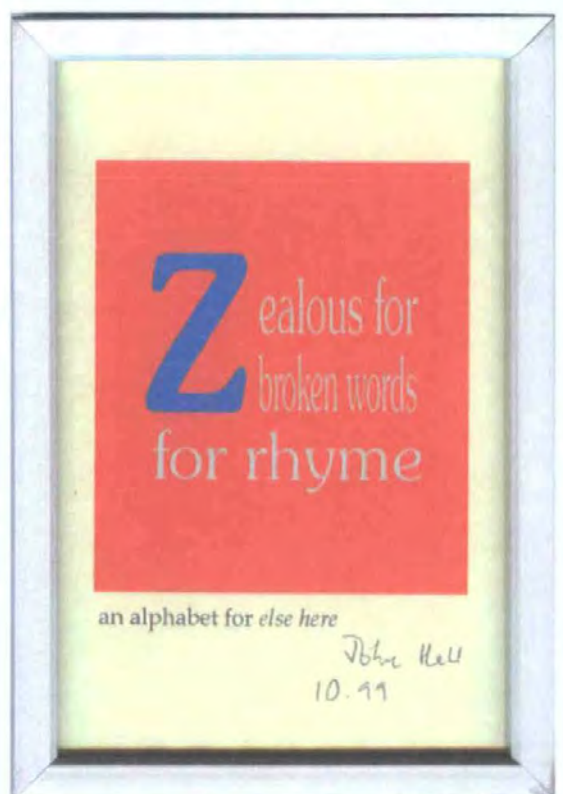
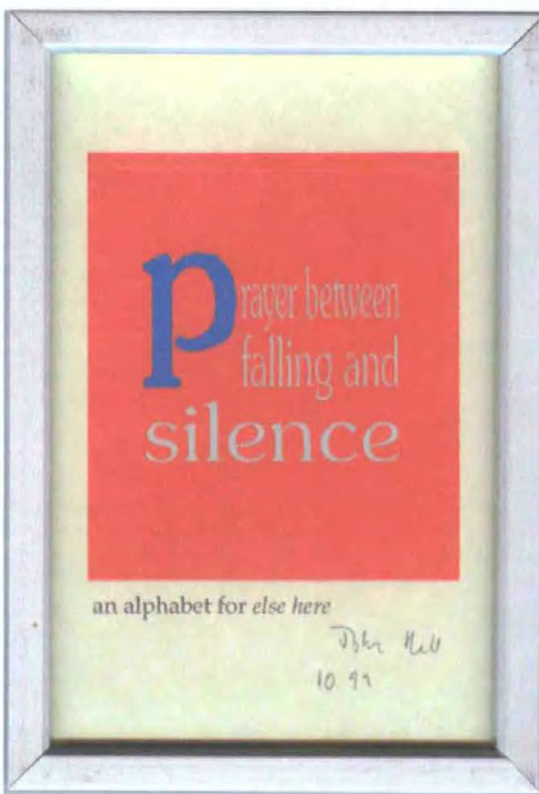
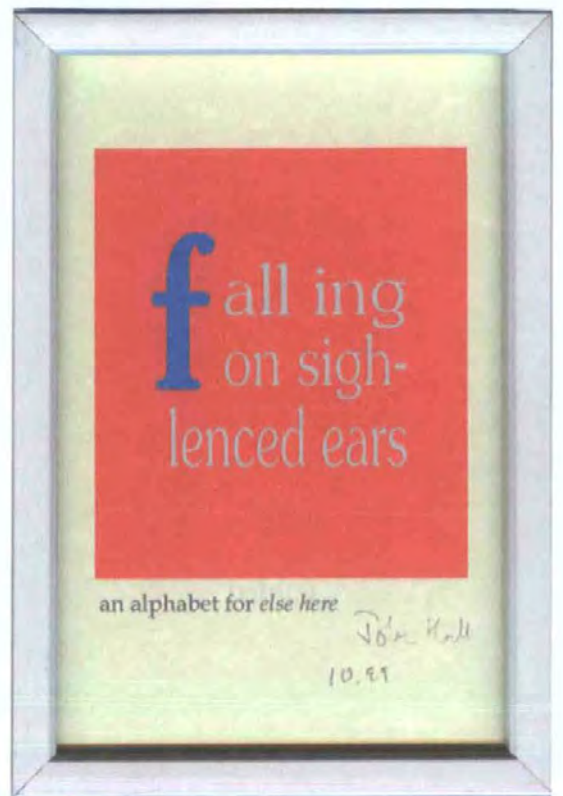
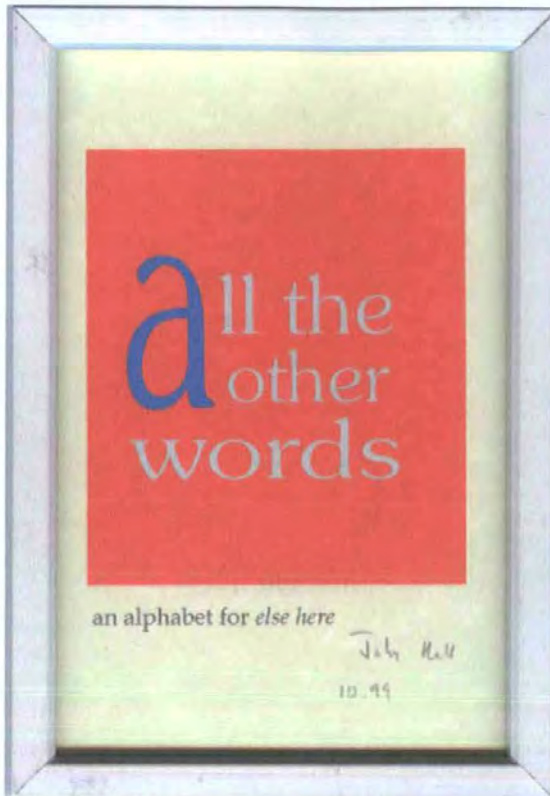
The alphabet pieces were written to provide twenty-six different poems for insertion into cased and signed copies of the author's book, *else here: selected poems*, published by etruscan books.

Wondering if these alphabet pieces related to the rhetorical category of the apophthegm, I looked that word up in the Oxford English Dictionary and was rewarded at a tangent with this as the final citation:

1879 Farrar *Paul* I. 593 The admirable Hebrew apophthegm, Learn to say I do not know.

(Label from exhibition)

The frames were set in a single horizontal line at about eye-height. Each frame is approximately 11 x 16 cms. On the next page are scanned images of four of the letters in their frames. These are followed by the full sequence arranged in a grid over three pages and designed for the page.



all the
other
words

before
another
silence

Catching
breath
to break

dream
on
on't
speak yet

enough
said (in
other words)

fall ing
on sigh-
lenced ears

getting up
where
here

hear in
herein
other words

in other
words
than here

jealous of
eloquent
silence

getting bac**k**
to where
never

lightly
falling
silence

Ono it
breaks, it
silences

mind
what
you say
out

no thing here
breaks in
to silence

prayer between
falling and
silence

quite
quiet
sighs

returning
from other
words



C.1.vii

House Works

House works

Various frames; many of the smaller ones were gifts.

I think that the premise of all these pieces is that much of the effort in establishing and maintaining a home is aimed at consecration; that domestic images are ritual sites for the attainment of grace or for warding off the harm of wounds; and that this needs doing.

(label in exhibition)

The following pages contain photographs, scanned images and page versions of many of the frames within the exhibition entitled *Loose-idity* that rely for their collective coherence on the original context of a domestic setting. Although there are many interconnections, thematic and lexical, they do not constitute a formal set in the way, for example, that *a lone knower's disavowals* does. Frames hung or set in the same space might or might not echo each other. Some were attached to the wall; others were set on a low, table-like surface. The screen stood on the floor. It had been a thought early on to try to bring some household furniture into the gallery since many of the images had spent much of their life on a piano top, on tables or dressers. This thought was abandoned early.

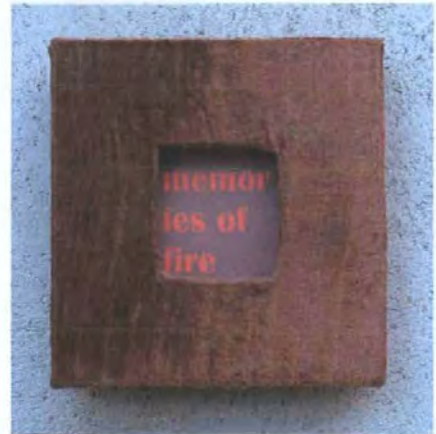
The page versions are included where it proved difficult to photograph the framed image, usually because the frame was made of highly reflective material.



Bless other folds Folding domestic screen; beech wood; width of each leaf: 19.2 cms; height: 176 cms



Ladybird ladybird; polished, beaten metal frame, external dimensions 10.4 x 9.3 cms



Memories of fur / fire; fabric covered frame, 13 x 13 cms



Page version of *Piss Fear* (confidential)



Fleck; 14 x 10.8 cms; 'fur' frame a gift from Angela Hall



Fury; external 'diameter': 25 cms. (Fur frame a gift from Angela Hall)



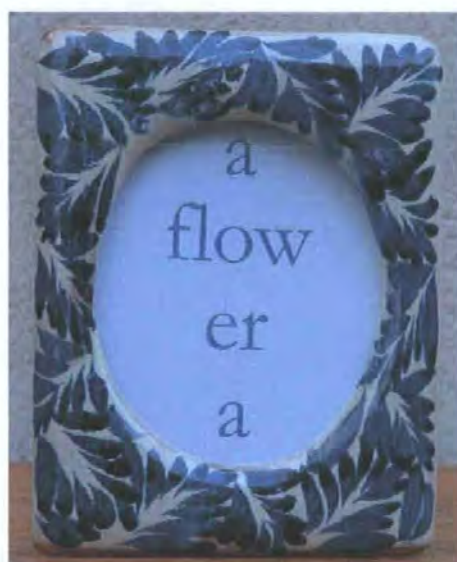
Light landing; 15.3 x 15.3 cms; bead frame a gift from Angela Hall (1998)



Beady i'd; wire and bead frame, 15.2 x 15.2 cms.



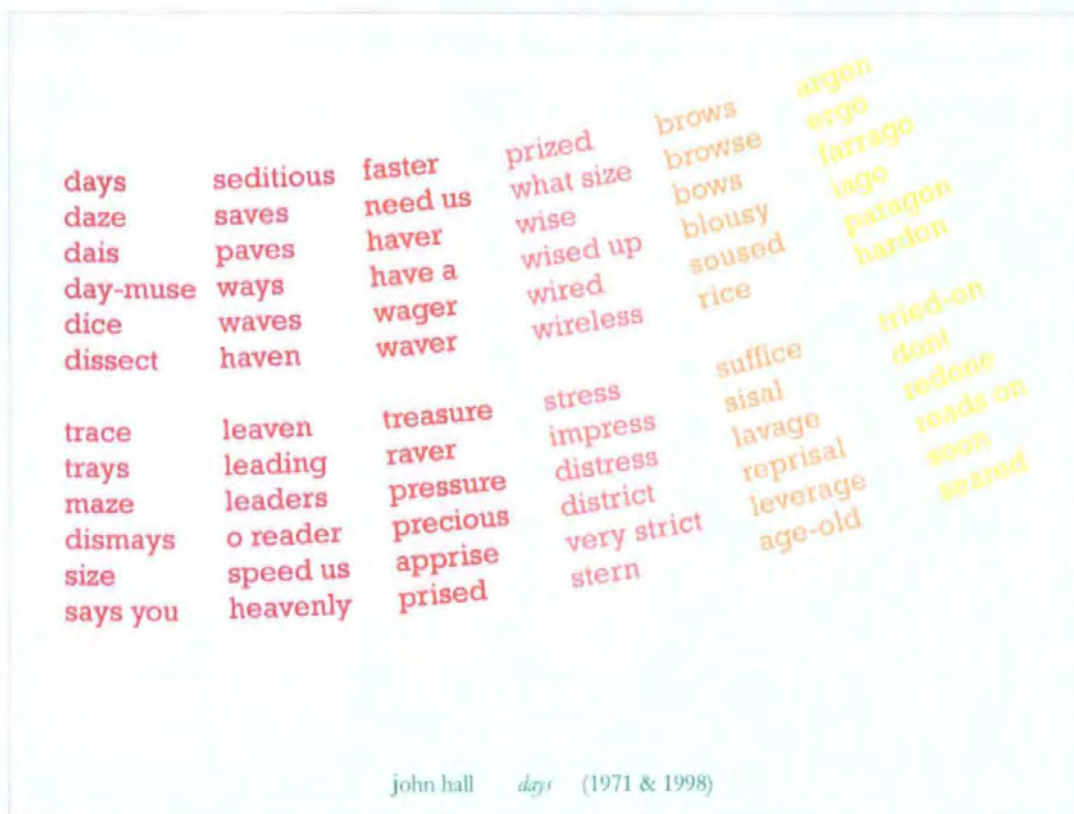
Through light grace; 5.6 x 7.1 cms; a gift from Sheila Grute



flow; 8.8 x 10.7; porcelain frame, a gift from Thomas and Birdie Hall, bought in Mexico (1998)



Blurt, Bleed, Blood (triptych); each resin frame: 7.1 x 8.4 cms.
(see below for page version)



Days; frameless version of adapted cover of *Days* (1971); (identical frame to *ardour arbour*, 39.5 x 32 cms).



Putti; 14 x 19.5 cms (without extensions); frame, decorated by Deirdre Hassard, a gift to Angela Hall (1996)

Candour; 15 x 15 cms; aluminium frame.

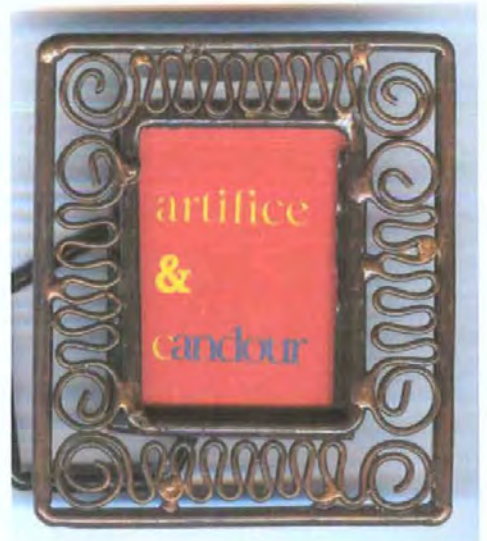


here where; 19 x 19 cms; (Prague. 1997)



Candid ardour; 8.5 x 13.4 cms; frame a gift from Angela Hall (Dartington, 1998)

artifice & candour; 6.3 x 7.2 cms; frame a gift from Angela Hall (Newton Abbot, 1997)



candid ardour; 8.3 x 8.3 cms; beech frame a gift from Angela Hall (Totnes, 1997)



unmoved; 15.8 x 15.8 cms; frame a gift from Angela Hall, (1997)



moved / unmoved; 16.5 x 11.5 cms; polished aluminium frame a gift from Angela Hall, 1997



who are you a you to; rotating double-sided aluminium frames, each section 7.4 x 9.9 cms; frame a gift from Angela Hall



I speak to you (from 'It's stranger'); 15.2 x 20.2 cms; frame a gift from Angela Hall (Melbourne 1997)



Family album with four apertures (from 'It's stranger'); 13.9 x 18.8 cms

you'sed; foldable mock leather triptych; 13.3 x 4.3; frame a gift from Angela Hall



it is often felt. Beech frame; height 10.2 cms; sides 11.7 cms.



loss in blossom standing frame; 20 x 25 cms.

Ecstasy; wall-mounted frame; companion piece to wall-mounted version of *Loss in blossom*; 31 x 36 cms.





barred; beaten metal frame, 12.6 x 12.6 cms (2002)



ardour / arbour / ombre / umber; page version (frame, 39.5 x 32 cms)



looking hard enough; wood frame; 10 x 10 cms



down where the ground; wood frame; 10 x 10 cms



shading into ardour triptych; three perspex frames from *Muji*; each 13 x 35 cms

a void where words
pound a voice where
words wound a vice
where turns sound
a verse words turn
a wound where
sounds pound
a pound where sounds
drown a round where

A void where; page version, (beech frame, 43 x 33 cms)

C.2 (G.2 on CD)**Through the Gap**

an exhibition of visual poems in the Shearsman website gallery

<http://www.shearsman.com/pages/gallery/home.html>

Through the Gap opened in the 'gallery' of the Shearsman web-site in October 2002 and is still, at the time of writing, accessible. The exhibition is designed and curated by Tony Frazer. Versions of some of the poems were especially prepared for the website. Others were photographed by Tony Frazer, some of them *in situ*.

Tony Frazer has kindly provided files of the web material for inclusion in this submission. On the CD, first open the *throughthegap* folder and then open *contents*.

C.1.viii**Couldn't You*****Couldn't you***

A set of four prose pieces in various frames.

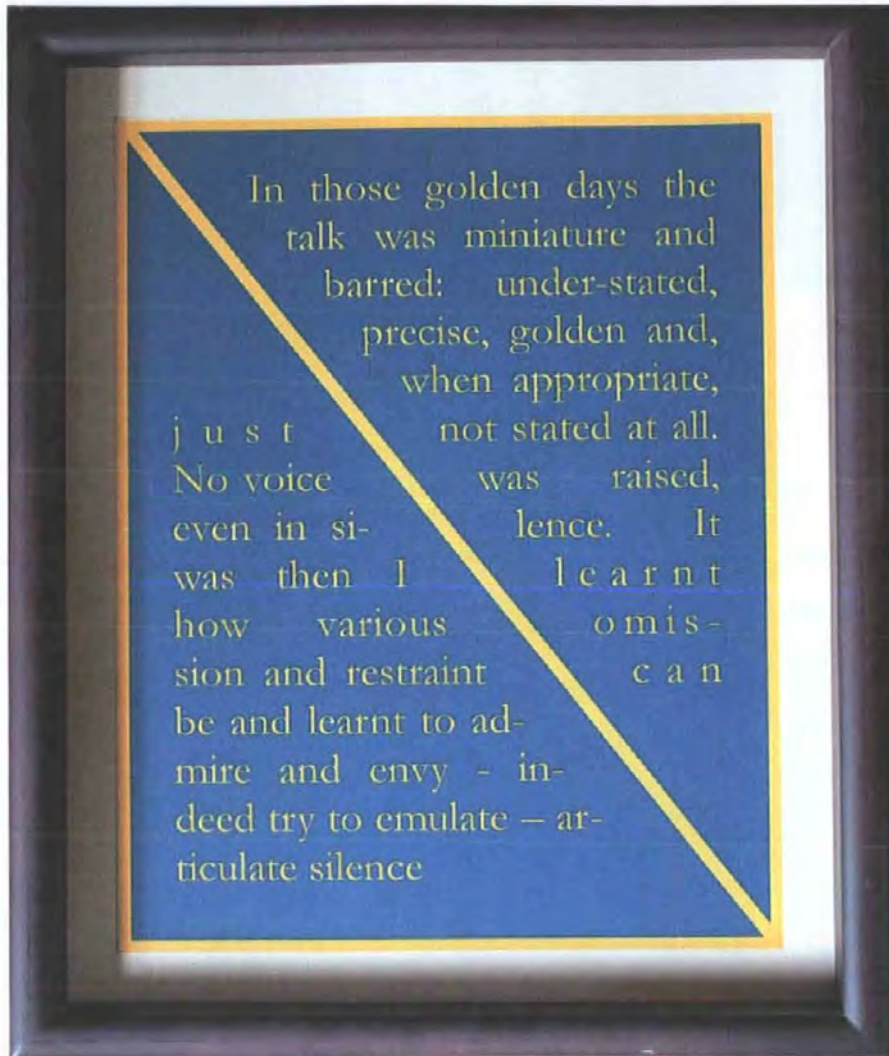
The largest frame was a gift from Philip Kuhn. The piece beginning 'In those golden days' was first prompted by the gift of a quite different frame from Sheila Grute.

This set has already had a number of manifestations – some of them in different frames; one in word variants; the entire set appeared as a sequence printed conventionally on white pages in the poetry magazine *Oasis*; they have also been through sound treatments by Birdie Hall.

(label from exhibition)

The frames were set in a row at eye height, to the right of the entry door.

These texts were difficult to photograph in their frames. Only one is shown in this form. The others are scanned or page versions.



Golden Bar (32 x 26 cms)

I could never get past the part in the story where they all left. A loss is not a loss unless it keeps happening. Perhaps there is a time when you are just about to lose the loss and you remember, poignantly. Like waking with a start just before you were asleep. The point is not when they left but repeating to yourself how it will be when they have gone. It will be all right won't it? No it won't. It is because you can't forget that it will happen again. Once is enough but there is no such thing as once. Once upon a time happens all the time and is impossible. It can't happen. The time which never was has gone and what repeats is not the time but the impossibility of its return except as a sense of its impossibility. What repeats is this avoidance of this story of loss. It has to repeat impossibly because it has no history. It is avoided so often it is fully there. Hung by the force of avoidance. And what hangs swings. At every moment returns to itself in order to leave for itself. It is not as though I could tell it once and for all. Though I could try. Couldn't you.

I could never get past ... Scanned version of unframed sheet (frame 26 x 32 cms).

Despite a severance, solemnly to declare
veracity and perseverance: verify and varify. Hit
verity and back down from teeth on lips to
front palate. Palatial errors, with flowers and
vowels free-ranging over the lawns. Parkland
commandeered for the purposes of modern
myth. Majestic common land. Tell me I'm not
wrong. Travel between vowels and prefixes
through the oscillations of cut-and-run, of truth
on the move. She smiles shyly because that's
the way she was stolen. An old trick. If you
can't say it sing it. The young charmer. More
than half in love with you singing. Repetition
of white teeth chanting against red lips. Truth
grows delirious. Heaven knows what the doctor
got up to meanwhile. Trembling in the face:
teeth and lips. Paid to cure. Caring about that.
Lying because you care about cure. Of course
truth bleeds loss and blossom on the lips.
That's the smile that perseveres. Spit the tooth
out to say it. Why not? Truly, you'll smile later
through the gap.

Despite a severance ... Page version (frame, 38 x 33.5 cms)

There is repetition and there is avoidance. There is avoidance of repetition. The avoidance of repetition is repeated. You don't notice perhaps because your attention voids itself, veering on to the surface of particulars. On to *the* line of events. This is how you love and avoid love. There is no object larger than the imagined world. Its worn corners. Its weary shoulders. Love repeats on itself. This abstraction is a loop out of the real that holes out local meaning by senseless repetition. Say it often enough and it empties. If you empty it carefully enough what is left is a fine abstraction, a void or vacuum pulling back the gravity of particulars. As though a nothing could exert such force. I repeat myself. Of course I don't. It is suspended by a force of insistence. On being nothing.

There is repetition ... Page version (frame, 38 x 33.5 cms)

there is repetition
I could never get past
there is repetition and there is
I could never get past the part
there is avoidance of repetition
I could never get past the part in the story
where the void dance of repetition is repeated until
the lost last part in the story where they all left

lost last part, page version (from beech frame, 43 x 33 cms)

C.2 (G.2 on CD)**Through the Gap**

an exhibition of visual poems in the Shearsman website gallery

<http://www.shearsman.com/pages/gallery/home.html>

Through the Gap opened in the 'gallery' of the Shearsman web-site in October 2002 and is still, at the time of writing, accessible. The exhibition is designed and curated by Tony Frazer. Versions of some of the poems were especially prepared for the website. Others were photographed by Tony Frazer, some of them *in situ*.

Tony Frazer has kindly provided files of the web material for inclusion in this submission. On the CD, first open the *throughthegap* folder and then open *contents*.

C.3

a lone knower's disavowals

a version for *Poetry Quarterly Review*

The folded double page that follows reproduces the double spread that was inserted into every copy of *Poetry Quarterly Review* Number 20 (Summer 2003). The piece of prose that can be found in C.1.ii was printed on the front of the fold, and on the back a biographical note. Tilla Brading, one of the editors of *Poetry Quarterly Review*, had taken some photographs at my *Loose-idity* exhibition (see all of C.1) and reproduced some of these on the cover and on other pages in the review.

a lone knower's disavowals

know
know
know
know

no
no
a lone
no



hover
over
in
sure
waters

edge she raves and rolls over
o now
no no
now o
knows

oh they open and opening to no now know
the raves and rolls over and
now know now know now know

eking
out
loss
in
close
shaves

nothing
known
nothing

now
loner
nowes
knows


no
know
er
alone

o
sh ow
h
o vers

o we
owe
no woe
know

o
no
now
knows

shore
up
w'
lo
moans



no
nou
ns

(eros)
peeking
at loss
loses you
in show

C.4**Performance Writing (1994 – 2004)**

an exhibition from the performance writing course

at dartington college of arts

curated by Mark Leahy and Deborah Price

Exeter Phoenix, 29 April – 16 May 2004

Dartington Gallery, 24 – 30 May 2004

Fine Arts Gallery, George Mason University,

Washington DC – November 2004

Two works were included in the Exeter and Dartington hangings of this exhibition: *Changing Lines* (three frames) and *Illegible, Intelligible, Ineligible* (two frames). Only the latter was shown in Washington. Legible versions of the text of *Changing Lines* can be found at D.6 (Great Works web-site)

Changing Lines (framed versions)



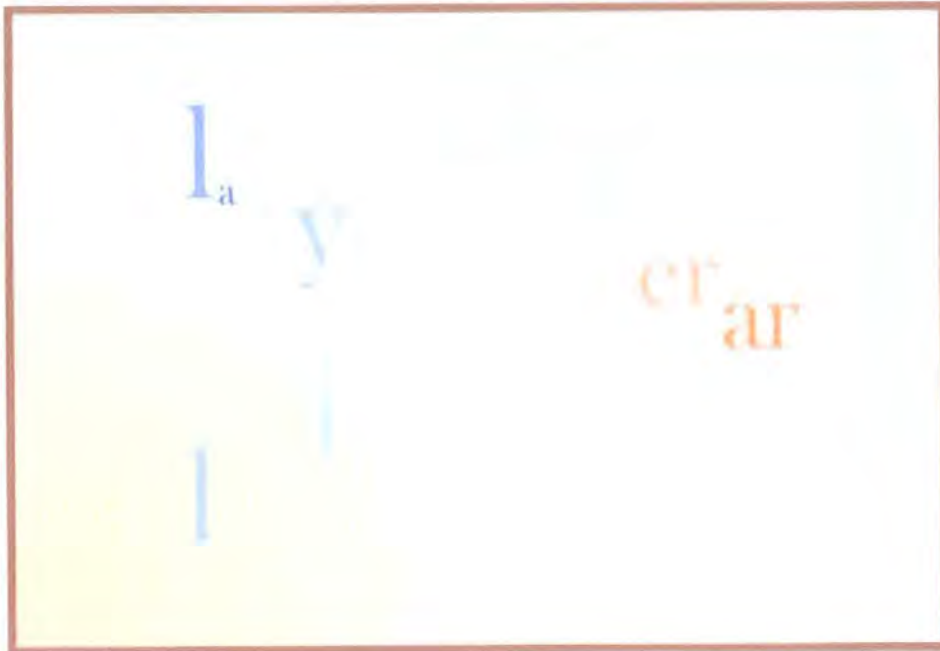
Illegible, Intelligible, Ineligible

Photograph by Julianne Kozel, from the Washington exhibition

C.5

Light Lies

This set of four framed visual poems was shown at the Small Press Book Fair, curated by Nicholas Johnson as part of the Exeter 2004 Text Festival (tEXt04). The fair took place in Exeter Public Library. All four images were mounted in plain beech frames. The first frame, set in landscape orientation, has external dimensions of 53.5 x 43.3 cms. The other three, set as portrait, were 33.3 x 43.3 cms. They were arranged in a row at just above eye height, viewable above the book stalls. A version of the title piece (the second one in this sequence) was included in *Onsets: A Breviary (Synopticon?) Of Poems 13 Lines Or Under* (Willowdale: The Gig, 2004). *Onsets* is tiny: 8.8 x 10.8 cms.



light lies
where air
first errs
furred
feared &
furious

an air
of errors
furring
the way
down

air of lies

C.6 (G.3 on CD)

Changing Lines

a web version for the Great Works website

<http://www.greatworks.org.uk>

The owner and editor of the Great Works website, Peter Philpott, has very kindly provided electronic files of the versions of *Changing Lines* as they are on his website. They can be found on the CD (G.3). Open the Great Works folder and click on JH1. A link to the website is also provided on the CD, in the Links file.

Seven variations are included, in a format designed not only for the web environment in general but with the aesthetic of the Great Works web-site particularly in mind.

Peter Philpott converted the files I sent him and had to go to considerable trouble to recapture some of the layout.

Three of these variations appear, with further variation, as part of C.4, above. These were larger, framed, and differently laid out. There are also A4 paper versions.

SECTION D

Articles on language, poetics and reading

- D.1: Writing and Not Writing
- D.2: Sentenced to (Grammar for Performance Writers 1)
- D.3: Performed through (Grammar for Performance Writers 2)
- D.4: Missing persons: personal pronouns in performance writing (Grammar for Performance Writers 3)
- D.5: Eluded Readings: trying to tell stories about reading some recent poems
- D.6: Falling towards each other: occasions of elegy
- D.7: Time-play-space: playing up the visual in writing
- D.8: Reading (II) legible Pages (and Reading a Polished Page)

D.1

Writing and Not Writing

1.

This piece is intended to be an account from within not of writing but of not-writing. It is autobiographical and schematic. It tries to deal with a sense which moves in and out of being a loss, a grief. It is not-writing as a shadow-process, taking its meaning from its relation to the identity of being a writer, to the processes of writing. Memories of writing play a part in what must remain a process of not-writing.

2.

Concern with process places the value in the act itself more than in the outcome and usually in a way that makes understanding of the process a special knowledge of those who do it, of primary practitioners. Perhaps it is worth distinguishing quickly between production processes and ritual or ceremonial processes. In the first case process is the means of arriving at a certain kind of product: there is an outcome, in the form of an artefact, which is intended to survive the process of production, and to survive as more than a record. A different process, which arrived at the same end, would do. In ritual and ceremony, the process – the sequence of moves made – is the event: the expected outcome might be some form of social or personal transformation rather than a produced object.

It is in the nature of writing that a script is produced and that this is an outcome which survives the event of its own production. In certain kinds of writing the script is a score for any number of later enactments which are the processes of its reading. Sometimes these might derive their force from the belief that they are re-enactments of the original circumstances and processes of the writing.

Writing and reading – of the kind being assumed in this discussion – are now most usually individual acts. This lets us get at some of the difficulties in the notion of process. We are looking for a ritual value in production processes and the ceremonies are increasingly individualised. A key ceremony is performed arcanelly – because in 'private' – by a writer. The script which is the outcome of the ceremony does not lead us all the way back into the original ceremony itself, whose privileged site is the writer him/herself.

It follows that only writers can return from the act of writing with a special knowledge of how a script comes into being. They can bring back travellers' accounts and in the telling imply that it is from the very being of a writer that scripts emanate, rather than from the inherited mechanical processes of the scripts themselves.

3.

Being 'a writer' is a matter of identity, ontological. 'Writing' is, in contrast, a verb-noun, a material process. In a society whose economy is still founded on literacy it happens all the time. Few of the people who do it are 'writers'.

The condition – that of being a ‘writer’ – colours the verb. Not all writing is ‘writing’. In the last ten years I have written many thousands of words but when my friends ask me, am I writing, I say, no, hardly at all. And from the way they ask I know it would be better to say yes, perhaps for their sake. It turns out that there are many who need to feel that writing, along with other arts activities, stands as authentic, uncompromised human behaviour. Being a ‘writer’ is a threatened, entirely marginal condition, and at the same time strangely revered and envied.

I was one of those who tried – very briefly, it now seems in retrospect – to prepare and maintain with singlemindedness (in a singular, in a single condition) the identity of being a writer. At first I didn't know what else to be. There was no other obvious way to like myself. The aspiration itself entailed scorn of so many other identities, and a form of prospective irony awaited just about any of the pragmatic decisions about the earning of income that sooner or later would have to be made. And this dislike of any other possible self was (is) a helpless ethical judgement, lacking any practical grasp of economics and power. Within a dislike of a world that had no place for writers there was no strategy with which to confront this situation except to become a writer. This first phase, which depended on the kinds of support which tend to go with being a student, lasted from about 1966 to 1971, when I returned to university to do a postgraduate teaching year. Between 1972 and 1976 I was employed as a schoolteacher, married, had a first child, bought and refurbished a house. For one year I switched to part-time. This represented an attempt to find a balance of energy and engagement, between hired work and work which represented nothing but choice. Singlemindedness had certainly gone, because there was too much else to do. From 1976 to the present I have been employed in Higher Education. At first this was in a way that was calculated to support and complement

the writing. During this time a second child and a second and then a third house and a changing climate for education – all of this made for an energy field that was always multiple, that was anything but single – in which writing had to find its place alongside any number of insistent (and often pleasurable) demands, and which increasingly, because its demands seem at times absolute, it failed to do.

4.

The question I now find myself asking in some bewilderment, looking back at the earlier singlemindedness, is what drives anyone to take up so fragile a position? Modernism had the answer pat: 'there was no choice, it was what I had to do'. This is, of course, a descendant of the religious calling, passed down through romanticism's project of the self and the imagination. My own cultural formation, like so many in the sixties, still drew on the residues of an earlier aristocratic culture, with which liberal humanist education was still imbued, and was permeated with a contempt for commerce (usually unspoken). In terms of possible identities the conflicts were more between different forms of service, than with any possibility of commercial or industrial work. Perhaps writing seemed the purest form of service, at the furthest remove from the army or the law. In practice there were a number of available positions, giving logic to a stance that at one moment felt plangently archaic, at the next a preparation of *the* language of a preferred future. In either case, the politics of the position was entirely Utopian, as though there were a project that could invoke anything as global as the language, and at the same time not get its feet very dirty.

5. *There isn't enough time ...*

As a material process writing takes time. And of course you don't just sit down and do it when you happen to have time. Writing takes time, especially when you are not actually writing but are behaving and thinking in a way that leads to writing.

Sometimes this means thinking about writing, about what writing is, about what it is you think it is because of what you have been trying to do or because of something you have just read.

For most, reading is part of the work of writing. There is so much to read. Reading is so slow. And reading is supposed not to be your life but to be something that illuminates your life. You go off on your own to do it. And in your relations with others they don't always let you do it (the young child's fist against the book which steals the parent's eyes and ears); or, recognising your relations with others, you don't always let yourself. Sometimes you tell yourself and them that it is part of your work, invoking a quite different order of necessity, including most emphatically that of the pay cheque. Maybe it is for a lecture or an article. There are times when it is more generally permitted such as on holiday or when you are travelling on your own.

6.

Keats could not concentrate on his medical lectures because he was thinking in writing. In his case he was distracted by sensations and imaginings that already had a latent opacity of phrased words about them. There might even be suggestions of rhyme. This is a matter in the first place of modality: medical knowledge is not the same as poetic apprehension. But it is also a question of time, since each modality demands its own duration. It is not simply a case of switching from one to the other.

When you regularly give time to something, your body is disposed towards it, and is constantly anticipating future moves.

And when the writing is done, when these words are drawn as sounds on paper or on a machine with its own memory like the one I use now, then there is another matter, another material decision: what do you do with them, where do they go in the clutter of data and possession, in all the stored knowledge of citizenship and salaried work? These phrases which, despite appearances, are not formed out of an optional playfulness, but which carry with them their own necessity, are not complete until they have somewhere to go. It matters very much where this should be, what kind of reply it might constitute. If there is nowhere – and therefore no kind of reply – the process is incomplete or frustrating. Only those who are powerfully driven to do so keep going.

Within my own writing, as it lost its own continuities and momentum, there was increasingly a problem of modalities. Earlier I had become used to the idea of a sequence or a book, the formal integrity which brings a number of discrete pieces together and which often derives continuity from the sense of unfinished business left behind by each poem or session of prose. With discontinuity of time (though I did adopt a number of formal strategies to build discontinuity into the structure) there are too many starts. A variety of strategies take off from a hierarchy of different energies. As a result I didn't know where to put anything. I kept getting confused between a number of notebooks. There was a journal, for example, that traced reading. (Actually there were different journals for different kinds of reading, either because the books appeared to belong to different ways of knowing and sounding

about knowledge, or because they belonged to different aspects of my own identity, e.g. the paid and the non-paid bits.)

This journal was supposed to hold on to the reading that would otherwise get lost – hold on to it both by ritualising it (rehearsing parts of it, for example, or reciting it) and by storing it – and if it got lost what point was there? There were two models of reading getting in each other's way: (i) I am always a becoming of what I have read; I don't need to remember it because it is me. The phrases of other writers are as it were the musculature with which I move, culturally speaking, through the world. How could it be otherwise?; (ii) what I have read I know; it is the capital I amass; there is an obligation to 'know' certain writings; and precisely because I am haunted by the possibility of losing the knowledge I must keep my accounts. According to each model there is a disturbing twist in the direction of history from time to time, that can follow the movement of politics. For example, those writers who formed me, without warning, and in retrospect, appeared to speak from a time before the one we are in; it is not their fault; they didn't know that history would turn them into liars; and that I would be their lies. Or that what I knew in the way of a special knowledge that others could at one time have been persuaded of the need for, had lost its value, its currency.

There was yet another journal which noted daily events: what had been done each day. Its literalness, especially in times when little of value seemed to be being achieved, was reassuring. This was a writing produced by disbelief, an extended sequence of alibis. Where once earlier these notebooks had been the 'source' for writings, not accounts of reading, but writings of reading and meditation, drawing on all the day's residues, and gathering momentum from a sequence of preoccupations

and motifs, now they were records of other necessities. Who would have thought that was done in the day? In writing these thoughts now, a repressed text in this journal becomes very clear: Can't you see why I couldn't be doing anything else? Why shouldn't a writing emerge from this range of activities? But the records are not so much memorials as substitutes for the active process of memory. There is a writing whose destiny is precisely oblivion: a trace which obliterates the trace, a swift naturalism acting to suppress what could have formed as memory.

This one had to be, literally, a book, each entry deriving its logic from its place in a sequence which mimicked a sequence from part of a life. Bits of paper get lost among other bits of paper (though sometimes when that did happen, the loss – the sense of loss – felt truer than the omissions). When the last page of the book was full the sequence was taken to have run its course. More would have been more of the same.

7.

I am describing very simple activities, very simple uses of writing, and ones which became increasingly privatised, as registers of personal senses of necessity without taking on the public rhythms of a different order of necessity. They had become supplementary, spare-time activities even if the spare time had to be fabricated at some cost.

8.

For so simple an activity there were too many problems, too many conflicts between different forms of support and sustenance, and between notions of 'useful' work. Anything I do is sustained in a number of possible ways. I get paid for it. I get

thanked for it. I am asked to do it and so know that I am needed. I do it to support those I support, who support me. I also may be driven to it out of appetite or curiosity or incompleteness, though whether these impulses will sustain and support it is another matter.

It is the simple traffic of personal energy in its relation to others. It raises the question of the differing 'others' of writing, of domestic and of salaried life. Sometimes the question is framed as 'who are you writing for?'. I think it is more: what is the set of relations implied by the act of writing? What pattern of love and company and rivalry is called up – not in the 'content' so much as in the communicative gestures and the positions implied from the direction of the writing's gaze? Which community operates as the determinants of which acts? The silence of writing can be very puzzling in this respect – very grandiose too or, alternatively, suddenly empty. Perhaps I am talking of what happens when contradictory 'relations of production' – both 'real' and virtual – are at work, and when an activity such as writing (there are, of course, others) sets itself to talk over the heads of any relations of consumption, when the pronouns of the discourse – including the you and the I – need have no sets of referents who 'actually' have to live together.

9.

A theme which is emerging in this particular writing could be put this way: there are writings which confirm the belonging of both writer and writing in a palpable set of relations (instead of 'palpable' I was going to say 'immediate', but on the whole it is precisely the immediate relations which do not need a writing – whence another set of tensions) and which may even be called into being by those relations. The palpability is expressed through forms of exchange, such as pay or requests or even

the palpable exchange of pleasures. And there are other writings which eschew a belonging or seek one which does not yet exist. The paradox here is to remember that there is usually a community of fellow-seekers operating within an intense sense of belonging of their own.

The activity, to keep occurring, must somehow be supported; and where there is a lack of material support it must be compensated for ideologically, with belief. Levels of material support and forms of belief both fluctuate. Knowledge can move in and out of brackets, or shift from becoming ground into becoming figure. What was felt to be a climate that was hostile to writing in the late sixties can seem friendly in retrospect, since no one then quite anticipated the form of right-wing radical materialism that came to be known as Thatcherism.

So how does a writing that doesn't sell in the volume the capitalist market requires ever get supported? The obvious answer is that it is subsidised by the writers themselves, both individually and mutually. Many writers accept relative poverty as the cost of their enterprise. Many others in effect do two jobs and work extraordinary hours. Some are lucky to have the two jobs in a symbiotic relation: teaching, for example, from the source material for their writing. There is also domestic subsidy, provided by partner or family. Compared with all these, official subsidy and direct payment for writing are negligible.

Apparently I once said that I would avoid three things as hostile to the project of writing: marrying, owning a house and having children. I married. I bought a house. I had children. I dread to think what would have happened if I hadn't. My job (as schoolteacher first) was serious and rewarding and demanding; it had its own

processes to be engaged in and an immediacy of 'publication', of call and response.

It was so much easier to say that I was a teacher than a writer. When I wasn't remembering what I was not doing I knew who I was, and was operating altogether at a different order of impossibility.

So what was it that I wasn't doing and how did I know that I wasn't? There were the records of my own words, precisely because I had been a writer. They shifted in and out of time. Sometimes I even, quite literally, lost them. I began to find it difficult to read any fictions or poetry that were not part of an immediate exchange with others. I quickly lost any appetite for converting others to the writing that gave me pleasure unless they first gave some sign. It was daunting to be reminded so frequently of the specialised nature of such pleasures.

10.

Do I need to do it and is it needed are two different questions, but related.

11.

The book of the mirror

The book of the breast

The book of silence

The book of babbling

The book of images

The book of idols

The book about words

The book of clenched teeth

The book of birth

- The book of remembering
- The book of forgetting
- The book of loved distances
- The book of near-sighted love
- The book of frightened love
- The book of lenses
- The book of passages
- The book of porches
- The book of the cloister
- The book of pathways
- The book of reasoning
- The book of chance
- The book of falling
- The book of distractions from the book
- The book of the denial of loss
- The book of inarticulate loss

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D.2

Sentenced to

grammar for performance writers: 1

This article is intended as the first in a series that engages with grammar as an awareness of syntactical function and structure within the process of writing. The series will be interested in what writing *does*, how it performs itself within the structuring and generative rules of grammar. The most localized writing decisions – syntactical choices and particular uses of parts of speech – are assumed to contribute to the totality of written performance just as much as so-called content. Because the sentence is usually taken to be the largest unit of speech or writing in which grammar realizes itself, the series starts with some thoughts about the sense of the sentence in writing.

It is possible to speak or write without using sentences but it isn't easy and it is more readily done in the cool of writing than in the heat of speaking. The sentence is there as the quite unconscious shaping principle, guiding the way in which one word *can* flow – or not – meaningfully from another.

In school we were taught – if we were told anything on the subject – to connect the sentence with the idea of completeness: something was finished when you reached the full stop. It was usually implied that what was completed had something to do with meaning or with logic, that it was a

completeness that had to do with more than the given mechanics of language. For most of us, I don't think that it was ever very clear. As a schoolteacher, I found it helpful to ask pupils to attend to their own breathing, and to think of sentences as something *to listen for* if they wanted to understand where one sentence had ended and another begun. This was useful because it helped to locate sentences as physiological experiences and to feel them both as units and as a continuity: each pulse of breathing leads surely to the next.

The sentence is there as a kind of tune or dance routine; once you start you know where it should go or is likely to go, not in terms of meaning or proposition, but in terms of rhythm and function – you feel the trajectory which is being set up, how things will fly or lean. The end of any sentence proposes itself the minute it is begun or even anticipated: seldom as a precise semantic sequence, word by word, but as an organizational and sonic template, a pattern or space which is likely to be filled. This does not mean that you keep faith each time with the initial promise; but if you don't you and your listener both know what you are *not* doing.

So, a sentence is a set of expectations, initiated in general by that great abstraction 'the language', and more specifically almost always by the earlier sentences in a sequence and, most importantly, shared by speaker/writer and hearer/reader. How difficult it is not to finish someone else's sentences for them.

In this are two very simple points. 1) Sentences belong as much to the listener/reader as they do to the speaker/writer. We prepare empty sentence

shapes in readiness for the meaning of others; we are not passive; we have rights. If it doesn't come the way it should, we experience tension or surprise, discomfort or pleasure. 2) The way a sentence feels as though it is going to go is part of the experience of that sentence whether it goes that way or not. Anticipation produces the *image* of a sentence before the actual sentence is played out.

I shall test out the experience of sentences in four different passages, all taken from larger contexts (two play-texts, a poem-sequence, a song).

The first is from that moment in *King Lear* which launches the main plot. The father wants his daughters to use a rhetoric of daughterly love to bid for (his) territory and power. When Cordelia answers with her 'Nothing, my lord', the grammatical form of her reply – its syntactical status – owes itself to his elaborate question and its confident expectation of a *full* (fulsome) reply. *Nothing, my lord. / Nothing? / Nothing.* Syntactically, it is complete, an answer, a sentence. But it is incomplete too, in that it is completely context-bound, syntactically, semantically, *psychologically*. It can be performed as almost not a sentence. Of course, it is *psychologically* incomplete. Minutes later Cordelia speaks eloquently about separation,¹ with rhetorical confidence in the form of address (of which one symptom is in the firm anticipation of the end-points of her sentences). This later is already both psychologically achieved and syntactically finished. It begins 'Good my lord' and that brings us to the end of the prosodic line. *Good my lord.* The phrase positions both of them in relation to the sentence to come, the sentence which is already given and which will be finished. It *performs*² an acquisition of power and the right to dispose the 'you' in the distance of controlled speech. What a different 'you' this is from the

earlier *Nothing, my lord* in which 'my lord' could be left out in performance provided intonation carried the sense of dependent incompleteness.

This incompleteness is already much more than she told us in an aside that she would say: *What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.* The clear, double self-imperative: a grammar of self-evident love, a grammar of silence because the grammatical registers in play already do allow truth. Already she is speaking to, using the grammatical devices of specific address. *How* shall Cordelia speak to the one who demands a reply? She won't. She does haltingly. Then truthfully and clearly. These are grammatical and psychological transitions.

Because of this business of completeness – fullness, *Gestalt* – there is always in language use at every moment the possibility of failing to complete, of refusing to complete. *Nothing, my*. There is also always available the virtuosity of control, knowing from the first word how the whole thing will end, like Milton with his blank verse. Or, not like Milton, letting the sentence appear to go, but knowing all along how the field is set, so the play of syntactic order is just there, just, all the time. In writing, the punctuation of *control* is marked not with the full stop (the period) – you're going to hit that anyway. It is in the inner hinges, commas which separate clauses and hang them together; or colons which signal, semi-colons which segment. Keeping your balance in heavy traffic, that is a different matter. The dash, the parenthesis, the digressions and pullings back – the feeling that punctuation conventions are not quite up to their task.

The sentence can't help itself but be a rhythmic entity. That is to say, the traffic is all going somewhere and all you want to do is cross the road. Word order and standard grammatical inflections of words might lend themselves to repeated rhythmic patterning, to the sense of pre-shaped templates operating below the level of meaning. Do you play with or against the expected? If this structural unit is also a rhythmic unit – and it is – what is its tensility? Here are some of the variables that you play with: length, tempo, rhythm, tight/loose, simple/complex structures, extensiveness of noun and/or verb phrases, cadence/end-marking. . . . Why? What is at stake? Performance writing is nearly always written in a space other than that in which it is performed. There is the writerly voice, perhaps, and the performic voice, a bi-vocalism, which is always there even if the two voices are separated by no more than the deferral of time. This is true even of lyric forms where we are supposed to trust the authenticity of the I who speaks. (The *you* of *I love you* is almost certainly historical in the moment of performance; at least you hope so if the poet's/performer's mind is on the job.) Whose words are *Nothing, my lord*? There may be two subjects behind the subject of the sentence, ensuring that the theme speaks beyond its narrative containment. The two voices can set up two expectations of the shape of a sentence, one perhaps nestling the other. In the quoted passage from *King Lear* there is very evidently a conflict between grammars – between grammatical stances within the world – and very evidently too the context (the author? the text?) favours one of them. Cordelia's way of speaking is the one to trust.ⁱⁱⁱ

The following fragments are from more recent texts (the earliest being 1961). Here's the opening of the first section of J. H. Prynne's poem-sequence, *Not-You^{iv}*:

imagination possibly. . . (*eyes left*) . . . cheek. . . no. . . (*eyes right*) . . .
 no . . . (*distends cheeks*) . . . even if I puff them out. . . (*eyes left,*
distends cheeks again) . . . no. . . no damask.

As *written*, we have two parallel, interdependent, discursive lines: the dialogue and the 'stage' directions (instructions for director or performer). Both lines float their syntax in an event – a sequence of actions which are more than speech – that continues, that the italicized line in a sense produces. The directions form a sequence of elliptical sentences, not quite imperatives, since they prefer the third-person approach of the novel to the second-person address to a performer.^{vi} What Winnie says is at most a long sentence, full of suspensions, figurative near repetitions and distractions of the speaking I. When the theme is the narcissistic one of the I behind the I, the subject of the sentence and its theme remove all constraints from each other. So there are two sets of sentences and yet the organizing principle looks beyond language it seems, at times, only to return to it. And another language form, which is not sentence-based and which favours nouns, is at work: the list, most specifically the inventory with commentary. Estate agents' talk. Even if there was anyone there to interrupt they wouldn't, loose as the sentence-form is. The sentence leads us back to the person who speaks and what she speaks about is an objectified version of herself, so the I appears in at least two different grammatical functions within the sentence. There is perhaps even a third, if we ask whom she is talking to. In the context, this is ambiguous since she appears to be talking to herself, though Willie's presence conveniently socializes the talk. Meanwhile the directions bypass the performer (who is not, as already noticed, their addressee) and address instead the director or the reader of the published script, in a very different form of address.

Writing (I mean any writing; writing-in-general) identifies discrete units in the flow of speech, usually conventionalized ones which are not available to the ear alone

(letter, word, phrase separators, sentence). The smallest character on the keyboard punches a dot on each side of the recognized syntactic unit. Speech is *meaningful*, even or especially in its incoherence, and writing is *orderly*. Conventional graphic notation ('grammatical' writing) insists on dovetail joints and finish, none of the blurring, sliding and abandonment to silence or physical gesture that live utterance allows, where the buck can be passed from code to code, always an alibi available or a continuity to override the end of something being joined. The full stop has fragile authority once it has to leave the page. Where to put the full stops in speech in any way which does not attempt to mimic the orderliness of rhetoric? The difficulty does not mean that sentences are the fantasies of writers. All sentences which start also end somewhere, not necessarily completed in script, but held back possibly, in play.

I listen to the remastered CD of the Cream^{vii}, to *I'm so glad*, credited to Skip James. The 'lyrics' are not provided to give notational clues. So, let me try. First, let the musical (poetic line) avoid the issue of grammatical punctuation:

I'm so glad
I'm so glad

I'm glad
I'm glad
I'm glad

Second, sentences...but how many? (I'm avoiding exclamation marks; they are intonational markers not grammatical punctuations.)

I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I'm glad. I'm glad. I'm glad.

But, no, when I hear the song I don't hear five sentences. I hear the latency of five sentences but not five manifest sentences. Or is it the other way round?

I'm so glad. I'm so glad. (*There is definitely repetition, with reinforcement.*) Then (*but not quite*) I'm glad I'm glad I'm glad. (*Both repetition and complex statement. Recursive gladness. Gladness in*

infinite recess. Gladness seeing itself seeing itself glad. A melancholy narcissism of gladness, hedging the bets on the sentence.)

We need a Derridean device for the notation which wobbles between conjunction and disjunction.

I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I'm glad that I'm glad that I'm glad.

or

I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I'm glad (↔)I'm glad (↔) I'm glad.

All my examples used the already written and/or the already performed to try to get at the grammar of the writing. This is certainly a problem of methodology. It is difficult to get at the phenomenology of sentence production, at the impulse which adds word to word. Even so, I hope these remarks help any writers reading them to consider where they are when they embark on a sentence; with what timing, what balance, what aggression, what insouciance perhaps about the risks involved. The circularity of the sentence means that it is always finished as soon as started (even perhaps if aborted); its linearity on the other hand gives narrative and drama to the performance of any sentence. And it is all at the start, all to do with the syntactic expectations set out at launch. If all the earlier sentences have been completed in predictable maps of circle and line, if listener\reader is not being pulled into an answering enactment of the structure and tension, then expectations, well then

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Good my lord,
 You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
 Return those duties back as are right fit,
 Obey you, love you and most honour you.

ⁱⁱ In J. L. Austin's sense of 'performative' speech in his (1962) *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) where an utterance does something as well as says something. All sentences are located *between* people and necessarily enact or propose a form of relationship. Syntax is inseparable

from these constant enactments. In any performance, especially in any form of live performance, a sentence may be *either* between performers (actors) *or* between a performer and audience. Of course, it is seldom *either/or*; it is more usually both.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not, of course, the only one to trust. Not even the only one to have difficulties with her (grammatical) inheritance. A whole other article could look at the Fool's sentences and their forms of address: the unlocated pronoun removes some risks from truth-telling.

^{iv} 1993, Cambridge: Equipage.

^v 1963, London: Faber & Faber.

^{vi} 'She squints down' rather than the instruction, 'Squint down' or even 'Get her to squint down'

^{vii} *Fresh Cream* (1967) Hamburg: Polygram.

D.3

Performed through

grammar for performance writers: 2

The term 'performance' is an invitation to debate rather than a fixed term with an easy definition. In this paper I want to work from two different understandings: (i) writing *as itself* performance; (ii) where the performance is an event that is larger than, more than, writing, and the writing's concern is with its relation to the whole which constitutes the performance.

What do I mean by 'writing as itself performance'? I would like to hold to one side a special case of what I could mean: For the moment I do **not** mean the acting out – the display – of the act of writing either in events that everyone can call performances without any sense of problem or its ritual use at key moments in civic or judicial procedures or ceremonies, such as the signing of the register or of the treaty or of the big cheque. All such cases belong as much in my second category, where writing is part of something more than itself.

I am taking the term from Chomsky. In Chomsky's pairing of competence and performance, the latter plays the role of *speaking* (the act of speaking) to Saussure's *langage*. In both cases we are talking about the particular, a very particular actualisation of the potential of a system or even 'organ'. When anyone speaks or writes in a language that I know, they put into play, they render actual and material, a

system of possibilities that I share (more or less). According to communication theory that enables me to 'understand' what they are saying. Of course. But more than that, my ear must follow the dance of their tongue. There is a physical mapping of attentions, one on to the other, as word follows word, as each grammatical unit fits itself to the next, so much so that at any time the grammatical journey can be hijacked, as listener becomes talker, as reader pushes into the traffic of writing. I like to think of this idea of 'performance' as very literal, as taking place slowly, through time – in the case of writing, letter by letter, literal by literal.

Because speaking and writing are often simply instrumental, hurrying to perform some other task, this performance is automatic, unconscious, losing any sense of itself *as* performance. For the story teller or the joker or the poet this is never so. For the ever careful literalist, this can never be so. Personally I am not interested in any writing – *as writing* – that does not actively engage me in some way in this process of actualisation. Talk, too. I like that phrase, to hang on your words.

In my second sense of performance, there are different kinds of actualisation implied: the actualisation of writing as part of the larger performance or the actualisation of writing into performance. In this sense of performance, to which performance theory has given its attention, the performance is a structured social event, in which time is in some way publicly orchestrated. Various forms of the individualisation of cultural experience make the distinctions difficult to sustain. I was reminded very recently of a short footnote in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where he reminds us that even reading from the page can be ceremonial.

Theresa de Avila considered reading to be a form of prayer, the discovery of another space in which desire could be articulated.

Countless other authors of spiritual work think the same, and so do children.¹

Reading is the form of performance to which writing for the page aims itself. There are other forms of performance which writing serves or participates in, in which the page is only a stepping-point, or a by-product or a record or not relevant at all. In each case I am interested in an articulation of writing with and into this notion of performance and the way that the forms of articulation have a bearing on the grammar of writing.

Grammar concerns itself with the way language operates *as language*, with those structural features of a language which enable the system of the language to be actualised in speech, writing or thought. In Saussure's terms, how *langue* can become *parole*; in Chomsky's we are talking about the process by which *competence* can produce *performance*. Grammar is concerned with the *how* rather than the *what*, with mechanism and structure, or functioning of part to part within language, rather than with semantics. In this respect grammar is a formalism. But it is only because the *how* and the *what* are never finally separable that structure and mechanism are important. As an internalised operation, most of us are unconscious most of the time of this sense of autonomous function. It is so internalised it is as though it speaks through us. In its generative aspect, it is a set of rules which enables us to speak, rather than one which inhibits us from speaking. As social behaviour, it is also, of course, subject to the sometimes inhibiting pressures of the normative. This is Hélène Cixous on the subject.

This mystery is easier to convey through music than through writing, because music is not subject as the text is to the fearful imperatives of language that force us to construct sentences with grammatical correctness, to attribute genders properly: writers of fictional texts are called to account.²

For a writer – for one who shapes language for special purposes, who manipulates words and their inner changeableness and who breathes through them to make them work – function and meaning are never fully separable. How you function is what you mean. And in any case, *meaning* is too laden a term for many writers, implying a direction of semantic intention somehow separable from the play of words (or as I shall be saying later, play of those other activities set in motion by the words or alongside them).

This takes us back to the two different senses of both performance and function. Neither banishes meaning; they are just attempts to recognise the complexities of the way that meanings are actually traded. The first looks at the moment and manner in which linguistic potential is actualised into speech or writing; the second sense of function raises the troublesome questions: whatever their own internal functioning, what do speech acts, including writing, get up to in the world? The social function of a sentence might not be what it would appear – when taken out of context – to ‘mean’.

Sometimes we just call this irony – the way you might insult me to make me feel better about myself. I have in mind, though, rather than the devices of irony and deliberate ambiguity, that wonderful phrase of Edward Sapir’s, ‘the caress of small talk’. Whatever else they appear to be saying, all I know is that your words are stroking me.

Because some take exception to the term ‘function’ and have a distaste for functionalism, I shall put this second sense of function differently and move us closer

to the idea of 'performance': not, what is that sentence 'saying', or even how is it constructed, but *what is it doing?*

Of course, what it seems to be saying and how it is formed are inseparable from what it appears to be doing. Together they make up an ensemble, either reinforcing each other or not. A sentence will do nothing unless it is heard. A sentence by someone already defined as ignorable will still do nothing, even if it is heard, however it is shaped, whatever it is 'saying'.³ Sentences don't do anything in isolation. A caress, for example, can be experienced as an invasive irritation.

The clause, 'With this ring I thee wed..' only **does** marriage (is performative of the marriage union) if all the other circumstances of performance are right – including most significantly that there are first and second person pronouns present who both make evident that they mean what is being said. The inversion of phrase order is important, *lining up in order of ceremony the ritual object whose localised, highly concentrated ('this') power reinforces the performative power of the linguistic statement.* The grammar of the words used in a 'real' marriage ceremony and the grammar of those used in a mimicked or represented marriage ceremony can be identical. The subjects of the verbs, though, viewed as social beings rather than as linguistic entities, have a very different status. It is not the grammar but the frame which tells us that one mimics the other. Or you could almost say, taking the larger view, that the grammar of social process is very different in each case. Pronouns are not that cheap and changeable⁴.

Performance writing always poses questions of relationships between writing and its frame, writing and other symbolic and/or expressive practices which together form the ensemble of a specific practice. Inevitably this raises questions of hierarchy, even a

hierarchy of grammars. I myself would look for the answer in the politics of collaboration rather than the philosophy of language. The specific answer in the case of each performance piece has implications for the burden of grammar; in what medium, over all, are the parts of writing suspended?

Perhaps the first, and most lasting of the questions of relationship – and of difference – is the one between writing and talking, between the practice and production of each, and between the written and the spoken. I have already started by referring to a third position between writing and talking – which is the loud reading: the script which isn't hidden. I recall a poet saying years ago that he would not read from a script at a poetry reading since only a bad poem is not easily recitable from memory. For most of the other poets reading on that occasion it was obvious that the page was the space of composition, the detailed memory pad of the poem and the reading had to stay true to the page, not supersede it. I believe that in many readings, especially perhaps recorded ones, you can hear the page. It provides the frame for the point of origin of the sentences and for the cohesion between them. It keeps them in line and refers to an authority more stable than the emotional logic of the speaking bodily presence.

Again, there is the crucial difference referred to here between the written-spoken and talk: writing is mostly an individual, monologic practice (though it doesn't have to be); writers do it, on the whole, on their own. Sadly there are many forms of talk where the same applies: the talker assumes or is given authority to be the only one who really talks. But talk is essentially dialogic; when we think of talk we think of people talking to each other. In speech, actual social speech, grammar is situated in exchange, can be cut short, outstared etc. Meaning is generated dialogically as much by the speech of an other as by the enunciative momentum of the speaking subject.

The generation of speech/writing carries the sense of the other, of another, of others, whether or not an actual other is present. There has been considerable emphasis since Lacan on the emergence of the *I* through language. I need hardly say that the image of *other* effected through grammar is every bit as important since language is the very condition of the social or – more simply – of the sociable. This other may be you or may be she or he; if love enters the field of pronouns we are in real trouble⁵.

The next two categories have in common that they both apply to signifying fields which are primarily visual. This might remind us of the close relationship between the word grammar and the Greek word for a letter. Parts of speech are inevitably still there, of course, but we are reminded that the fundamental part of **writing** is the letter-form together with the letter-sized space and other forms of punctuation.

First, a relation between writing and architecture (or more broadly between writing and the design and organisation of space) is both more and less than visual, since it has to do with habitation, work and movement, with reading as casual, monumental or environmental, not as prayer but as surround. We expect here to find writing at its most laconic: grammar fragmented but solidly relocated in architectural sentences.

The proper name, the logo, the motto, the slogan, for example. This spatial placing of writing does not keep it in one line. The lines of architecture or organised public space lead in all sorts of directions. Writing is put into space where, if it achieves linearity, this is just one line among others and you can keep returning to it.

Secondly, between writing and the practices of fine art: drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, performance art. Grammar is diachronic; it functions through time. It sets up lines. It propels forward. The time of writing corresponds to the time of reading/hearing; at least there is a fit, which time-based performance attempts to

reinstate. In those media which arrest time – the photograph, the painting, the sculpture, for example – the time of viewing bears little relation to the time of production. In these contexts, the power of the sentence can be broken, and individual nouns and phrases can be suspended in a visual space.

Thirdly, a relation with sound structures, many different relations within sound structures, from the setting of words with music, through pieces which use words as the material with which to make a sound world, to poetic work which moves through the lexical layer of language into the phonic substance from which meaning is shaped. At one end grammar defers to a form of prosody; at the other grammar is the merest suggestion that the sound we hear belongs to language.

Fourthly, a relation between writing and gesture, writing and movement, writing and a choreography of behaviour. The minute that writing is just a means to another end it could be that something else – another form of notation perhaps – could do the job better? Or is it that the gesture, the movement, the action, is overlaid on the written and the layering of the two is the performance? In writing with this kind of purpose there is likely to be a pull between the need for complete sentences that comes from linguistic grammar and a sense of movement which corresponds to the phrase, which is a sketch, a suggestion.

Fifthly, a relation between writing and different traditions of and attitudes to performance. I have in mind here scripted performances, performances in which (usually) performers speak, in which there is a grammar for the speaking of performers and a grammar for the notation of the performance other than their speaking. There is an extraordinary delicacy about the grammar of stage directions. Their purpose is that of instruction, like a recipe book:

Simmer the diced potatoes in the stock until tender.

The verb is in the imperative mood. Simmer. There is, of course, a 'you' involved.

The two 'the's situate the two nouns in the here and now. That's from *The Soup Book* by Carolyn McCrum⁶. Whereas this is from Max Frisch's *The Fire Raisers*⁷:

Biedermann has to sit down on a drum, sweating.

'Has to'! The obliqueness and tact of this! Playwrights become novelists of the present tense. Presumably they avoid the imperative mood out of deference to directors and actors and find themselves instead in the present indicative, through the use of mood and tense making an absence present in the wished-for (wished for because writing a play does not mean that it will be put on) re-presentation of drama.

There is a variation on this from the (film) script of *The Graduate*⁸:

We move with MRS ROBINSON and BEN out of the sun room,
into the hall, up the stairs and along the hall to the doorway to
ELAINE's room.

We is the camera, we is the audience in collusion with the makers, shuffling along in a sentence, whose string of prepositional phrases mimics the journey through the house (out of, into, along, to, to). The first person singular narrative is one thing; the first person plural – when it feels this literal (as against some grand collectivised we) quite another.

In each of these cases, writing has a relationship with at least one other expressive, symbolic or aesthetic 'system', each with its rules, conventions and procedures for the generation, production or transformation of – let's take a short cut here – 'texts'.

Each 'system' has its dynamic repertoire of possibilities, born of constraints. To speak loosely, each has its *grammar*, affecting the grammatical options of the writing.

But I don't want to use grammar *too* loosely and want to hold a distinction between grammar and composition or grammar and discourse or even grammar and rhetoric. For linguists, as far as grammar is concerned, the sentence⁹ (with its parts of speech) is everything: every language user has to negotiate the sentence, even if only through finding devices for avoiding it. But any actual use of speech or writing is always more or less than a sentence. As discourse – as something made from the texture of language for the purposes of expression, communication or deferred or amplified presence – the status of the sentence is very different. Any discourse can be less than a sentence, is usually more. There are other conventional units apart from sentences, which are units of discourse rather than grammar – for example, the paragraph or the verse or the 'speech' in the turn-taking conventions of dialogue.

The aspects of grammar most likely to reward the attention of performance writers include at least the following:¹⁰

as always, the sentence – most notably length and complexity and implied rhythmic and syntactic entity

personal pronouns and the other linguistic signs of non-linguistic presence (the 'shifters', such as 'here', 'over there', 'now')

*conjunctions, most notably **and** and **because** but also **but** (and, of course, **or**¹¹)*

prepositions, especially in terms of what they do to time and space

nouns and their relation to surfaces and substance

proper nouns and their domestication of the world

abstract nouns and attitudes

all the different behaviours of verbs through mood (indicative, infinitive, interrogative and that key mood for performance instructions, the imperative; voice (active/passive); and tense, with its mixture of temporal and ethical inflections

the use of adverbs in performance scores – the qualifier of a verb transferred over to another performed action – slowly, angrily, lightly etc.

The reward, if it is to be a reward for writing as it relates to performance, will only come if the attention comes through into the ways that speech and writing are actualised as events and take up the activating presence within events.

Summary/argument

1. Grammar is a fundamental characteristic of language. All writers – and indeed all talkers – use it.
2. Grammar is a dynamic playing out of part to part and part to whole where the substance is language and the whole is a sentence
3. The parts of grammar are not individual words with dictionary meanings but parts of speech: categories like nouns, verbs, prepositions, which perform different functions in sentence formation.
4. Writers aim themselves, in the playing out of composition, at wholes other than sentences which for convenience we can call texts.
5. In the case of texts which are wholly written, there is correspondence between grammatical decisions and compositional decisions. Sometimes these will be the same.

6. In the case of texts or compositional wholes which do not end up as pieces of writing, there is still a correspondence between localised grammatical decisions and the compositional whole.
7. All grammatical events take place in social space, which they in part effect and always affect.

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¹ Michel de Certeau (tr. Steven Rendall) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 226

² Hélène Cixous (tr. Deborah Jenson), 'The Author in Truth', in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.148.

³ See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power*, especially 'Authorised Language' and 'Rites of Institution', pp 107-126 (Cambridge: Polity, 1992)

⁴ This discussion owes itself very obviously to J.L. Austin's *How to do things with words* but also to the Bourdieu discussions referred to above.

⁵ I am intending to develop these thoughts on personal pronouns in a later article.

⁶ Carolyn McCrum *The Soup Book* (London: Magnum Books, 1978)

⁷ Max Frisch *The Fire Raisers* tr. Michael Bullock (London: Methuen, 1962)

⁸ From *Film Scenes for Actors*, ed. Joshua Karton (New York: Bantam Books, 1983)

⁹ See Emile Benveniste, 'The Levels of Linguistic Analysis' in *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek, University of Miami Press, 1971 pp. 101-112 and my own 'Sentenced To' in *Performance Research*, March 1996

¹⁰ For a different list, see Gertrude Stein's 'Poetry and Grammar' which was printed in *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1911-45*, pp.125-147, ed. P. Meyerowitz, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1971.

¹¹ In the original talk, I had left or out. Fiona Templeton suggested afterwards in conversation that it should be there. Of course!

D.4

Missing Persons:

Personal Pronouns In Performance Writing

grammar for performance writers: 3

If I or you should chance to be
Involved in this affair,
He trusts to you to set them free,
Exactly as we were.¹

In this brief meditation on personal pronouns I want, in the context of a journal dealing with performance, to keep in mind three different conditions in which pronouns operate, all of which have a bearing on performance writing: spoken exchanges, writing, and performance. The pronouns which interest me most are the first and second persons, *I* (or *me*) and *you*. The proximity of *I* and *you* implies an exchange that is both grammatical and more than grammatical: a relationship of persons. I want to suggest a tension always there between the grammatical and the extra-grammatical. Because pronouns together with the other 'shifters'² always refer speech acts back into the site in which they occur, it makes a considerable difference how that site is staged, what kind of site it is.

A concentration on the first two persons singular makes the absence of the third conspicuous. I shall take this up. There are a number of significant issues which I shall do no more than acknowledge. For example, there are the various motivated evasions

of first person singular including *we*, *you*, *one*, any one of which merits an article on its own. I shall say nothing about the she/he problem.

Let me start with everyday speaking. Here pronouns could seem the most necessary parts of speech. They are the ones that seem to embed us, warmly even, in the action of exchange. *I* is used by the person talking to refer to her- or himself. *You* usually refers to the person being addressed, the one at whom the talk is aimed and who is needed for the talk to be dialogic or conversational³. *You* is the one expected to reply, though perhaps not in words, whose lack of reply is itself a reply⁴. In conversation there has to be a second person even if only to provide the pretext for a monologue. And how do we know who is meant to be *you* (at any one moment, because only *I*'s talk can sustain the condition of being *you*)? As soon as more than two are gathered around speech there can be doubt. For one thing, Standard English has shed the *thou/you* distinction. To sort out any doubt we go, as observers or participants, for contextual clues, since any actual discourse is polysemic – there are always multiple grammars involved and the different grammars inflect each other. For example, in a vague, easily imagined context, someone is talking as *I*. There are three others present. The speaker's body, and her look, angle themselves subtly towards one of them: this must be *you*. Or perhaps the speaker keeps her eyes on the floor because she cannot bring herself to reveal the intimacy of a *you*. Or again, in oratorical confidence, her eyes sweep the company as she pluralises – perhaps even communalises – the occasion. In English, the pun is irresistible: if *I*'s eye aims at *you* then *you* it is.

If there are only two present and they keep replying to each other, then each takes a turn at being the *I* of discourse and while that one is *I* the other is *you*. That's

dialogue. If there are more than two, then anyone present can become the temporary *I* of shared discourse and everybody else can become an unvoiced *I* of the not (quite) spoken. I can *think I* and know it. You only know that I am *thinking you* if I 'say' it. *You* belongs to *I*.

Anyone spoken of in the third person is treated as not there⁵. Apparently Arab grammarians called the third person the 'absent person'. Emile Benveniste called it the 'non-person'⁶. The *I* and the *you* of speech are both in speech and mark its outer (utter) limits: the actual mouths from which these words come address the person of the other across a space, even if it is the space of telecommunication. When these mouths say 'here' and 'now' they mean the same *here and now*, or at least ones whose relativity is evident. *I* and *you*, as words, belong to speech every bit as much as *he* and *she* do. They are all parts of speech, pronouns all, but *I* and *you* do not *refer* in the same way as *he* and *she* do. *I* and *you* mark the poles of discourse itself, the terminals through which language can become discourse, can situate speaking subjects in relation to each other. They are not in any simple sense pro-nominal. They don't *stand in* for names, for nouns, the way *he* and *she* can⁷.

Benveniste's notion of subjectivity posits a *speaking subject* and not a *writing subject*. 'Language.... institute(es) a unique but mobile sign, *I*, which can be assumed by each speaker on the condition that he refers each time only to the instance of his own discourse. This sign is thus linked to the *exercise* of language and announces the speaker as speaker'⁸

This is a 'condition' that both writing and performance can challenge (or avoid).

Except where writing is being purposefully performed in front of our eyes as an act of

writing – and wherever this occurs *presence* is being ‘performed’ as well as writing – there is at the very least a temporal, and probably also a spatial, gap. A person behind the text – the grammatical subject of utterance tied as an *I* to flesh with a joined history – can only be inferred from and in the text. In place of the joining of body and utterance is the other body, the corpus, the text as itself an inscribed body, to which the reader brings her or his body and asks perhaps: what was my speech to which this text is the reply? The reader has had to go missing from her or his own time zone in order to encounter this text from which the writing *I* has already gone missing (except as the textual trace of *written I*). The only *you* the *reading I* will find is also in the text⁹.

The reader of *this* text will be aware of the slipperiness of the topic that is opening up here. Interactive texts can mimic the conditions of speech events, though with a different delay. And many texts invite a reader to play the part of the empty position marked *you*. In his tongue-in-cheek *Personism: a Manifesto* Frank O’Hara ‘invents’ a literary ‘movement’ in which poems and telephone conversations could substitute for each other: ‘The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. In all modesty I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it.’¹⁰

Despite this example, literature and performance are at best oblique forms of address. Gertrude Stein’s comment on this obliquity was to say, ‘I write for myself and for strangers’¹¹. The place of the text and the place of performance are places where a ‘for myself’ is a gift for strangers. If there were a pronoun for it, a special *person* – an indication of an address for no one – then, and only then, could we talk of texts and performances as ‘forms of address’. Up till now this pronoun is at best a pure negativity, the *Not-you* of J.H.Prynne’s poem sequence of that name¹², or is signalled

through a slipping around between pronoun forms as a search for that place and a keeping empty of the pronoun reference. Beckett's *Not-I*¹³ is 'mouth', is not a name. The play dramatises – by which I mean offers a psychological account for – the failure to mouth 'I'.

Beckett's *Not-I* doubles as literary text and performance text. As performance text, 'mouth' is a part to be 'acted', to be *impersonated* on stage; the *presence* which is forwarded is that of the text/performance, now legally controlled.

What then of the bodies of 'live' performance? There may be speaking mouths situated in the same space, addressing each other across that space, constituting a to-be-witnessed *I-you* exchange. Or a performer or 'the performance' might appear to address the audience directly. Is there then a *you*? Can I reply? Does a body lean towards me or an eye single me out? Can the discursivity of the performance text be, as it were, a speaking subject? Am I friend or stranger?

There are troublesome categories of performance where performers manifestly or ambiguously perform themselves. The recent solo performances of Nigel Charnock for example appear to work through an autobiographical excess of the performing *I*. In contrast many poets feel *themselves* to be the unavoidable excess of a performed text.

'The strange convention of the poetry reading ushers in a theatrical self with a vengeance, the performing *I* bringing her accidents of voice and costume and mannerisms to flesh out a starved text, married and reconstituted with it in fullness before all eyes, like wartime powdered egg soaked in water. Inside this show and working against it, the borderline inauthenticity of the lyric 'I' gets relieved only inside the performed *I*'s speaking, where everyone, you hope, finally sees the truth of the matter – that it isn't you.'¹⁴

The performance company Desperate Optimists play out ironically this 'borderline inauthenticity' as part and parcel of a method both of construction and of performance. They work in between the theatrical conventions of *impersonation* (the mask found in the text) and the ambiguous lyric duplicity of live performance where the body insists on bringing its history back into the text. There are forms of direct address (deliberately disingenuous) to the audience. The performers on stage address each other with the names that are known to be their off-stage names. The pronouns can't settle between two possible sets of referents. Signs of authenticity – of the kinds that are not offered in conventional scripted theatre – playfully, sardonically at times – reveal their inauthenticity. I may feel I am about to be interpellated but the *you* passes safely by, leaving me as it were precisely to one side.

The density of a full performance text can draw me into that missing pronoun position where I am beside the text and not staring at it, where I might take myself up into the texture of its discourse. A theatre is a space of discursivity and not a speaking subject of discourse. The audience can only be constituted as a *you* by that discourse and there is a problem, in any case, with plurality because a *you* needs to be able to turn into an *I* for dialogue to take place. *Is* speak. *Wes* do not. *We* is always a figure of *I*'s speech.

Readers and witnesses are strangers, with moveable relations to the persons of the text/performance. Even lovers and friends are strangers when they read or witness. A reader, dear reader, is not a *you* except by virtue of deliberate rhetorical devices.

Likewise audiences. An audience for a text or a performance consists of strangers. Let's call it (*us, you*) the fourth person, witnessing an event whose central exchanges it is excluded from, the shadow of the missing first person who 'wrote' the piece.

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¹ Carroll (1993) p.109

² Jespersen's, and later Jakobson's, term for personal pronouns and other words like 'here' and 'now' which rely for their specific meaning on the instance and context of each speech event in which they occur. Jakobson (1990/95) pp. 386-389.

³ Speak's gloss on 'converse' includes this: 'to dwell (lit. to turn oneself about)'. I like the suggestiveness of both aspects of this – dwelling in language and turning oneself from *you* to *I*. See Walter Skeat, *Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* Ware: Wordsworth (1993)

⁴ In a much quoted moment, Jacques Lacan, thus: '..there is no speech without a reply, even if it is met only with silence, provided that it has an auditor..'. Lacan (1977), p.40.

⁵ The title of the regular Radio 4 Programme, *Does He Take Sugar?*, catches the effect of this exclusion.

⁶ Benveniste (1971) p.197

⁷ There can also act as indices for either the anonymous or the unnameable.

⁸ *ibid.* p.220

⁹ 'The addressee, however, is included within a book's discursive universe only as discourse itself.' Julia Kristeva in 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' from *Desire in Language*; also in Kristeva (1986) p.36

¹⁰ O'Hara (1972) pp 498 – 499.

¹¹ Stein (1966) p.78

¹² Prynne (1993)

¹³ Beckett (1984)

¹⁴ Riley (1997), p.80

D.5

Eluded Readings: Trying To Tell Stories

About Reading Some Recent Poems

First: some aphorisms on reading, in its relation to poems

Reading is desire before it is technique, tactics, strategy – certainly before it moves towards interpretation or judgement.

Reading has to engage with another desire, that of a text. In this respect it resembles sexual desire.

In reading, is a desire to *know*. Often this takes the form of wanting to know *otherwise* rather than wanting to know *more*; in particular, perhaps, to be at those openings of knowledge, not fully hidden, not fully revealed.

This desire to know is bound up inseparably with its contrary or its desire-in-tension. This is the desire to keep returning to the not-yet-speaking substance and motor of language. There is to be found there the pleasure of before-knowing, of not-knowing, in that state where it might or might not give itself over to knowing.

Every reading arrives on the scene of a text with its own history and its own poetics – repertoires of reading modalities, genre readiness, gaps aching for texts.

Every text was written by reading, is a place written all over with desire, that awaits a reading that will bring to it another desire.

Reading is an encounter between different desires shaped by reading.

Each of these encounters is both unique and full of resemblances.

Each takes time, encounters time, and intersects with other economies of time.

Any reader is disposed towards certain kinds of texts and away from others. This is a complicated story – economic, social, psychological, cultural above all, if culture is taken to be the flows of texts through people, the flows of texts by way of people through people.

The explicit poetics of a reader are not necessarily the implicit poetics of her or his reading.

Genre does half the reading.

Genre is a force-field of multiple projections and introjections, derived from the already-read.

Any reading either confirms or adjusts generic expectations.

When there are no expectations – or few and weak – a reader is a stranger, an anthropologist perhaps, in a first-time encounter.

Generic force in contemporary poetry is relatively weak; participants are few and do not consist of an elite of the powerful.

Participants can respond with an open play of genres – and fragments of genres – derived from within and without the field.

The half of the reading that genre does has in these circumstances to be made good.

The following list of imperative verbs stands for modes of engagement with and within poems: *move, play, do, make, say, know*.

Any one term could be a heading for all the others; different heading, different poetics.

Once textual desire becomes text it become technical and the technical means are textual – even where a poem seems driven by a desire to subvert textuality.

Not all texts are scenes for the easy playing out of the desire of a reading.

A reading may first be lured and then resisted, drawn to the scene for a willing seduction that is abandoned.

Resistance can come from either or both parties to a reading: as a conscious play of power within a speech act – as ‘political’ resistance; and / or as a game of modulation with the resistors of linguistic circuitry. The current introduced into the circuit is reading desire.

Technically, all of the following elements of textual production can be modulated to produce resistance:

prosody and syntax (especially in their interplay),

compositional segmentation and structure, including principles of cohesion,

sequencing and juxtaposition

pragmatic markers (including signals of genre and deictic devices)

lexis (or vocabulary)

encyclopaedic reference¹

These last two can take reading on a detour to other texts.

The internet is changing the relatedness of texts.

There is a final potential resistance that has no precise site, unless it be the end of the poem²: a gestalt or consoling wholeness that is at once promised and withheld.

More aphorisms: on reading before reading

When can the reading of a text be said to have begun? There is the convergence of two textual trajectories – mine and the book's.

Reading has always already started.

Concretely it starts with the paratextual aspects of reading – book as object, cover, author's name, title, publishing details, acknowledgements, epigraphs – and the first visual sighting of blocks of texts³.

Syntax, prosody, thematic material – all these project forwards with the promise of arrival or at least the promise of a chain of provisional arrivals.

At the same time, the incorporation of syntax into longer strips of discourse announces a principle of aggregation that is itself a form of repetition. A reader has to *do* sentences – or alternative grammatical syntagms – and their jumps.

Prosody is a play with the repeatability (or near repeatability) of shapes within the signifying substances of language and writing. A reader has to *do* lines and their jumps.

So there are two movements in relation to each other: forwards, and the up-and-down, to-and-fro, push-pull of the somatic mnemonics of repetition.

Inevitably these movements gather up a drama of psychological motivation (what drives this sequence? what keeps it back?), of social purpose (what kind of a speech act is this? where does it place me and what does it want from me?), and of knowledge (what does this utterance know about what? what is the shape and quality of its knowing? what is the difference between knowledge that advances and knowledge that repeats?)

When can a reading be said to have finished?

These are not considerations that I will now 'apply'. Now I shall try to read into some actual poems. I have limited myself to four books. Any fewer and the lure of a critical reading would be too strong. The space available limits me to reading into and out from a few lines within a poem or section within each book. I want to hold on to (literally too) the book as the most immediate textual environment for these selected lines. The books are as follows: R.F.Langley's *Collected Poems*, Peter

Middleton's *Tell Me About It*, Simon Smith's *Fifteen Exits* and Andrea Brady's *Vacation of a Lifetime*⁴.

A title in a constellation of texts: R.F.Langley's 'Mariana', from *Collected Poems*

R.F.Langley's *Collected Poems* was published by Carcanet in 2000 but not read by me until the end of 2002. The Acknowledgments tell me that Langley's first collection of poems was in 1978. I did not read this at the time. *Collected Poems* as a title is thematically neutral (though the theme may be literary history and authorial gestalt).

I want first to tell a story about reading the title of the first poem in the book and then to move on to a poem called 'Saxon Landings'. The first poem is called 'Mariana'. Something about the register, almost of narration, suggests that this is a reworking of a figure from literature or fine art. I take down from my shelf an ancestral copy of Tennyson's *Poems*. I don't immediately see 'Mariana' in the copious contents and there is no index of titles. I put off the search and read Langley's poem. It is arranged in eight blocks of twelve lines. It addresses itself immediately to my ear as a condensed and very carefully patterned prosody with careful attention to (short) line length and to recurrence of syllabic properties. It engages explicitly with notions of looking, with that second order visual space that can be evoked through the devices of what Pound called phanopoeia rather than the material visual space represented by blocks of text. The looking that the text narrates is set from within a windowed building. The view is constrained and minutely observed. In this poem perception is action and plot is what 'might' have been. The verb moods are divided accordingly between indicative and a subjunctive that looks into a past that did *not* happen but *might* have. Langley's Mariana appears in control, if this is not a paradox, of her own

subjunctive omissions – this control is perhaps most evidenced in the modal auxiliaries and the use of commas: there is tight interplay of syntax and prosody.

Still puzzled about the title, I resume a search and quickly have a trail – Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*; a setting of the song in Mariana's first scene in that play, *Take o take those lips away*, by John Wilson; Tennyson's two responses to the scene; a painting by Rossetti and another by Millais; some remarks by Pater⁵.

I read – or look at, or listen to – all of these. Each one for its while becomes a primary text, refusing the subordinate role of gloss.

Shakespeare's Mariana appears late in a play whose thematic context is an enquiry into and testing of virtue – as sexual behaviour, as truth and as the practice of law and governance. As it happens, these are all topics that Andrea Brady takes up in *Vacation of a Lifetime*. Shakespeare's Mariana readily gives herself to a plot to sleep with the politically powerful man who had abandoned her and in doing so saves another character, Isabella, from the praxis of the 'contemplation of evil'⁶. Despite all this it is Mariana's abandonment in the moated grange that interests Tennyson, and also Pater, Rossetti and Millais. Tennyson uses refrain to reinforce the sense of dejection and stasis of a woman whose life is defined by setting rather than action and who will make no move to escape. Rhyme and repetition work as a form of entrapment – the sounds can only be repeated not eluded.

She only said, 'My life is dreary,
 He cometh not,' she said;
 She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!'

What pleasure there is for me in these is in the play of 'she said'.

This is how the Langley poem starts:

And, looking out, she might
have said, 'We could have all
of this,' and would have meant

...

'She said' has become 'might / have said' and, had she said it, it 'would have meant'.

At this point I asked myself how much of this other reading, which I had very readily taken on, had anything at all to do with the Langley poem. I certainly thought so but couldn't *know*. I also didn't know if knowing would be the point. All I knew was that reading – and looking at, and listening to – these other texts was to read the Langley poem within a specific intertextual cluster and to allow the different texts to read each other. The Shakespeare was the most 'helpful'. Within this cluster I had a sense of what Langley's *Mariana* knows and does. What it *does*, and requires of me as reader, is reduce the knowable to the immediately perceivable and then oscillate this with the subjunctive mood that troubles this looking with possibility. This is not what the poem *says* because the speaking voice is the making voice: utterance is refracted through the materials of the poem. It is an enclosure, operating through linguistic and perceptual constraints.

As many of you will know, but I didn't at the time, the author had given an interview for *Angel Exhaust* in which he provided the contextual information systematically excluded from the poems themselves ('It's named after the Tennyson poem, because she is a woman inside')⁷. What was most *telling* from the interview was not the 'explanations' but this:

'I rather hope that the reader could miss almost everything and still get something out of it... So I think, well, you know, this poem must've done something before I did all that explaining, and now I've either spoilt it or made it better.'

Yes, indeed, but perhaps neither spoilt nor improved; once read, read – another in the cluster of texts, each acting as a filter on all the others⁸.

Titles, epigraphs and opening lines:

(1) R.F.Langley's 'Saxon Landings' in *Collected Poems*

I could tell a similar story about 'Saxon Landings' and indeed about the poem called Juan Fernandez. But I won't. This is how 'Saxon Landings' starts:

Here is of all the very this
is at last to keep the signals
lit or soon, they might, who knows
for sure the shore to either
hand so quickly in the haze.

I have to read this aloud or as though aloud even to myself. This pulls me into a body knowledge of this articulation, of speech as psycho-motor activity. There is a phonically 'easy' version of that first line that divides it into four feet, not quite all iambs because of what happens at *very*. *Here is of all the very this*. A lot happens at *very*. For one thing *this* should not follow it. Its syntactical position *should* pull it into noun position. It *could* work, treating 'this' as a pro-noun. But it doesn't work in a way that gets over the stumbling even *within* the line. There is *here, is, this* – all emphatic markers of presence with that familiar paradox that it is exactly what is present that does not need to be specified. But this is somebody else's presentness, assuming all the knowledge that goes with being present, passing over to a reader – me – its loss, the frustration of a loss of what was never there for me in the first place. This is a poem, it seems, about a 'first place' and I am not there. I am interloper, trying to put together what I can overhear. And what else gets broken in the line-break?

is at last to keep the signals

I want to pattern this. I want to make it make sense. I have to recover *this* from the previous line and I have spotted *lit* wrapped over into the next line. I want to pull a syntactical string out from its linear entanglement: *this is at last to keep the signals lit*. Ah yes! But perhaps, no, for there is now retrospective damage: *here is of all the very* is now stranded in its incompleteness. I'll live with that for now. This is all happening as fast as I can manage it. I need to go on, and the rest of the third line now *works* with that syntactical string but I need *who knows* to be a closed parenthesis, delaying the verb for which *might* is the modal auxiliary. There is no comma, though, and the verb phrase I expect or *want* in the next line is not there. It lacks. It might have been, for example, 'land' or 'break land' or 'reach'. Try 'reach':

'is at last to keep the signals / lit or soon, they might, who knows, *reach shore*'

I am not trying to suggest that in my re-reading I am literarily re-arranging the poem so that it 'makes sense'. I am reading in a vague and unachieved way both what I expect and what I find. My reading is caught between. I don't quite know what to expect but I'm not getting it. There is a breaking off and the next line starts with its own momentum: 'for sure the shore to either'.

I am distracted by the repetition of the homophone *sure / shore* within three syllables and cannot share the surety the terms signals. 'Either' too needs its noun or noun phrase. The line-turn reveals this as 'hand'. 'Either / hand'. What does this 'mean' – that there is a shore on either hand in this particular *here*? Possibly, but I'm not there.

so quickly in the haze.

This is unsure light, hazy.

Things are being left out. A first act of elusion and resistance is elision – to make a gap and cover it over in one move. The gap can be sutured – so close a join that there

is no movement. Ellipsis always marks the passage – or the non-passage – of the not-said. There is always a difference between not saying as a rhetorical variant of saying, as in euphemism, and not saying as an experience of beyond-saying.

Omissions can be marked with the three dots of an ellipse, with the trailing voice; others are there in the (syntactic, though not necessarily 'performed') pause after a semi-colon or full-stop. There is underlying expectation that gaps, breaks, joins, bends and ends will happen at punctuation marks (syntax) and line endings and caesura (prosody). These can also be decoys. And is it a psychology dramatised *within* the text – as with Mariana, the psychology of one or more 'characters' – or is it the psychology *of* the text, that drives it and ambushes it?

Trying to identify compositional segments is a motivated attempt to find the poem's motivation.

*Here is of all the very ... this
is at last to keep the signals
lit ... or soon, they might, who knows...
for sure the shore to either
hand ... so quickly in the haze.⁹*

A *person* is in a context with which they can only deal elliptically, such is the urgency and uncertainty. There is no overview of the kind expected of generals, historians and nineteenth century novelists. This person is inside a situation and the coding is restricted in time and place. This dramaturgical reading produces a text rendered banal, perhaps, by the spelling out of ellipses (the removal of the spell of troubled *joins*). For what of the other psychology, the one *of* the text rather than *within* it? What is it to be inside or in the dark, to be seeing as best as you can, and to respond to what is at stake with what can only just be seen? This seeing may be

threatened with loss, or with appropriation as possession: with a will to know through seeing, having and storing in the dark. I am certainly drawn into a world of uncertain perception with a will to see, and so know, and am without access to an absolute text. In some of these poems a faith in a discipline of attention (rather than knowledge) almost provides absolution.

The whole poem, 'Saxon Landings', enacts its own processes of knowing: the panicked knowledge of domestic threat, a story told in glints and flashes, an allusion to an historical context of some significance, the inclusion of references to classical mythology which turn out to be a *reading* within the poem of images inscribed on a dish, itself an artefact for triple use – domestic, sacred, exchange value. Some of this I only 'know' because of that interview. On early readings, and without the benefit of the author's own glosses, I was confused by this encyclopaedic set. Saxon landings are ambivalent in relation to national identity. Speaking as an 'Anglo-Saxon', were the Saxon landings 'us' landing or 'us' being invaded? What is being threatened and whose side am I on?

The poem is made up of five fourteen-line numbered sections, invoking associations with the sonnet tradition and its preoccupation with human love. The word 'I' does not appear once in the poem, though significantly 'my' does in the phrases 'my lady' and 'my / voice' in the last section:

Your calm, my lady, has been
to have it your own

Second person pronouns (and the missing second person pronouns implied by imperatives) run throughout the poem, strengthening a sense of address and of domestic altruism. There can be no second persons without an implied first person.

Why is it so understated, this presumably male voice, drawn into a conative address of its 'lady'?

History, the stories of classical times, the proper names – these can be checked after a fashion. They are parallel texts.

carrying your silver dish still
carrying you've been given a silver dish

That is current knowledge. No parallel texts are required. Or, you could say, these are the parallel texts of so much art, literature, domestic life, advertising.

In the poem these are all collapsed together, with all the orderliness of fourteen-liners and underlying metre, but with syntactical compaction, and with a deliberate confusion between layers of knowledge and their status:

Save yourself stop this reflective you
can't think it sling it and run my
voice is quite shrill because while
you've been ships have beached, some
bird yelped, the face of a god looks
straight at you you were eating off his
sacrilegious

The orderliness is at some cost. Where in 'Mariana' the mode of attention is reflective, here reflection is light from the dish, *action action action* means that reflectiveness of thought is inappropriate. By the time I have reached those two 'yous' right next to each other I am negotiating them at speed.

(2) Peter Middleton's 'Put Yourself In Their Place', from *Tell Me About It*

Peter Middleton's title is, like Andrea Brady's *Vacation of a Lifetime*, a colloquialism – a catch phrase – and like hers, is at this stage in my reading suggestive and provisional. Poem titles are not like essay titles. Who knows yet, though suspicions will be forming, whether this is adopted in a spirit of ironic

difference or of solidarity with everyday speech, even with its ironic everyday variant? There is a long epigraph attributed to Edward L. Bernays. The first two words are 'public relations', a service operation whose task is to tell us about something. The end of the epigraph suggests that poets are better than public relations experts in foretelling the future. This sets my expectation for some form of thematic engagement.

There are thirty-eight poems, all graphically very similar, twenty-one lines long and divided into three, and each with its own title. There is some variation in line-length between poems. I can see all of this without reading – that is I can read it graphically. Either the patterning is trivial and wilful or it is a deliberate espousal of formal (prosodic) constraint that will be present to all the reading. This is a writing made to fit shape-as-rule rather than a writing that is allowed in each instance to find its unique shape. Perhaps something is already being *said* and done about discourse as repetition? It is self-evidently structured into parts which operate as equivalents. The formation is that of an array. Who knows (yet) whether they are in parallel or in series? And there are two components to the patterning: line and chunk¹⁰.

⋮

The second poem is called 'Put Yourself In Their Place' and here are the first seven lines.

Every moment I would need to refuse
 credence. This couldn't be a policeman
 I'm patching together from colour dots.
 There is no opening out of this living
 room to a world in law. The pretence
 of action is not a struggle with injustice.
 And I've all but disappeared into society.

The first poem, *The Poetics of Labour*, has already established an ironic engagement with public discourse and 'spin' from the moment the second syllable of 'politics' is

subverted into 'poetics'. This second title belongs to the language of discussion – pub or TV politics, particularly to a manoeuvre designed to unsettle point of view and to engage in otherness. Significantly the 'their' refers to missing third persons – it is not 'put yourself in *my* place'. There is a sequence of completed sentences exuding the tones of constative self-confidence, with the gaps between them requiring rhetorical and semantic negotiation. The sentence is the most prominent compositional segment. Line ends introduce pauses or playful ambiguities as bends in sense. 'Credence' for example has surprise; there is bathos in 'room' following the emphatic 'living'; and 'pretence of action' is something of a conundrum, after a firm sentence launch with the definite article, 'the pretence'. The firmness of the statements turns out to be all register and tone – talking as if you know – because they all have either negation or conditionality built into them. In what conditions *would* this putative addresser need to 'refuse credence'? In five sentences there are three variants of 'not' and one 'but'. The only sentence without 'not' or 'but' is the one that has both 'would' and a word signifying a negating action, 'refuse'.

At one level this is a performance of being the one who knows. At another, it is a systematic undercutting of the rhetoric of such knowledge through the sequencing of sentences which might just stand up on their own but which, in this sequence, produce ethical uncertainty about both the positioning and singularity of this 'I'.

What is the conditional term of that 'would'? Is it, 'if I were in their place I would...?' I still, in any case, do not know who 'they' are, though I can see that 'putting yourself in their place' could be a guiding principle in public relations rather like 'the customer is always right'. For what purpose might you be putting yourself in, yes, let's say it, *my* place. Perhaps so that you can interpellate me. If so I have my

counter-interpellation ready: I refuse credence. This is a credo that is an anti-credo: a creed caught up in its negation. What might be the action or practice of such a creed? With this question I am thinking of Althusser's citation of Pascal¹¹: what you do to believe is pray. So what do you do in order *not* to believe? In the next sentence this becomes a failed refusal to decode an image of a policeman: the stated refusal to decode the pattern of dots paradoxically names the policeman in language.

The poem seems to be directly taking on language games of some purchase in the social (commercial and political) world. The mode is not a commentary on these other games so much as a resetting of their rules from a surrogate 'within': the poem puts itself in 'their place'. The argument is something that *happens* within and between sentences, not what a political voice is '*saying*' through the sentences. The mode is that of argument, and argument implies debate. A reading of these poems is a dialogue with a text that refuses to do anything but repeat itself. When what is being repeated is a pun, say on justice, then repetition is an oscillation between signifieds without resolution. There is no higher court, no moralising coda that produces the rhetorical recapitulation of, 'You see what I mean'. This ironic distance seems in this case to be the main site and source of resistance. Ezra Pound famously described poetry as the news that stays news: this poem insinuates itself into the coded mechanisms through which the news never was.

There is no reason why such a game cannot be run through variants on related topics in such a way that it exactly fits a scheme of three groups of seven lines. There is no reason because this is exactly what happens.

(3) Simon Smith's 'Friday 21st April' from *Fifteen Exits*

A quick flip ahead in *Fifteen Exits* to the contents page shows that there are fifteen separately titled somethings. These are referred to in the Acknowledgements as numbered 'exits', as in 'Exit 1: The Nature of Things'. This is a poetic form known as an 'exit', perhaps invented by the author. An 'exit' is usually a way out of a building or a way off a motorway or a stage direction. Here there is in play too, for me, a sense of 'outring': statements that find an exit, an envoi.

There are 43 pages of text, with each exit varying in length; a preponderance of filled pages – that means long lines; a variation between repeated patterning and irregular divisions of the page. There is no epigraph for the collection but each exit has at least one and these are often also woven into the texts which follow. Together with dedications of individual poems, they suggest that these poems are placed, Frank O'Hara style, between and in relation to nameable people. A lengthy book-list could be made from these and from citations and allusions in the texts. This poet explicitly makes a world out of collaged readings as much as of things, here acknowledging that a reading is always more than a text, is an action of a person in a world with others.

Far from suppressing situational markers Simon Smith multiplies them and appears to go out of his way to leave traces of source and process. This is the entry to Exit 2:

2. Friday 21st April

(TAKES #1 – 23)

For Sandra Watson

The world of the happy is quite different from the unhappy

Wittgenstein

That is already a collage of materials, a little poem in itself if a reader so chooses. Below the text of the poem, which is entirely contained on a page, there is more: May 1995. This suggests that the poem is in some way 'about' or a homage to 21st April 1995, that there were 23 'takes', that the last was in May and that they are all, somehow, included in this text. The poem is 'for' Sandra Watson. I could even be guessing that this date was shared between the poet and Sandra Watson in some way. In other words I am expecting a lyric in which 'Simon Smith' is a character in his own poem in the way that R.F.Langley and Peter Middleton were very much *not* in theirs.

At work you could be anyone,
 say there is a God and Christopher Smart the casualty,
 the spell quickly broken rattled tender clay
 knowing sometimes a casual blossom freshens the mouth
 sometimes as beacons cross-country allege a livelihood
 caravans queue along the road somewhere.
 Now the sun's out I feel happy, as though politics could be Love.
 The more serious things get the deeper the bark of wolves is neo-classical,
 light fallow towards 8.00 p.m., Friday, 21st April the position
 of the sun, wind speed, RPM disposed towards the Gods.

After this ten-line section there is a line-break, then a seven-line section and then another ten-line one. So there is a vertical symmetry of sorts, with the same variation in line length sustained. That longest line contains twenty syllables, the shortest eight. I am not sure how relevant syllable count is. Measure will be something else here.

Are there enough grounds to take that first 'you' as the poem's dedicatee? I don't think so. This could be that generalised 'you', equivalent to 'one'. It is a line that could be used by Peter Middleton, as belonging to everyday wisdom, as part of

colloquial 'argument'. The line ends with a comma and the next line with 'say', which could well introduce a clause or phrase exemplifying an anyone: say, Christopher Smart. That's who you could be at work. But then it turns out that that second line has completely new business and its own logic (*say there is a God and Christopher Smart the casualty,*) as though 'casualty' belonged to the same syllogism as 'God'. Where there is a god there is *a* casualty and for the purposes of argument let it be Christopher Smart. This book is already a thoroughly literary environment so I take Christopher Smart to be the eighteenth century English poet rather than the name of someone 'at work'. I know of Christopher Smart mostly through allusions like this one in the writing of other poets, though I couldn't name a single other one. A proper name in a poem like this is as it were a door in the text for which the text is a corridor. Both an entry and an exit. Or to put it quite differently, the proper name is a complex value whose referent is the literary figure – that is to say, the work and associated biographical material – cited. I need to *know* the work – not just of it – to read this line in any but a provisional way. I look up Christopher Smart in the *Wordsworth Companion to Literature in English* and immediately get a sense of the connection both with God and casualty and find an anthology that contains thirty pages of his work¹². This includes an excerpt from *Jubilate Agno*. I am immediately a convert, perhaps a casualty, and glimpse some understanding of the syllogism.¹³ Time perhaps to break the spell of Christopher Smart: *the spell quickly broken rattled tender clay*. This is a new line and a new 'sentence'. I think that *line* is probably going to be the main unit of composition, though these long lines allow for internal segmentation along all of logical, syntactical and collagist grounds. All I can do with this line is find two segments that abut with the break / join between 'broken' and 'rattled'. Syntactically 'rattled tender clay' wants to be a noun phrase. There is a problem, though. 'Broken' and 'rattled' have a semantic

relationship; 'rattled' and 'tender' work as fragile (ie breakable), but usage also connects 'tender' with 'soft', which is bruisable rather than breakable. 'Tender clay' sounds like flesh as viewed by a god, and, yes, by all means, let's see this as the casualty of original sin, but meanwhile that has been a resistant node, a spell of syntactic and semantic ambiguity, the more problematic because of the growing status of the line.

There is no enjambment or other cohesive device to tie the next line in, though in itself it has untroubled coherence:

knowing sometimes a casual blossom freshens the mouth.

Although it is not a complete sentence – being a clause with a conjoining present participle – this is not a frustration in context. Why? Because these lines are being laid down *next* to each other as though they were moveable elements in a visual composition – in particular as though they were collage. The variation on the fundamental poetic tension of prosody and syntax becomes a tension between *next to* and *next-in-turn* – a tension between simultaneity and sequence. What happens when these lines lie next to each other? Is happiness as easy as the Wittgenstein epigraph could be taken to suggest? Skipping two lines which, in the compositional method I am inferring from my reading, could be one (*sometimes as beacons cross-country allege a livelihood / caravans queue along the road somewhere*), there are two lines, each starting with a capital letter emphasising their syntactic status as sentences, which appear to address this question:

Now the sun's out I feel happy, as though politics could be Love.
The more serious things get the deeper the bark of wolves is neo-classical,

I said above that I thought that the line was going to be the main unit of composition. I am not changing my mind but it no longer feels quite so simple, not least because that leaves out of consideration the line's relation with syntax that has also been

emerging, where the modality of syntax enacts or indexes a modality of engagement through language – in other words, social and cognitive registers. In this opening section, a sentence tends towards two-clause status, whether or not both clauses are fully offered and whether or not both are contained within a line. The grammatical relationship is one of subordination and syllogistic connection. Propositions are given the syntactic contours of *being logical*, of needing a fit that is not quite available to them: *as though politics could be Love*. The logico-rhetorical figure here goes like this: *what if* the sun were to happiness as politics is to love? The connection of April sunshine and happiness is a tireless (and ‘true’?) association of western lyrical poetry. So much so, its truth can stand as premiss. But that is not quite how the ‘as though’ is operating, suggesting instead that the *sun / happy* correspondence depends upon a *credence* in the *politics / love* one. And this isn’t ‘love’, it is ‘Love’, the poetic figure of Love, a figuration that, being ideological, is by definition political. But the proposition is not: as though Love could be political. It is ‘as though politics could be love.’

The following line should help to see off any relentless pursuit of resolved logic and the entanglement of logic in syntax. ‘Things get serious’ in both Love and politics. This is to draw sense from proximity that is always also a powerful logic, even when coincidental. The two-clause balance – the antithetical display – would finish that line as a sentence after wolves: *The more serious things get the deeper the bark of wolves*. For all I know this could be drawn from an account of the lives of wolves, perhaps even from Lucretius whose *Nature of Things* has been so present to the previous exit. In any case there are two other elusions of the logic that appears to be on offer. First there is that verb-phrase: *is neo-classical*, that reaches back for ‘deeper’ as properly belonging to it as adverb, as though the phrase were: ‘is more

deeply neo-classical'. Suddenly the statement is diverted into being one about aesthetic categories and chronologies. And secondly, the line ends with a comma, suggesting that its syntactical business is not over yet.

light fallow towards 8.00 p.m., Friday, 21st April the position
of the sun, wind speed, RPM disposed towards the Gods.

These lines, joined by enjambment, read like an entry in a ship's log. Nothing arbitrates between two possible senses of 'fallow'. 'RPM' – which I read as revolutions per minute – is another measure of speed but of speed which goes around, which repeats itself. The register now is of a professional reading of signs though one with a misplaced 'therefore' that could either follow the list or come just before 'disposed towards the Gods'.

This seems to be a poem as very much a made thing in which a poet negotiates a relationship with people, with the way that different knowledges are carried in the already written, as though these were indeed entries to love.

(4) Andrea Brady's '1', from 'I Liberties, The White Wish Part I', from *Vacation of a Lifetime*

The book has 130 pages of text, divided into four 'parts', each one further subdivided into numbered or named sections, with most sections (or individual poems?) set on individual pages.

Vacation of a Lifetime is a text in which *structure* declares itself in *texture*, so that a localised reading is always reaching back and forth, aware of replay with variations, of terms and figures, that form a weave, of suggestions of narrative, of a thematic enquiry like that of Peter Middleton. In some ways this is to suggest a drama whose cast list is lexical, or equivalent, in the sense that the lexicon can provide all the

terms without generating a grammar in which to concatenate them – lexemes, rhemes and narratemes, in particular. The consequence of this is that to be reading any one section in the sequence is to have any previously read sections in play, both as phantom text fragments reading themselves back in and as lenses on the current text. The anaphoric and cataphoric reach is extensive, giving a sense of cohesion even where a reading may not resolve itself into coherence. Another way of putting this is that all the elements of the composition except internal syntax are treated prosodically – that is, as elements subject to the memory game of repetition.

Thematic and lexical relay is set in motion with titles, and above all with the initial epigraph. This is the opening page to Part I:

Liberties, the White Wish *Part I*

'That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excrementall whiteness...'

This is easily traced (for example, through looking 'excrementall' up in the OED) to Milton's *Areopagitica*, an argument against the introduction of censorship through licensing procedures for publication. It is, in other words, about the liberty of argument. The withholding of attribution might suggest that this epigraph is all that is needed: a morality play in which Youth can only act virtuously through knowledge of evil and therefore must be at liberty to know, must not have knowledge withheld. Vertue and vice are personified; virtue carries essence of maleness from its etymology and vice is female; vertue can either be an abstention and therefore a blankness or can be a praxis and therefore a fullness; purity is not absence; 'blank' is derived from the French word for white; and excrement has a double etymology – referring either to the rejection (sifting out) of waste or to an outgrowth. The OED is clear that in this epigraph the sense is *excrescence* or *outgrowth*. In a twenty-first

century publication, and in this poem in particular, the sense of body waste or discharge is too strong to bracket out.

The thematic clarity of purpose, if that is what it is, does not translate into the repeatable macro-patterning of the kind adopted by Middleton. Each of the thirteen poems of Part 1 has some form of repeatable patterning but in no case does one page exactly resemble the previous. As example, the first three run as follows: 4x4, 5x3, 8x2+1, and then a return to 4x4. It is as though each has had to negotiate its own shape. In Part 2, all 28 sections, as with Part 1, fit easily within the page but there is variable length with no stanza breaks.

In this case it is difficult to settle on a few lines which can become a way of reading into the whole. I wanted a passage – of which there are many – featuring a cast of personal pronouns consisting of ‘I’, ‘he’ and ‘she’, where ‘I’ is somewhere between narrative and lyric voice, where ‘she’ is either a character or a displaced ‘I’, and where ‘he’ is a character often associated with both violence and desire. I wanted it too to be one in which established terms and themes are in play. I’ll settle for reading out from the opening of Part 1, which has the ‘she’ and the ‘he’:but not explicitly the ‘I’. Being the first poem it can only cast back to title and epigraph, and to previous readings.

For charity, she crawls through a soft rut
rating the speed of the clip: mare's
tails race rattling her, her eyes drip their fuel
into the gaping bed of yellow rape and its cobalt border

that swims with estrangement.

That first line seems to be in narrative mode. We are being told what a character – a ‘she’ – is doing in narrative present tense. There has been no scene setting, no offering of a proper name or descriptive site for which this pronoun is a stand-in.

Contextual clues may or may not come later. I am already suspicious of that phrase, 'for charity'. It *could* be being used in its colloquial sense of doing something for a charitable cause. After the epigraph, though, and its dividing of terms, *caritas* ('dearness, love founded in esteem', OED) is there as well and by the line-end it is doubtful whether there can be any settling between these options. Is she crawling through a 'soft rut' because she is in love or for charity, a different kind of love? What about 'rut'? 'crawled through' predisposes a reading of 'rut' as a worn track ('especially in a soft road', OED 2). The first OED sense is again very different and has an uncomfortable fit with 'charity': 'annual sexual excitement of the male deer'. The etymology of this second sense is from the Latin term *rugire* meaning 'to roar'. Is it a false memory or does the word 'cervine' appear later in the sequence?

The first line-end is negotiated from 'rut' to 'rating', without punctuation, but moving into a present participle conjoining a related clause: *rating the speed of the clip*. These terms, which at first seem so simple, are not anchored by textual context into a single meaning. The doubling (or more) continues, as does reading *for* – rather than *of* – meaning, where meaning is not yet so much what is being said as what is happening because this still seems like story. 'Rating' – judging or setting a value on – anticipates a later ambiguous term in the poems, 'scoring'. With 'rut' roaring in the ear, 'berate' may not be far away. As for 'speed of the clip', I want this to be something like a film clip, but there are also as possibilities 'clasp', 'blow', 'embrace'. This word, together with variants such as 'clipping', will come up again. An epigraph is a 'clip', a cutting from a larger piece.

Let's retrace steps:

For charity, she crawls through a soft rut
 rating the speed of the clip: mare's
 tails race rattling her

That colon is the next issue: 'Its best defined use is to separate clauses which are grammatically independent and discontinuous, but between which there is an apposition or similar relation of sense' (OED). 'Mare's' and 'speed' offer happy enough apposition and 'race' too can be recruited to that cause; then, perhaps, retrospectively the punctuation changes to semi-colon or full-stop, or even comma. But more important than that syntactic pressure is the prosodic pile-up. So far there have been (cha)rity, (c)rawls, (th)rough, rut, rat(ing), race, rat(tling) – all except three words monosyllabic, two of the exceptions being 'ing' participles. This is very compacted. This is not a *soft* rut. And what about these mare's tails? The literal sense has already offered some connectivity but not enough. There is also the cloud form that betokens wind and, finally, and I didn't know this without looking it up, there is the 'creeping, perennial herb of shallow waters and mud flats' whose habitat is 'shallow water or muddy margins of lakes, ponds, margins and streams.'¹⁴ This will do for the soft rut and for the anticipation of banks, margins, verges of later lines and sections:

her eyes drip their fuel ?
 into the gaping bed of yellow rape and its cobalt border
 that swims with estrangement.

Eyes in this poem are often sites of discharge – of excrement. Here it is fuel. This could not be further away from the eye as 'gateway to the soul', a limpid entry point, without pollution. This discharging eye connects it with sexual desire and also with weeping wounds. The third poem has a 'lactating eye'. In 5, 'see how milk / pours from the cold solder'; in 6, 'by gluttony for fluids alone'; in 7 'drawing / dark fluids from the base, / her secrets seeping into a blank...'; and 'From you eventually / to watered milk...'

'Gaping' and 'rape' have 'bed' in between them. 'Yellow' anchors the many possible meanings of rape to the plant, which is now normally to be found in *fields* not *beds*.

The term *bed* undoubtedly activates a possible connotation of sexual violence which leaks back to 'drip' and forward to :

spasmic wildness. She hates and washes her
body's frenzy for splashes of vice in white
jetting from the mouth of his horse.

'Vices in white' reaches back to the epigraph. 'Jet' is yet another polysemic signifier, one of whose significations is 'black'. Like cobalt, it is a material strongly associated with a colour. The pattern of colour terms in this first poem runs as follows: 'yellow rape' (l.3); 'cobalt border' (l.3); 'arctic green' (l.7); 'dry and whitened' (l.8); 'chrome-white' (l.9); 'brown out of traffic' (l.11); 'tracks grey and curl' (l.11); 'a white latch' (l.13); 'vice in white' (l.15); 'jetting' (l.16).

Am I right in thinking that white is all of the colours in light and none of them in pigment?

Closing

It feels appropriate to end on a question. Much of reading is a matter of holding nerve in interrogative space.

Perhaps these are not just eluded readings. Perhaps they are frustrated and frustrating. What I believe I have found in the course of this enquiry is that each poem has seemed intransigently to have proposed the terms for its own reading and that these terms are to be found nowhere except as the text of the poem itself.

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NOTES

¹ I am using this term in the sense given it by Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *Interpretation as Pragmatics* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1999), (p.4): "The concept of 'encyclopaedia' in the broad sense of a set of beliefs and elements of knowledge which reader and author bring to bear on the text is borrowed from Eco..." The Umberto Eco source is *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1984)

² Giorgio Agamben tests out this idea in relation to the last moment in which enjambment can take place – *the end of the poem* – in the chapter of that title in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999)

³ Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

⁴ R.F.Langley *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet/*infernal methods*, 2000); Peter Middleton *Tell Me About It* (Cambridge: Barque Press, 2002); Simon Smith *Fifteen Exits* (Hove: Waterloo Press, 2001); Andrea Brady *Vacation of a Lifetime*. Peter Middleton's chapbook is reprinted in a variant text in his selected poems, *Aftermath* (Applecross, Western Australia and Great Wilbraham, Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2003).

⁵ William Shakespeare *Measure for Measure*, ed. S.Nagarajan (New York: Signet Classics, 1964); John Wilson "Take, o take those lips away" on the Deller Consort CD *Shakespeare Songs* (Harmonia Mundi, HMA 195202), with thanks to Angela Hall for the acquisition; Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Works of Tennyson* (London and New York: Macmillan Co., 1892), pp. 7-8, 29-30; Dante Gabriel Rossetti *Mariana* (Oil on canvas, 1870), Aberdeen Art Museum <<http://www.abcgallery.com/R/rossetti/rossetti36.html>>; John Everett Millais *Mariana* (Oil on canvas, 1850-51), The Makins Collection <<http://65.107.211.206/painting/millais/paintings/mariana.html>>; Walter Pater 'Measure for Measure' (1874) in *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (McLean, Virginia: IndyPublish.com, no date [1889], pp. 87 -94), also reproduced in Shakespeare, above; and Pater's commentary on the song in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (ed. Adam Phillips) (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998) Chap. VII.

⁶ See the discussion of Andrea Brady's *Vacation of a Lifetime* below.⁶

⁷ "An interview with R.F.Langley: propos recueillis par R.F.Walker.", *Angel Exhaust* 13 (Spring 1996), 116-28; citations from pp. 125, 121. Also available at <<http://pinko.org/74.html>>

⁸ During this time I saw Pedro Almodovar's film *Talk to Her*, a film in which a hospital plays the part of the moated grange. Two women, each attended by a man, are in coma and cannot reply. The theme of the sleeping or comatose woman, incapable until awakening of recognising her own desire, is widely encountered, but the viewing was current to my reading and by accident of timing became part of the reading. And all of these authors, and this reader too, are men, for whom 'might have said' and 'would have meant' *might* be refrains in a tireless gender speculation.

⁹ I am least certain of the ellipse between 'lit' and 'or soon'; I feel the need for some negotiation there, that I am being hurried past and I want to know what the rush is. The editor, Nate Downard, hears an ellipsis differently: *To me it seems clear that "for sure" forms a coherent unit with the preceding words, thus making a little interrogative shrug: "who knows for sure?"*. And now I certainly hear that too. I hear them both.

¹⁰ Etymologically a verse is something that turns and a stanza something that stands. Since at this point in my reading I don't know whether these turn or stand I am avoiding both terms.

¹¹ Louis Althusser (tr. Ben Brewster), 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p.168

¹² *Poets of the English Language III, Milton to Goldsmith*, ed. W.H.Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952)

¹³ What can I do with the fact that almost the next entry in the anthology after Christopher Smart is William Cowper's 'Verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his solitary abode in the island of Juan Fernandez', that Juan Fernandez is the title of a poem by R.F.Langley and that I had followed a false encyclopaedic trail out of that poem that, despite its direct pasting in of a passage from Robinson Crusoe, led me to an eighteenth century Spanish painter called Juan Fernandez? Shall I *refuse* this as coincidence?

¹⁴<<http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/acquatics/hippuris.html>>

D.6

Falling Towards Each Other: Occasions Of Elegy

I walk down in the evening to the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church. The light is fading and there is a hint of Autumn (Fall) in the air. I am reflecting on forms of loss, especially deaths, and the forms and practices of words – and of other ‘texts’ – that ‘we’ use to define and negotiate these. This is something I do anyway. I am not unusual in those strands of my reflection which are to do with loss and death; ‘everybody’ does it. Only those interested in writing and / or the precise forms of social and psychic processes which deal with loss are likely to combine the two strands of reflection and put them up against each other. On this occasion I am responding to an invitation for some writing and so the reflection is occasioned and occasional. And actually¹ the walk is not *down* to the graveyard; it is *up*. That ‘down’ is already, perhaps, elegiac. And that present tense, where did that fall from? Actually the walk was two evenings ago as I write this sentence².

The last time I was here was for the funeral of a friend, Peter Knight, who taught Physics in school and wrote poems. The ceremony included a reading of poems. They were all his poems, offered in a doubly double move, *from* him back *to* him, and – through the attention of congregated friends, colleagues and relatives – *to* something *from* him that marked both *loss* and *survival* at one and the same time. There is always this second doubleness attached to the deaths of those whose

business it is to leave traces which sustain a present tense after their deaths. Of course there are also all those traces in the form of photographs which Susan Sontag and others have argued are already epitaphs. Those photographs, some of which are framed monumentally, haunt with their temporal ambiguity, ghostly presences of loss – loss either of youth, or situation, or life³. Has anyone left instructions to have all photographs of themselves burnt after their death?

The poems read in the roofless church at Peter Knight's funeral were not specifically written for the occasion of mourning – they were not, in other words, elegies.

Though recited here on an occasion that marked the death of their author, they were chosen to celebrate the quality of the man and his writing: *this is what we have lost*.

There were people who had been very close to him who were weeping. And there are poems – music, of course, even more so – that could take up that weeping, share it and shape it in lachrymae and lamentations, a modulated ritual procedure to bring people together in topically acknowledged forms of grief.

Ye sacred Muses, race of Jove,
Whom Music's lore delighteth,
Come down from crystal heav'ns above
To earth, where sorrow dwelleth,
In mourning weeds, with tears in eyes:
Tallis is dead, and Music dies.⁴

This occasion, by contrast, allows differing investments in loss and proceeds through a mosaic ritual of differing participations.

After years of not hearing William Byrd's elegy I had playing through my head two of the repeated phrases: 'Come down' and 'Tallis is dead'. Tempo, iteration, tone, duration: it takes time and repetition to mourn. My version of *Ye sacred muses*, on crackly vinyl with brittle sound, lasts three minutes and twenty seconds⁵. Four phrases are repeated: 'Come down', 'In mourning weeds', 'Tallis is dead' and

'Music dies'. The last two lines are repeated with all their internal repetitions, with a third and final 'Music dies'. Music has died five times, and survives. In this slow, extended and repeated time, grief can be joined and given a collective shape. Is the elegy a lyric account prompted by an occasion? Or is it part of the shape of an occasion, a component of ceremony, designed to perform mourning? And what ceremony do I perform when I listen to it on my own at home, by virtue of a newer and more mobile technology of memory that allows a displaced mourning, a grieving for a loss – perhaps indefinable – that the mourning itself might or might not name? And I would want to generalise out to a larger notion of occasion and even to trouble the question with another, both political and anthropological: *whose occasion?*

The Oxford English Dictionary gives as the etymology for *occasion*: 'ad. L. *occasion-em* falling (of things) towards (each other)⁶. It is not just the *things* that fall towards each other, though there is always, I would say, a sense of conjuncture or convergence that marks something as an 'occasion', even for those with their attention on the 'everyday'. It is also that occasions are marked incidents that cause certain people to fall together. Many are set, as though permanently, by calendars. And I see from the Oxford English Dictionary that the etymology of calendar is the Latin word for an account book – accounts were due on the *calends* of each month. Rent day. Pay day. These are occasions.

Many of these calendric occasions are now routinely marked with the exchange of texts and images in the form of cards: for example, birthdays, Christmas, New Year (and its eve), St Valentine's day. Others, such as solstices, equinoxes, new and full moons, are not (yet) marked with the routine exchange of cards but are often the occasion for poems. Some of these are grand dispersed occasions in which the texts

can be ephemeral simply because they will be repeated – or at least variants will be. I have become very taken with these opportunities for textual production and circulation, with their lines into established expectations; texts can be used to cause or maintain a falling together through the formalising or ritualising of formulaic exchanges, like the exchange of gifts. It is far too limiting to see these as genres of texts only: they are genres of cultural exchange in which the formal properties of the texts may or may not be wholly fixed. Participants may be mesmerised by the strictly regulated formalism of the required texts or may, at another extreme, become thoughtfully pragmatic and functionalist: *what is it we should be doing here and what text will do that job?*

These questions are anthropological before they are literary or, in the thick of pragmatics, they are both sociable and ethical, and will inevitably raise further questions about the ‘occasion’ of any textual event. What are the complex dynamics of the falling together of texts, events and people, such that certain texts can simply signal that this is an occasion of such-and-such a kind and that certain kinds (*genres*) of occasion can signal the need for appropriate textual behaviour?

⋮

The role of news media in this signalling has been much noticed recently, in responding to occasions of death in which it is decided that there is no stance for a commentary that is not complicit in the occasion: the death of the daughter-in-law of the British queen; the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York; and, as I write, two young girls in Cambridgeshire whose murders become an exemplary loss for ‘all of us’. As with commentaries on grand state events, including coronations, the commentators become MCs of a pervasive rhetorical – and imbricated – layer of proceedings.

Andrea Brady's recent article in *Quid* 9⁷, focusing on the deployment of grief to regulate difference and commentary, put the questions very forcibly: in a world of rhetorical interactions, were you pushed or did you fall? The occasion that she considered – the aftermath of the events of September 11th 2001 – is one whose rhetorical community was immediately constructed – through news media and those with access to using them as sites of address – as universal, as the community of 'the world'. That this particular occasion could be repeated, that is a fearful political question, whose provisional answer is provided on behalf of the 'world' through military action, threat of military action, intelligence, diplomacy, tireless rhetorical and ideological activity. Unlike, say, a marriage or the entirely predictable death of those near the ends of their lives, this is something 'we' do not want repeated. If its rhetorical management is to be effective, though, it must *repeat* (be citational, re-enact key elements of previous performances) and be *repeatable*, bringing together previous responses to grand scale disasters, to deaths of those *not* expected to be at the end of their lives⁸, to horrific crimes and to times of hostility when the enemy can only be understood as 'evil'.

Part of the rhetoric of an *exceptional* occasion is just that, a rhetoric of exception: *this has never happened before*. Available for such, perhaps, are genres of the monstrous, the grotesque. But otherwise, it is because these occasions are repeatable, are themselves generic, that there can be genres of speech acts⁹; it is because there are genres of speech acts that the occasions can be repeated, modulated, orchestrated. Any number of *performances* can derive from a social *competence*. In this sense an occasion is always an occasion of an Occasion¹⁰ and participation marks more than

itself. There are rules, and one of the rules, as Andrea Brady illustrates, may be that participation is not optional.

So in these terms there is Death, which stalks 'us all', and there are the deaths of friends, relations, public figures, people in our own trades, perhaps, whom we admire. Each of these deaths is part of an already formed narrative and we deal with it as best we can, caught somewhere between loss, memorialising (often this is of an already lost younger version of the person), frustration at unfinished business, care of those even closer, juggling perhaps with any re-positioning that is a consequence of the death, and with what happens to our own view of mortality, of transience.

Elegy deals with mournfulness as well as with mourning. As form and modality, elegy can respond to sense of loss and mortality and can articulate a relationship with the literal dead. It can also be a specific form of memorialising through grief, through affective and/or substantive articulation of loss. Such is Byrd on Tallis. 'Music is dead,' he has his singers sing in a wonderful demonstration that it is not.

J.H.Prynne's *Shadow Songs*¹¹, where 'glorious dead' invokes the genre of war memorial, seem to me to work across and away from a sense of loss, and at the same time to sing in its shadows¹². There is no named death in the poems, just the glorious dead. Nor do they mark an established occasion, so far as I know, for remembrance of the glorious dead. And where I encounter them is not as part of any shared ceremony ('Only the procession is halted') but on the page of a book that can be visited at any time, because I own a copy. I need enter no public space, except for the space that the poem itself constructs, to join a ceremony of meditation. This is itself an occasion, a variant of the occasion of individualised reading, like listening to Byrd

on my own. I don't feel that I understand it. Sometimes, perhaps, the 'lovely harm' of reading is the lost company of those signally not present to the act of reading. I am talking about a kind of text, not wishing yet to generalise: how can a private reading be elegiac? Mournful, perhaps, or melancholy, in Freud's (or his translator's) sense of the term?

Like Byrd's elegy on Tallis, *Shadow Songs* combine a grammatical sense of indirect imperative¹³ with all the implications of 'come down':

And let Nightingale come
down from the hills.
and

And if the dead know this,
coming down into the dark, why should
they be stopped?

The poem also carries that already cited troubling oxymoron, 'lovely harm' ('the years with their lovely harm'): elegy can't remove harm but can, perhaps, render it 'lovely'.¹⁴ It is, I would say, a charm *against* loss: the dead can walk barefoot on the earth. John Riley, another poet whose death was untimely, also engaged often with this paradox.

Recent secular practices of memorial are more likely to specify the dead, using grounded memories, with an obligation of a truth to the person even if that crosses the taboo of 'about the dead, nothing unless it's good'. *This is the person in the round. I remember their faults with affection. To ignore these would be to wrong them.* William Carlos Williams' *To Ford Madox Ford in Heaven*, playing on the title of Ford's *On Heaven*, is a deliberate example, making only ambivalent allowance for elegiac cadences or modal gestures to the sublime (the conceit of heaven), instead using a direct form of address as of honesty to a friend loved with reservation:

A heavenly man you seem to me now, never
 having been for me a saintly one.
 and

Provençe, the fat assed Ford will never
 again strain the chairs of your cafés
 pull and pare for his dish your sacred garlic,
 grunt and sweat and lick
 his lips.¹⁵

Ford had already offered the ambivalence that allows heaven to *come down* into the secular environment of earth, and so Williams can, in what is probably another tradition of elegies, borrow the effects of a cosmology from which he is at least at one remove. In another of Williams' elegies on a writer, *An Elegy for D.H.Lawrence*, the ironic term is 'love' rather than 'heaven' ('men driven not to love / but to the ends of the earth') and there are, as in the performed version of Byrd's elegy on Tallis, repeated variants of the statement that the named person is dead.¹⁶ There is no redundancy in such repetition. The first step in responding to a death is perhaps to verify that it has happened; the second perhaps is to speak the death – for each verifier to say it: Lawrence is dead. The first is witness; the second participation in utterance. And the 'utterance' can be transposed into ceremony – even silence – provided that the ceremony clearly performs the statement: the person named is dead. This is what funerals do: (i) indeed the named person is dead – look!; (ii) this is the named person who is dead. And then mourning can begin¹⁷.

In the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church the recent gravestones convey, in their brevity, a variation on a few themes. One – an obvious one – is the marking of a life through the specificity of dates of birth and death, to create that poignant narrative of a supposedly unique chronology, most poignant when the death was of a young person ('Aged 2 ½ years; So precious') or, in one instance in the graveyard, where

husband and wife had died within days of each other. The gap between these deaths was only eleven days and those responsible for commissioning the inscription had arranged for the two-liner from Sir Henry Wotton to be included:

She first deceased, he for a little tried
To live without her, liked it not and died.
Sir Henry Wotton 1568-1639

This gravestone is a memorial not only to two individuals but also to their marriage (and of course to Wotton, also given his dates). As a naïve visitor to the graveyard I was not ready for how prevalent a theme this one of domestic relationship was. Many of these dead are remembered as husbands, wives, grandparents – less frequently, of course, as sons and daughters. The loss implied in all these cases is a domestic and familial one: a beloved and exemplary family member is dead; here they lie. In no case that I saw (admittedly only a few rows) was any other social position, such as a trade or occupation, cited. It is as though it is the repeatability of *family* that makes these losses public: the ready identification of family with family, which shapes so much contemporary public grieving. In the still prevalent schematic cosmology of *up, down* and *here*, family and home are *here*. ‘Here’ is also, by extension, ‘earth’, which can be set off against ‘eternity’, as Emily Dickinson does in *The Bustle in a House*.

The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth –

The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity.¹⁸

Loss is not stated as such in the graveyard, though memorials of this kind always mark the place of loss, and do so again in a double function captured in the phrase, ‘lest we forget’: they are sites of memory *and* commitments to remember (wards

against the fearful loss that is forgetfulness). Memorial is seldom taken as read but is doubled with redundancy: *IN LOVING MEMORY; CHERISHED MEMORIES*. Loss is approached more directly through the word 'missed', always coupled with 'sadly', with its implication of an emotional aim that has lost its object¹⁹, whose object may just have gone missing. The epitaphs move in on the generic business of elegies, it seems to me, with this declaration of sorrow or lack. The occasion of an elegy is the period of mourning, in which grief is a process with a duration (in some societies, carefully regulated through dress code and restrictions on activity; in Freudian psychoanalysis, a process with a discernible narrative²⁰). A gravestone is intended to be permanent; using Freud's much discussed distinction you could say a statement of sorrow on a gravestone – fixed rather than re-iterated – is to commit to melancholia and to refuse mourning its due process. I wouldn't for a minute want to suggest that this is actually what happens; only that the domestication of the public marker is also a temporal domestication. These are the dead Thomas Gray wanted to bring into the privileged domain of the glorious dead, the domain of those who occasion not just epitaph but also elegy.

The last theme from these gravestones is the notion of peaceful rest, usually through the familiar formulation of 'REST IN PEACE'. 'Rest' allows for ambiguity: refreshment, remains, and – another imperative – 'stay there'. Where the life of the dead person had been troubled, particularly through painful illness at its end, then there is a domestic and curative poignancy: just rest there; let nothing trouble you. What is invoked is the euphoric emptying of sleep. Peace is there to ward off the anxiety of bad dreams that Hamlet feared. It seems to me that this term skirts around the association of death with the sublime without ever losing the domestic (and

therefore profane but literarily touching) gesture of the soothing of the brow. How long can soothing take?

I keep the company
of the articulate dead, whose remaining
purpose is to talk to us
of their living. I also keep the company of the living,
naturally, otherwise would not be interested
in the dead. I listen to each
and talk back. no one
will silence any of us, because we talk
in the company of the dead
with those who live
now or at any time. don't ask me
why this is.

This is the first section of a piece called *Apple Poems* which I wrote in about 1968 and then lost. I recovered it recently after talking with a friend, who had known the poem at the time, of its loss. No, she said, she had a copy. Meanwhile the opening statement, 'I keep the company / of the articulate dead' was never 'lost' because I remembered it. I wanted to make good the loss by writing out from that opening.

When Alaric Sumner (13/3/1948 – 24/3/2000) died, I put in the place of his loss this:

THE
ARTIC-
ULATE
DEAD
WHERE
EVERY
EAR

And had very much in mind too Douglas Oliver (14/9/1937 – 21/4/2000) and Barry MacSweeney (17/7/1948 – 9/5/2000). I was unable to attend a memorial gathering at Dartington for Alaric but produced, to be shown in my absence, an animated

PowerPoint piece, whose colour, scale and tempo are missing from this representation just as the setting is from the Byrd elegy. It began with the above and then:

PERHAPS · IT · EASES · THE · LIVING · IF · THE
 DEAD · STAY · STILL · ALARIC · IN · AND
 OUT · OF · FRAME · A · LURE · TO · THE
 LIVING · ALWAYS · TO · AN · OTHER · PLACE
 ALL · WAYS · ALARMED · RESTLESSNESS
 HELPS · LIVING · TONGUES · TO · MOVE · SO

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¹ This word 'actually' is for me, and perhaps others, a memorial marker of the poet, Douglas Oliver, who died in 2000. When I hear it used, including by myself, in a particular way, I remember him and the part the word played in his speaking. It was for him, I think, another kind of marker – it marked the entry into the register of authoritative explanation.

² See Gillian Rose on the 'pathos of syntax' in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 125-126

³ Certain kinds of sound recordings can have the same effect. I have just moved offices at work and have changed telephone numbers. Alaric Sumner, whose sudden death in March 2000 so shocked friends, colleagues and students, must have been the last person to have used the number because when I set about changing the message on the answering facility what I heard was: *hello this is Alaric*. For a second or two this was a living voice, and consequently it was as though for a second or two I had to re-enact a mourning. I take up aspects of this theme below.

⁴ William Byrd *Elegy on the death of Thomas Tallis*, 23rd November, 1585

⁵ Mary Thomas, John Whitworth *et al* *An Anthology of Elizabethan and Restoration Vocal Music* (London: Saga, 1964)

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary (CD-ROM Version 2, 1999)

⁷ Grief Work in a War Economy, in *Quid (9)* (Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, 2002)

⁸ Are most of the best known elegies in this category? Mahler's *Songs for the Death of Children* were not allowed in the house when our sons were young.

⁹ This phrase is intended to evoke the title of M.M. Bakhtin's *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, 1996) and also J.L. Austin's notion of speech acts which has been so usefully put to work by, among others, Judith Butler.

¹⁰ The title of one of John Riley's poems is *A Birthday Poem / For One person, and Hence for Others*; John Riley *The Collected Works* (Wirksworth and Leeds: Grosseteste Press, 1980) pp. 93 – 94

¹¹ J. H. Prynne *Poems* (Fremantle and Newcastle upon Tyne: Folio / Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Bloodaxe Books, 1999) p.81

¹² I hear Thomas Campion's *Follow Your Saint* when I read these 'songs'.

¹³ Is that what a prayer is, a necessarily indirect imperative? When dealing with death, who is giving the orders? Gillian Rose touches on this in the last section of *Mourning Becomes the Law* (cited above).

¹⁴ 'Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,'

(‘There’s a certain Slant of light...’)

Emily Dickinson (ed. Thomas H. Johnson) *The Complete poems* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975) p.118

¹⁵ William Carlos Williams *The Collected Later Poems* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965) pp. 60–61.

¹⁶ ‘...poor Lawrence dead.’ ... ‘Dead now...’ ‘Remember, now, Lawrence is dead.’... ‘Poor Lawrence / dead...’ ... ‘Lawrence has passed unwanted...’

William Carlos Williams *The Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1938, 1951) pp. 361-364

¹⁷ It happened that Douglas Oliver and Anthony Barnett visited Dartington, I think for a reading, just before John Riley's funeral in early November 1978. We travelled up to Leeds together for the funeral. Doug told us that he had just been reading something which explained why it was important to attend a funeral: it was so that you really know that the person is dead. I can't now ask him if he can remember what it was he had been reading.

¹⁸ Emily Dickinson, cited above, p.498.

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, under verb¹: 16. To perceive with regret the absence or loss of, to feel the want of...

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in Volume XIV of the Standard edition, translated and edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957); pp. 243 – 258); also in the same volume, ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ and ‘On Transience’; see also, though I would not want to suggest that her work belongs within the category of ‘Freudian psychoanalysis’, Gillian Rose's *Mourning Becomes the Law*, cited above – especially p.35 – which argues that the procedures (and these of course include tempo) of mourning are political, ‘become the law’.

D.7

Time-Play-Space: Playing Up The Visual In Writing

“Perhaps thinking must in future first open the time-play-space for poetising, so that through the poetising word there may again be a wording world.”

Martin Heidegger, “For Eugen Fink on his Sixtieth Birthday.”¹

light ly
falling
time e

I want to approach very slowly this question of the *time* of writing, and how this might differ when attention is on the *look* of writing. This might take time. I am uncertain about the status of some of the modal distinctions implied – as, for example between a ‘visual’ writing and any writing not so called but working through the eye even so – and have a strong intuition that social genres of interaction within which different *modes* of writing occur, or into which they are placed, may have as much to do with modalities of time as the formal temporality of any specific medium.

I came to the making of ‘visual poems’ as a reader and writer of poetry on and for pages where a page is thought of as one in a folded sequence of leaves in a book or magazine. Poetry for the page has an unbroken line of descent from oral forms,

adapting to scriptive and then print literacy and to changes in writing and print technologies. Handwritten and printed poetry draw patterns on pages which a reader encounters before any sounding – actual or imagined – of words begins.

Experienced poetry readers take in at a glance a number of spatial features that will translate later into temporal ones: on any occasion of reading off the page the first reading is, in other words, a visual one of a different order from the systematic decoding of the visual signs of alphabetic script². Even at this stage, though, individual words or word clusters, such as those in titles, might catch attention and insist on their immediate legibility – on transporting a reader through or past their material visuality.

The most obvious features of this immediately visual – pre-lexical – legibility are: line lengths, division into blocks, ratio of type to white space, length of poem. Some preliminary sense of letter form might already be in play too. What is also immediately apparent is whether the page is a formal feature of a poem or is simply a given of book media. Many lyrics are contained within a page or a double-spread. In these cases their *end* is contained before it is encountered: a spatial syllabic journey can be paced within a frame³.

Some readers will also at this stage of (pre-)reading pick out the visual patterning of punctuation marks: will *see* something about syntax, especially perhaps sentence length and clausal complexity, and will anticipate how this plays off against line and stanza breaks. Any such anticipation sets the conditions for reading.

With these introductory remarks I am trying to deflect a misleading distinction between working with visual material, where that material is predominantly

linguistic – even perhaps literary – and working with the familiar literary conventions of a page. The history of writing systems, as seen from the point of view of alphabetic writing, has been one of the making of shapes that can be seen (or felt), that recognisably belong to a specific system or set of rules for a writing game. It would be a very different discussion that considered also those forms of writing that are encountered only as sounded or performed – where there may be no visual signs of script or where a script might have been purposefully transcended or suppressed. It would also be a different one if I were discussing visual material that is not *predominantly* linguistic – the use of linguistic signs as elements of compositions within visual art traditions, for example⁴.

In relation to time there are a number of formal distinctions already in play here. All discourse makes, takes and shapes time. In each case it also differentiates itself from the modes of time that surround it, that immediately precede and follow it. Art works whose medium is temporal through and through are severed from other flows of time through markers of *beginning* and *ending*. Others, with no temporal beginning and end *of their own* – though they may well be severed spatially from their surroundings through border, frame or architectural or topographical placement – invite a temporal negotiation that is their relationship with ‘reader’. These are fundamentally different modes of engagement. What happens when they are brought together?

Forms such as photographs, drawings, paintings can appear to offer everything up *all at once*, allowing for an instantaneous gestalt. The subsequent play of time in, through and across the space then might well feel as though it is the viewer’s⁵. The image allows a viewer to take her or his time, to make time to do so, or not. In contrast, a film and forms of ‘live’ performance whose temporal dimension is fixed

in advance invite a viewer or listener to give themselves over to this already shaped time-within-time. The domestication of digital technology is increasingly allowing for some degree of a breaking or re-ordering of this division of temporal power. And then there is the temporality of linguistic texts: sequenced like film or music by virtue of the concatenated structure of language, but open to the varying competences and engagements of readers. Many literary texts are a time-game between text and potential readers: how can the to-be-absent writer shape the way that the time of the text is measured out? Perhaps this question underlies all prosody, if prosody can be taken to include prose in its reach.

Graphic presentations of poems – let us crudely say, in the first place as graphic *re*-presentation of metrical units and then, as a graphic *im*-presentation of breaks in the chain – offer up the poetic *line* as both a measured entity in the continuities (and hesitations) of a text and also as detachable, as having the capacity to float off and be separately legible, out of sequence. As soon as a poem can be read as an assemblage of lines, each line can come close to giving its legibility away to a glancing encounter – can, in its stretched out way, offer itself for something approaching an all-at-once reading.

As I have implied above, my own insights as a practitioner are drawn from a very constrained notion of the ‘visual’ in relation to text, that starts with the page and the line of poetry and not from art school, and that at least until now has relied wholly on domestic computers and a ready supply of high-street frames. The ‘visual’ genres I have worked with have been mainly domestic objects: framed texts, cards and clock faces. My first prompt was wanting to produce a poem as the cover for a book that, given the ratio of line length to average poem length, was to be in landscape format

(22.8 x 13.8 5³/₈ cms).⁶ A cover invites a different kind of reading from body-text. In the hurried typology above, it is a visually – that means quasi-pictorially – composed space, usually containing quite separable lines of text. Covers do not insist on a reading whose labour must set out at top-left. Detail is plucked, scanned, browsed. At least two modes of temporality are in play, and each mode is a different kind of variable-time reading.

There is a way of taking in an exhibition in a kind of *recce*, with the promise (that is often not kept) of a selective return. Exhibitions (unless they are ‘permanent’) take place in calendrical time. Their openings and closings are a matter of public availability in a fixed place for fixed durations. It is the characteristic posture of a book to be *closed*, and characteristically it is the visual presence of the spine that is the opening that marks this specific closedness. So there are image-collections that open and close in somebody else’s time and there are books that, if available, open in *my* time. Unless I am opening one idly ‘just to see’ or opening one to reacquaint myself with some part of it, the act of opening is the first move in a potentially significant – and often daunting – temporal undertaking.

So there are these different kinds of being-there of images and writings that include: being there and open at given times and being there always but closed and awaiting an opening. And there is another that has come to interest me more and more: those domestic images that, like the books in your shelves, are always there and, on the face of it, always open. They contribute in a number of ways to constituting the time of their environment: how it celebrates continuity-through-time (this is always also a

loss, of youth if not of life) of its members; how it shows itself (or not) as stratified shards of a history beyond this space; how it appeases or appropriates the dead; how it calls in – as memories that may have no originals – absent places or times.

These images are perched on the surfaces of furniture and equipment or hung on walls. There are no set times in day, month or year for ritualising their presence with some special attention and thereby reactivating whatever force is in them. Some of them glaze over through sheer ever-presentness. Visitors might stoop towards such an image and in doing so re-open it to view for others, and when this happens the image participates in the social time that belongs to modes of hospitality, that has its own shapes and conventions.

This kind of presence of framed images is necessarily visual and spatial – a closed-off framed space that helps shape the space it is in and offers at the same time symbolic openings, through the doubleness of all signs, and through their resemblance to doors and windows, to other spaces that are figured within them. A house is a partitioned enclosure – a spatial environment before it is 'visual' – that as an environment can be modulated – every object, every sound, every smell. These framed images are part of this larger composition; sometimes it is enough to sense that they are there.

Their doubleness is temporal as well as spatial. As 'writings', in the broader sense on which Derrida insisted, they temporalise through the oscillating delay that is of the essence of writing. They ambiguate time so that it is a medium you are both within and without or stretched from a now and a then towards that always deferred settling of the score.

At some times of year these images are augmented or displaced with the temporary presence of cards marking anniversaries. Cards are (like) miniature books, in that they enclose – fold in – a text that must be opened, though lack of spine insists on frontal display. There is an established order: image on open display, words inside. Of course there can also be words outside, woven into images or sitting under or over as captions. And the words inside are of two orders, usually: those that come with the card are part of commodity choice, and those personal additions, necessarily hand-written.

There is a tradition too of inscribing a space ('Bless this house', for example, or those joke signs in kitchens). This form of inscription is the opposite of hand-writing. The hand-written card says, as it were: 'This is again your / our time and I hereby acknowledge it; when this marked time is over you will throw these words away, and next year I will send again'. In contrast any formal inscription – carved or embroidered letters, say – places the obduracy of the labour of writing over against time: to throw such words away is an act of violence. They are 'for ever'.

This environment for and of words and images has increasingly attracted me: an infiltration of words marked with their labour into the space both of domestic photographs and of inscriptions which connect homes with other places of public inscription: places that ritualise religion, genealogy, death, state power and law, and that do so in large part within a formal and discursive theme that declares the necessity for social and transcendent continuities *despite* mortality. Whatever their formal means – and they are significant – their temporal situation is *in* this despite and that is where their work goes on.

At the same time, these formal means that are adopted in the visualising and temporalising of domestic space, are promoted and displayed in the standard games of marketing, in which time is mobilised equally as anxiety and promise. And there is now a developing technology for printing, which, in relationship of hand and eye, moves the emphasis from hand to eye, and in doing so casualises monumentalism and public inscription.

For Heidegger, the temporality of Being is a unity made up of the three 'ecstases' of having-been, making-present, and not-yet, with primacy given to the future. The translators of the 1962 translation of *Being and Time* provide the following gloss on *ecstasis*:

The root-meaning of the word 'ecstasis' (Greek 'ἔκστασις'; German, 'Ekstase') is 'standing outside'. Used generally in Greek for the 'removal' or 'displacement' of something, it came to be applied to states of mind which we would now call 'ecstatic'. Heidegger usually keeps the root-meaning in mind, but he is also keenly aware of its close connection with the root-meaning of the word 'existence'.⁷

This is how Heidegger leads up to the use of the term:

The future, the character of having been, and the Present, show the phenomenal characteristics of the 'towards-oneself', the 'back-to', and the 'letting-oneself-be-encountered-by'. The phenomena of the "towards...", the "to...", and the "alongside...", make temporality manifest as the *ekstatikon* [Greek letters in the original] pure and simple. *Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself.* [Italics in original]⁸

This comes 350 pages into a patient argument that relies on a deliberately repeated use of terms and cannot readily be lifted out of context. Even so I want rather simply-mindedly to follow a few of the indications from the passage from which this excerpt is taken. Heidegger has just argued that 'temporality' is a verb masquerading as a noun; even though it is used as the subject of predication it shouldn't be, because

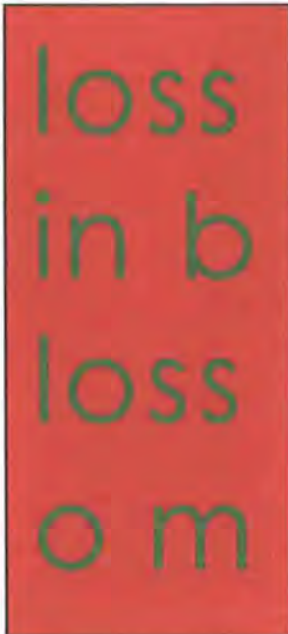
'temporality temporalizes', it never just 'is'. Taking this together with the notion of the 'ecstatic' which brings together "'outside-of-itself'" with "in and for itself", I want to suggest an interaction between the way any given text *performs* time, in a performance that is 'ecstatic' in relation both to its environment and 'itself', and that engages thereby with temporalities beyond its own. This engagement can be with its 'context of utterance' – its situation, where and between whom it is placed; in association with what other behaviours and texts – and it can be expressed thematically. There is obviously a difference between the performance of time and statements about time.

I used a plural for 'temporalities' just then where I suspect Heidegger would have used an essentialising singular. This is partly because I have no way of feeling certain in the face of a phenomenally transcendent Time and partly because of an awareness that 'our time' is multiply temporalised, however vaguely these temporalities may be sensed.

There can perhaps be some simplifying distinctions: between a time which could loosely be called cosmological (theological, geological, astro-physical, Darwinian – even biological); one that is historical (historiological, perhaps); an order of temporality which is in some sense a time of being and becoming (and therefore too of having-been), and of death; an order which is to do with a quite specific *now* or a quite specific *then* (in which because of the nature of writing – indeed of language – any *now* is already a *then* and any *then* is being recuperated into an already past *now*); and an order which is to do with *taking-time* and shaping it as a medium (how much, how fast, how long, how pulsed (divided into repetition)?

Of course these can be thematised – the earlier ones almost necessarily so – within writing – but themes are relatively promiscuous in relation to forms and formal procedures and I shall try – and fail – in what is to come in this essay to leave aside any predominantly thematic engagements with time.

In relation to everything above, how does a text ‘perform time’ and what do ‘visual materials’ have to do with this? To save time I shall be schematic. I shall use, in the spirit of the invitation to participate in this discussion, a piece of my own. It is a version, adapted for the context of this article, of a visual poem that I made first a few years ago. I should say that I am still working on this because it has only really ‘worked’ in one frame (Varnished beech; external dimensions: 20 x 25 cms; opening: 8.5 x 13.6 cms). Since I often start with the frame, its shape, size, colour(s) and materials are part of the poem from the outset, not just as an afterthought.



The characteristics of time that I shall consider include: duration, tempo, fluctuation, variability.

Duration: how long does it last? How long does it *seem* to last? How does the experience of duration it offers provide a point of correspondence with other kinds of experience or sense of duration? How long will it endure (hold off decay, as a printed object)?

Tempo derives from the Latin word for time; in itself it is as an attitude to time and a way of pacing it; it is the experience of time as movement rather than as duration (a stretch between two *thens*, organised as anticipation and memory in relation a

moving *now*). 'Pace'⁹ is a good metaphoric term because it breaks movement into paces, steps. How is the text paced? The word has narrowed its meaning to 'speed' but that is only one aspect of pacing and excludes the extended sense of 'gait'.

Fluctuation: perhaps this word can catch some of the changeable *dynamics* of tempo, its disruptions or flowings in different directions: the irregularities that imply a regularity. Fluctuation is characteristic of a text and is encountered through 'reading'.

Variability allows for different time relations between text and 'reader'.

So how can these terms help understand the time-being of the visual poem above? I shall run them across a different set of headings: grammatical time, prosodic time, lexical time and discursive time. I hope to subsume under these headings two others: structural (or architectonic) time, and, of course, themed time.

Grammatical time: grammar has little to do with duration except in so far – and that is quite far – as a sentence has duration, as a sentence insists on the significance of its duration. 'Loss in blossom' is a noun phrase making use of a familiar 'x in y' structure. It carries no grammatical setters or markers of time – no verbs (and therefore no marked tense), no adverbs or adjectives of time; its preposition 'in' can be temporal (though is more often spatial, perhaps). In its temporal mode 'in' can be a 'now' marker: 'It *is* the time when loss is in blossom'.

Syntax performs time by performing through time in the linear operation of word order. Syntax has tempo, relating to complexity (and also always borrowing from its discursive context – for example the tempo of preceding sentences); and complexity

also produces fluctuation. Although not a completed sentence, 'Loss in blossom' can count as complete in discourse on the analogy of a caption or title. Syntactically, I suggest, this does not lack, does not frustrate, does not suffer from the loss of a verb. If treated as an ellipse, there are two easy solutions, carrying different meanings: 'Loss is in blossom' or 'There is loss in blossom'.

Also, another form of syntax is invoked, one that is pictorial rather than linguistic: the compositional space of a defined rectangle announces wholeness every bit as resoundingly as any rounded-off sentence and brings with it centuries of expectations about two-dimensional spatial order.

So what does this all this mean for syntactical time? As the person who made it I have to be careful here. What I think it does is send it back to itself so that the reading can be done at a glance and yet never be over. The phrase has a beginning and end but is so short that it has ended before it has begun. The containment of pictorial space (at least partially) absolves the phrase from the drive to become sentence.

Prosodic time: This is a poem in four lines, having an uncertain number of syllables (four or five – how do you treat the 'b' in line 2? Do you sound it at all? Is it 'Beh'? Do you slide or elide into loss? Or do you do all of these in another act that sends you back?), with 13 letters. It is the equivalent of the first two feet of a single pentameter line. Its prosody, in common with all page poetry, is both graphic and phonic, but it leads with the graphic so that letter form (Century Gothic), letter size (44 point), line-breaking, character spacing, justification, are all part of its matrix of decisions. Character spacing and justification are intended to create an inner

rectangle of letters to declare its fit (its rhyme) with the rectangle of the frame. Two of the four(?) syllables are identical, pointing up a strong rhyme. There is an assonantal relationship between the short 'o' of 'loss' and that in 'o m'.

The 13 letters are made up as follows: four 's's, three 'o's, two 'l's, one 'b', one 'i', one 'm' and one 'n'. This means that actually only seven different letters are used, with considerable repetition. Below is the lower-case alphabet in Century Gothic, highlighting the used letters. It is a type-face of deliberate design simplicity.¹⁰

abc**def**gh**ijkl**mnop**qrst**uvwxyz

The letters chosen are either formed through uprights (l, i), rounds and part-rounds (o, s) or a combination of the two (b, m, n). Many others could have been used within these constraints. The following are outside the range in that they contain straight horizontals and diagonals: e, f, k, t, v, w, x, y, z.

Two colours are used, one for figure, one for ground. They are 'simple' colours.

This is as tight and as enclosed a double prosody as could be expected. It does not itself in any way stretch time so much as assert its own spatial repeatability. Perhaps there is not so much fluctuation as oscillation: colour vibration in association with an oscillation between text / between-text / text / between-text, and so on. The piece is always there. It is for a reader to enter it and then, having entered, to leave, if only temporarily: this is its variability.

Lexical time (etymological and intertextual): Of course individual words, as syllables and combinations of syllables, have duration and tempo. This makes it possible for poems to consist of single words. But that is a consideration for prosody. As lexical items they only work – and only produce fluctuations – because they have done time, because they have accrued meaning and force through usage and association; they bring this with them by appealing to prior knowledge, by putting the dispersed having-beens of linguistic items up against the linguistic having-been of a ‘reader’.

In this case there is a vocabulary of three words, though the prosodic arrangement might trouble the certainty of that statement. Is ‘om’ supposed to be a word here? After all T.S.Eliot used it in one of the best known (modernist) poems of the early twentieth century. And what about ‘bloss’? Does it sound like a word? Or is that just because it is so like ‘bless’ and ‘bliss’ – ideas that may seem to have natural affinity with ‘blossom’. These neighbouring words are also neighbours in the room where one framed version of the poem hangs and another sits.

If any of this querying occurs in a reading (and I don’t mean one that sets out with exacting critical and analytic attention) then there is lexical fluctuation, never resolvable, present to every circuit of the reading.

But what of the words that are certainly there: ‘loss’, ‘in’ and ‘blossom’. In the terms of this discussion the word that oscillates most for me is ‘in’, a preposition of space and time. As a preposition of time it is as *present* as any preposition can be (too punctual a present to allow for the continuities of ‘during’). It suggests ‘now’, but also carries that intimate spatiality of ‘within’.

A term like 'in', though, is not usually experienced (leaving language mechanics like poets and linguists aside here) as having a history. I assume that it is treated as having a workaday function. The other two words are, I suspect, encountered as 'steeped' and as 'poetic'; as word-objects they carry a sense of having been around and both semantically allude to time. 'Loss' is a melancholy or mournful relationship with the past¹¹. 'Blossom' is (*stands for*, in popular usage) an annual, transient occurrence of bliss. As words they carry etymological and intertextual time; as semantic items they thematise it.

Discursive time: what is the discursive context for this 'thematization' – a grand term indeed for three words? I try to write as a reader now! Perhaps there are two epigrams – in other words two condensed and elliptical arguments worked into each other and borrowing off each other. One is a little aperçu: that the linguistic sequence 'l-o-s-s' doubles – both graphically and phonetically – as the word 'loss' and as a sounded element of the word 'blossom'. The same could be said of 'colossal', as another example. But here it is 'blossom' and not 'colossal'. So the other epigram is about a most familiar seasonal cycle: the transitoriness or fragility of blossom, that is enjoyed always with the poignancy of love for the about-to-be-lost. There is, of course, a long and strong tradition of poems on this topic¹², with a choice of moral.

I have already touched on the social discursive context for the framed versions of this poem that I have made. One hangs and one sits where family photographs might be found. I don't want to suggest that there is a single performative for family photographs and paintings, mantelpiece objects, paintings of scenes, but there is no doubt that one is to *bless*. Blissful images of a past act as charms towards the future:

to bless individuals, to bless the collective *family*, to bless this *house*, this place that enacts the continuities of loved beings, even of genealogies.

The etymological note on ‘bless’ in the OED marks a convergence between a Teutonic term meaning “to mark (or affect in some way) with blood (or sacrifice); to consecrate” with the Latin term *benedicere*, (etymologically) “to speak well of”. “At a very early date”, the note goes on, ‘the popular etymological consciousness began to associate this verb with the n. BLISS ‘benignity, blitheness, joy, happiness, which affected the use of both terms.’”

stand
ing a
part i
n bliss

This poem – loss in blossom – has a companion piece, filed in its directory as ‘ecstasy’, and produced well before my reading of Heidegger.

There is an awkwardness in this lexical history, carried in the word ‘bless’ and transferred to ‘bliss’, that wishes, as it were, to cover a wound of sacrifice with a speaking well. And then there is an insertion into and invocation of the specific discursive context of *home*, where the fit might too

be awkward, where the taken-for-grantedness of an established (though troubled) temporality might just be further troubled by a speaking well that confounds itself, by a speaking that repeats itself.

Have you seen? Have you read? Do you see? In the present tense of a seeing that all the same takes time?

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Rowe (web journal)

¹ Martin Heidegger *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) p.369

² I have discussed this aspect of pre-reading in 'Eluded Readings: trying to tell stories about reading some recent poems'. This was given as a talk at Birkbeck College, London University on March 26th 2003 and will appear in *The Gig*, 15 (Willowdale, Ontario, 2003).

³ Compare, for example, a page in almost any of the original Tom Raworth books with their appearance in the recent *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003). Quite apart – if you can manage the 'apart' – from paper, typeface and other differences in the book object, the gaps and blanks – spaces and turnings that are temporal transitions – are unavoidably re-written. It isn't that one book is 'visual' and the other isn't; it is more that they are very different kinds of visual objects.

⁴ *The Dual Muse: The Writer as Artist · The Artist as Writer* (Exhibition catalogue: Essays by Johanna Drucker and William H. Gass; Introduction by Cornelia Homburg, (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1997) on the whole comes at its stated duality – at least through its images – from the point of view of 'art'. The essays by Robert Vas Dias and Mark Leahy in the catalogue for the exhibition *Verbal Inter Visual: Linking Worlds of Art and Poetry* (London: Central St Martins, 2001) explore the same 'confluence', with more attention to poetry. In both cases the conventions of exhibition probably pull the work in the direction of 'art'.

⁵ Photographs are perhaps the most poignant in the way original light-drawn images are captured at quite specific points in time and yet, once processed – and especially if framed and hung – are open and vulnerable in their exposure to quite different flows of time.

⁶ John Hall *Days* (Pensnett: Grosseteste Review Books, 1972); the cover is reproduced at http://www.shearsman.com/pages/gallery/john_hall/books2.html

⁷ Martin Heidegger *Being and Time* (Oxford et al: Blackwell, 1962), translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson; Footnote 2, p.377

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Meaning 6 in the OED gives: 'any one of the various gaits or manners of the stepping of a horse'; and 7: 'Rate of stepping; rate of progression...'. 'Gait' would do well as an alternative for pace; or that specific sense of a 'going', when applied to the gait rather than the state of the track.

¹⁰ I should say that I have made versions of the piece using other fonts, including one with light serifs and distorted rounds.

¹¹ I want to relegate to a footnote the obvious comment that *loss* is a concept central to at least one 'world religion' and also to psychoanalysis.

¹² About the same number of miles as centuries from where I write this, Robert Herrick in *To Daffadils*, for example.

D.8.i

Reading (i)legible Pages

What is it to read a page? But there are so many pages, so many readings. Is there always a resistance from a page? Is a page always both resistance and lure? Or can you pass through or over it, skimming off its layer of language to re-embody it as speech or ineffable lived experience? I am going to take a special case of resistance, that of illegibility, to help ask the question. It may not be such a special case.

illegible



I have found it very difficult to get this word ~~illegible~~ ~~ineligible~~ ~~intelligible~~ to behave consistently, to be intelligible as a fixed sign in the space of a page for which it is eligible. There is a seemingly irresolvable jostling for a place with at least these two other words, and a third (fourth) comes in derisively with an elegant clarity that is nowhere legible in its form. There is this jumble of 'i's, 'g's and 'l's that are the same at the beginning and end but confused in the middle. The following is a kind of graphic representation of a version of this jumbled hearing:

inelegant? / ineloquent?

In this example the three words accept the conventional rule of horizontal line and have also been drawn to same length ('stretched to frame'). It is easy to see that there are three 'g's; less easy that there are three final 'e's; very difficult that there are three initial 'i's. Looking at it again I find that *intelligible* wins out over the others. Perhaps this is because I want it to. The next example sticks to the rectilinear grid implied by a lineating page and enabled by the operating matrix of a computer 'page' but slightly separates the words vertically. Is this more or less legible? Is the word sandwiched in the middle now lost? This word is 'illegible' and this word is illegible (to me, who put it there).

The software on the computer I am using finds 'inelegant / ineloquent' above perfectly legible as both 'editable text' and as 'image'. Any text whether legible or illegible can be read as image. But the overlaid words are illegitimate in the computer's domain of text recognition. This can suggest three overlapping categories: text operating primarily to deliver (optical) character recognition (by humans and machines); text as *legible* 'image' (in speech marks to allow room in 'image' for tactility, spatiality, mobility...); text operating as *image-of-text*.

in / il / ill

There is something else unsettled about these words: an ambiguity of the 'in' (or transformed 'il') In two of the three words it is a morpheme for negation (just like 'un' in 'unreadable') while in the third it is not 'in' at all but an eroded 'inter' with a

spatial force of *between* or *within*. I can't get rid of this prepositional and adverbial force from the other two. Everybody knows that 'illegible' means that you can't read it; but is everybody quite so sure that it doesn't also acknowledge a performative (transformative) of *into* legibility or an uncovering of what is lurking *within* or *between* legibilities, another order of legibility.

There is also the syllabic pun of *il* / *ill*, suggesting two states of legibility: *ill legibility* and *well legibility*. Searchers for legibility will always find something that they can read, to the extent that filtered or suppressed legibility is often a lure into reading, if a modified and resisted reading, or a reading that finds another circuit or flow. According to Harley¹ reading is, at least at the level of word recognition and at least for literates, 'mandatory'. Confronted with writing you don't choose whether or not to read. If your reading is blocked what do you do²?

But you do choose, do you, to open a book? When you do open a book what you see are pages. And on those pages?

Page, book and text

Page is a term in a set of at least three, the other two being *book* and *text*. It is the middle term: a page is in a book; text is in/on a page³.

Actually it is not quite as simple as that. *Book* is standing in as a term for any generic form of folded or fixed assemblage of pages, such, for example, as a newspaper.

And although *writing* is still perhaps the primary association with page, 'text' must be supplemented with 'or image/text or image and text'. Images on pages nearly

always have words in close proximity. When those words are captions they are expected to be efficient, instrumental, deferential: it is the materiality of the image that counts, not theirs.

Book

A 'book' is a fold containing pages. The minimum number of pages in a book is four (including the covers). Because a book is a fold, for a reading to take place somebody has had to unfold it. A contemporary adult reader expects to do this herself. When a book – as most of them are – is a manifold, then there are many turnings. Each opening is also a closing. Every closed page is, as such, illegible. Most of the pages in the world are closed and therefore, as I write, illegible. I take it that every reader is from time to time overwhelmed by the thought of all these illegible pages.

It is easy to feel superior as a reader to some forms of illegibility but only some.

Page

Most pages are now made of paper. When you fold and unfold a book you touch paper. You might even run your finger along the line just ahead of or below your reading.

So a page is a surface to be handled, touched and stroked. Each page is also a space and a view. As a space it is a site where objects are (or could be) placed (composition) and where movement takes place between them ('reading'). The objects are marks. Even an empty page is scanned, perhaps felt. On an empty page there are no legible marks. This does not mean that an empty page is wholly illegible.

Its textured surface, its size, its shape, its colour, can be read. Momentum from immediately preceding reading might project on to it an imaginary spectral text. It can behave with the doubleness particular to a screen: screening off and ready for a screening.

There are different kinds of empty pages. Some are there to be filled. Some are places of transition, pause, rest, or an extra fold like a wrapping asserting the value of the filled pages between. Others are blank because that is what is written on them: nothing, white on white.⁴

For a sheet (of paper, especially) to be a page, it must either be written on or available for writing; it must also either be in a book, have come from a book (what severance!), be going to a book, or otherwise mimic in its configuration what is to be found in a book.

There is no such thing as one page since a sheet that becomes a page is double-sided. To talk of a single page is to insist on forgetting *the other side*. The other side might well be an *under* side, or a *back* side. I am not sure what difference it makes to know that this is blank.

Page as three 'field vectors'

Each page, whether filled or not, is a complex force field that is a dynamic of (at least) three vectorial fields. For brevity I'll call them lineating field, framing field, mapping field.

Lineating field

Within a top-to-bottom, left-to-right, writing system, the page's association with text privileges the top left hand corner. This is a quite specific privilege like the GO square on the monopoly board: it marks a starting point and a new lap. In this space the privilege of beginning and end of line is played down: all marks are presumed equal unless explicitly signalled otherwise (as headings or footnotes, for example). The space of the page is already a kind of strip-field, with a left edge as a place to re-start and a right to drop and return. Faced with a filled page no reader can do it all at once. The best thing you can do is to try not to stumble as you move from left to right and then down, left to right and then down, with your eyes making their saccadic jumps only slightly ahead, aware of peripheral (illegible) textuality above and below (Harley 2001, p.142). The waymarks are the graphic characters belonging to writing, all of which also face right. To sustain this particular lineating vector the marks will all be clear and recognisable and in all other ways will follow the rules of written language.



There is, as it were, a gate at top left and another at bottom right. This page is something you pass through. But then you start again even though in some respects it is a new field. A "real page-turner" is a book which suppresses the sense of re-starting, of repetition.



Though the lines are visually in parallel, procedurally they are in series and the series is hardly interrupted by the turn of the page.

How welcome the gaps and indents are, when they come – those spaces inscribed not with letter forms or even punctuation marks but with empty characters placed there

by way of space bar, return key, tab key, or by lifting the pen momentarily off the surface.

Lack of graphic clarity in this kind of page will stall or crash a reading, provoke obsessive decipherment or just encourage you to skip. This is page in a relay of pages. Everything moves forward. You can always go back to get a better run at it, use the momentum to guess your way through.

Andrew Powers is one writer who has recently exploited relative contrast to pick out a secondary text and leave the faint tones of the original text difficult to read (Lama Lobsang Darjy and Powers, 2003). Tom Phillips has of course taken varied and extreme approaches to the same principle in his continuing work on *A Humument* and its related texts. (Phillips 1997). Forced Entertainment have used selective obliteration in their textual version of *Speak Bitterness* (Forced Entertainment 1995).

Page as frame

The page's framed character, usually reinforced with a margin, organises the space quite differently, playing up its relationship with pictorial space and with conventions of composition that are to do with containment, rather than with passage, with a mirroring back of held foveal vision rather than with the mobility of a traveller's searching gaze, with scanning rather than forwarding, with marks that form visual constellations rather than with linguistic tracks. Sequence of engagement is relatively open and it is quite possible to look at writing without reading it – in fact to recognise that writing is just a particular way of making marks on paper. It may be enough for marks to look like writing.

The term constellation is intended to suggest that not all marks in the framed page are equal – blocks, graphic edges, swirls, implied centres, patterning, all these will establish a viewing or reading hierarchy that is not the same as in a lineated sequence.

In the page as a frame it may not be at all clear what is signal and what is noise.

When the framed page is a formal determinant within textual genres, the page is then not just where writing happens; it belongs to writing.

At this point let me remind you that I am suggesting that all three vectors are at work within any page, with their relative force varying in readerly expectation and textual realisation. Lineated reading has now such a strong history that many pages



are divided into grids of visual frames, to be read from top left as in the set of ideograph-like figures made by Cris Cheek using his tongue and various dyes (Cobbing and Upton 1998, no page numbers).

Page as map

And thirdly, mapping: the rectangular plane of the page provides axes and coordinates for mapping position, movement, orientation, time. As a map the page is a space allowing for the remembering or anticipation of specific locations, or journeys and connections other than the lineated or constellated ones: a graphic or textual item with its own specific co-ordinates. As an illustration, when you are looking for a particular phrase or sentence in a book you have read, don't you recall that it is, for



(A map of prosodic form: it is most certainly a poem that has been rendered 'illegible'.)

A mapped page may even be concerned in mapping morphological and syntactic features, breaking and shaping words and grammar to re-reveal their parts, perhaps to transform the part they can play in 'speech'. It will use spatial configuration to map tempo or to complicate time in a trapped angle between the time of concatenation and the space of composition. In a mapped page there is more than one syntax at work, more than one morphological set. Forms of lettrism can treat each individual character as a morpheme within a grammar that may not ever be fully actualised.

Text

The three vectors are different ways of talking about anticipations and realisations of different logics for patterns of marking. *Marking* on pages is usually done with ink and provides the *figure* to the page's *ground*. And in this context I am talking specifically about those kinds of marks that are available as the graphic means for writing, and, also, those marks that sufficiently resemble writing to suggest through their presence that writing may be the topic if not the means of the marks.

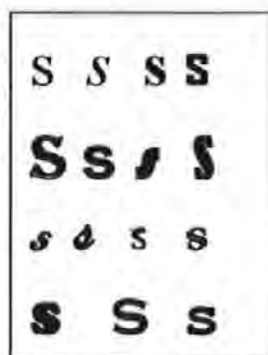
Let's rehearse something about the recursivity involved in alphabetic writing whose destination is a page.

There is a surface ready. This will act as ground. It may not yet be a page. It may be a sheet. It may be a screen. This surface must be fit for the purpose of legible marking – not too absorbent or too resistant, too rough, too crumpled, too dark, too bright. There will be the means – equipment and materials – for applying marks to that surface. Each mark will contrast with the surface to which it is applied and will stand out from that surface as figure to ground. Too much or too little contrast – both of these disturb reading.

The precise shaping of each mark is already itself marked with a history of association – in other words these tiny 'meaningless' elements that are used to set language in motion are already written all over with 'meaning'.

These marks of writing, these letters, punctuation marks, numbers and other related symbols, that can currently be shaped by hand (usually using an implement) or relayed through a keystroke, relate to the soundedness of spoken language. This is not at all exact. For one thing their grapheme-phoneme relationship is not in all respects fixed. And for another the correspondence relies not on actual sounds and fixed character forms but instead assumes zones of differentiation within systemic set of visual signs belonging to graphology and of sound signs belonging to phonology.

Here is a range of drawings of the letter 's' currently available in the top part of the font set of Microsoft Word:



As a form of marking, writing lies anywhere on a continuum between being a species of line drawing and a species of stamping – in other words applying the already-drawn. It is never a case of drawing what you see or hear. It is always a matter of re-drawing drawings that have set purposes in a given writing system and of doing so in a context where different modes and styles of drawing operate too as registers of affect and differential social exchange (“In your best handwriting...”).

The word ‘drawing’ catches very well the cursive movement of a hand over paper. It will not do for the punctiveness of cuneiform or the soft percussiveness of computer keyboard writing. This latter is of course a form of clip-art. The drawings are already in memory. Choose the style (font) and select with a stroke. You will not see that I hit the keys in anger from an impression on paper. You will not witness my tentativeness, verging on the illegible. If I want you to see my anger I shall need to represent it as a deliberate supplement. I shall choose tentativeness as sign, perhaps by doing no more than damping the contrast between figure and ground. Gesture of a hand mark is brought back in as a simulation.

These graphic marks are crucially members of combinatorial sets. They are added together, usually in horizontal lines, to make syllables and words, using conventions of spacing or of joins that preserve as well as possible their differential status (‘m’ not ‘m’, for example). Legibility counts on the integrity of the letter form – its size, shape, density, contrast with ground, spacing, stylistic consistency with other letters in the set.

Using unfamiliar or ineligible combinations (consonantal strings without vowels, for example) will block sounding and frustrate word recognition.

Writing has come to rely on punctuation – crucially on word spacing – but also on parsing markers – switches at clausal or sentence joins. Punctuation marks are enablers of reading but do not have the status of graphemes. To produce an illegible page, strip out all punctuation including word spaces. Alternatively treat punctuation marks as belonging to their own exclusive combinatorial set (for example Bergvall 1996).

Where there is writing – or something that looks like writing – there is always something to read. Resistance in one layer might re-route reading to another.⁵

Legibility of text

In alphabetic writing systems, basic legibility relies on grapheme-phoneme transfer: that individual graphemes can be recognised and discriminated from within a written-language set *and* recognised as indices of phonemes that are thereby activated *as though* they belong to the sound shapes of spoken language.

Below or to the side of this base, there can be: recognition and discrimination of graphemes with no or limited transfer; recognition that there *are* graphemes on the page (see the cheek example above) but without information for full discrimination and transfer.

At a higher level, the grapheme-phoneme transfer has to be effective enough for the sequenced combinations in the graphological modality to activate transfer on to a

parallel modality of phonological combinations, leading to the articulation of syllables. This doesn't mean that you have 'understood' – you may be effecting this transfer in a language that you know just well enough to sound in your head but not well enough to be at ease with its lexicon and grammatical construction. There may not, in other words, have been a phoneme-morpheme or grapheme-morpheme transfer. You could at this level produce a homophonic translation but not a literal one.

Fluent legibility (reader *and* text) produces further and further transfers into semantic exchange and, most importantly, into pragmatic engagement with the text's world and the world of the text.

Textual transactions

I have been treating legibility and illegibility as sets of conditions affecting transactions of readers with marks on pages, where the marks either belong to or gesture towards writing.

A will to read has to be in play for the terms to have any sense at all. Obviously a given text can be seen to meet conditions of legibility without being legible to *me* because I don't know the language, the writing system, am unfamiliar with the handwriting of a person, place or time, or am simply not practised at coping with a wide range of letter forms. Parties to the transactions of reading are not equal. An easier solution would be to describe legibility as a condition of a text rather than a condition of relationship with a text. But there's no legibility – and therefore no illegibility – without readers.

'Legibility' could be the term for the textual condition where the graphic marks are performing their linguistic function without in any way drawing attention to themselves. They simply (!) carry a reader's desire into the text as though this were a wholly paraphrasable domain. They provide a signal whose 'noise' is not even noticed by a reader absorbed in narrative or argument or some instrumental transaction that is the context of the message. The 'message' is the text and the graphic marks are the channel or perhaps operating code, no more visible than the computer languages that provide a deep structure for the 'user-friendly' interface.

There are variations to these neutral conditions. One is that the code can be degraded, be very noisy, and you struggle to listen to the signal through all the noise. Another is that the signal is so noisy you shut it out, you don't bother. Another is that you find yourself treating the noise as the signal⁶. And here we may have differences between illegibility, the representation of illegibility, and a readerly code-switch, that looks for readability in a different part of the message (Hayles 2002, pp. 50-51). Finally – and I have Jakobson's definition of the poetic in mind here (Jakobson 1960) – the elements of the code might themselves *become* the message through phatic display, hyper-legibility.

In all but the condition of neutral or 'ideal' legibility, a reader's desire encounters friction at the very moment of activation, is obstructed, distracted or refracted by any questionable status of the mark-page relationship. Consciousness of legibility is already a kind of il/legibility, is a material reminder of the material processes of reading and as a force cannot ever mark an absence of meaning-affect-effect. You can always walk away but already something has happened. A mark that belongs to writing is always a mark or trace of utterance as well as an instance of a writing

system. As sign of utterance it will always provoke some form of psychographological reading, however casual. A sign has been left and this already implies a Someone; perversely this someone may have tried to obscure the very sign they have left; there may have been later sabotage; the sign might be a sign of obliteration of the sign. Who knows, illegibility in some cases might be the paranoid gesture that repeatedly reveals the site of a crypt it thinks it is thereby hiding (Abraham and Torok 1994). In others, of course, it is strategic activism within the politics of textual interaction.

PS: Some types of illegibility

A different essay could start at this point and set out to try to read some pages in which illegibility is at issue. (And indeed I shall attempt in separate note to comment on the contribution to this issue by Tanja Dabo) Instead I shall finish with a sweeping set of gestures towards different kinds of symptoms of and different strategies for il/legible texts. I am not in this context including those experiences of unreadability that can be produced by syntax, vocabulary, unfamiliar encyclopaedic reference or an unrecognised performative function. Instead I am seeing illegibility as inadequacy in or 'damage' to the material features of a text – the ink, the letter forms, the paper, for example.

Page

The page itself, the paper, as one side of a two-sided object, is vulnerable to many forms of damage: burning, crumpling, tearing, cutting and re-assembling, shredding and re-assembling (TNWK – see below), folding, spillage, cup or glass marks, gluing up, pasting over, sealing, deterioration through exposure to heat, light, damp. Most poignantly a page is vulnerable to loss, to being lost.



TNWK (things not worth keeping) *'Retrospective Screen' – an occurrence of things not worth keeping at Dartington Arts Gallery March 1 – 12th 2000 including woven shreds from 'shre(a)d(d)ing title (TNWK www.)*

Graphic marks

Overprinting, scale of characters (too small or blown up beyond definition), degradation or poor definition; (partial) erasure; obliteration; distortions; use of letters, words or lines to make drawings (including collaging of text-parts to form non-linguistic shapes (Jaeger in Cobbing and Upton 1998); a refusal to respect the usual rules of combination; interruption of “techartypographic layout with a kind of gestural semiotics”.⁷

Interventions between the two

Many of these forms of production of illegibility are quite specific to the writing machine (Hayles 2002) current and available. Much of the typewriter art of earlier decades took procedures, forms and effects from the fact that a typewriter was designed exclusively as a *writing* machine. Anyone who had used a typewriter could

look at typewriter art and feel her hands shadow the movements of paper and carriage in a need to change orientation and positioning. Or else the cutting and pasting would be literal and not the metaphor of PC terminology. Distortions could also be achieved through moving a sheet on a photocopier. Now this can still be done on a scanner bed but there is no need since the same effects can be produced through the use of software. Again we have a move from reading gesture to reading representation of gesture.

Could all these be talked about as no more than the production techniques for 'new' kinds of cultural commodities⁸? Or are they 'signal vacations' (Joanna Drucker in Cobbing 1998), games played within the instability of written language, or acts of revenge against the written where it has appeared most stable? Or instances of remappings and reinterpretations of the human body through its cybernetic engagement with texts? (Hayles 2002, p. 51) Or acts of avoidance – holdings or foldings back within acts of writing from what is too appalling to be written? There are so many pages, so many illegibilities.

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¹ "When you see a word, you cannot help but read it." (Harley 2001, p.150)

² "The antiabsorptive does not so much prevent / absorption as shift its plane / of engagement— forcing / a shift in attentional focus." from 'Artifice of Absorption' (Bernstein 1992, p.76)

³ "Writing is not *on* paper, like a flat projection upon a screen, but it is *in* the paper, as it were." Robert Sheppard (in Cobbing and Upton, 1998; no page numbers)

⁴ The blank and the black pages in *Tristram Shandy* are both highly legible – one to be filled, the other a graphic version of ‘Alas, poor Yorick’. Images of these can be seen on the Glasgow University Library website. The image of the blank page (147) shows that it is not blank at all. The text of p.148 shows through, to my eye just below legibility. (Sterne 2000)

⁵ Jacques Lacan’s reply to M. Valabrega, when he has just said, “*In consequence it is the forgetting of the dream that is the obstacle*”, “It isn’t the obstacle, it’s part of the text.” (Lacan 1991, p.126) or Gertrude Stein, ‘it is wonderful how handwriting which is illegible can be read, oh yes it can’. (cited in Perloff 1998, p.264, and Dworkin 2003, p. xviii; Stein’s proposition appears on p.155 of *The Geographical History of America* (New York: Random House, 1936). The Dworkin citation – and inclusion in the bibliography – was mistakenly omitted from the published version of this article).

⁶ N Katherine Hayles discussing Roland Barthes *S/Z* in Hayles 1990, p.188: ‘Barthes concludes that “literatures are in fact arts of ‘noise’” and declares that this “defect in communication” is “what the reader consumes”’.

⁷ Steve McCaffery in Cobbing and Upton 1998.

⁸ How new? *Tristram Shandy* was first published between 1759 and 1767; Joanna Drucker’s *The Century of Artist’s Books* was published in 1995 (New York: Granary Books)

⁹ See note 5, above.

D.8.ii

Reading A Polished Page

Reading a polished page

A rectangular photographic space, itself a surface, offers another surface whose ~~only~~ clearest outlines are the edges of the frame. Including or to the surface is an arm, severed by the frame edge, holding a ray and appearing to press the one to the surface. This arm, the ray, a smear of white paste, darker areas of stain - all these are outlined within the frame, attaining a view of what constitutes pure surface, how such purity could be attained. Outline differentiates - divides up a surface into things that might interact. Pure surface? Would that be an absorption of everything visible in the scene?

I am looking at two versions of a photographic image by Tanya Debó, one of them on a flat computer screen (23 x 33 cms on the screen), the other on photographic paper (24 x 36 cms), with an acetate overlay. The one on my computer screen must have been scanned in. Like the one the wire comes in from the top left. In the paper version, the acetate traces outlines that can be traced on the surface and marks the islands and peninsulas and lakes.

D.8.iii

Reading A Polished Page

A rectangular photographic space, itself a surface, offers another surface whose clearest outlines are the edges of the frame. Intruding on to this surface is an arm, severed by the frame edge, holding a rag and appearing to press this on to the surface. This arm, the rag, a smear of white paste, darker areas of stain – all these are outlined within the frame, altering a sense of what constitutes pure surface, how such purity could be attained. Outline differentiates – divides up a surface into things that might interact. Pure surface? Would that be an absorption of everything visible into the same?

I am looking at two versions of a photographic image by Tanja Dabo, one of these on a flat computer screen (23 x 33 cms on the screen), the other on photographic paper (24 x 36 cms), with an acetate overlay. Both of these versions are as it were on the way, are part of a process towards publication on a folded page. The one on my computer screen must have been scanned in. In this one, the arm comes in from the top left. In the paper version, the acetate marks up the outlines that can be found on the surface and tags the islands and peninsulas, seas and lakes so formed, with capital letter signs of 'G' and 'M'. A handwritten note on another piece of paper explains that these stand for 'Gloss' and 'Matt'. Decisions about the degree of lustre – usually global ones for photographs – here lead to another set of internal contrasts, adding perhaps a narrative possibility of transformation from one to the other. I must allow

these instructions to transform my viewing. I must filter the surface of the photograph as it appears, in a deliberate act of perception that imagines change. The printer received these as instructions for processing and I assume that we can all now see, on its folded page, the result of these instructions.

The Gs and Ms provide an orientation for the photograph that has the arm coming in from bottom right. What decision of dexter and sinister will the printer have made?

The image is in monochrome. It is prepared for a journal that does not use colour images. Even so in 2004 a monochrome photograph of this scale carries the sign of art. The frame divides into two, left and right. This is not the division produced by matt and gloss or dirty and clean. The hand reaches half way across. The rest is surface where stain and lustre provide contrast.

The arm is a reductive metonym (synecdoche) of a person who is doing something with this rag. I read it as a woman's arm. Is this, perhaps, the shape of the finger nails and of the wrist? Or is it more because I still expect it to be a woman's hand that presses a rag to a surface, unless that surface be mechanical or part of a process of construction?

The only way to avoid collusion with an act of severance – with a frame that asserts its exclusions over and above its containments – is to imagine the missing body. The hand is a right hand; the rag-holder is right-handed. Her head is not in the way. I assume the surface is horizontal, like a worktop, and she stands before it, keeping everything out of the way except that arm. I experience an imaginary strain as I identify with this assumed posture, so forcibly represented off frame. But also I can't

help identifying with the camera position and find that this is where my / her head should be. Maybe that is the source of the strain. And isn't that area below the hand bright?

If the orientation of the image has the hand coming in top left, then this is another body, over the other side. The camera's angle of view meets the rag-holder's imagined angle at a diagonal. Why should this be?

Just before it is cut by the frame the arm provides the darkest area in the photograph. This may not be so. Maybe that stain or spillage, diagonally across, is just as dark.

Half of the photograph can be read within a convention that aestheticises texture, surface, even dirt, that appropriates the object-world into a formalism of surface, light and shade. The other half could almost belong to the same convention, in a more extreme variant, where not just the object-world but also human work that takes place in it is appropriated for these aims. But because it is an arm, and because the hand presses into a rag, and seems to have been doing so enough for the rag itself to press back up between those fingers, the frame does not provide that rectangle of contemplation this convention requires. The outer frame insists, to my viewing, on violence – a violence of a severed body part, of severance from authority – from an author – of the work suggested in this image.

Like so many still images this one too seems to hover on the edge of narrative or portraiture, perhaps both.

This is a photographic image by Tanja Dabo. I know, in my viewing, though I have never witnessed them, that Tanja Dabo makes performances and that many of these have taken the form of meticulous polishing, in at least one case of a whole gallery floor. I have held back this knowledge in my account so far. But now it comes flooding back in. The image itself is a metonym of performance. A person acts, works, makes and removes marks. Marks are both stains and assertions of presence, smears and spillages of a has-been-here. They can be both polished up and polished away. Where varnish or lacquer add shine as a layer to a surface, polish acts in a combination of abrasion and fill. In a perfect shine there is nothing left to fill.

There are no words in this image. I mean this literally, though words might form on a viewer's lips. But here it is in a journal issue called *On The Page*. And my account comes out of a conversation with the editor that encourages me to read the image as illegible. Have all the words been polished away? Is this sometimes what photographs can do? How long can words be kept away? Could anybody, seeing this image, not find themselves 'reading' it? If such a reading happens, is it 'spoken'?

This reading doubles as a postscript to the article on reading illegible pages above and as a commentary on a photograph by Tanja Dabo inserted in the same issue of the journal. The handwritten page appeared as p.92; the whole printed text is in the DVD included with the issue.

SECTION E

Critical and celebratory readings

- E.1: Two articles on Peter Riley
 - i. On *Lines on the Liver* and *Tracks and Mineshafts* and two essays
 - ii. Before you fall
- E.2: John Riley, poet
- E.3: Some things I wanted to say about Doug [Douglas Oliver]
- E.4: Terms of Engagement in F.T.Prince
- E.5: Dress and Address: 'John James' in John James
- E.6: Karen Mac Cormack's *Implexures*: an implicated reading

E.1

Two Articles On Peter Riley

i.

*On Lines on the Liver**And Tracks and Mine-shafts¹*

I am constantly bugged by something I think I'm supposed to be saying: the philosophy of poetry or the joys of wisdom or the truth that snaps the world back into place. Where is it? It's easy enough to focus on nothing like a missing pilot and set absence into the text just to have it there before us, newly reflective; but you are elsewhere and it's very uncertain that something human is actually there at the end of this dispersed line wanting or waiting for anything on earth. Surely the fire is getting low; if we don't signal our love there will be no reason for dying. I turn to the simple sky-trapped animal, the *looke in thy heart and write*, bit. Plentiful and expensive. The heart, of course, is a non-existent book in which we read the education of the world. The Adventure of Bugs Hunter. What rubbish. *I am not I, pitie the tale of me.*

From (v) of "Eight Preludes", *Tracks And Mineshafts*.

I can only begin to give an account of my reading of these texts: my own reading so frequently contradicts itself and the texts are themselves so self-knowing that they accommodate into themselves a number of contradictory self-readings: they acknowledge both the inadequacy of saying and deal as a recurring concern with the inadequacy of the need to say.

¹ This review of *Lines on the Liver* (London: Ferry, 1981), *Tracks and Mineshafts* and *Two Essays* (both Matlock: Grosseteste, 1983) first appeared, untitled, in *The Many Review* 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 12–18. Many thanks to John Hall and to John Welch, editor of *The Many Review*, for permission to reprint it.

I am not in my attentions going to distinguish between the two main texts for I am more interested in the voices and preoccupations that connect them. In particular I find myself responding to a gathering dependence on prose, to the way that layers of prose are made the home of an errant poetic: under the guise even of explication a prose attaches an intentionality to an abstract image of 'the self' that the poems then try to outwit.

Lines on the Liver begins with nineteen pages of prose, by the 'Self-lecturer' who is also author of the thirty poems that follow. The variations that end the book are preceded by two pages of prose descriptions and contextualisation. *Tracks and Mineshafts* includes many prose passages (like the one quoted above) and one long prose sequence and comes with a sibling prose text "published to elucidate some of the imagery of the poems in *Tracks and Mineshafts*", which are further self-lectures, extensions of the primary metaphors of mining and dreaming that confirm that Peter Riley is dealing with knowledge and its informations, not with mining but with readings and dreaming of mining, and with living that knowledge and those dreams so that the miner becomes a figure of the self, economically, ontologically – an economic function embedded in all human purposes and equivalent to those other individualised metaphors of the self, the hunter, the gatherer, the pastoralist, the cultivator.

I don't want to engage in the detail of these prose explications but nor do I want to brush them aside as distractions from the 'poetry'. I want instead to try to respond to their purpose and language as part of the substance of contradictory desires that I find to be these texts. For despite the wish to have a world, there, despite any speaking of it, there is also a wish to talk a world into being. Around the corner of

each utterance is not any kind of silence, but the poet talking, talking, self-lecturing. and just as the reading that meets it is a lonely reading – no one in my daily life talks to me about the latest Peter Riley text – this is a lonely writing that knows its own urgency from within and has lost any easeful nonchalance about the political vacuousness into which it might place itself.

There is a fact of our lives that these writings are helpless with that we may recognise the desire that is us, that we may find a speech inseparable from the forms and substance of this desire, but that this sensed power is not returned to us in the confirmations of social power: it is all source, and solipsism and desperation. For example I have just used a 'we' that universalises a fundamental phenomenological self. *Lines of the Liver* and *Tracks and Mineshafts* are writings caught up in a sense of the writer's destiny to be in the fullest imaginable sense a 'person', and in the paradox too that this destiny to be a full person moves within a language that makes of the pronoun 'we' a despairing term, one that has to deflect a whole series of collective meanings.

In the first place there are the simpler versions of 'we', two homophonic pronouns, semantically and existentially intertwined: the 'I' who desires and the 'I' who knows what it is (he) desires; the one on whom the light falls when it does, the one who digs for it. These are two identities, contradictory, dialectical. They correspond to two other first pronoun uses, both singular and plural. There is the everyday self, the one who is domestic and is more or less employed, who moves house and gets overtaken by the owners of faster cars. This domestic 'we' is often present, especially in the 'poems' and where present is often threatened, guarded, cryptic in the way that the namelessness of pronouns allows. Where the other language of the self, with its

primary metaphors of economics and spirituality (both manifestations of essential value), deals in a notion of 'home', these domestic people live in a house with windows, book-shelves, wall-hangings, a telephone and a car outside in which to go to work. And in this domestic economy desires get in each other's way. So this is an 'I' and a 'we' caught up in contingency, each move provisional, hopes in transcendence ironically modified by the desperation of circumstance. The voice is colloquial, talkative, occasionally capable of expletive. Within a larger linguistic space that relies on magniloquence, that hopes for so much from metaphor, there is a voice that can be sarcastically anti-metaphoric, 'down-to-earth'.

The second identity, already implied, is the plural form of the person assiduously involved in the rhetorical transactions of metaphor, in transformations willed by desire – by love, hope, belief, lack. It is not a contingent 'I' but 'the self', the very type of human consciousness. This figure shifts around too. Sometimes it is a collective sense coinciding with the idea of 'the town' as a specific social and emotional force-field within the land-form, as extended home, a specific community lived from within rather than sociologically describable; or it might be the human figure implied by an archaic term like 'the plain' or an understanding of humans in which geology is socially incarnate. As I say, the figure slips around and usually the speaking voice is outside any social gathering, is implicated only in the sources of behaviour, not necessarily in the mannerisms. At any moment this 'we' can either be caught up in history or transcend it.

I think that there is always in these texts this contradictory, paradoxical duplicity of identity: the historical 'we', western, post industrial, living out the technology of mass-production and mass reproduction, not so much victim of capitalism as

accomplice through and through. This 'we' is in all the nets of power – not only technology but geology too, as though the technology were absolutely determined by geology so that 'we' are 'used' by metal and its 'exhaustion'.

The other is of course the pure figure of human possibility, desiring, dreaming. And of course I do not speak as if I have caught Peter Riley out in some way. 'We' are all these 'we's' and to keep them all in play without abandoning the possibilities of utterance to an absence of intention, to claim and to disclaim, to reach for love without denying circumstance – well, these are very considerable achievements, are records of a battle with the angel of language that most wouldn't have dared begin. His moves are more or less as follows:

The angel drives him into the homiletic. He becomes the lonely wayside preacher.

The angel drives his attentions down chthonically, below the surfaces open to perception into the tunnellings open only to specific experience, knowledge, dreams. The poet's knowledge mediates dreams of the underworld and the miners' labour becomes merely emblematic: the true labour here is metaphoric.

The angel suggests that a wished-for world can inhere in an unwished language.

The angel insists on his writing as a social attention burdened with responsibility for the future.

The angel suggests that in play the signifiers of language can turn away from their responsibility for the future without sarcasm. The angel's last play: to outwit the Law, which is Language and Knowledge, there is only Language and Knowledge.

There is nothing to be except clumsy in the face of what he tries to take on because he is not interested in a manner of stoic elegance but wishes instead to write his way through every move, through the whole net, and through it all, despite everything, runs the hope of a redemptive power of (a notion of) selfhood and language. As so often when there is the idea of 'self' at work, there is a strong and consistent metaphor of redemption, with its implied loss or failure – that gap that pertains to desire rather than an easily redeemable lack and also there is that familiar questing self, burrowing it seems into otherhood out of sheer ontological destiny. In some strange way what 'the self' tries to redeem is an irredeemable economic and social loss, so the discursive task is experienced like that of Sisyphus.

And this is the desperation I find in these texts. I find in them an unhappiness, but more than that they deal with an experience that is of its nature incomplete without grace and yet is dogged by a refusal to accept the conditions of a grace. How to act, how to be in the world: these questions are obsessive. Loss is seen to pervade the material world: relationships and employment are contingent destinies, haunted by inadequacy; materialist politics are seen to evade the profound metaphoric verities of the self. There is only one place to get it right and that is 'the person' and it is perception itself which must be right since desire joins, is joined by, perception to all other behaviour. But perception opens onto a world conditional on language and history: history has lost nearly everything; there is no pre-lapsarian self set apart and rescuable from history. So the world is loved and not loved and the self cannot disclaim the world or seek through power to change it. Grace which is necessary is impossible.

I put this too simple-mindedly, I know, but I want to get at what troubles me and to put simple-mindedly what has its formal substance in a particular archaic rhetoric which is to be found often in the prose. I do not doubt for a moment that perception and shared mental images in the form of collective metaphors are of ethical importance but when this becomes the basis for a hesitant self contradictory and doomed transcendentalism I am worried. What is at stake is as usual what poetry or writing can offer, how attentions within the language can work ethically as well as aesthetically. These are texts of strong ethical intention which keep, on the very point of political clarity, reverting to a psychic theology of original sin. Between the person and 'the World' there are only just perceptibly the mediations of culture. Although the poet can use a dismissive and despairing tongue about "motor-way communities" and "the stupid hordes", which places a commenting self somewhere outside the dialectic, he insists that the 'self' is implicated, that what is desperate in culture can only work by finding its original permissions in self-hood.

*This is fine. Of course there is no pristine and potentially 'whole' self outside culture. But apart from the notions of 'the world' (how this word recurs!) and 'alteriority', both of which weight every thing in favour of the isolated perceiving, desiring and knowing being – because they belong to it – there is nothing to offer as second term in a social and economic dialectic in which the configurations of power might be considered. What could the mechanism of such a transformation as that stated in the following be? "Every human act genetically modifies the species, since it is only at the new point (of access and departure) that we gain our formal existence, and the moment is absolutely decisive in the future of the world and the fate of its bearers." The 'act' for a writer, the doing, is the written production of language to meet the force of occasion. Is it just hope to say that 'the world' returns

this act, enfolding the person who writes? Who does? A sense of an economics of language or of labour, in which each act acts on another and responds to the acts of all the others, moves in and out of metaphor, which is another sense of determinism leaving the world open to the acts of the person. The miner is of course one such economic metaphor; but also more loosely, less tied to such a specific form of labour, throughout the texts is a string of rhetorical figures having to do both with material commerce and the commerce of the soul (gain, profit, loss, coinage / furtherance, redemption, salvation, loss). The very possibility of there being a false language relates to these figures as something like counterfeit notes and coins.

We are told in *Lines on the Liver* that all this "might look like a theory of election but isn't". It isn't, only because all are elected (or doomed) in the face of the universal destiny of selfhood – death – or in the face of the aim of all labour which is "for the speedier decay of nature".

And yet despite the disclaimer – and the reason why there needs be a disclaimer – there continues to be a feeling that there has be a redemptive behaviour; that although it might be "our" destiny to be "used" by fossil fuels in a kind of inverted humanism there is a way of living with destiny, of attaining an anonymous presence in the world, in which as it were the desires of the self can be come contiguous with natural light, that might constitute a salvation. "Light" is a very important term, particularly in *Tracks and Mineshafts*, and is one of a number which link these pieces back into an earlier (Christian) tradition of spiritual exercises and battles with meaning. It wants to be a theory of election and is but isn't because it also has theoretical and temperamental reasons why it can't be. Whatever it is it is given to language and is allowed to take place there.

P.S. Anyone who has tried to write about texts that are humanly and linguistically complex knows the frustrations. In order not to shower on a second set of readers the radiating fragments of a fragmented reading, in order not to reconstruct the confusion and half-ignorance of the going, the pleasures and distractions of the ear, I have ended up with a partial reading. Of course. But I want to say so. And to register that in this piece I have lost my first response to *Lines on the Liver*, which now that I register it remains important, which was excitement about how right that book seemed to be, how wise it was about living in England now and how welcome that was, given the scarcity of things in any form that gave me that.

September 1983.

** A note to the paragraph starting "This is fine..."*

Our attentive editor asks me if I could clarify this paragraph. I wish I could because it is the nub: if you look for "the truth that snaps the world back into place", if what you are after is "the philosophy of poetry", where do you look? Poetry can have wisdom which is joyful and how easy it is to confuse this with the eager "philosophising" of the self of the poet. By working in what frame analysis would presumably call a multiple frame, Peter Riley's texts hope that the two can be one. In my article I've hardly attended at all to the wisdom of the poetry but instead listened to the 'philosophy' – particularly to the terms that have been in use within phenomenology – and to the ways it is embedded in the texts as a whole. Of course in these texts the 'philosophy' isn't systematic or academic: the steadily held 'I' of the

phenomenologist is cut into the multiple text, both into that what can be typified by punning where a domestic meaning dances with a play of sound, and into that wavering 'I', the talkative one, who shifts about, authenticating the whole as having been experienced.

Now although the philosophy isn't systematic (in fact it is carried and placed within a larger structure that is literary: in a fiction it might be assigned either to a character or to the authorial voice; here it is assigned to the character of the author who has other characteristics too) the philosophical statements do imply a systematic philosophy that could be reconstructed by someone more knowing than I am. The paragraph that causes the difficulties is a far too hasty attempt to take the outlines of the philosophy and lay it over a few parts of the text that point up a mismatch. Beyond these texts, and very much within them, I am very interested in the poetic and philosophical term 'world', which can be claimed as the environment for a speaking self: it can become the loosest of all generalities, the global spread and naturalising of 'otherness' (here 'alterity'). To the extent that the recent notion of selfhood implies an important dimension of the person that transcends any social, cultural or historical context, this term 'world' becomes a necessary context for the self. As terms they are nothing without each other. (They belong to each other). Anything so large is both ecstatic and deceitful as a context: of course at times a 'self' will be dislocated and lonely.

Although the large term, in the quotation from *Tracks and Mineshafts*, is not *world* but *species*, the statement implies a means by which the acts of the self are integrated into that larger space as more than context and it turns out that the mechanism is biological ("genetic"). Such a claim is edifying for the lonely speech

of a self and without stating a mechanism it obliterates all the intermediary groupings between person and totality of a species if such a scale could be thought even to exist. This is not just a case of faulty philosophy or bad theory: it is the silencing of a writing in the desperate search for its own necessities for as a writer a person's chief "act" is writing.

I wanted to connect to this operation – this specious connection – the second order transformation of labour into metaphor whereby features on the economic plane can be entirely taken up into global desire; it is to do to mining what happened extensively to agricultural labour when that too was naturalised into landscape. I am caught here: my explanation, which has become a commentary on my own words, is still far too hasty and, again, simple-minded. To expand it would be to take us into something else.

ii.

Before You Fall: Postlude on a Prelude

This brief article starts life as a postscript to an earlier article on Peter Riley's *Lines on the Liver* (Ferry 1981), *Tracks and Mineshafts and Two Essays* (Grosseteste 1983), written for John Welch's *Many Review* (No 2, Spring 1984) and reprinted here. I wanted to respond to more recent writings with some of the thoughts left trailing in that article in mind.

The books I have particularly been reading are *Alstonefield* (Oasis / Shearsman 1995) and *Snow has settled [...] Bury me here* (Shearsman Books 1997). Apart from some brief general remarks, not tied to any specific reference, my focus is going to be very narrowly on a line-by-line reading of the first poem in the second of the two books – called 'Prelude' – in the belief that that very short poem offers ways of reading the two books.

Hasn't it been a feature of Peter Riley's writing that there is always some shaping urgency behind the texts – a purpose in respect of something to be known, or found out, some intuition to be pursued, some ethical quest to be undertaken? This urgency has been such, it seems to me, that no single voice – no single persona for 'Peter Riley' – could carry it; nor could he live easily with what poetry all on its own might

be assumed to know, without recourse to the knowledge frames of, for example, palaeontology, archaeology, social geography, industrial history.

He has seemed to want a writing that could be instrumental in the endless business of recovering an image of human virtue, of grace, of love. At the very least he has wanted to lend himself to struggles for disengaging harm. There are ironies in this but not at all the ironies of supposedly agency-free utterance. There is a play with first person modalities which seems to me tactical: the author allows himself to be ignorant, foolish, banal at times, like one of Chaucer's dreamers, because this is the wisdom that outwits ignorance by allowing it back in as another valid mode of knowing.

This play between personae often sets up some explicit or implied narrative, often the kind of journey that is burdened with a question – perhaps even a question which itself needs to be found rather than answered. He sets up narratives or lyric moments where the swooning limits of the phenomenal call for the linguistic strategy that Keats called negative capability. A wide-eyed literalism – grace in particulars, the pleasurable resistances of the real – runs alongside a sleepless hermeneutics, treating the world as an interpretable text. It is the movements between these that seem now to characterise Peter Riley's work.

Take 'Prelude', the first poem in *Snow has settled [...] bury me here*. The poem invokes a particular poetic (and painterly, photographic and filmic) register which finds an elegiac melancholy in the perception of landscape, a charge of affects not accountable for by the surface of particulars. This landscape is usually empty and at

the same time filled with loss. Where there is human presence this is as a trace or memorial or is a figure silhouetted in the redolence of loss.

Snow has settled in the lines

I am reading this off the page and already my ear is responding to a familiar metric, a way of both hearing and seeing the language as coming in lines. (This of course means 'hearing' what can only be seen. Lines are visual.) This line is keyed to a soft sibilance, reinforced at each end with an *s/n* relationship, symmetrically arranged. The only consonantal breath-stops in the line – the *tt* and the *d* of *settled* – add up to no more than a brief caesura after the *d*. A line in the landscape is being observed through a markedly prosodic line, implying a pun that cannot be spelt out – in Saussure's sense of the term, a *motivated* relationship across the bar of the sign, linking associated signifiers, linking implied signifieds, over-determining poetic cohesion.

Of an old ridge-and-furrow system

The metric is sustained as are *ss* and an avoidance of stopped consonants. But where the first line belongs to percept and introduces the tone that invites associative reading, the second moves into knowledge code. Snow has settled on a *system*. Perhaps the ridge-and-furrow system of what became the Elizabethan line is also settling snow.

Striping the gently sloping dark

Gently was already there, carried in the means, and it slopes into that 'dark', whose privileged position in the line system catches it temporally as a noun. The dark. Once you slope into it, that's what there is: the dark. It can be where fear is, or ignorance, or where sleep restores colour in readiness for the light. It is where there is relief from the brute repetition of objects.

Then the noun is recuperated as an adjective, a relatively innocent attribute of the environment

Green fields, engrossed scripts

Scripts are supposed to be engrossing not engrossed. What is this enlarged and fattened writing, already associated with the fields? The double signification of *line* continues.

Of duration, repetition, authority

Duration – old; repetition – system of lines, insistence on the constitution of the same; authority – the systematic anonymity of power. Who is the author of these lines, whose ‘system’ was there ahead of them, ensuring a dialectic of same and different? What is the time of their authority? What is the duration of the system of correspondences which links the two kinds of lines, given that the dark, in its alternating pattern with light, is eternal. Light / dark – another ridge-and-furrow system, replicated synchronically in any set of ridges and furrows seen at an angle. Up till now, answering my own question, the authority of the poem derives in part at least from a literary tradition of duration and repetition. The ‘author’ is no more than the person on the spot, the conduit of a repetitive wisdom. And then what happens?

At which that calm baby in the self

Which calm baby? The demonstrative precision of that ‘that!’ That one. There must be a term in the old rhetoric for this device which invokes the phenomenal authority of deixis in pointing at the emperor's new clothes. In the earlier lines metaphor is implicit in the figures used and is underpinned with the same kind of photographic literalness at play on the front cover of the book. Both ‘baby’ and ‘self’ are

troublesome terms, the latter very much a figure in Peter Riley's narratography. More than that, though, 'that' and 'the' reach out to some 'system' that might need to be separately learnt. It has no immediate link to percept.

That finds it so difficult to speak

Is difficulty ever calm? This baby is not an infant. This baby can speak but finds it difficult. And is calm. Is there any evidence of difficulty of speaking in these lines? Are the signs of difficulty not subsumed within an authoritative coherence?

Lowers an eyelid on the shrinking day
And suddenly says outright
The entire brochure of love and all

The metaphor moves into narrative. Is it George Herbert who is somewhere there? The baby, given to silence, breaks into the spontaneous 'brochure' of love. A brochure in my book sells or specifies something. In this case, love. But no not just love. Love and all. Oceanic.

And finally, the form that begs for rhyme gets it:

Stay here before you fall.

There is such satisfying completion here. Not the shrinking but the closing of the day. The sense of calm closure is prosodic entirely. What does this all mean? You are going to fall – swoon perhaps in the oceanic dispersal of particulars into love and all – and since you are going to fall you might as well stay here to do so. In which case the strictly temporal 'until' would be better. 'Before' can be either spatial or temporal or ambiguously both. But 'before' does bring with it the colloquial authority of a form of parental or teacherly imperative: *Shut up before I make you!* This reading could be:

If you don't stay here, you will fall

'Fall' is like 'dark', so habituated as a word to metaphoric use that alternative readings can't be kept at bay. The fall. Perhaps there is a third reading that can be pointed up by adjusting the 'you' to 'your':

Stay here before your fall.

This one comes to me from other readings of Peter Riley, where versions of the self take on adventures against primary harm, finding it everywhere, and staying there because that is where, paradoxically, these selves find love and grace.

Both articles published in *The Poetry of Peter Riley* (ed Nate Dorward), *The Gig 4/5* (Willowdale: Canada, 2000), pp.35-46 ISSN 1481-5133. The first of the two articles first appeared in *The Many Review* 2 (Spring 1984), ed John Welch, pp. 12-18

E.2

John Riley, Poet

‘These are my images, I use them, not to answer but to hear.’¹

I was invited to talk briefly about the poet John Riley at the 1996 Wessex Poetry Festival, with its thematic title of Poets and Visionaries. I was asked to talk about him as a friend. I hope that I was able to do that but writing is always at least to one side of friendship. What I tried to do, and have tried to do here, is to talk about the writing, and to talk about it out of a refreshed reading. Reading and re-reading most of the published writing of a single writer is to be caught up in an experience of repetitions and motifs, in changing senses of what constitutes a coherence or totality of a body of work and perhaps its relation to a life. Premature death can so easily be read as a writer’s final piece, especially if that writer’s work is preoccupied with mortality. I have not been tempted to look back from any moment of summation but have instead allowed myself to remain caught up in the experience of reading. As a result my remarks may feel fragmentary. I have broken them into sections, and have come back on myself, to acknowledge that feeling.

ancient business

In the way that news about writers and writing works now, there will be many who have never heard of John Riley, have never read or heard a line of his writing. The first thing to say is that he is a writer to read, a writer of poems and prose which have

no need of mine or anyone else's interpretations. In the case of John Riley, go direct, find the work. He called his first solo collection *Ancient and Modern*, deliberately invoking the familiar hymn book and indicating with his title that in his view much of the old business of poetry was not to be pushed aside in an excitement of wanting to make it new.

He operated as though it is the poet's primary task to respond to light, to love, to a need for ease. I don't think John Riley had any interest in being obscure in his writing. He sought lucidity as a task of syntax, of knowing, of seeing, of loving. What makes him interesting is that his work enacts both the force and complexity of such a desire. His poem, *A Story*² (from *What Reason Was*) begins:

Humans are so uneasy
Even in their loving
To be on the safe side
They call it dying

and ends:

What kind of stories
Will you tell your children?

Tell them how easy love is.

John Riley

John Riley was born in 1937 in Leeds, where he stayed until the end of his schooling. He did National Service in the RAF and then went to Cambridge University where he began his friendship with Tim Longville, with whom he was to co-edit *The Grosseteste Review*, publish Grosseteste books and collaborate on translations and other writings. After University he was for a few years a school-teacher. In 1970 he stopped teaching and had to sustain himself – and on this occasion I don't mean only economically – as a writer. In 1973 he married Carol. In 1977 he joined the Russian Orthodox Church, which appeared to bring together for him theology, 'ancient'

certainties of ritual repetition (of the repetition of ritual which is itself a set of repetitions – repetition is often a way of ending without ending, a device much used in his poems), and the pleasures of Russian language and music. In 1978 he was killed. His writing maintains its argument with and anticipation of death, as the condition for having a world.

Between 1967 and 1979, nine books were published under his sole name. A further six, including the two books subtitled *Versions of Holderlin*, were collaborations with Tim Longville. His solo work was gathered together into a *Collected Works* by Tim Longville in 1980, after his death. Tim Longville also brought together a memorial volume, *For John Riley*.

I first encountered his work in 1966, through Andrew Crozier's broadsheet, *The English Intelligencer*. The first piece I read was the poem called Ancient and Modern.

*Reading the poem, Ancient and Modern*³

Away from the house the snow falls slanting

Why that first phrase, 'away from the house'? Why in that order? Is this a domestic voice? or a voice 'away from the house'? Many of the poems look out from within, using the familiar technology of the window (as lens and frame) to turn the phenomenal world into a page to be read, as a text for homiletic meditation.

In this poem the sight of snow prompts an extended and rationalised association through the way that it has appeared to make the trees, 'almost in leaf', put on a 'complex, stream-lined growth'.

Did you ever see
The maidenhair (some few survive), a pre-
historic tree?

This is how thought, knowledge and memory work together. The maidenhair is brought into the visual and narrative frame, by analogy, by knowledge, by the force of metaphor.

Limpid leaf, irregularity,
A touching intent to grow come what may
With perhaps insufficient means : a pleasure

To look on. As who shall see in winter leisure
Compassionate history take lucid measure
Of our too obvious nourishment on hate,
And love that can't pass for understanding.

That last sentence is certainly 'away from the house'. Is this the writer exercising the pleasures of 'winter leisure', hiding behind the mask of a relative pronoun? Is this sentence a question? And what does (or would?) *who* see? Through the window, away from the house, *who* sees a second agency, 'compassionate history'. Isn't 'compassionate history' *who* by another name, insisting on reading Time off weather events and the survival of botanical species? If so, 'lucid measure' is a term for the way a recognisable prosodic procedure in this quatrain tries to act out compassion, to apply measure, as by one who sees through a window 'our too obvious nourishment on hate'. And how, syntactically, does that last line fit in? Is it that 'we' are also obviously nourished on this love that is not the celebrated kind that 'passeth understanding' but that is something other than understanding, unavoidably different?

The poem which started with a phrase about separation ends in a tight, elliptical theological question about love. This is, to put it mildly, immoderate (unmeasured).

Tell them how easy love is. At the point of apparent maximum decorum, the poem has

gone wild, has conjured in these troublesome abstractions: compassionate history,
love, hate.

A summary of John Riley's writing as essay, as effort

how to have a world

how to have a world filled with light

how to have a luminous world when you know you have already lost it

On light

Bishop Grosseteste, whose name appears on the spine of so many of John Riley's books, wrote 'on light'. So did John Riley, all the time. As a metaphor, light (with its binary partner, dark; less so its other partner, heavy) is profoundly embedded in language use; it could almost be claimed as a 'primary metaphor', by analogy with primary colours. It takes real effort to remove any trace of metaphor from light, as some painters and physicists ('natural scientists') have attempted to do. Perhaps you could also say that any preoccupation with light, whether metaphoric or anti-metaphoric, is haunted by a more-or-less repressed fear of the dark. Perhaps you could also say that there are many qualities and conditions of light, but that the dark is absolute.

John Riley in his writing was very responsive to light. To see by, in every sense of see. He wanted to see clearly and he did not want it just to be what *he* saw. As a poet I don't think he was at all interested in his own idiosyncrasies. But he wanted the gaze held, and as it were – and unfashionably – unified. Hence the windows, the sense of horizon and distance, the views offered from above. The measured exercises of seeing which form consciousness, by which any of us come to know anything, that is what

drove him. And consciousness does not mean for him the emerging ego of a biographical self. Consciousness means the world. To know and to love is to find the world in its place. And this love is a practice, a verb: it has to be *done*, and to keep being done, for the world to be there, in a place. One of the names for this practice is poetry. In this sense, in this very literal, very pragmatic sense, poetry is (a) light of the world. And just as for visual perception – and for those writers in light, photographers and many painters – there are qualities of light, so there are qualitative differences in the procedures of poetry which vary the light of speaking and the world that is spoken. This is the effort, to have light, which opens – perhaps some would see it as breaks – the syntax of his later poems.

two unities

Just above, I slipped in(to) a contradiction which is I believe an accurate one. There is the perspectival unity of the see-ing, talk-ing subject: the one who looks out through the frame of the window. And then there is another perspective, that of either God or that profane agent, the astronaut (see, particularly, *The Full Moon is Bathing these Fields*, from *What Reason Was*⁴). When he found that he could not use a rhetorical control to move between these perspectives, the lines open to allow multiple voices through and the poems lengthen (*Report, Unfinished* and *CZARGRAD*⁵, for example). Earlier on, though, there are these two linked unities: the profane with the sacred, the domestic with the universe of the divine, the here and now with the Everywhere, the One with the Others. There is a Poem in *What Reason Was* called 'A Birthday Poem, for One Person and Hence for Others'. That 'hence' is quite a hinge.

intentionality

Although John Riley was always playful in language – by which I mean no more (no more!) than that light strikes on each syllable in turn, whether or not a meaning easily turns on that syllable – language was always for him both a means and a form: there was always something beyond language at which language had to aim itself, scrupulously, and also there was always something within language, that comes with it, that must be wrestled with.

listening and translation

There are those whose main technique as a writer is to speak, to write, to keep talking (one way, after all, to outwit the dark is to fill it with sound). There are others, and I feel that John Riley was one, whose main technique is to listen. I believe he heard what it was he wanted to write. In a festival called Visionaries and Outsiders, I could be taken to mean that he heard voices. And I don't mean that. I mean that as a writer he just listened very attentively, and held the shape of speech and others' writing to find what he really heard there (*'to move from mechanical habit to consciousness'*⁴⁶). The judgements of the ear are all very precise and are connected through to a specific sense of the visual, which I have touched on already, which is often a highly concentrated sense of the everyday: more Samuel Palmer's cornfield than Breughel's. I am reminded of James Joyce's notion of an epiphany. Often the language he heard was already formed: the speech of others in his early poems and in the prose, for example, or lines coming through from early writers including very much the authors of the authorised version of the bible. I would guess that he was drawn to translation by the opportunity it offers to work this material that he kept hearing. To voice what it is that has been heard is always a kind of translation: many of his poems are translations in this sense.

love and sense

John Riley was one of those writers who use writing at one and the same time as an instrument of love and as a means of making sense. For him love is both referent and syntax, – that is to say, his poems can be *about* love and can also attempt to enact the condition of love in the way they are uttered. Like John Donne, he can be both philosopher/theologian of love and at other times hopelessly amorous. He was by no means the first to enjoy an ambiguity between an erotic and a theological charge of love. There is a recurring figure of address in his poems, called ‘my love’, ‘mia cara’, ‘my darling’. This can be taken *literally* and I hope has been by those so addressed. But it can also be taken *literarily*, and by this I do not at all mean false, inauthentic.

longing/loss of love

Love can't pass for understanding. Love blinds. So does light. John Riley's written world is threatened by the loss of love, by the potential absence of necessary love – and whose isn't? His writing constantly reinstates the world as a loved place. In his case this occurs often through illumination, through aura, through luminous and numinous selection rather than through promiscuity and multiplicity (providing a contrast with, say, Whitman, Ginsberg, O'Hara). And this world is not anachronistic or archaic but nor is it ever quite of its time. Another way of putting this is that a social historian would have difficulty in reconstructing the social world of the 1960s and 1970s from John Riley's poetry, though his prose contains wonderful fragments of the everyday. Vision cannot pass for understanding. Optics can't. Every effort of lucidity casts its shadow.

love and light (again)

The device of love is lucidity, the drive for lucidity is love. The poems are sources of light which find light. One poem is even called *The Poem as Light*. There are related terms like *bright*, *moon* and *blue* – not to mention *lucid*, *limpid*, *gleam*, *bright* and – why not – *delight* (a word lured by the sound of *lite* into what Skeat calls its misspelling). This light is indexically joined to features of the natural world. There is a recurring iconography of clouds, rain, stars and moon, for example. It is often raining in his poems and the rain is no more banal than moonlight is. Invariably these iconographic features mark a question – philosophical, theological – or mark love or its lack.

light and epiphany are grace; the difficulty of grace

In the later poems, the grace is not so easily achieved. This is far from a failure in the writing. The writing responds:

a concentration of attention such
 deep well of love bright cloud is
 fixed
 that love
 is never fulfilled
 but the ways
 of approaching
 endless⁷

If love is never fulfilled, at what cost is the ease of a finished sentence? Who would be thanked for that grace and favour? To be secure the sentence has to break itself, the prosody to negotiate the difficulty of sentences which re-start in a tension between repetition and another way of approaching.

Light illumines, and thereby reveals, either surface or interior.

Light will not reveal what is concealed from it. The way that Time writes hides as much as it shows. This is how *Chronographia Continuata* ends:

if seventy years of living
 mark a face , why shouldn't this be marked and marred
 by a form that hides as much as it shows .
 what we stand in need of . what we have .⁸

'Marred' so nearly repeats 'marked' and indeed to mar is to mark in a mark that always marks a loss. Just as there was a referential ambiguity about the 'who' in *Ancient and Modern*, so still here the 'this' of the second line is uncertain about whether it points to possession ('what we have') or longing ('what we stand in need of'), to the form of what happened or what didn't happen. There is an ambi-valence here which no amount of light can resolve. The deictic marker lies in the shadow. In the book of letters called *Correspondences* this is taken to the extreme. The author only speaks in a 'Dear Reader' preface⁹ where he suggests that it is only the words of the others that can be an author's truth. He makes a book of others' letters to him, withholding his own contributions to the correspondence. The form of his own letters is a form that is hidden in order to show.

punctuation

In the late poems the punctuation marks work as much for the purposes of prosody as of syntax. There is a space – a visual pause – before and after each. The full stops condense as much as end sentences; the commas negotiate awkwardnesses; space, comma, space, marking incompleteness, gaps in speech where turns occur. The space before the full-stop has the effect that as a reader you find yourself over an edge before you recognise that you have finished. Hesitation and irresolution: the lines hiding as much as showing.

in almost total deprivation we are all
 learned survivors, the soft fruit calls, soft rain
 a crystal, carried internally, a facet gleams as if
 by chance, at the bark of a tree, glows in the atmosphere

when memory if of the future
 then we may speak of fear and sharpening
 and of love too more than of the fallen fruit
 of the form that is calling and to that lovely form¹⁰

Books by John Riley

- Ancient and Modern* (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1967)
What Reason Was: Poems 1967 - 1969 (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1970)
Correspondences (London: Human Condition, 1970)
Ways of Approaching (Pensnett: Grosseteste, 1973)
Prose Pieces (Pensnett: Grosseteste, 1974)
Mandelstam's Octets (Pensnett: Grosseteste, 1976) – translation
That Is Today (Newcastle upon Tyne: Pig Press, 1978)
A Meeting (Alverstock: Stingy Artist, 1978)
Mandelstam : The Stalin Ode Sequence (Melbourne: Rigmarole Of The Hours,
 1979)
The Collected Works edited by Tim Longville (Wirksworth: Grosseteste, 1980)
Selected Poems edited by Michael Grant (Manchester: Carcanet , 1995)

(with Tim Longville)

- Common Objects* (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1966)
In The Arms Of The Gods: Versions of Holderlin Volume I
 (Lincoln: Grosseteste 1967)
The Civil War (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1967)
A Legend Of St Anthony (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1968)
The Lou Poems (Lincoln: Grosseteste, 1971)
What I Own: Versions of Holderlin Volume 2 (Pensnett:
 Grosseteste, 1973)

Published in *For John Riley*, edited by Tim Longville (Wirksworth and Leeds: Grosseteste, 1979) – a memorial volume collecting together a number of responses by friends and fellow writers.

¹ Last line of *With Heavy or Light Heart*, CW p203

² *Collected Works*, p.86

³ CW, p 53; SP, p3.

⁴ CW, p76; SP p16

⁵ CW, pp138 and 153 respectively; SP pp59 and 73

⁶ Quoted from *Views Of Where One Is*, CW p54; SP p4

⁷ end of Part 2 of *CZARGRAD*, CW p160; SP p79

⁸ CW, p.; SP p125

⁹ CW, pp 337-338

¹⁰ in memoriam, CW, p129; SP, p51 (from *Ways of Approaching*)

E.3

Some Things I Want To Say About Doug:

that he wanted to be a good man, to make of his writing a good place;

that this bumped him into a sense of bad places;

that making a writing that *is* good and *does* good is technically very demanding;

that there can be no singular technique;

that the wish for goodness as it pushes into writing can bring a clumsiness with it, a self-conscious ignorance, a self, conscious of ignorance;

that ignorance can be both good and bad and that it is possible to be impelled at one and the same time both to know and not know, to appear to be (to sound like) one who knows and to make an ignorant place where something else can be known.

This is what he did, often, make a place of writing where knowledge cannot be too sure of itself, arriving there as it does in the clearing from such different places, by means of such different journeys.

In an appropriate vagueness some of these can be named and / because his writing names them.

For example there is the journalist in him setting out to know and narrate, seeking evidence and story, looking for the transactions of power over distance, for willed political forgetfulness and concealment;

or there are the forms that knowledge can take in the academy (though an academy entered late by one who already had the compulsive habits of an autodidact);

and most importantly, there is a knowledge that comes of love in its relation to loss, from loss in particular of a loved son.

I see this as linked with two preoccupations: with wise foolishness, including his own, which permitted such a serious man to play

and with ceremonies of loss and recovery, with ceremonial knowledge.

His writing sometimes shaped and performed such ceremonies.

He never set out to be their master, though; the ceremonies lack a master and a master mode - somehow deadly serious and absurd at the same time.

He obviously didn't believe that writing entails giving up the right to speak within the writing.

His writing is an interruption of writing.

Those driven by the need to *see* the scene which calls them, often find that they are pulled in too close to see clearly or that they are rebuffed by a surface that doesn't explain.

Doug had to *know* the scene, to circle it with narrative circumstantiality, with prosodic iteration.

In the moves between these modes - of story telling, of explaining, even of drawing - something else - a place of writing, a scene from which he would look up - cleared.

A place to start is in innocence.

He had that other word *harmless* as though it were another way of saying innocence.

And yet the ethical arrows of *ought* and *should*, pointing to a preferred place, could never be innocent.

It *should* be so easy to get there; knowledge *should* be the means to get there, despite the fact that when you look you find a loving stupidity, a way of not knowing, that circles in on, out from, itself.

And then when you trace those circles you spin in change and repetition, making your knowledge dizzy, not harmed so much as beside itself, leaning out towards the fabulous, the direction and tilt of story – always one of loss and yearned for redemption;

and in circles, in and around the stories, a moral not in place so much as coming into place: something that can happen because a writer writes.

Published in *A meeting for Douglas Oliver* ed. Wendy Mulford and Peter Riley (Cambridge et al: *infernal methods*, Street Editions and Poetical Histories, 2002) pp. 10-13 ISBN 0 905795 00 0 and 1 871965 60 8

E.4

Terms Of Engagement In F.T.Prince

I am going to try to itemise some features of F.T. Prince's work which continue to give me such pleasure. This has proved less easy than I expected: it is one thing to itemise them; it is quite another to extricate them from each other in the work of so careful a poet.

This is how I spoke them to myself when I still thought it would be easy: that he loves the particularity of sentences, where emotional and intellectual drive plays itself off against grammar; that he loves prosodic games that derive patterns of phonic repetition and variation from past writing, and that he loves in particular the way these games have to negotiate with the first game, of grammar and its obligations to sense; that he loves rhetoric, by which I mean the speaking or writing that is entirely appropriate to its context (a rhetoric expects to make a direct call on grammar; what he re-invokes is a call that it can make on poetics too); and finally – and I am not sure that he 'loves' this one so much as knows he is caught by it – he holds to a poem as a discursive instrument, each one a quite specific form of knowing. I shall struggle with what it is that a poem needs to 'know'; as a first stab let me just say that it needs to know the limits as well as the delirium of love and/or power and that these limits are always as much circumstantial – in other words quite specific – as ethical. And that it

needs to know them through a quite precise formulation of words. It is the shape that knows.

My itemised list can be seen as key elements in a set of terms of engagement. These features – to do with language, social position, knowledge, psychology, ethics – are held in relation to each other so that a sense of composition is in play at every level of an experience of reading, from the juxtaposition of two syllables right through to structural purpose and coherence. F. T. Prince is such a skilled poet and has, in everything he wrote, a purpose towards a knowing or a truth that troubles the skill of a reader. He is not a *difficult* poet in that modernist line of ‘difficulty’. His means, though, which are so often formally dialectical, enable him to address and accommodate difficulty as the opposite of an easy life. And perhaps ‘difficulty’ will do as an alternative general word for what it is that on the whole the poems set themselves to ‘know’. In practice, of course, the topics are often historical – from political, art or literary history. If the topics can be described as to do with love, ambition, power, public figures in the privacy of solitude, the biographical juncture always catches a tension, a betweenness, so that the topic headings are never that simple.

I am going to be using the first sentences of three early poems from the 1979 *Collected Poems* as a way into discussing some of these issues. Here is the first example:

My lord, hearing lately of your opulence in promises and your house
 Busy with parasites, of your hands full of favours, your statutes
 Admirable as music, and no fear of your arms not prospering, I have
 Considered how to serve you and breed from my talents
 These few secrets which I shall make plain
 To your intelligent glory.

(An Epistle to a Patron, p. 13 (1979))

This opening of *An Epistle to a Patron* is still astonishing in its directness, in the tempo and energy that has, as it were, come from nowhere. This is the first of his *personae* poems, in which the text takes the form of an impersonated utterance in a dramatic context. An architect-engineer, making a sales-pitch to a prince – in which what is on offer is himself as artist – , produces a piece of sustained rhetorical architectonics that performs by analogy exactly what it promises. The first sentence illustrates without need of further comment two of my itemised pleasures: the construction of a long, complex sentence (syntax) and the construction of a persuasive argument (rhetoric). As though there wasn't complexity of rhythm enough in the sentence treated as prose – and there is, I would say, an invitation to treat it as prose *as well* – there is in addition a deliberate accumulation of syllables to the verge of excess and the equally deliberate folding back of lines. This exercise in public language combines the confidence of complex, cumulative sentences, launched on a conditionality always sure of its own resolution, with a powerful grasp of prosody. In practice this last means springing the sentence against the line – unrhymed, variable in length but finding a momentary delay, a rest for further propulsion.

!

This is the language of public negotiation, of knowingness about power and its psychology. It moves deftly between the deferential and the threatening, playing two needs off against each other, incorporating subtle shifts of register.

The terms of engagement for this particular poem have been declared. Who will be speaking? In what rhetorical context? At what juncture in the life of the speaker? Through what prosodic pattern and what modality of syntax? And in what generic

structure that will mark its being as poem and its severance from 'the world'¹? Unless it is evident from a glance at the page, we don't yet know what the final shape will be; in the case of this poem the rhetorical promise of the opening is breathtakingly sustained throughout its ninety lines:

and skill in setting
Firm sets of pure bare members which will rise, hanging together
Like an argument, with beams, ties and sistering pilasters.

The term of engagement that is often more implicit than explicit is the one that stands behind them all: what is its stake? Or what appears, from the evidence of the poem, to motivate all its decisions? *Memoirs in Oxford*, a very different poem, makes this explicit, with all the care and difficulty that that entails, as its business and texture:

And here am I now forced to try
Thirty years later as it is.
To take their measure and unravel
Before and after – look and travel
Back over opportunities

I missed! And can I now forgive
Myself for having missed so much?
I was afraid to take or give,
Disabled or unfit to live
And love – reach out and touch.

Somewhere between that 'forced to try' and that painful comment on life and love is what I see to be a continuing drive in all these poems, even where they appear to be more explicitly about historical power: a sustained, honest and courageous meditation on love, from within its savageries², from one with the courage to speak its difficulties³, and the knowledge, skill and rhetorical tact to find different forms of speaking.

And so to the second of the chosen opening sentences:

Call out, celebrate the beam
 Imprisoning and expressing him.
 (*The Tears of a Muse in America* p. 19 (1979))

Where the form of address of the opening of *Epistle to a Patron* is quickly accounted for by the dramatic context, here unlocated imperatives and an unspecified pronoun leave context and sense puzzling. The next two lines don't help:

Fix the mature flash for the end, but in advance
 Fix in the glow of that sense what will pass.

Who is speaking to whom? Is this the poet, fully conscious of literary tradition, invoking the Muse? Or is this the Muse instructing the poet? Is this the poet talking to himself about a composition? Or the poet hooking a reader into being a writing-reader? The sentences are terse and to the point, with no apparent need for elaborate negotiation. In the power-play between line and sentence, the lines win and sound, however distantly, with the effect of incantation.

The poem is in four sections, of which this first is far and away the shortest. The second continues in imperative mood but with more clues to the context, a set of instructions for bringing into being a specific fictional figure:

Give him a pale skin, a long hand

And the figure, having been constructed, needs as it were a photo-opportunity:

And let him,
 Pleased to accomplish purposes,
 Alight in a loose dress from a car.

Only in the third section does an acknowledged narrator-figure appear, operating through 'I'. At this point it becomes apparent that the poem is an enacted essay on fiction – not just 'about' fiction but a demonstration of fiction-at-work. The 'writer' now, as a simple consequence of following instructions, does have a character, but is

left with a tension between the already written and with what *intention* would wish to find there – a vagueness often just beyond writing.

In the fourth and last section the ambiguity between the 'I' and the 'he' is not resolved; it is at times as though there are two layers of 'he' (a written narrator and the character) and that 'I' has been pushed back one level. It is always available to the poet to find a place to write just outside the writing only to find that that too is part of the writing:

Caught in that leisurely and transparent train
Of the soft ostensibility of story,
His motions and his thoughts are their own net,
And while the beam folds on itself, I'll not
Deny it is indefensibly too fine.

Here is the opening sentence of the third poem:

The secret drops of love run through my mind;
Midnight is filled with sounds of the full sea
That has risen softly among the rocks;
Air stirs the cedar-tree.
(*The Moonflower* p.35 (1979))

Although the punctuation suggests that this is only one sentence, structurally it is three, two of them simple, one with a single relative clause. Line endings and syntactical units reinforce each other. This is not an argument (*Epistle*) or a performed enquiry into fiction (*Muse*) but is a more familiar lyric attention to the phenomenology of full presence where outer and inner can be juxtaposed as images that relate to each other. 'My' in 'my mind' belongs to the first person of lyric usually assumed to be the author.

I find this a troubling poem that has a miniaturist's precision about its own imprecisions – its ambivalence. The most troubling word of all is the first one: 'the'.

'The secret drops of love'; so specific and so secret. The 'drops' anticipate the first line of the second stanza:

Somewhere a fainting sweetness is distilled.

The night scent of this African flower wounds the wound of desolation:

The touch with which reality wounds and ravishes
Our inmost desolation.

Where so many of the poems find or construct an object of study and knowledge and do so through devices of self-othering⁴ or of third person narrative – the world out there re-presented – this one is vulnerable to the body-invasiveness of rich scent, the swooning and emptying that that brings. The writer who likes to know gets as close as he can to knowing nothing; longing hangs in the night, not quite – or ever – love or knowledge or belonging:

All being like the moonflower is dissatisfied
For the dark kiss that the night only gives,
And night gives only to the soul that waits in longing,
And in that only lives.

There are those two lines in *Memoirs in Oxford*:

The need – and hope and fear – of truth
Must be the same as poetry.

Yes. And, for his contribution of such fine examples, and for his generous attention – which I do not expect him to remember – to me, as a young writer briefly in Southampton, this is my thanks, to F.T. Prince at 90.

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¹ Detached from my desires, in an oblivion
Of this world that surrounds me ...

The Moonflower p. 35 (1979)

² And my whole anxious life I see
As a combat with myself, that I do violence to myself,
To bruise and beat and batter
And being under
My own being,
Which is an infinite savage sea of love.

The Old Age of Michelangelo p.75 (1979)

³ To believe is above all to be in love,
And suffer as men do who are in love

Drypoints of the Hasidim p.153 (1979)

⁴ Put the case, and I see myself
Quite easily as other than
I am ...

...

How can one think the self away
Or feel identity can change?

Memoirs in Oxford pp. 133-4 (1979)

E.5

Dress And Address: 'John James' In John James

Perhaps the first hint of what I want to write about comes just five poems into *The Collected Poems*, in the early sequence *Mmm... Ah Yes*. It is an apprenticeship poem, a reworking of Cavalcanti's 'Chi è Questu Che Vièn' (7)ⁱ, probably by way of one of Pound's versions. It follows the first handful of poems which catch in their short lines a phenomenology of scene or setting. The poem opens with a single word line: 'Christ'- and it may take a few more lines to be quite sure that this is an exclamation, an abrupt escaping of breath through the charged proper name, rather than a courtly overlay of divine and worldly loves. Let's say an exclamation of this kind is an escape of word noise that carries a charge along the lines of: 'I am here and reacting!'. In the terms elaborated by Roman Jakobson in his often cited paper "Linguistics and Poetics: Closing Statement" (Jakobson 1960),ⁱⁱ it is 'emotive' in that the 'set' of the communication is on the supposed 'addresser'ⁱⁱ. I say *supposed* addresser because this is a poem – indeed one that is 'after' a long dead poet – and who knows who is *really* exclaiming thus?

The scene now directly engages this 'addresser' in a perturbation of desire, that might even turn violent:

no more than
a wordless
breath
hints at

her each
 rare virtue yet
 no other woman
 has such modesty
 & I think so
 highly of her
 I daren't
 picture the
 outcome

The short lines, many of them ending with functional words that require syntactical continuity – *then, at, each, yet, so* – mimic a short-breathed (and not a 'wordless breath') failure at calm; the 'yet' in particular marks a point of failure of courtly transcendence. Caught in high thoughts about 'rare virtue', what could be this outcome he(?) dare not picture?

Here is a poem that has built into its shaping the desire and impatience that appear to drive it. The 'I' is a dramatic figure whose restlessness implies a presence beyond the specificity of the text.

For many there would be nothing at all remarkable about this. Of course a lyric poem is by conventional definition the privileged place of first person utterance – and unlike a letter (epistle), not even requiring a second person – where a poet speaks as a perhaps exemplary sensibility and where truth may be a measure of authenticity; or even where poet, like rock star, may flaunt a difference, display a self as well as speak from it.

This question of the first person pronoun, the relation of textuality to selfhood, was a contentious one for twentieth century poetics, and remains an unresolved difference between practices. There are poetics still 'spoken' in an autobiographical voice in which the enounced figure of the poet within the text is supposed to be

indistinguishable from the enouncing poet, and in which, unsurprisingly, the topic of a poem is often an autobiographical moment. Indeed this autobiographical circuit is often what is meant by the term 'lyric': something song-like provides a transformed and transforming modality of utterance that can be, contradictorily, both self-ennobling and self-transcendent.

Even within practices that could be described as 'modernist', there is extensive range of play in what is always potentially a triple figure: poet behind the text, poet within the text, poet's experience in the text as event (in Jakobson's terms this is to say that the figure of the poet can contribute to all of the emotive, poetic and referential functions, with varying emphases between them). Think of the hyperbolic MacSweeney figure in *The Book of Demons* (MacSweeney 1997), the proper name subjected to gleeful and punishing variation; the consistent and purposefully ambivalent enquiry into the 'words of selves' in Denise Riley's work (Riley 1993, 2000a and 2000b); the hesitant speaking presence in John Temple (Temple 2003); the use of 'I' as a mask for impersonation in, for example, Pound (Pound 2001) or F.T.Prince (Prince 1993); or writing in which the word 'I' is violently – even sometimes uncertainly – separated from its status as shifter, from its place as the marker at the mouth-opening of utterance. Perhaps J.H. Prynne's *Not You* (Prynne 1993 and 1999) could serve as just one example.ⁱⁱⁱ

The 'poet behind the text' can become a very literal and present figure on the occasion of public readings. Many have commented on the charisma of James's readings. MacSweeney too could be charismatic. Riley has tried to resist this charisma (those who have heard her read can decide how successfully), making a

point of commenting on the way ‘the strange convention of the poetry reading ushers in a theatrical self’ (Riley 2000b: 62). Prynne’s readings are deliberately rare^{iv}.

Writers have long adopted procedures intended to outwit an autobiographical speaking self. I think these outwittings could all be said to rely on notions of a systemic medium above, below or beyond any individual utterance – Science, Objectivity, Divine Guidance, Chance, *the Unconscious*, *the Language*, *the People*, Intertextuality.

Here, from T.S. Eliot, is a symptomatic modernist remark on a motive for the effacement of self in writing. It comes from ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (Eliot 1920):

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is that the poet has not a “personality” to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important to the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

In treating the poet as medium, rather than as expressive agent, and in referring to a theory of the soul, Eliot indicates a theological genealogy (closely linked, I would say, with a ‘metaphysical’ view of ‘scripture’) to this question of an ‘I’ in and of poetry. Keats’s ‘negative capability’ is not too far away from this kind of statement, and later Jack Spicer was to produce a very literal version of ‘medium’ in his account of poet as radio receiver (Spicer 1975: 273–5)^v. The vocabulary also helps to

distinguish between two strong notions of self that in practice are difficult to keep apart: self as a metaphysical unity, as both subject and object of self-knowledge; and self as a 'medium of impressions and experiences', a social everyday self of both the just-so-happens and the make-it-happen^{vi}.

I put the just-so-happens and the make-it-happen together as aspects of this 'everyday self', although they could also obviously be presented as quite different. I am trying to get at the obvious fact that there are complementary roles within the 'impression' metaphor – for example, stamp and wax. Freud's 'Mystic Writing Pad' (Freud 1984) is a classic text, perhaps, for self as wax; and then, in contrast, there is de Certeau's tactical 'common man' (Certeau 1988), operating a pragmatics of the everyday, making it happen with no grandiosity at all.

It may be in a tension between the two that much of the interest lies in poems like those of John James. At the end of his introduction to the *Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (O'Hara 1972: x), John Ashbery, commenting on the autobiographical material that pervades the poems, has this to say:

Yet there is little that is confessional about it—he does not linger over aspects of himself hoping that his self-absorption will make them seem exemplary.

Rather he talks about himself because it is he who happens to be writing the poem ...

This may be disingenuous. The poet whose poems can be read as clues to taste is also a stylist most concerned with the presentation of a social self^{vii}. It is a matter of style to make this presentation seem a just-so-happens.

A simple dichotomy might suggest itself: on one side, those for whom a poem is an 'expression' of a poet's personality and experience; on the other, those for whom a poet is self-effacing 'medium' for the enunciative flux of her or his time. A way of consolidating such a dichotomy might seem to be to set up Frank O'Hara's *Personism*^{viii} (O'Hara 1975: 498-9) in opposition to the Eliot excerpt above. But let me reformulate the second half of Eliot's first sentence, removing the negation (*not this but this*): 'a poet has a particular medium to express, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways'. Spicer would talk about *being* a medium, not *expressing* one. This may well be a symptom of the 'struggle' that Eliot was experiencing as he shaped these thoughts. For the moment I prefer to take it as intentional because what it introduces, mistake or not, is the potential for two different thickenings: textual and cognitive (or psychological). If the poet is an 'expressed medium' then the figure of the poet can be made central to the thickened texture of the text, quite inseparable from it. To the extent that I am talking about poems (rather than socially or biographically knowable poets), the figure of the poet can only be found *in* the text and this device of the figured medium can trouble the status of a text from within, for example by giving it the features of live exchange, with all the contingencies of a speech directed by one person to another(s) in a quite specific situation. This can make a 'text' feel as though it is symptomatic of some social exchange that is larger than it is, that some alternative communicative posture might be assumed at any time. There is a rhetorical figure known as parabasis, in which the author is permitted – perhaps through the medium of a chorus – to speak directly to the audience on 'personal or topical matters' (OED). The convention of the poetry reading is built around this figure, with the poet signalling when s/he speaks *in person* – and therefore in the real time of the reading performance – and when s/he is the medium for voicing the text that was produced in another time. You

could say that this convention produces a double performance: the 'pure' performance of the text and the performance of being the author. James is one of those poets who can pull the effect of parabasis back into the text.

Of course – and this really does make a difference – the text's intertextual relations are part of – perhaps become part of – the text. John Wilkinson's *Angel Exhaust* article on John James (Wilkinson 1996: 80–91) includes in its title, let alone its argument, how James dressed for his late 1970s readings (how, you could say, he made himself up; clothes and make-up are after all everyday theatricalities of the presented self). Here there is no possibility of a reductive notion of the text itself, unless the notion of text is properly expanded to include the performing presence of the poet at a live event. And if it can be expanded this far, who is going to decide what else gets in to the enlarged sense of text?

And I have not yet emphasised one of the most memorable propositions in *Personism*: 'While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born.' This is knowingly a long way from a poem as a 'machine made of words' (Williams 1965: 4)^{ix}, according to which a poem is *like* a telephone rather than an exchange between people that could *use* the telephone as its medium or channel. Part of the joke here is that a lover's telephone call, unless recorded and transcribed as though it were a David Antin talk piece, leaves no textual trace that is available to others. If a poem really is between two people, what am I, a third party, doing here? What is left for me is a poem that may be *as though* to another but - as far as the poem is concerned *as poem* - addresser, addressee, address and context of address are all *in* the poem. Once a 'message' is 'poetic', in Jakobson's use of these two terms, the notion of

addresser and addressee get muddled – at the very least doubled^x. The ‘poetic’ text is a deliberately made thing, in no way restricted to the occasion of an initial spontaneous exchange with another. All writing is of its nature detachable from its original ‘addresser’. There are intellectual property rights to provide some compensation for this severance but these are applied by law from without. Territorial markings of a text have to leave traces of the individuality of the author *within*. These can include the signature of what linguists call idiolect^{xi} (for example, Barthes as well as a trail of proper names and allusions that fill out the space behind the first-person pronoun.

Any poet can engage with registers of address and can even use a poem as an instrument of direct address – for seduction of a person or an audience, for example; or indeed as a gift^{xii}. Where persuasion of any kind is involved, as it usually will be, the addresser will be figured into the address, as a full part of its purpose. There is a ‘John James’ in these poems. Students of fiction are routinely taught to distinguish between author and first-person narrator. These poems that carry the author’s name – John James – speak as John James, and in doing so elaborate a performing self who carries that name, a cited or quoted ‘John James’^{xiii}.

If the poem is a machine made of words, it is a machine placed – if only hypothetically – by one party before another(s), in a rhetoric compounded of power and desire; in a rhetoric specific to an occasion that may either be evoked or actually constructed by the poem.

The essential feature of text, therefore, is that it is interaction. The exchange of meanings is an interactive process, and the text is the means of exchange ... (Halliday 1997: 139).

This suggestive passage goes on to identify texts as ‘coded forms of gift’, often participating in larger contexts of exchange that can be viewed as ‘contests in giving’.

John James’s poems fail Keats’s test of negative capability^{xiv}. They have designs. And because they have designs on others they have rhetorical design. That rather abstract triple figuration above (*poet behind the text, poet within the text, poet’s experience in the text as event*) does not allow for this dynamic between the figures and beyond them. A poet brings desire to a place about to become a poem; the desire finds a place and shape in the poem which is both adequate and not adequate because the desire was not wholly *for* the poem; the poem, shaped by this desire, calls out in a double address: one that relays the desire that preceded it; one that vibrates in its shaped desires. A poem can be a missile made of words.

In *Collected Poems* there are poems that perform the presentation of a social self in the act of performing preparations and awaitings for that self; poems in the guise of recipe for public behaviour^{xv}; poems that adopt modes of address that disrupt the expected civilities of social space^{xvi}.

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In *The Small Henderson Room* is a poem called ‘A Public Self-address System’ (71). The word ‘self’ is of course a messy supplement, an intruder into a perfectly comprehensible term: ‘public address system’, an arrangement of amplification that can make loud voices louder and allow quiet ones to extend their reach without sounding louder; registers of intimate private exchange can reach out into a ‘public’ which they thereby transform. The title catches all of this contradictoriness, invoking the values of public address in a deliberate confusion with the kind of poem that can read like a diary entry. Is this poem indicating that this poetic ‘self’ is already a

'public' persona or is it hauling a back region self into the front region for an all-too public address (perhaps even a dressing down)? Of course any poem is itself a public context by virtue simply of being published. This is the delicious paradox of so much work in the lyric mode: the experiences and affects of a privatised self are rendered public and the conditions of privacy require this paradoxical publicity.

A later untitled poem that starts 'uuhhh?' (111) and seems full of a surplus frustration and near violence, has this in it:

this morning
 has all the insistence
 of reiterated financial
 difficulties
 & is hence
 PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL, by
 virtue of its separation
 from unthatched
 events
 back in the distant market

The specific nature of these financial difficulties is not the topic. If it were, then this might be a 'confessional' poem. This 'PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL' is the privacy or privation that marks the legal and financial relationship between a 'self' and financial corporations: a self-address system in the sense that this is how public companies address 'selves'. The poem starts abruptly in the middle of things. The corporate address has just taken place in the implied real time (that means, dramatic time) of the poem. Something has just been said or done, so frustrating that words would be too refined a response. First the surprised interrogative – 'uuhhh?'; then the disgusted self answer - 'hacchh!'.

Both this poem and 'A Public Self-address System' also feature a choice of music, a programming for the occasion, and something that can be named and specified as

choice in contrast to the pressing abstractions of 'separation' or the phantasmagoric choice of *who to be*.

'A Public Self-address System' also starts in an abrupt way:

What a range of possible action:
 But we must, by necessity of essence,
 be capable of holding up
 those modes unsuited to the moment –
 there's a whole system of choices
 by which to operate
 & that's an intrinsic feature of you, butty!

This is a tottering performance of an empty or contradictory public rhetoric. A rousing if unspecifying opening line, immediately followed up with the hesitating caution of a 'but' and an expansive first person plural; the ethical (self-)exhortation of 'must', then a comma-induced pause; abstraction compounded with abstraction and assonance in 'necessity of essence'. Both logic and sound suggest that 'essence' is a reversal of 'necessity', or at least of that kind of necessity that is associated with 'must'. There the two words sit, separated only by an 'of', with all those *ns*, *es*, *cs* (sounded as *ss*) and *ss*: *necess*, forwards; *nesse*, backwards.

The stacked arrangement of clauses reads like those rhetorical delaying tactics in which a speaker keeps talking in order to engineer time to find a suitably charged resolution^{xvii}. In other words, he holds things up. And in holding them up he holds them to view, perhaps, including those modes that would not automatically come into view because they are 'unsuited to the moment'^{xviii}. Is it a choice to consider what 'suits'? The tottering comes to an end, finally, in the bathos and familiarity of the self-address – 'butty'! These lines have *performed* a helpless attempt to use a rhetoric of choice to make everything all right. It hasn't worked. And when I say it hasn't worked I don't at all mean that this is a failure *as poem*. I mean rather that the

the miserable whine of traffic in the streets.

That 'we are standing / on' evokes a caricature of an island, a Gulliver ('we') *on* Lilliput. This is the *wrong* setting. But what to do about it? 'Look out!' That's a threat. But what of and to whom? The image of the buzzard flying straight for its feed is vague in regard to these questions, though not short on tone. And the music always stops at some point.

In 'Poem of Inevitable September, or, I'm a City Boy at Heart' (59), there is a variant on this motif of oppressive disproportionality between the desire brought into the poem and its setting:

looking down out of quite another sort of emptiness
into an English thoroughfare, in a town so small you can
feel it all day like wearing a collar
a size too small.

In this case there is a 'you' instead of a 'we'. Again this 'self' is too big for the setting, and needs, by implication, the imaginary City in order to transcend this sense of constraint and disproportionality.

In these poems the poet looks for a transcendence, a getting away or a getting above;
or paradoxically a becoming safe within, a quieting of desire, presumably through a fulfilment that is not an isolated one

I have desire safe against the mist here,
locked in its box of bone. I look into you again &
know we can still find ourselves out on the street
walking very slowly towards the taxi
not at all cold.

Fulfilment, euphoria, the occasion that matches desire – from time to time these are to be found within the poem. More often, perhaps, the poems enact the frustration that these forms of transcendence indeed would have their suited settings, their suited occasions, but that this is not here, or now. It is one thing to be awaiting a part in a scheduled grand occasion; quite another to be waiting for an occasion adequate for an already conceived part and for the desired kind of setting. This waiting often takes place in bars or bathrooms. One example could be the early sequence called

'Waiting' (61–66), or a poem also published in *The Small Henderson Room* called 'Side Window' (68):

Thus,
the contemplative delay cannot be named
indolence; rather a poised inhalation of ... er ...
certain powers.

Once again a proposition is deliberately undercut by the poised absence of poise, by a performance of its stalling or self-frustration. James characteristically employs two related tropes. One – the state of *neither-nor* – can be illustrated from this same poem:

Meanwhile, my position lacks sense –
I'm neither perturbed nor unperturbed.

A variant is a circular construction that takes the form of a speaking expressed as a refusal to speak, as in: 'what I make of the situation is what I make of the situation' ('Poem of Inevitable September', 58). This is one of those KEEP OFF signs expressed with attitude (ie 'and I can make you'). It is not far from the posture of:

Watch out for further exfoliations in
our casual blasé mean and cocky
how-would-you-like-a-punch-in-the-nose
attitude

('Talking in Bed' 2, 109; and again in '(cough)', 156)

At some remove from these devices is the exhilaration of full public-address modes (*A Former Boiling* (159–167), *Inaugural Address* (181–185)), or of attention to art works in attempts to translate the address their materials make (*Toasting* (169–179) and many others). In these poems, that I will not discuss here, the 'self' disappears into the performance, is wholly part of it. The address is public and is not 'self-address'.

'I'm neither perturbed nor unperturbed' is unlikely ever to sound calmly unperturbed. Although the poems often reach for calm and, perhaps especially early

on, often switch register towards the end in order to do so, the effect is too disturbed, too active in its surface effects, to work as narcissism. The poems all want something outside of themselves and can never settle unambivalently on this want.

as we let the afternoon
recline to its conclusion with as much poise as Manet's
Olympia, but not so bold erotic or passé – just
resting, calm in the assurance of a lack of stasis.^{xix}

(Side Window, 68)

The afternoon reclines to its conclusion. 'Reclining to' is movement. 'Reclining' – which is what *Olympia* can be said to be doing in Manet's painting – can be still, though most significantly, *erotic* is intended to *move* (transitive verb). Quotidian time moves in its all too familiar cycle: every day, afternoon becomes evening, evening becomes night. There is no stasis about this except when the cycle is viewed from above, as still. Manet's *Olympia* is invoked only to have really significant aspects of the painting first stated and then subtracted from the simile: 'not so bold erotic or passé'. What is left of the likeness? Where have these notions of the 'bold erotic and passé', having been stated, now gone? How long will this rest last? It is some way, for sure, from 'Meanwhile my position lacks sense'. 'Calm assurance of lack of stasis' is as close as the poem will get to stasis.

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'Inventory' from the early *Trägheit* (49–50) deals directly with this 'lack of stasis' that wants its own calm:

Whichever way I go,
what aches frets or elates, continually recurs,
& has its own self-consciousness. It is like
what we want least to be deprived of.

and ends on a note of willed elevation that expresses something of a manifesto for desire:

I would speak out not in solution, but cell to cell
as long as I remain unsevered from my purpose.

And yet this poem is rhetorically and syntactically structured around forms of severance – often in the guise of the separation out into alternatives or contrasts: *whichever; either / or; neither / nor; but*. Each of the two quoted lines contains a negative, undercutting the assertiveness of the positive statement: ‘not in solution, but cell to cell’; ‘unsevered’. As with the elimination of features within a simile, ‘unsevered’ invokes the very severance it wishes away. That second line is also conditional on the ‘as long as I remain’. This conditionality echoes the ‘would’ in the previous line, though as a modal term in a number of English dialects ‘would’ also operates as a kind of (self-) imperative, as a modulation of ‘I must’. So just in these two lines there is a ‘not ... but’ construction as well as an ‘as long as ... un’ one. And this modality is not only present in the first two lines. Reducing the poem to the first words of its nineteen sentences (seven sentences in the first thirty-three-line section and twelve in the shorter second and third sections combined.), reveals this pattern

Whichever ... Or ... Neither ... Its ... Nor ... Nor ... Nor ...

(33 lines)

Whichever ... It ... We ... Having ... Having ... Or ...

(10 lines)

I ... They ... Sometimes ... It ... But ... That ... I

(12 lines)

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Most of my examples have come from the earlier collections. I’ll not try to offer an account of a full trajectory of the work beyond referring again to John Wilkinson’s view that the toasting poems of the late 1970s demonstrate a possible direction in James’s poetry through the charismatic performance of a public persona and poetics

that could well have developed into a sustained public rhetoric and have attracted wide popular interest (Wilkinson 1996). These poems read as though explicitly designed for public address. Like many forms that mix spoken rhetoric with music – or retain a spoken rhetoric that has strong associations with a musical form – the rhetorical devices are in your face; incremental tropes of repetition that must always suggest the dynamics of improvisation. The later pages of *Collected Poems* show a return to quieter self-citation – down to a near reprise of some of the earliest poems.

A Theory of Poetry (133–137), published before the toasting poems, mixes a formalist *ars poetica* (one that adapts a visual aesthetic of abstraction and materiality drawn from his interest in painting) with provocative attitudinising about appropriate behaviours for a would-be poet. So far as I am aware John James has not published critical articles on poetry, nor articles on poetics. He prefers, it seems, to absorb such modes of attention into his poems, where reading is a situated act, and operates as a ‘mode ... suited to the moment’:

I haven't a thought in my head that could
sound like a line of Hölderlin

(Rough, 114)

A named book can also be a prop in a backroom performance, like *The White Stones* (The Dragon House, 119), an ‘old Paris Review’, or the ‘Tauchnitz edition of Tarr’ (both Talking in Bed, 108/9), which flop or slip from the poet’s fingers. It may be significant that in all these instances, reading is not actually taking place; there is the sign that it has and perhaps that it has languorously lapsed^{xx}.

A Theory of Poetry is not a ‘theory’ at all, at least not in any way that would be understood by literary theorists. It is deliberately magisterial in tone, and like the earlier ‘To a Young Art Student’ (24), adopts the posture of worldly advice to the

young. As such it relies on charisma and, as so often in John James's poems, it raises a pleasurable ambivalence about the extent to which practice and preaching are one, or whether they even want to be. For example:

 this will subvert any/ deny any/ positive/negative
 narrative reading
 & stress the written surface
 with all its openings windows apertures leaks

This (read with the preceding stanzas) is impeccably in a line of modernist poetics that has promoted deliberate textuality (texture) over narrative (very much including autobiography) or other teleological structures. However, it is precisely the way that a narrative reading always troubles 'the written surface' – or indeed the way that the 'written surface' can itself be read as the trace of a narrative event – that is one of the pleasurable complexities (perhaps Keats would have said *perplexities*) of James's poems. This narrative reading very much includes a figure of the poet in that surface: the poet as written but always teasing too with a presence whose wants and frustrations disturb that surface. A poem can't actually punch you in the nose. But could this poet?

Usually when I read this poem, I 'do it' 'in the countryside'. So what am I to make of:

 avoid the countryside unless
 you are going to do something there
 like ascend Helvellyn
 or shoot a brace of partridge to take to your kitchen

And where do I place myself in relation to:

 useful activities include
 eating talking and dancing
 listening to music (preferably live bands
 looking at paintings & undressing
 dressing & undressing

The poems are full of such acts cited as apt rituals or provocations (or both), moments of deliberate pleasure turned as gesture or knowing display – repeatable moves in a Theory of Living, always very precise. The poems are either sociable or in a solitude that remembers or awaits sociability. They are sometimes quiet and tender acts in the departing shadow of the inevitably fugitive. They are sometimes full of a sarcasm that seems aimed at making *someone* uncomfortable. At other times they are angry. And when they are threatened, they threaten.

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ⁱ Numbers in brackets following poem titles refer to page numbers in *Collected Poems* (James 2002)

ⁱⁱ According to Jakobson there are six factors at play in any communication event. An *addresser* sends a *message* to an *addressee*. For this to work the participants have to be in *contact*, more or less share a *code*, and also each have some prior knowledge of the *context* which gives meaningfulness to the message. Different motivations for communication place the 'set' or emphasis of the event on different factors. Jakobson uses the term 'emotive' for a communication motivated to draw attention to the addresser and 'poetic' for a communication designed to draw attention to the formal qualities of the message. In this terminology, 'message' refers to the quite specific material and formal properties of the communication object/event, not what it 'says'.

ⁱⁱⁱ Two of these poets – Barry MacSweeney and J.H.Prynne – appear in various guises in James's poems. Denise Riley almost certainly does too, in a poem called 'Gender' (341), that reads in its entirety: 'Denise is a very secretive people & so am I'. And I think this works the other way round too. Isn't there some intertextual crackling in Riley's 'When it's Time to Go' and in 'Rayon', both from *Mop Mop Georgette* (Riley 1993, 39 & 41)?

^{iv} A decision that in no way diminishes the charismatic aura of the poet 'behind the text'.

^v 'The Practice of Outside', cited from *Caterpillar XII*, July 1970; see also 'Sporting Life' in the same book (218)

^{vi} There is a third 'notion of the self', not directly implied in the brief quotation from Eliot but consistent with either the metaphysical unity or the situated social self, and that is the charismatic self. Gregory Freidin calls the first chapter of his book on Osip Mandelstam (Freidin 1987) 'The Charisma of Poetry and the Poetry of Charisma'. Many of the charismatic behaviours, textual and otherwise, that he notes in relation to Mandelstam would be actively eschewed by James but his discussion seems apt even so. In particular, he dwells on the poet's manner of reading, his social demeanour towards others, his 'hauteur'.

^{vii} I have Erving Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959/1990) in mind here, a book in which the author uses an extended analogy from theatre for plotting the way in which social selves are rehearsed and performed. One of the chapters of this book is called 'Regions and Region Behaviour'. In this, Goffman distinguishes between back regions (for example, the kitchen of a hotel) and front regions (for example, the dining room of the same hotel). This distinction is an entertaining one to apply to James's poems. Some can perhaps be separated according to region. Many of them are back region poems, exalting in the pleasures of preparation or the frustrations of waiting. Preparation is itself a performance. Others deliberately confuse front and back, treating each as the other.

^{viii} There is also O'Hara's contribution to the *Statements of Poetics* (O'Hara 1972: 500, from Allen 1960: 419–420): 'What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems'. John Wilkinson (Wilkinson 1996: 80–91) has already made the obvious connection between the O'Hara 'manifesto' and John James's practice.

^{ix} In Williams the metaphor of machine seemed to take over from an earlier metaphor of building or architecture that had emerged in an exchange with his architect brother (See, for example, Williams 1984: 55). In 'The Morning of Acmeism', written in 1913, Osip Mandelstam had written, 'An artist's feeling for the world is a tool, like a mason's mallet, and his only tangible product is the work itself'. (Quoted by Nadezhda Mandelstam in *Hope Against Hope* (London: Harvill, 1977 and 1999, 268).

^x See note ii above. Halliday's (Halliday 1978) terminology may be more helpful than Jakobson's in relation to (inter)-personism in that he provides some means for thinking the interplay between 'interpersonal' and 'textual' functions in language exchange.

^{xi} Roland Barthes both adopts and problematises the term in *Elements of Semiology* (Barthes 1967, I.1.7), citing Martinet's definition: 'the language inasmuch it is spoken by a single individual'.

^{xii} See the reference Halliday 1997, below.

^{xiii} It may be useful to suggest parallels with film, theatre and some contemporary modes of 'performance'. Conventionally, actors in naturalistic dramatic narratives are impersonators of fictional characters; they may draw on their 'real' selves but are also supposed to be skilled at keeping themselves out of it. This does not apply to those actors characterised as stars, whose 'real' self has to be a sustained performance requiring a huge support staff. Often a part in a film or play will be adopted or even designed to support this other performance. Modes of performance developed in visual art contexts have very deliberately eschewed any notion of 'acting' or impersonation. Out of Brechtian distantiation comes another tradition, one in which performers at one and the same time double as 'themselves' and as the figures of artifice that a script or a devising process has produced. Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy, for example, when performing in their company, desperate optimists, have addressed each other by their first names when in full performing mode. Spalding Grey performed 'himself' in his monologues.

^{xiv} 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us,' in a letter to Reynolds, dated 3 February 1818 (Keats 1948: 96). Just as apt to my present discussion is the equally well known proposition in his letter of 27 October 1818 to Woodhouse: 'A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in and for filling some other body.' (Keats 1948:228)

^{xv} Many of the poems include recipes – or at least contain references to food that are attentive to choice of ingredients and their treatment in cooking – or take the form of an instruction set, like a recipe. I include *A Theory of Poetry* (133–138) in this last category.

^{xvi} I shall return to some of these disruptive effects later in the article.

^{xvii} When he was alive, my father-in-law used to enjoy completing the adult threat that starts 'If you do that again' with the anticlimax of 'that'd be the second time'.

^{xviii} I am grateful to the editor for prompting me about 'holding up'.

^{xix} It seems no coincidence that the words 'poise' and 'passé' have both appeared twice in my quotations from James's poems. The stylist who aims at poise, and who knows at what cost, can even knowingly risk balance – and thereby display poise – through an occasional embrace of the passé. Alternatives to passé are 'stale' and 'faded' ('Talking in Bed', 108–9)

^{xx} The very first poem in *Collected poems* has this:
the book

slipped from
his fingers
pages flutter (*Shades in a Conversation*, 3)

E.6

Karen Mac Cormack's *Implexures*:

An Implicated Reading

a

On the back cover of *Implexures* Cole Swensen's endorsement describes the text's structure as 'polybiographic'. This term seems to have emerged when a name was needed for a participatory method devised for compiling a history of medical sonography through the medium of an internet discussion list. Initially the instigators of the project had used the term 'poly-autobiography' but had changed this because the historical archive was proving to be 'both biographical and autobiographical'.¹ The aim was to create a history of a group activity through equal contributions of individual members of the group without conventional editing or univocal narration. DuBose, apparently the author of the term, comments:

The primary problem anticipated will be the differences in individuals' writing styles, and a possibly confused organization.²

b

The Great North Road was intended by Cecil Rhodes to run up through Africa from Cape Town as symbol and means of economic and political colonising of an entire continent. It passes through two territories that for a while bore inflected variants of his family name and that were, for a few decades, administered by the company he developed. In the more northerly of these, now called Zambia – its name coined as an

adaptation of the name of a river rather than of a hero of an infiltrating people – it runs up through Lusaka, through Kabwe, and then, six kilometres north of Kapiri Mposhi, takes an easterly turn and divides off from the main road to the copper belt.

This is map, not memory. It is someone else's mnemonic, not mine, though an earlier version of 'me' did travel those roads, and these names sounded through my early childhood and in later family story-telling. I was born in Kabwe at a time when it was known to white English speakers as Broken Hill, named after a mining town in Australia. I was born there because there were no hospital facilities in Mkushi, where my family was living because of my father's posting. Mkushi is just off the Great North Road after its easterly turn.

Karen Mac Cormack was born some years later in a town on the south west of the copper belt called Luanshya. She was to spend very little time in the country. She seems pleased, in biographical notes, to name it as her birthplace, and to speak of her two passports, one Canadian, the other British.

According to the 'World Factfile' on the CIA website, English is the official language of Zambia to this day. The site lists the 'major vernaculars' as Bemba, Kaonda, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, Tonga, with 'about 70 other indigenous languages'. Employment in the mines at Luanshya attracted speakers of many of these tongues, though I believe that Bemba is the main one of the area. My mother learned Bemba and Nyanja. I could speak only one language and that was English. I left Zambia when I was just 13.

c

Many 'countries' are mentioned by name in *Implexures*. Zambia is not one of them. Nor is Canada. The following are: Malta, Ceylon, Sudan (the Anwar dam), Ireland, Saint Lucia, Mexico, Isle of Man, England, Scotland, Greece (Naxos, Athens), Sardinia, Tenerife, Lanzerote, United States of America (Boston, San Francisco, New York), Italy (many parts), Portugal (Porto), Turkey (Istanbul), South Africa (Cape Town).

These places relate to different aspects of this family biography, and therefore to different times – some to more than one. They seem to derive from archives, from parental nomadism, from the travellings of a western (young) adult ('This is the faraway those living in a cold climate vacation to' (I, Six 24)), from replays of family memory in talk and letters.

The list above could be re-sequenced to show which of the 'countries' had once been under British rule, which ones operated officially or significantly through the English language, which of the rest are fully receptive to English through tourism. The CIA 'World Factfile' has English last in its list of languages in use in Sudan but adds that 'a program of "Arabization" is in process'. Under Article 8 of the Irish Constitution, 'The Irish language as the national language is the first official language' and 'The English language is recognized as a second official language'.³

I think the name Canada is carefully avoided at one point in *Implexures* through the less political 'North America' (I, Fifteen 60). And here is another avoidance – more telling, for my purpose:

Is this even vaguely similar to the disenchantment with the touchstone (now estranged from), that country so forming and formative whose language I live in? (I, Ten 44).

I take that country so mentioned to be England and the bracketed phrase to be full of ambivalence. A touchstone was used to test the quality and genuineness of metal alloys. Is this estrangement a loss of faith in this device for testing good faith? Is it a metaphor of the country as a whole set of values? For a language? Is it (also) a nostalgia, a pain at the loss of a means of returning home? The silence of 'Canada' is very loud and sounds like the refusal of any *here* as privileged place of return, of 'I', of 'home'.

Movement as a *place* itself so no motion is homeless. (I, Six 28)

d

In the abstract of his essay on 'polybiography', DuBose defines the term as 'the history by many of the many events'. I prefer to be less certain about where the *poly* leans in *Implexures*. Yes indeed, the voices of many, sequenced or layered through. But *many* can have, as any sociologist of language could tell you, one collective voice, a plural homoglossia; or different voices that together harmonise their differences in the making of a unified and coherent *topic* or *chaft*. *Poly* is not necessarily *hetero*, especially where genealogy is at stake. Isn't genealogy usually a discourse of the *same*, a search for or recitation of *homology*?

DuBose chooses to slip in 'events' where etymology would suggest 'lives', on the assumption that a biography is the writing of a set of *events* that constitute a life.

At one point in *Implexures* Mac Cormack also adopts the word in a way that treats events as inseparable from 'experience'⁴:

(Chronology is the death of us.) *When* we experience an event is only important to the individual whereas *if* and with what results the experience has occurred is

of concern to a collective. The family goes in so many directions as to render the singular forever invalid. (I, Seven 35).

I find this a significant but troublesome passage. The 'if' status of an experience is particularly troubling, marking uncertainty in the form of a 'whether'. 'If' here is a phenomenological condition – closely related, I think, to that epistemological modality of uncertainty that Keats called 'negative capability'. How do you experience not experiencing? This can also get close to an elaborated practice of vicariousness, in particular of proxy experience by way of identification with the experiences of selected others, especially family. Time includes what hasn't happened: the missing events also need their chronology.

The passage is one of many aphoristic wisdoms that double as commentaries on the purpose and method of *Implexures*, and that consequently provide an immediate means of using the surrounding text to test the proposition. The poet has just listed a sequence of strong visual memories ('The sunrise in Naxos, the sunsets in Mexico ... the rainbows at Bolton Abbey'.) Memory and writing of memory can bring these together into a simultaneous set, into a single (sequenced) sentence. Chronology is usually taken to imply a listing of events in the order in which they occurred. But *when* is not the same as putting into line, as the book's opening epigraph makes clear. As demonstrated, memory can jump between *whens*, absorbing them into the *now* of its own inescapable present tense. *Implexures* is full of *time writing*, and of deliberately writing across time, is much taken with different methods for this task. *Implexures* indeed is in large measure a *chronology*, a discourse of and on time.

The passage quoted above assumes that chronology and a relation of individual and collective can be spoken of in the same breath, though not with the same article. It is

'*the* individual' and '*a* collective', and there is an easy slide from 'collective' to 'family', though this time it is '*the* family'.

Plurals in English grammar are imprecise, perhaps particularly in relation to personal pronouns. The death of 'us'. When 'we' experience. I suspect that language historians of the future will be able to date – to chronologise – such usages, perhaps as 'humanist first person plural'. And what of this other collective singular, 'the family'? Is this the generic term that anthropologists use? Or is it the particular family whose biography is here being written, that is being narrated *as family*? It is certainly not, in this context, the ideological term often invoked in the phrase 'family values'. Is a family not a kind of singularity? Isn't a genealogy that is narrated from within the network of genetic affiliations it narrates always a singular perspective? These are *my* people? Blood is thicker than water.

Implexures is a writing of many lives, but not *any* lives. Most of the many are *already* in formation under a collective term, awaiting as it were a confirmatory writing. Some have even prepared that writing with a writing of their own. But it is a writing that does not want to claim any singularity of perspective, nor knowingly to adopt the modes that might lead that way. Its chronology is a mixing of time. It is a polygraphy in the sense that it contains many writings of a life or of lives, whoever provides them.

e

Let me try a wavering distinction and pretend that there isn't a huge weight of past philosophy pressing up against it.

There is a writing driven by and towards an ontology, a discourse on *being*. This writing wants to push around in being, in status, in posture – either the being of the implied utterer or of the objectified world which authenticates this same being as co-present and as witness. As I understand it, this kind of writing wants to be at once singular and universal. Ontological *method* (a writing is always a method, viewable also perhaps as genre) universalises the singular, the particular. Typographically this can be represented as an oscillation between *being* and *Being*.

Any ontology that relies on writing is also, pragmatically, an utterance working in *interpersonal* modalities. It addresses someone or knows that someone is overhearing. To mix grammar in there, there is no ontology without *person*, and because person is a grammatical set there is no person without the *other* persons of grammar.

Any genealogy that is also in part autobiographical is both an enquiry into and an act of specific ontology: this is who *I* am and this is how I know. It is I who speaks thus, with all these others lined up behind and around me, including all those others who are part of the temporal ensemble of my I-through-time and of those various sets to whom I can belong as 'we'.

And then – and here is a first distinction – there is a writing that knowingly operates in nets and modes of knowledge. It might well do so in a spirit of disputation, want not only to push statements and ideas around, but also to disturb vectors of knowledge, very much including those that are linguistic. There is an extreme form of this position in writing, and one with which I'd connect Karen Mac Cormack: any act of writing, even the purportedly ontological, intervenes in knowledge and finds

its way into available patterns of intersubjectivity⁵. Within this position, for example, syntax is always also argument, at the levels of both grammar and discourse. The argument may well be *against* ontology, against any predication that seems to be sourced only in deictic utterance.

In two earlier Mac Cormack texts – *Fit To Print* and *At Issue* (with Alan Halsey) – the argument or programme has been fully specified. On the back cover of *Fit to Print*, there is this:

Structured on patterns of meaning that foreground linguistic materiality, these poems negotiate the newspaper format to enact a fusion of mass culture with an innovative writing practice.

The author's foreword to *At Issue*, includes this:

In AT ISSUE I examine the format and contents of the magazine instead of those of the newspaper, as Alan Halsey and I did in our *FIT TO PRINT*.

A poem is claimed back as a mode of expository writing. It can take the form of an 'examination'. Inevitably these specifications can act as rubrics (ie 'directions for ... conduct', OED) for readings of the body text. And an academic apparatus of bibliographies, lists of sources and references, reinforces this sense of cross-genre⁶.

I leave only slightly to one side an additional modal and generic question, that of *story*: knowledge modalities that rely on narrated networks of textual *persons* all *doing* things and having them *happen*. Here is Cole Swensen again, this time from an interview:

—but the "I" in a poem can only say: it's the third person that can "do" in a poem. I find that an interesting dichotomy: as soon as we get the first person in literature, we're reduced to speech, and in turn, speech becomes action, as in J. L. Austin's performative language. The spoken word is always an act. A primary act.⁷

How the first person singular has troubled writing! First the first person can only 'say' and not 'do' and then it turns out that all saying is doing after all. What are

these different kinds of acts? Once a *person* has got into a poem it may not make much difference whether it's first or third. There is, for a start, the difference between the 'I' who speaks through that pronoun and the one who narrates the actions of herself as 'I'⁸.

What does a genealogy 'do'? Is 'we' both an augmentation of 'I' and a way past it?

f.

I am going to attempt an extreme summary of the way the argument immediately above can apply to Karen Mac Cormack's writing.

The genealogical project of *Implexures* is at once ontological, epistemological and narratorial (being, knowing and story-telling). This folding together is the task of any genealogy that is *told* from within. Karen Mac Cormack is evidently conscious of recent proscriptions, within certain writing environments, against their convergence. The texts that are being 'examined' are, in a sense, Karen Mac Cormack's 'own'. This could have produced a reneging on or a disavowal of the *methods* of her preceding books and I'd be surprised if some readers don't see it this way. As I see it, she knows and wants the difficulties. For one thing, I am suggesting that the book represents her own re-negotiation with first person pronouns – singular and plural – , on terms. For another, she opens her units of composition up well beyond the sentences and lineation that had set her earlier compositional constraints.

g

Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company secured, as part of its charter, mineral rights in the territory that was to become Zambia. Until 1924 this charter also

required the company to provide administration. In 1924 this responsibility passed to the Colonial Office of the United Kingdom.

I was born in Zambia because my father was a 'colonial servant'. At first it was a job and then it was as though he had been called. In his case, and of many of his friends, this did not mean that the call of Home ever quieted. The place he called Home was somewhere unknown to me. It turned out later that there was no specific locale for this Home. It was geographically dispersed across counties and I don't think was ever so simple as being nameable as a 'country' (England-Scotland). Country, yes. A country, no. Cities were never part of the poetics of Home as I absorbed them. Nor are they a strong part of the poetics of *Implexures*.⁹

I was born away from Home. This just happens to be I.

Pick a childhood to look at. This doesn't have to be your own, but if it is, the strangeness of certain events may shift unexpectedly. The more central regions are established before questions reach those limits. (I, One 10)

And then there is a difference between being at home nowhere and of being sort of at home anywhere (or at least where English is spoken or where an English-speaking traveller or settler is expected).

h.

No home but in and through Language. The domestic place is marked off ahead with a personal pronoun, sets of interpersonal pronouns. Refusing these is to refuse to be at home in language in the very act of using it as refuse. Of course, languages are always leaving home, sometimes for good. It is that mode of language that is designed to operate away from home – what Basil Bernstein called the 'elaborated code' – that can fold an expansionist exile back into all its routine operations.

The Tongue Moves Talk, Fit to Print, At Issue – poems made from the re-assembly of the already uttered, mostly of the already written, of the already re-assembled.

Someone makes things out of words and because they are words this is already a kind of speaking. Even where procedures are strictly aleatoric there will even so be found the thrower of the dice, the deviser or acceptor of the procedures of chance. And these throws will be motivated, even if they are motivated to be unmotivated.

Writing through. The author's name on the cover. Suppressing the *I* may just be not *saying* it (like taboos against naming god that are the opposite of denial).

So, three takes, which do not exclude each other.

(i) At any one time, something moves a tongue or a hand to talk or write, or an already moving tongue or hand moves further talk or writing. Even if nothing *comes out*, the movement towards it is there, and to the extent that any such movement is discernible, *something comes out*. There is a potential for utterance from a marked place, a perturbation at a precise point and moment in the fields of language. This perturbation marks a witnessable place of desire, even if not yet either of speech or writing. Those are your lips that move, or that don't quite move. Those are your hands. Sometimes a holding back may be motivated by a counter-desire, the desire to avoid the double collusion of *I*. What happens *if I don't speak*? Is this experience of 'if' not itself a kind of negative utterance, a speaking not-speaking?

This may be a motif (and motive?) in *Implexures*.

(ii) The other take. Put it extremely: Language is a land-fill site of the already spoken, the already written.

Perhaps 'English' is on the way to being co-terminous with global late-capitalism¹⁰. Through what feats of tricksterism can any speaker of English step out of this relentless drift?

(iii) And at any one time, a third: neither the about-to-speak, the would-speak, nor the toxic detritus of the already expended. But the present participle, the in-use, engaged, occupied. This is not a difference between speech and writing that can fuel wars between their exponents, as between owls and nightingales, leaves and flowers. This is being caught up in the movements of the tongue moving talk, in the eddies and swirls of situated inter-desires. Where a tongue (hand) is moved, there is a social presence, a social performance, a motivated disturbance towards, within, or out of, language.

What is it to disturb the already uttered so as to disturb also this sense of social performance: to suppress the voiced or even implied *I*, to break^ε up any syntax contaminated by its issue from a desiring (and perhaps intrusively dangerous?) mouth. To voice is to encourage breath rhythmically to disturb your larynx. This is not 'the' body. It is yours.

i.

In the 14th century the English language replaced French "at the tables of the aristocracy". (I, Seventeen 66)

No doubt this has something to do with the fact that those same aristocrats had lost their Normandy estates and, by that, their privileged channel-crossing and identification with an over-there.

To what century will be ascribed the change that split 'Made in English' off from 'Made in England'¹¹.

j.

In the forty-seven pages of poetic text of *The Tongue Moves Talk*, the following are the only instances of 'I' or 'me'.

i. The title of the first poem is 'I'm Big On Ladders' (TTMT 11). This feels like citation rather than autobiography.

ii. In 'Do you Know Who Your Employer Is?' (TTMT 19), '(I would refer all terms to "grafting")' appears in brackets

iii. In the double-columned piece, 'At Issue II' (TTMT 37), just below the epigraph and, like the epigraph, in italics:

he this
i that

Neither the 'he' nor the lower case 'i' is placed in relation to a name.

iv. Included in the long prose periods of 'At Issue III' (TTMT 39) is, 'furniture I can ride and left profile'.

v. In 'Deca', there are two instances: 'I ran for the response was thrown so received where ushered ending up to leave' and 'I examine "to continue" a semblance of the other side of all unhinged deserves better'. (TTMT 43)

That's it.

Of course this is a very crude survey. It could be extended to take in also the uses of 'you', of 'we', and even the implied person of all the imperatives, a mood that may often be prominent where 'I's are being suppressed. Or even the exhalation of breath that forms an 'ah' and in doing so marks the emotive place of utterance ('Untitled', TTMT 13).

The examples in (iv) and (v) above are embedded in a syntax that is fairly typical of these books that precede *Implexures*. Pseudo-sentences seem to be composed out of existing phrases whose severance from prior sentences leaves jagged edges in their new syntactical home. For example, are there source sentences for 'furniture I can ride and left profile'? And if so are there two or are there three?

£

Statements and predications are by no means fully suppressed even if the place (and motivated agency) of utterance is disguised. Who states? Who predicates? And then there are those intriguing devices of person avoidance, of avoiding attribution of knowledge: 'it is', 'there is' (See perhaps especially 'Untitled', TTMT 20).

k.

The first striking instance of the first person pronoun in the book of *Implexures* is in the dedication, that place where a text can become a gift, a consecration, an offering:

*This ongoing text is dedicated with love
to those (living and deceased) who form
my community, creative and personal*

Initially the dedicator avoids first person through a passive voice that neutralises or abstracts agency. This abstraction ('is dedicated' rather than 'I dedicate') may well underwrite a *performance* of dedication through its invocation of a beyond-personal. The third line, though, homes in on person exactly where singular and plural are expected to co-mingle: 'my community'. Here a 'community' is in part a willed effect of textual activity, a made home, a putting into relationship, through text, of nameable persons, of pro-nameable persons. This is the other side, perhaps, of a deliberate distancing, through devices of linguistic disturbance, from the implied (the implicated) communality of an apparently common tongue.

l.

a
word
in
the
ear
of
another
word's
order

(AI, 11)

m.

The place names in *Implexures* do not pull unarchived memory back the way that they do, say, in Erin Mouré's earlier books¹². Mouré sings a memory tune that is in her head. It is never over. The narrative will always have its commentary, whose form of words might itself become a memory, ripe itself for commentary and so on. Memory is unavoidable repetition. Commentary can be both testimony to this

unavoidability and a means to escape it. In Mouré the folds are wrappings, can always be wrapped further or unwrapped. In Mouré memory may be recursive because Home is a present tense and a migrant skin – or a present tense that also surveys the other tenses. Memory is an interior, like Alberta, like that collectivity of organs that is a body felt as a within. And there are those passages and openings out and in, especially lips (labia). It is the way the *I* forms between the lips of the mouth. Out it comes, whatever its ironical turnings back and away.

In *Implexures* memory is a research project, an archive ('one refers to birth through paper [I, One 9]') of connected pasts and others.

To absorb a history of family through the centuries requires a forebear's attention to facts and no fear of paper. (I, One 10)

Or even to have (find) forebears whose lives will be archived, who expect to live in the fore-life of an archive, who are not feared by paper; whose houses have (had) libraries.

n.

I write this in the south west of England (in Devon, a proper name that features in *Implexures*), in a rural edge of a country that gives its name to this language of expansion, drift, commerce, globalised fantasies, reorientations and explanations; and I read across gender, an ocean and political borders, but still I don't expect to have to translate. There may be all kinds of estrangement *within* this language position. There is certainly anger *without*. If the source is French, someone (Fiona Strachan, Barbara Godard, Marlene Wildman, Caroline Bergvall?) will have de-estranged aspects of the language for me (perhaps you could say that the better they have done it, the more effectively they move me between different modes of

estrangement). In the language of Microsoft and the White House I pretend to attend to *ciudadáns* of elsewhere.

What do I know about Canada? How does my ignorance of English-speaking Canada differ from my ignorance of French-speaking Canada?

I know that English is a powerful vehicle of privileged nomadism through time and place, and that it is an instrument of person, time and relation. Wasn't it an English-speaking Canadian man who coined the term 'global village'? Where English is a first language there will still be entanglements of European genealogy (history read back from a genetic subject). Where English is an 'official' language without being everyone's first language there will be other entanglements. As a reader I can be folded into the writing in English of a Canadian poet, can find myself implicated there. At the same time I am cautious. I read across gender, across borders, across an ocean, whose crossings and re-crossings were, and still are, motivated, criss-crossed with wave forms that very much include the textual.

Where an instability between languages is within a text, and cannot, by virtue of its own internal linguistic textual crossings and re-crossings, be put in the hands of a 'translator', then I am reminded of the uncertainty of my place as reader, of my insecure rights to and within the elaborated code of an ideological world traveller¹³.

o.

In *Implexures* it is not only words and phrases that are folded into each other; it is also those modes of discourse I have talked about above. This may be why Karen

Mac Cormack needs a prose line in these 'poems'. There is a strong sense of cohering principles – the narrative of genealogy and, an enveloping *argument*.

I shall itemise eight obvious folds, though there are others, I am sure, including that of a commentary that seems to oversee all the folds and to produce a string of gnomic wisdoms. I do not include in what follows the two exceptional sections:

Eleven ('on reading *An Inland Ferry*'), whose mode seems to be that of the 'writing through' familiar from some of Karen Mac Cormack's earlier books; and Fourteen, the 'DEVELOPMENTAL DICTIONARY' (lexical explanations with the *explananda* held back until later).

i. Epigraphs. There is at least one epigraph at the head of all except two of the numbered sections. These are either from well known authorities (for example, Aphra Benn, Deleuze & Guattari), pointing a forceful and suggestive interpretative line into the body text; or they are from figures who are themselves part of the topic and texture of the body text (for example, Susan Hicks Beach, Margaret Mac Cormack).

†

ii. A sequence of excerpts from letters or postcards (or a diary? but I think these were *addressed*) represented in italics, dated and placed, all from between 1974 and 1980. These are chatty, excitable, belong to their time, and are always from an elsewhere (Castries, Saint Lucia, Jan, Feb 74; Naxos, Greece, May 76; Carrara, Italy, 77, 78, 79,80; Athens, Greece, June 77; San Francisco, USA, 75)¹⁴.

- iii. A variant on these, in the form of reminiscences from the implied present of the writing, such for example as the whole of Fifteen, a first person anecdote that leads to the one-line moral: 'As for a blind date, well, that's how I met *I*.'
- iv. A genealogical set of folds derived it seems both from paper (and web, perhaps?) research and from visits and journeyings. The family names that recur include Christian, Gregorie, Curwen, Hicks Beach, Ward Thomas, Mac Cormack.
- iv. Aphoristic disquisitions (if this is not a contradiction in terms) on memory, time, archiving, journeyings, maps as mnemonics and scores (I am treating this one as including the little random chunks of 'history' – not obviously related to the family chronicles – that probably represent another mode, related to the lexical enquiry, below (vi)). These can read like excerpts from a writer's – and/or reader's – notebook.
- v. Aphoristic disquisitions on grammatical and ontological person, and the extent to which a person is ever separable from a collective, dispersed across time and place.
- vi. Glosses on a history of gendered nouns, drawing particularly, it would seem, on Jane Mills.
- vii. Line drawings – just a few of these, including two scenes (Greece, Italy?) on the title page; the diagrammatic drawing of a fan; and two seed-like objects appearing just below the expression of a wish to suspend the use of lines.

viii. Black and white photographs (four, all except one given a whole page). One of them also appears on the cover. These aren't captioned but the copyright page connects them with the italicised correspondence from Carrara, thereby authenticating that address as *not fabricated*, and by extension also the others.

p

This polybiography is also polymodal. If this is a problem, as DuBose thought it might be, it is obviously one relished by Karen Mac Cormack.

q.

The conventions of western genealogy, especially in its written modes, have been an important part of the superstructure of patrilinealism: male line succession as the immortal extension of individual mortal, an I in a line of 'I's, constituting a 'We' under the banner of family name. These conventions are in stark contrast with the lesbian counter-move of Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig cited as an epigraph by Nicole Brossard in *Lovhers*: 'Since the day when the lesbian people renounced the idea that it is absolutely necessary to die, no one has' (Brossard 30).

£

I assume that all patrilineal cultures demand a privatisation of biological acts of conception only to project on to the concealing screen repeated tales, texts, images and regalia of succession. Men whose stories assume succession have no visible pregnancy of their own to demonstrate incontestable consanguinity.

I know very little indeed about my mother's mother.

Karen Mac Cormack eschews diagrams of succession or any neat linear narratorial gathering. She wishes to suspend 'the notion of lines, straight or otherwise'.¹⁵ Her image is a fan, not a branch diagram (I, One 13). This is not a metaphor to be taken, I would say, too strictly. All the folds of a fan are joined both in folded sequence and also at their point of convergence. She does not provide the equivalent of these joins, this convergence. Her textual structure is nothing like so mechanistic as this. Often the sources are no more than pronouns in her text and the connections are assumed rather than given.

I find the way that the word 'fold' as used in geology or in cooking more apt to her procedures.

r.

Let me read my way into section Two, as an example of texture.

The section's title is the number, given as a word. Then, after a double space, there is an alternative heading: 'historical letters 2', with the number given as a figure. This suggests that there will be two ways of counting these sections, that the two counts should be kept separate but that counting counts.

Immediately under this sub-heading, there are two epigraphs, italicised: '*Desire knows no time but the present.* — Aphra Benn'; and '*The present is always insatiable because it never exists.* — Charles Bernstein'. Neither of these two authors is listed as a 'source' in the section at the back bearing that heading. These two epigraphs, taken together, can be read in the form of a chiasmus: desire and insatiability forming one diagonal, the other the repetition of 'the present'. The first epigraph posits a

present tense (and perhaps a presence) charged by desire; the other, a present tense doomed to attempt to consume itself into an existence that will never arrive *as present*. A theme has been declared: a desire for a present that tantalises that very desire. These texts have been *found*, with a purpose. They may have been attracted there by a prior 'meaning'; they may attract a meaning to come ('A promotion to meaning enlists words', (I, One 11).

Let me call 'meaning', for a moment, and in this context, nothing other than an insatiable desire for sense.

Next there is a three line 'paragraph' in the place where the introduction would be:

Within the orbit, a pick, a path and much tracasserie. At first entangled leads to more so notches ride the space before the eyes. Enliven the odds. Reduce the party and its funds. Distinguish between examples.

The first (elliptical) sentence is perhaps a scene, an image. The definiteness of the definite article is rendered indefinite through lack of contextual detail. I don't know which 'orbit' is meant here. The best claimant for 'the' is perhaps the orbit of the earth. I don't think so. Something comes round. An orbit is not a straight line. And within 'its' circle are a pick, a path and much bustling around. 'Pick' next to 'path' sounds like choosing, or the path might be being dug; but in either case why rush around? In the next sentence there is narrative: something happens that is to do with entanglement. Then three phrases in a row, driven by imperatives, urgent, sensible in tone, but quite without a context.

Those epigraphs about desire are still there in my reading. *Entangled leads to more. Enliven. Clarify*. These sentences are folded into paragraphs in ways that disturb the status of each – of sentence, of paragraph.

Then there is a paragraph about having pneumonia in Mexico. This one seems to mediate a prior description ('Many descriptions of landscapes, city and town squares ...'). This is a writing that is a reading – one from which deductions can be drawn, for the paragraph ends quite unexpectedly (at this stage anyway) with a wisdom: 'Maps augment possibilities, shift decisions, and co-exist with time-tables' fascination.' This is as thematic as the epigraphs.

The final paragraph I shall comment upon is the one that leads up to the drawing of the fan.

For a Victorian not prudish on the page, having made mention, she remained discreet, disagreeing (it would seem) with a forebear's tenet that "few of one's secrets are worth keeping to oneself." Falling portraits woke her in the night but possibility of an intruding danger occurred only after her facts were re-positioned. That we might view ourselves across the century in anything other than static form, introduce a working draft to clearer scrutiny, steal in the pen to library's likeness engrave ... this is not a conversation nor a theme, it is a letter, another fold in a fan where the writer in this decade sees the angled history of a past decade's correspondent snapped shut.

As reader, I'll have to pick (up) – or not – who this *she* is, find a desire path through my reading. This will already be insatiable. I can't stop anyone in mid flow to ask because this is writing. After my reading has orbited back through the whole book to this section I think I know. This is, in any case, writing about a writer. The previous paragraph was, I believe, an example of a writer folding her own earlier writings back in to a 'present' text. In this case she folds in her readings of the writings of – almost certainly – a 'forebear'. I take the 'repositioning of facts' to be what writers can do – in this case, write themselves into awareness of danger.

After the ellipsis there is an example, to be found throughout the book, of a folding in of reflection on the book's own methods. Perhaps this has already occurred with the wisdom about maps.

Enliven the odds. Distinguish between examples.

S.

28 August 2004

Dear Karen

Ten months after acquiring *Implexures* (and having it inscribed) in Conway Hall in London, I have been reading it with care and real interest, not least because it is doing what I have been trying to work out how to do - that is, set in play, into an always refreshable presentness of a text, different pasts, including acts spread by memory of journeyings and archival record, to produce the charged pseudo-memory of genealogy and geographical reach.

I can see why two of the sections - the ones set out in a lineation that says 'poetry' - are not called 'historical letters', but not what the difference is between those others that are and those that aren't.

But the main impulse for this e-mail is the discovery of another intersection between our own histories and genealogies (I mean in addition to being born in the same country while our parents were away from 'home'; and in addition to the fact that we bump into each other (and each other's texts, perhaps) at events connected with poetry.

So, here is the intersection. A genealogical tie started up every time I read the name Christian. The more I came across it the more I thought I needed to check my own paternal family connections. This is what I found. My great great aunt, Frances Emily Hall, married, on 5th May 1855, Alfred Christian of Malta. Alfred was the son of Samuel Christian of Malta (banker) and Susanne Gregorie.

I assume that Alfred was 'of Malta' on account of his father's banking activities. He certainly continued to play a part in the life of the Isle of Man. ¹⁶

...

t.

My own genealogy converges with the one woven through *Implexures*, at the time and place of another convergence: of banking, naval activity, military/colonial administration, all related instruments of an act of colonization that belonged to European power conflicts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. ¹⁷ The lure of Malta had nothing to do with settlement; everything to do with strategic control. I suspect that the nineteenth century banks of Malta were from the start more than purely local facilities.

English is still an 'official' language of Malta, along with Maltese.

These are troublesome notions of a collective. 'Families' play out their parts, according to their 'place', in the scripts of economic and political history, which do have their chronologies, of sorts.

Reduce the party and its funds.

u.

The epigraph to 'At the Front', the final poem in *The Tongue Moves Talk*, is from Emmanuel Levinas and reads:

The chosen home is the very opposite of a root.

I finish my own reading by angling back into the text of *Implexures* another from the same author:

The I always has one responsibility more than all the others

To be published in a collection of articles on Canadian women poets by The Gig, untitled at time of submission, edited by Nate Dorward (Willowdale, Canada, 2005) pp. 87-107

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¹ See Terry J. DuBose 'Polybiography of Diagnostic Medical Sonography' <http://inccf.pacificu.edu/JAHC/JAHCIVI/ARTICLES/DuBose/dubose.htm> or <http://www.obgyn.net/us/us.asp?page=/us/feature/polybiography>

² *ibid*

³ <http://www.irelandcmb.org/gaeilge.html>

⁴ I can't resist the etymologies of the two words, in this context. An 'event' is something that *comes out* (*e + venire*) – I would add – *anyway*. It so happens. 'Experience' is closely related both to experiment and to peril. Its Latin verb source (*experiri*) can be translated as, 'to try, to put to the test'. For those at peril of the events that constitute their lives, in memory. I am grateful to both Paul Zeal and the OED for these etymologies.

⁵

imagine

being

and not

knowing

Tom Raworth in 'The Conscience of a Conservative' (Raworth 162)

⁶ Karen Mac Cormack is not alone among Canadian writers in her inclusion of a book list. Erin Mouré's Acknowledgement at the back of *O Ciudadán* starts with this comment: 'This book is a reading practice in a community of others. References abbreviated in the text and critical to the book's conception and movement, expand as follows:...' (Mouré 2002, 141)

⁷ Interviewed by Jon Thompson in *Free Verse* Issue 5 (Winter 2003)

http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/freeverse/Archives/Winter_2003/Interviews/interviews.htm

⁸ There are many games with this word in *Implexures*. I have myself tried out my thoughts on personal pronouns in a piece called 'Missing persons: personal pronouns in performance writing' (Grammar for Performance Writers 3) in *Performance Research* Vol 3, No 1, 1998 (pp. 87-90).

⁹ I take *city* (Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver) to be implicit in the poetics of Nicole Brossard, Erin Mouré, Lisa Robertson...

¹⁰ 'Half of all business deals are conducted in English. Two thirds of all scientific papers are written in English. Over 70% of all post / mail is written and addressed in English. Most international tourism, aviation and diplomacy is conducted in English.' (Kryss Katsiavriades,

<http://www.kryssstal.com/english.html>)

¹¹ I have just received from Stuart Mills a small white square card with four lines of capitalised (and squared off) red and blue text: MADE IN / ENGLISH / MADE IN / ENGLISH (Belper: Aggie Weston, 2004)

¹² For example, WSW (*West South West*) or *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love* (Mouré 1989 and 1992)

¹³ For example, Erin Mouré's *O Ciudadán* (Mouré 2002) and Caroline Bergvall's *Goan Atom: 1. jets-poupee* (Bergvall)

¹⁴ Elsewhere to where, though? See section c., above.

¹⁵ There is a wonderful ambiguity produced for me by that word 'suspend'; if a line is suspended the chances are that it will straighten! It depends what it's made of.

¹⁶ From an e-mail from John Hall to Karen Mac Cormack. 'Frances Emily' has been corrected from 'Emily Frances'. Genealogical evidence indicates that my great great aunt married Karen Mac Cormack's great great great uncle. I have no idea how many people I could claim retrospectively as my 'great great aunt'. I know of Frances Emily only because in the archives available to me the (patri)line has not been suspended.

Frances's sister, Eliza Jane, married a Chamberlain. One son was Basil Hall Chamberlain, a Japonologist credited with bringing haiku to the attention of the English-speaking world. Another was Houston Chamberlain, who left the English language behind him to become German and to develop theories of race that were to win him the admiration of Adolph Hitler.

¹⁷ 'The British colonisation period began in 1800. It is thereafter that Maltese banking history really starts in a pure institutional sense'. *The Banking History of Malta*,

<http://www.bankinghistory.de/Bulletin/FABH-web/www%201-2001/New%20Research%20-%20John%20A.%20Consiglio.htm>

This notion of instrumentality works in both directions. Colonisation was an 'instrument' that aided military activity and banking and was, most certainly, a method of and framework for administration.

SECTION F

On Interdisciplinarity

- F.1: Interdisciplinarity: disciplines and arts practice
- F.2: Issues for discipline and context: designing a taught postgraduate programme in performance practices
- E.3: Review of *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity*

F.1

Interdisciplinarity: 'Disciplines' And Contemporary Practices

This is intended very much as a discussion paper, deliberately set at a schematic and abstract level. Behind the discussion is a question which could be very simply phrased something like this: when whole fields of practice are undergoing change and are likely to continue to do so, how can we offer a framework of teaching which helps graduates enter those changing fields with courage, energy and imagination and with appropriate skills, understandings and frames of reference? This question is too big and important to be the discussion today but it is behind it.

I want to come at it by way of a distinction which is important whenever there is a practice at the heart of a degree and that is between the **practice** itself – the way it is conducted and organised in a world beyond education – and the **subject** or **discipline** – the way the practice is framed and taught within institutions of higher education. I shall be using the term 'discipline' more than the term 'subject' mostly because I want to relate the whole discussion to the notion of **interdisciplinarity** and there is no useable term which relates to 'subject' that has not already been put to different use by psychologists.

I am taking for granted that both practices and disciplines are institutionalised: that there are organisations which attempt to define and control them – sometimes the same organisations in each case, more often perhaps different ones. I am taking for granted too that arts practices and disciplines operate through exclusions and therefore always have their *other*, a repressed or excluded unconscious – often, of course, the ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ or ‘everyday’ forms of the time. Provisionally – and with Freud, Goffman and de Certeau¹ in mind – I shall refer to this third as **the everyday**. I shall not elaborate, but simply have in mind that at any time, challenges can emerge to practices and disciplines out of recognitions of what has been happening in an *elsewhere*.

Between practice, discipline and the everyday there are variable distances in any given field. A crucial factor in determining the distance between practice and discipline is this: are there professional bodies who have at most specifically designed the training or at least have maintained some control over syllabuses and their delivery? In the world of performance I would suggest that some practices remain very close to education and education-based research – which in some cases seems to have considerable responsibility for sustaining them; others operate in a tension between education and industry, which is an increasingly familiar theme in discussions about education; and others finally are seen as relating straightforwardly to industrial training, perhaps training within employment.

I shall be using the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ as a way of opening up discussion about established ‘disciplines’ and named cultural practices, having in mind that there need be no one-to-one correspondence between discipline and practice. Theatre, opera and film are clear examples of cultural forms which draw on a number of component

practices, almost any one of which can be framed as an academic discipline. 'Theatre practice' – as a singular term – has to refer to a unifying or integrating practice: a practice of making coherent. Within professional practice there is usually one role which carries this unifying responsibility. The extent to which each participant also needs to understand the sense of the whole to which she or he contributes is an interesting issue, of course, for any practice with directors or conductors.

A discipline can be said to confer an intellectual unity to a range of practices. I do not myself believe it is useful to confuse the notion of 'interdisciplinarity' with complex, multi-practice forms. Mixed or multi-media forms may or may not be interdisciplinary. They may be no more than an extension of the compositional palette. The issue for practice emerges when an extension of media (often through technological developments and applications), materials and practices puts into play structurally different understandings and histories of performance, composition and judgement. Where different histories abut or merge, and where practitioners and educators wish to take explicit responsibility for the consequences, interdisciplinarity is usually invoked. I shall come to this. But we still have a difference between an interplay of practices and an interplay of the 'disciplines' or framing discourses within which those practices have been intellectually located. Later I shall try to provide a more detailed explanatory framework.

A number of terms have been doing business recently to name both the interplay between practices and cuts across existing practices: that old term, 'new' is always useful as a prefix; in addition there has been the use of terms like 'hybridisation' or 'live art' or 'new collaborations', where the implication is that the collaboration is across forms and not just between people. A most significant adjustment of

terminology has been the adoption of the generic term 'performance', which provides the 'P' in the initials making up the name of CONCEPTS. This term has provided a much larger frame for thinking about practices and their relation to each other. It has certainly helped us at Dartington in England to name and develop two performance-related studies for which the term Theatre could not possibly do full service: Visual Performance and Performance Writing. As a term it can also make it easy to be conceptually lazy: why try to be precise when the catch-all term will do. It can trail with it too an easy anthropologism, the over-ready recourse to cross-cultural analogy. But these are small problems in relation to the gains. It is worth noticing in passing that the use of 'performance' as a generic term has begun to displace 'performance' as a fixed term in the dyad, performance/composition. Instead, the relation between the two comes to be seen as dynamic and fluid. To talk of new performance is to talk of new composition too and not just new ways of performing old compositions. For those of us who are in the business of education for arts practice, the relationship between the two sets of terminology – for which I have been using practice and discipline as shorthand – is important. We operate within two sets of practices in relation to at least two institutionalised worlds, and all the time may be conscious of a world of everyday performance practices still eluding us. How can we ensure that the educational world, with its existing institutions, resources and funds can best serve the future of performance practices – and of those compositional practices which are essential for a developing future for performance?

In Britain the term 'interdisciplinarity' has begun to be used rather loosely in connection with modular or credit based courses on the assumption that an encounter with enough disciplinary fields will itself provide an interdisciplinary approach. It may well come do so for some students, but if this effect were to become widespread it

would inevitably produce shifts in the sense of what makes up a disciplinary field: to what extent any of us is authorised to bring one set of knowledge to bear on another. Just as I do not see mixed-media work as necessarily inter-disciplinary, I suggest that 'multi-disciplinarity' is not the same as 'interdisciplinarity'.²

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Let me try out a four-term typology of approaches to the teaching of the arts as practices or disciplines. This is a matter of the primary emphasis of an approach and I shall exaggerate to make a point.

First there is the conservatoire. This takes a practice-based approach, within clear understandings of the conventions of the practice and assumptions about the 'needs' of an existing profession – assumptions which are not always accurate and up-to-date. The practice implied is unproblematic; the analogies with law, medicine and engineering are clear. Let us say this aims to produce producers, **subjects** of a particular performance practice.

Second, there are approaches which take the field of practice as an **object** of study, where the assumed future practices of students are that *either* they are receiving a very useful generalist education which could lead in any number of directions *or* that they will continue as critics, scholars and educators. This approach takes the texts of a practice as givens and is usually more at ease with scripts, scores and documentation than with the processes of production or even of live consumption. As an approach it belongs to the academies rather than the practising professions. Examples include musicology, art history, literature, film studies (*about* as against *how to make*).³

Third, there are **training** establishments for contemporary representational and performance media, especially those in which production processes are industrial or 'post-industrial', reliant on 'state-of-the-art' technology and subject to shifting divisions of labour.

Fourth – and most risky and problematic – there is an approach which is committed to a future for performance practices but sees the forms, conventions, contexts, production methods and patterns of participation as anything but fixed in advance. What to do in these circumstances? Train for what you know now in the hope that everyone will change together? Or prepare for openness in an extreme economic version of 'open field' composition? I know that this can sound like typical late-twentieth century future-talk, grandiose and full of empty posturing. I think, though, that there is a version of it which is very practical and responsible.

It is this fourth which interests me. It must take the direction of a critical awareness that can lead to practice as well as to commentaries on practice. It is all too easy to replace older canons with new, even fragmented 'post-modernist' ones and leave students unable to think their way beyond what they have been given. Critical awareness must include awareness of what constitutes a practice, a discipline and their everyday equivalents, so that these can be seen as enabling rather than as restricting constraints.

This fourth category comes closest to my own key institutional motives for an interest in interdisciplinarity⁴. Other motives from within educational institutions to raise questions about interdisciplinarity include, I believe, at least all of the following: frustration at the blocking of certain collaborations or innovatory practices; the

inability of institutions to respond to changes in professional practice or technological developments in the cultural industries; a disciplinary homelessness among some whose practice doesn't quite fit anywhere; a 'return of the repressed' – moments of recognition of significant everyday practices; shifts in ways of conceiving theory-practice relations; tightening resources encouraging institutions to redraw a boundary around a cluster of disciplines rather than around a single one; a channelling of funding and resources down well established lines; a restrictive territorialism among teaching staff

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Some of the issues follow from decisions about how to divide up for the purposes of organisation and management an educational institution. These can only be addressed at a particular level in any given institution; they are management issues which form part of local politics and call for managed and structural solutions. As difficulties they at least have the advantage of being relatively near the surface. Below the surface, though, there are issues which cannot be accounted for in terms of easily changeable organisational arrangements. The divisions of institutions are matched, reinforced or counter-pointed with formalist divisions of knowledge and practice, which provide the focus and sense of direction for established studies; which have applications way beyond any one institution, indeed beyond the institutions of education, and which provide a constant validation for ranges of practice and discourse. Superficial changes in organisation or academic structure which ignore these established boundaries are unlikely to work very well.

When I used the word discourse then, I separated it from practice. But it is probably more useful to use the term in the more inclusive way developed by Foucault and to

remember that a whole range of practices and vested interests are bound up at any one time with any systems of division and classification. I shall use etymologies of some of the key terms as a way of catching illuminating connotations; then I shall look at some of the practices which can establish and sustain disciplines and even, though more rarely, larger frames within which disciplines can inter-relate.

I want to start with the key word **interdisciplinarity** breaking it into three meaningful components:

inter -discipline -arity

Let's start with **discipline**, having in mind a sequence of nouns which descends into deeper and deeper abstraction:

disciple discipline disciplinarity inter-disciplinarity

The Latin *discipulus* meant, it seems, no more than *learner* or *pupil*. The Oxford English Dictionary of 1971 gives us as its first meaning for disciple: 'One who follows or attends upon another for the purposes of learning from him (*sic*)'. An educational model is there already: a follower of a mentor or guru, almost certainly male. Perhaps the complementary Latin word is 'magister', *master*. The OED makes clear that the primary influence in English of the word is through the New Testament – a follower of Christ. It helps if followers of the 'masters' are believers.

The Latin *disciplina* can be translated as *the instruction of disciples, tuition*. The OED helpfully adds, 'Etymologically, *discipline* as pertaining to the disciple or scholar, is antithetical to *doctrine*, the property of the doctor or teacher; hence in the history of the word *doctrine* is more concerned with abstract theory and *discipline* with practice or exercise.' It could be that in relation to the teaching of practical arts *doctrine* and *discipline* have merged.

Not surprisingly, one of the meanings for *discipline* is given as: 'A particular course of instruction to disciples'; and another (2) as 'a **branch** of instruction or education; a **department**⁵ of learning or knowledge; a science or art in its **educational aspect**'.⁶

A practical arts discipline is going to be made up of at least the following components, each of which can of course be given a different emphasis:

1. a defined making (or performance) practice or a defined set of related practices, requiring a combination of technical know-how and aesthetic judgement
2. a rationale (usually implicit?) for inclusion of any specific practice in the set and for its status within it
3. defined fields of reference: what examples of past and present practice are kept in play as part of the constant defining and re-defining of the discipline?
4. a discourse or set of discourses involving judgement and value.

If I am right that a tradition of master (with all the problems of maleness deliberately left with the term) and follower is still a powerful one in arts education⁷, we should add: -

5. affiliation with a *magister* (or *magisters*). In some cases a course or institution will define its discipline in terms of its resident Master. In other cases the discipleship is at least at one remove: a disciple of a Master becomes a Master somewhere else. In other cases the Masters will be found at a glance in the course bibliography⁸.

I would also like to suggest that in any active and healthy discipline there is always a sixth:

6. an awareness of the full intellectual and cultural **context** in which the discipline operates. Where this sixth applies there will always be at least one framework for

looking beyond itself, which broadens the field of reference to take in related practices and informing discourses.

What about '*arity*', though. An 'inter-discipline', which seems to me a perfectly reasonable term for, for example, contemporary cultural studies, becomes quite rapidly itself a discipline. 'Interdisciplinarity' is more a pre-disposition, attitude or ethos; let's say, above all, a general attitude to the relations between disciplines. As a pre-disposition it has a motive, and as I have implied above, this is never fixed or given, and the motives of interdisciplinary pioneers are never the same as those who follow. Those who follow are disciples; disciples constitute a discipline. A key motive is often political: by which I mean no more than the wish to put knowledge to a discernible use determined by desires and needs which have their origins outside the given divisions of knowledge.

And so that leaves us with '*inter*'. Let's go quickly to three of the many senses. In each case I shall translate '*inter*' as the English 'between':

1. **relational**: as in a conversation between two people; this is dynamic and dialectical; the '*inter*' marks off a field of force, with constant shifting of resultants; two disciplines meet and produce a changing third (a shifting synthesis)
2. **spatial**: as in the English saying 'falling between two stools' – ie taking place in the space that lies between two or more disciplines. Disciplines are historical and relatively arbitrary; there will always be gaps identified or emerging in the fields of knowledge and practice
3. **possessive**: as in 'shared between two': 'Belonging in common to or composed of elements derived from different [*disciplines. in our case*] (OED)

These are all two-way relationships. The arts have long been familiar with borrowings, poachings or plunderings, with the illuminations which arise from the practice of analogy. These are usually one-way. I want to concentrate on the three two-way senses, though, and to catch up with a holding definition of 'interdisciplinarity':

interdisciplinarity is an approach to the organisation of learning which is as concerned with achieved and potential relationships between disciplines, with spaces between disciplines or in overlapping domains, as it is with the self-defining activities of separate disciplines

The intended implication of this definition is that productive interdisciplinarity needs informed critical attention to disciplinarity – awareness of the field of force of any discipline which is brought into interdisciplinary play. Productive interdisciplinarity is specific – the specificity of the disciplines in play, even if they are transformed by the play, is always significant.

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And so now let's try a working definition of a discipline within the arts, hesitating at the limitations suggested by etymology and metaphor:

discipline: a practice (or set of practices) identified with a com/de/partment of knowledge (or set of same) unified by the following factors:

1. a **name** recognised within academic, critical, curatorial and funding practices
2. a **history** (including a history of those who could be followed)
3. a sense of a **meta-syllabus** (against which specific approaches can be measured)

(syllabus = body of knowledge; existing pedagogic conventions; assumptions about core or component practices)

4. a set of defining **differences** from other nameable disciplines⁹
5. an **organisational** presence
 - a. **within** institutions (with implications for the locations, designations and loyalties of personnel)
 - b. **between** institutions and their 'members' (professional bodies, network organisations such as CONCEPTS etc, journals)
6. the gift of a specific ontological inflection: it not only **has** a name; it also **gives** a name, which is then a primary attribute of what one is: doctor, artist, musician etc
7. an apprenticeship system for potential named members, including, most significantly, a system of judgement of qualification

The concept of the discipline belongs to an organic view of education: having identified a calling or discipline, a student develops within it, building knowledge and competence incrementally until a moment arrives of initiation into a relatively achieved state, meriting the named award. There is a sense of a quantity of knowledge and competence which is **enough**. This is not the same as the level of all too visible competence in professional practice. For a practitioner what constitutes **enough**? Is the question ever over?

Until recently in Britain the 'discipline' has been linked to a model of education which sees it as a process of increasing specialisation, with students who choose an 'academic' rather than 'vocational' route usually reducing their study to three subjects at 16 and to one at 18. It has often been argued that the aims of higher education have been set by the specialist guardians of the disciplines in the universities and academies rather than through any overview of the needs either of individual students or a social whole.

This is a topic of current political debate, of course. In Britain the debate tends to be complicated by another set of divisions to do this time with age; planned change seldom seems capable of consistency across the entire learning age range. A national curriculum – a politically potent working definition of disciplines, their hierarchical relation to each other, their content and how to assess students within them – is being introduced for schools, changing the sense of the autonomy of arts subjects within schools. Some reduction of the range of knowledge usually takes place at 14. At 16 our young are expected to make specialising choices. For the 16-18 year olds the debate seems to be mostly absorbed by the sense of difference between vocational training and generalist 'academic' (and therefore 'subject'-based) teaching – this can be viewed in some cases as a conflict between a notion of a discipline policed by academies and a notion of a vocation either actually or supposedly desired by professional and industrial interests. Much arts education is situated most interestingly between ideas of the vocational and the academic and also between historically different notions of what constitutes vocational training: traditional skills still carry with them an almost mediaeval sense of apprenticeship; new technologies require different skills and dispositions – in which any actual application needs to be viewed as an example of the possible in relation to a transitional set of contingencies. This distinction prompts a number of questions about the value of both disciplines and vocational trainings for later employment and also about their value for partial employment, for non-employment and for full participation in a sense of the future of a changing social and cultural life.

In Higher Education a significant increase in the number of participants and a reduction in unit funding has been accompanied with the development of combined

honours courses, modularisation and notions of credit accumulation. At the extreme, the open-choice modular scheme enables students to achieve degrees through the aggregation of different 'modules' or subject-topics; 'disciplines' lose their power to impose their own sense of coherence and unity. At most these schemes promote a multi-disciplinarity. The larger the modular scheme, the wider 'student choice', the more open needs to be the conception of the totality of the student's learning. It is organisationally difficult if not impossible in large schemes for the ethos of 'interdisciplinarity' to permeate the scheme; institutions, departments or faculties which more narrowly define their field have more of an opportunity to plan for interdisciplinarity. It can, as at Dartington, become an organising principle for the conception of the whole curriculum, from macro structure to design of common components. Open-choice schemes pose particular problems for conceptualising an educated practitioner.

Specific models of interdisciplinarity can be taught. It can be argued that some versions of this approach do no more than expand the subject range. This, in itself can be valuable; having the structure to identify and teach practices which **lie between** or which are a **common domain** is valuable. This will be difficult for any institution embedded in traditional disciplinarity or wholly committed to open models of credit accumulation. In the former, exploratory projects can be set up which are structured in order precisely to explore the interaction between two practices, two sets of histories. It is worth considering within either model, modules or programme components which are designed to have explicit relationships with more than one pathway or which are explicitly designed to consider difference and connectedness.

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There is an interdisciplinary issue for all arts teaching which extends beyond the specifics of skills training and which certainly applies to any teaching project which wishes to address its relation to the contemporary. Put at its crudest this is the theory/practice issue. Any traditionally established discipline comes fully equipped with a body of 'theory', consisting often of an established canon of reference works and authors, a critical and analytical tradition (which is probably also canonical) and a decision about specific bodies of knowledge which might be relevant. Limits of time, particularly exaggerated in practical courses, make these decisions difficult. Artists need access to other forms of knowledge. Which forms? Physiology? Psychology? Sociology? Anthropology? Philosophy? Linguistics? To what extent is there already at any one time a convenient inter-discipline, a kind of 'general studies' already packaged and available, such as contemporary forms of cultural theory? All these have their disciplinary frameworks and histories. What relationship should they have with the 'practice'?

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When a few years ago at Dartington we were trying to re-plan all our degree work in such a way that the relationship between disciplines could be activated we set ourselves the following guidelines:

- i. ensure that the disciplinary boundaries are seen as historically and culturally specific and therefore subject to change
- ii. establish a continuing debate, across subject lines, about the nature of performance and composition in such a way that the debate can influence student (and staff) practice
- iii. extend the awareness in all performers of factors which affect all performance but which have traditionally been given less attention within some disciplines

- iv. encourage students, in whatever discipline, to consider compositional solutions which might involve disciplines or media other than their own
- v. enable a sharing of bodies of information and of conceptual perspectives which have relevance to all the arts

You will see that these are very practical considerations in the structuring and planning of teaching and I shall end with a number of considerations just as practical, which in some cases will clearly repeat elements of the discussion above:

Does the academic management structure of the department, faculty or institution support or hinder the possibility of interdisciplinarity? What is the status of those in charge of disciplines? In what *fora* do they debate as equals? Is responsibility for interdisciplinarity explicitly located anywhere? In an individual? In a group? Does the management structure encourage competitiveness over resources or institutional status – in other words does it work towards the defence of disciplinary territory?

At what level in the institution are educational goals set? To what extent do they allow for collaborative agreement and planning? (Interdisciplinarity will never happen by *fiat*)

How, in relation to disciplines, is space deployed?

Does scheduling work for or against interdisciplinary work? What academic considerations are brought to bear on scheduling?

Are any curriculum components shared by students associated with different disciplines? If not, why not? If there are, how were these planned and agreed? How are the possibilities of different relations to different disciplines addressed?

Are there any curriculum components which specifically address issues of interdisciplinarity and set up the debate for the students? What support does a

student receive whose work crosses disciplinary boundaries? What guidelines are there on student interdisciplinary collaboration.

Do assessment procedures encourage or discourage interdisciplinarity?

There are many other issues, of course, including important ones to do with entry systems, national and international course directories and promotional literature, which are geared to established subjects and their combinations. I am going to finish at this point, though, in the hope that I have raised questions of some practical help for those keen to promote specific approaches to interdisciplinarity. Everything I have said could imply that interdisciplinarity can be as carefully planned as disciplinarity.

Let me subtly adjust that in a distinction that works in English: disciplines can be *planned*; interdisciplinarity needs to be planned *for*.

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¹ I am thinking of Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, first published in 1901 (translated by Alan Tyson, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1975) – Vol 5 of the Pelican Freud Library); Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin (1959)) and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (translated by Steven Rendall, University of California Press (1988)); More recently there has been Alan Read's *Theatre and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge (1993))

² A genuine multi-disciplinarity – within the sense of discipline that I shall be elaborating – is probably inevitably also interdisciplinary for any given individual. A single 'module', however effective in its own terms, is unlikely on its own to initiate anyone into a discipline.

³ In relation to Theatre, I am not sure whether the name always makes the approach clear. Is there, for example, a distinction along these lines between Theatre and Theatre Studies?

⁴ I admit freely, though, that I have others. No established disciplinary field matched my own practice as a poet. As a student who already wanted to write I signed up to study literature, which is the study of the already written within quite specific genres. That is important to writers, but their field of reference always extends way beyond the written *as literature*. What were writers reading and studying? No disciplinary field defined this. This has not altogether been a disadvantage.

⁵ 'Branch' is reassuringly positive; as a metaphor it is organic: branches grow on trees, in this case on the tree of knowledge. The image gives knowledge a powerful natural and unified presence – growing and changing but only just. Imagine if the dictionary had referred instead to a slice of the knowledge cake, or indeed a shelf in the knowledge cupboard (I understand that the German word *fach* is a compartment, shelf or drawer). It is helpful

to get behind some of these metaphors which still lurk in our terms. What is useful about the metaphor of shelf or drawer is that it implies one of those storage systems which is at the same time actively a classification system. The drawer, for example, can bear a name; and anything can be put into it as long as it fits either or both (a) the shape of the drawer, (b) the name. As a 'compartment' a drawer or shelf differs from a 'department'; the first is spatial or topographical; the second is organisational.

⁶ The typographical emphasis is mine.

⁷ There is a telling overlap between 'discipline' and the other word which is often used in the English language to do the same job, at least within education: 'subject'. Strikingly, control and power are associated with both terms:

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | disciple – follower | subject – under the power of |
| 2 | discipline – branch of learning | subject – branch of learning |
| 3 | to discipline (to control, chastise) | to subject – (to exercise power over...) |

⁸ Where discipline is defined by discipleship it is likely that there will be resistance to any forms of interdisciplinarity which are not sanctioned (at least in spirit) by the Masters.

⁹ or even from the indiscipline of the activity which has not yet claimed an academic name. Think of the different modulations of the term 'music', each implying a different range of inclusions and exclusions.

F.2

Designing A Taught Postgraduate Programme In Performance Practices: Issues For Disciplines And Context

Preamble¹

There is one main underlying question in what follows: what can be the most productive relationships between educational institutions which teach performing arts and the various professional worlds of performance practices. I shall not be suggesting a single answer.

Three terms came into play in earlier presentations: *practice*, *theory* and *research*. I want to add three more and to risk some absurdly short working definitions. The three extras are: *learning*, *discourse* and *praxis*.

I take *practice* to refer to a commitment to an action or set of actions that, in their moment of realisation, are what they are and nothing else. Any instance of practice will owe its meaning and value to genre, convention and tradition. Even so, as *practice* it will be particular to the concrete moment of its manifestation. The decisions of practice exclude alternatives in an act of commitment. Practitioners give this specificity constant attention.

In this context I take *theory* to refer to conceptual frameworks which can be used for both explanatory and generative purposes. Theory can gesture towards possibilities beyond the scope of any one practice and can be used as a fast track to bypass the slow accumulation of learning through experience. Generally speaking, criticism does not belong to the world of theory, though it is likely to draw from it.

Discourse is a useful term for remembering that there is a much wider frame of talk – of all kinds, including, most importantly, gossip – which is inseparable from any field of practice. These forms of talk will include received wisdoms about what is thought to be worth knowing. This is where criticism is more likely to belong. Many university departments have little to offer in the way of theory but are rich in discourse.

By *research* I mean no more than a systematic question-asking and finding-out in relation to either practice or theory. A research task can be timed to last an hour and it can be a life-time's project.

And finally *praxis*, that term that is one of our remaining debts to Karl Marx: bringing all of the above to bear on each other in a strategic practice. Or, to put it more simply, to act after having taken thought.

I add *learning* as a reminder that this, rather than concrete 'practice', is the primary purpose of all educational institutions. What should be learnt and for what purpose is not addressed, of course, simply by importing the term.

Introduction

I am going to be using very recent and as yet relatively untested experience of planning, developing and beginning to implement a new master's programme to talk about issues for postgraduate approaches to arts learning. In particular I want to open up thoughts around the following:

1. Questions of purpose
2. Questions of level and starting point
3. Relations of named and established subject fields with emerging practices
4. A triangle of terms: practice/ theory/research
5. The role of academies in relation to contemporary practice
6. A programme structure to address these issues

I state them now not because I shall be moving systematically through them one by one, but for the opposite reason. I want to be able to move around them more freely.

The Dartington context

I am going to approach these questions by way of something of a case study of the development in the institution where I have been working for some time: Dartington College of Arts, located in the rural South West of England. I shall offer a sketch of the context so that you can judge how much of what I have to say is quite specific and how much has a more general application.

Dartington is small, specialist and necessarily focused. All of its work relates in some way to contemporary performance arts. It has an undergraduate body of about 430, which is unlikely to grow significantly over the next few years, given current UK funding policies. These undergraduates are divided between Music, Theatre,

Performance Writing and Visual Performance, with some also giving a proportion of their study to Arts Management.

There are about 25 research students, studying towards PhDs or MPhils. This number has been growing steadily over a five-year period. Many of these research projects have a practical component.

The number of salaried academic staff is in the low 20s. Nearly all of these are, in the current jargon, research active – either as practitioners or as more conventional researchers or, in a number of cases, both. Each year, well over a hundred others, mostly practitioners, also make teaching contributions.

Dartington College of Arts is now very much part of the Higher Education world of the UK. This was by no means always the case. It emerged out of a project in rural social regeneration modelled on that of Rabindranath Tagore in India. A wealthy couple, Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst – she from the United States, he from a different part of England – bought a depressed rural estate in the 1920s and set about a restoration intended to restore the local economy and the social and cultural environment as well as the buildings. They wanted to bring together in one place work, education, arts and a shared concern for the environment. They did not want these to be separate from each other. They wanted all of them to be part of communal interaction. Their view of the potential of arts activities within communal behaviour was not at all at odds with their espousal of and support for some of the key modernist painters, dancers and theatre makers from both sides of the Atlantic. To some of these they gave, quite literally, a home – and indeed more than a home, a

work base. Michael Chekhov had a studio to work in; the Joos-Leder Dance Company had a dance studio specially designed for them.

Dartington was thus a place where the practice of the arts had priority over their teaching, though always, and I shall elaborate on this, in a way in which the two were seen to need each other. It was assumed that the practice – process as well as product – was for others. Teaching, of course, is always in one sense for others, though quite how ‘Other’ will vary considerably since there is usually a strong motivation to transmit what is already known in order to ensure that the next generation is the ‘Same’. In times of change the arts can mark a battle ground between this investment in the Same and Other.

The mission of the College stresses ‘personal and social value’. When in sound-bite mode, we use three other headings to characterise our approach as

- An interest in emerging practices and forms
- Pragmatic, theoretical and strategic concerns with context
- A concern with interdisciplinarity, borderline disciplines, and practices without clear disciplinary homes

The Dartington MA and the notions of practice and learning

We have just started a taught MA. A single framework offers routes to five different awards, all relating in some way to performance practices. This includes an approach to Arts Management for practitioners. The programme is aimed at and designed for practitioners – either recent graduates wanting to establish a practice or more experienced practitioners who want a structured opportunity to reflect on their practice and extend, develop or transform it, or perhaps even to change direction, to

cross a disciplinary boundary. Because the research programme was already in place we were able to think carefully about the different purposes and values of a taught Masters and a research-based MPhil. Although there is a difference in status reflected in the varying investment in time, we wanted to see them as different kinds of opportunities, not just as steps on a single ladder. Researchers must have a clear project from the outset and be prepared to work it through on their own with supervisors as support and the institution – its staff, students, activities and facilities – as a sustaining environment. Taught Master's applicants want the opportunity for (re-)orientation, for examining their own motivation, for exploring methodology and for spending some time working in close proximity with others. With the MA we wanted to create a context in which the MA students would be actively helped to become a primary resource for each other.

I have said that the programme is aimed at and designed for practitioners. When we say 'practitioner' at Dartington we mean reflective and autonomous practitioners – people who make their own work and expect to take responsibility for it. We also assume that for this kind of practitioner the process of learning is never over; their practice will continue to develop and adapt; and except in respect of quite particular skills, there will be no neat division between 'training' and 'application'. This kind of artist learns on the job, always.

More specifically we are trying to reach people who see their practice as fully contemporary and who are prepared to engage strategically with the context in which their work will be made. This is not a kind of practice that has well established career structures. These are always in the process of emergence and transformation. We expect people to be active in making work – and in helping to shape the contexts and

conditions for that work – rather than more conventionally being equipped to ‘find’ work.

There is a theme here which still challenges many of us: how to square a conviction that in times of change the arts must be part of the activity which shapes a future and at the same time keep touch with the everyday values and activities of that time. This too is where ‘context’ comes in.

There is another theme I would like to pick out: connections between arts, learning and forms of sociability. All arts have their craft or skills dimension. In some traditions this dimension is very prominent and its learning sometimes jealously guarded. In relation to another kind of arts learning there is a doubleness which I would like to stress. Let me say that participation in arts activity – of whatever kind – is always both a particular way of being and acting in the world and also a very particular way of knowing it. The *learning how to* which is involved in the acquisition of craft or technical skills always also opens up on to a further set of possibilities, touching on the body’s practices and knowledges. I am not trying to suggest that these openings are always consciously taken up. Far from it. Many practitioners are content to see themselves as technicians and aim perhaps at technical virtuosity. But for others there is this interplay between technique, medium, form, context, cognition, social intervention, where a change in any one aspect is likely to demand a change in at least some of the others. This interplay can never be over – another reason why practitioners of this persuasion are condemned to being ‘life-long learners’. It isn’t a choice. The packaging of competences and knowledge, which can name a moment of completion, is never for them. A new motive will demand a new skill, a new skill suggest new formal possibilities, and so on.

What I have tried to sketch here is an intertwining of learning *how to*, learning *through* and *engaging with*: a consciousness perhaps that form is knowledge and that this knowledge is always a practice, an event, an action in the world. As knowledge it always has substance, form and context. This cannot be precisely spoken in another tongue, nor perhaps, precisely, in another place. It can be spoken *about*, but that is another matter.

It has been my experience that the practitioners who fit the category I am trying now to sketch not only go on learning. They also can't help 'teaching': they are often very good at it and find multiple ways of doing it. Because their own learning engages with the *how to* in relation to a *what* and a *why* and a *with what effect*, they tend to engage with responsibilities way beyond any narrower definition of their own practice. A rich notion of context is part of their activity. They see their work, perhaps, as not only *for* others, but as *with* or even *from*, others. The preposition I have left out is *about* others. That is far less relevant in my view.

Purpose and motivation

I hope that it is becoming apparent that I am circling questions of *motivation* for practice and learning and how this might connect with postgraduate learning in performance practices. Without clarity about motivation, decisions about structure and curriculum content are vacuous.

Up till now I have assumed that the most important motivation is that of the practitioner him or herself. This accords with the image of the driven artist that has been with us at least since romanticism. Other motivations are now also assumed,

relating to other so-called stakeholders in national educational projects. It is as well to name them. It is one clear way of deciding who or what a programme is for. Let's say, at speed, that these other stakeholders include parents, employers, professional bodies, educational organisations (at all of regional, national, institutional and inter-institutional levels), funding bodies, and those strange partners in the practice of the state, civil servants and politicians.

It is worth stressing that this is the separable list of stakeholders in the (higher) educational process. If we ask the same question about stake-holding in the performing arts we find ourselves in an even more complicated and speculative discussion. I shall leave the question hanging.

In many cases parents are extending the time of support for their daughters and sons, and want it to be worth it. It would be challenging indeed to design a postgraduate course around the presumed wishes of parents as a category. The category of employer is relatively straightforward in relation to the specialist needs of the cultural industries but much less clear within the loose web of not-for-profit activity where so much emerging contemporary practice finds itself. The clearer the connections with employment, in its conventional sense, the clearer also the role of professional bodies.

The educational context is complex. I shall pick out one or two features or relevance to this paper. The specialist focus and scale at Dartington removes one layer of problems: any new programme is going to be consistent with the declared institutional mission; tension between satellite and centre is much less likely. Other issues we cannot avoid. Despite a number of years of widespread modularity and a

national statistic showing that now nearly 80% of all UK applicants for first degrees apply for programmes of study involving more than one subject, the notion of the subject is still a guiding principle behind funding, recruiting directories and academic quality assurance. It is risky to step outside the canonic roll call of academic subjects either by proposing a new one or by taking up an interdisciplinary position that looks across more than one border. Emerging practices often do not fit neatly within these established categories.

Finally in this rapid survey, there is the combination of funding regimes and government policy and the way that these can be brought together to act as a filter on student numbers. Currently 'employability' as a criterion is likely, in the UK, to crop up in most funding-related documents. This of course encourages programme design in fields where this notion can be addressed relatively unproblematically. At least within the arts this might also encourage short-termism – a failure to address newer and more open notions of employment and patterns of work in the future. It might also fail to address important questions about the roles that participation in arts activities can play *in relation to* the world of work without always being seen as part of it. Issues of cultural policy need more headings than 'employment'. It helps if governments and their funding agencies have an understanding of the values of arts activities that goes beyond the notion of immediate 'employability'.

Earlier I invoked one current slogan for educational policy, 'life-long learning', and implied at least that in my view any postgraduate programme should fit into a sense of a learning continuum, or of multiple learning continua, with possibilities of very different points of departure. The second familiar category I want to invoke is Continuing Professional Development. I have already suggested that highly

motivated practitioners will find ways of going on learning whether or not they undertake formal programmes of study. This is an internal drive, which will inevitably also be stimulated by contextual changes, some of which may well suggest the need for updating of skills and knowledge: in new technologies or new discursive fields, in response to manifest social and cultural change in the community, or to understand changes in cultural policy, for example. Where opportunities exist, individuals who recognise these needs in themselves can deal with them in piecemeal fashion if they so wish. A master's programme with its own logic of coherence may not be the answer. Even so, it seems to me, any taught postgraduate programme has to be positioned in relation to this heading. What are the development needs of practitioners? To what extent can practitioners be told what these needs are and to what extent do they need a structured opportunity to find their own answers?

It is at this point that I want to address the question of *post what?* Postgraduate awards are by definition for people who already have a first degree. In practice this has proved true of our first intake at Dartington, though, in common with many other institutions it is not the degree as such that matters to us; it is what it signals, what it might say is already in place. Any applicant who can demonstrate the qualities without actually having the qualifications would be more than welcome.

So what are these qualities? Some of them are of course generic and lead towards those debates about 'graduate attributes'. For example, an honours graduate is expected to know how to learn within the protocols of higher education – how to shape and organise a discursive enquiry; to be at ease with the notion of 'theory'; to be disciplined in the management of learning time; to have a working awareness of the western divisions of formal knowledge; and to have been initiated into at least

one academically defined subject field. Graduates with conventional arts, humanities or social science degrees, may, through their first degree studies, have become highly motivated to extend their study *of* or *about* into a practice. The degree itself will not indicate their ability to make this transformation. In many cases they will already have made an independent start and will have work to show for it and that work might be sign enough, one way or the other. I would be interested to know of postgraduate conversion courses designed specifically to effect this transition. There could well be a demand. Many gifted school students are still steered away from practical arts activity in favour of conventional studies whose practice is geared to the essay.

Where the first degree has been in a practical arts discipline there are other expectations. It certainly should indicate that the graduate could operate within a nameable practice. The award itself may say relatively little about the status and identity of this practice for the individual. There is a profound difference between having marketable skills and having a sense of being a practitioner with an established or emerging sense of direction. It is this latter that we are after. This is not something that a first degree can be expected to confer on all graduates. Nor is it something that has a direct correlation with class of degree. The aims and orientation of the particular degree programme will be pertinent and so of course will the motivations – again – of the graduate.

What is my practice? Or what does my practice seem to be becoming? These are very valid postgraduate questions. They need a structured environment in which to ask them.

Types of programmes in the arts

A minute or so ago I referred to the orientation of a programme. I want to come at this term by way of two slightly different typologies: one derived from the *Review of Postgraduate Education* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and others in May 1996 and still referred to in the UK as the Harris Report; the other, one that I have been using for a few years now.

Harris included the following types for master's programmes: 'professional and practice related', 'preparation for research' and 'deepening subject knowledge'. The first indicates a clear link between a programme in an academic institution and the assumed needs of a profession. In the UK at least this type might also be taken to imply a link with at least one professional body, perhaps even recognition by a Union. An award may double up as a licence to practice. The other two imply a greater likelihood of a closed academic loop in the sense that academic institutions are still the privileged homes of research, at least in relation to arts activities.

'Subject knowledge', when set in distinction to practice, is also an academic concept through and through, I would argue.

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At Dartington we found these types useful provided they were not seen as mutually exclusive. We decided that we were addressing all three listed above. Practice, research and subject knowledge are all relevant for a particular kind of practice, one that embraces theoretical modes of enquiry and values certain discursive practices. More pragmatically, the combination acknowledges that the academies are now very significant players in the supporting framework for contemporary practice: many practitioners have academic roles, either as teachers or researchers or both.

'Employability' for an increasing number of practitioners will at least include the thought of employment within education.

The second typology I am going to use is mostly descriptive but is also intended to be useable as a simple orientation device. There are three types. These too will, of course, be found to overlap in practice.

1. Type 1: programmes designed to train practitioners for known and established practices: conservatoires, acting schools, degree level training programmes related to employment in the cultural industries. The motive for such study is vocational. These programmes must be career-related. They risk being designed around an inevitably very low success rate measured in terms of successful career rather than academic qualifications.

This type relates to the Harris category of 'professional and practice related'. The assumption is that the profession is an established one with known forms of practice. It is likely to be geared to the known rather than the unknown – in some cases so known that the repertoire belongs to the heritage industry.

These are for obvious reasons the kinds of programmes which need to work closely within an understanding of the needs – or supposed needs – of employers.

2. Type 2: programmes designed predominantly as studies *about* practices or at least the formal outcomes of such practices – their related bodies of scores, texts, scripts, histories and commentaries. This approach tends to be doubly text-based. It studies texts and it results in the production of secondary – that is, discursive –

texts. It relates to the Harris type of 'deepening subject knowledge'. The key issues here are:

- What assumptions underlie the designation and definition of the subject field?
How is it bounded?
 - What is the object of such study? Towards what practices does it lead? I am surprised how seldom this question is asked – how little examination there seems to have been of the privileged practice of the essay (of which this paper, is of course, an example)
 - Historically this form of study has always been better equipped to deal with texts as already there, and by implication with some sense of a canon. Its innovations, where they exist, are more likely to be in relation to its own discursive instruments – methodological or conceptual – rather than with forms of practice.
3. Type 3: there are programmes which share with Type 1 that they are practical but differ in that they are not preparing students for known and established practices. The approach tends to look for a balance between technical training and conceptual and strategic awareness. They tend to have a strong reflective and theoretical component which is geared to practice just as much as to discursive commentary.

This is where Dartington sits and where any programme concerned with the idea of making – rather than interpreting or studying *about*– will find itself. The issues here are many. If neither 'known and established practices' nor already named subject fields are the key determinants of the frame, there is a real difficulty in setting limits and a risk of arbitrariness in pedagogic decisions about skills, bodies of knowledge

and frames of reference. There is the opposite risk that other considerations, including validation principles and methods and institutional and national quality assurance frameworks, will exert negative pressure on approaches which are inevitably open-ended since they emphasise questions and motivations and try to avoid institutionalising solutions.

Parts and whole / subjects and frame

A key issue of principle as well as of design is in the naming of wholes and parts and of the relative status of whole and part. At Dartington we have gone for a solution along the lines of 'specialist study in an interdisciplinary context'. We tend to name versions of the parts and arrange validation procedures to turn those names into awards. The 'whole' is then a meta-structure, aimed at effecting interaction between the parts. So for our MA we do have a name for the whole: Performance Practices. This is not a name for any award, though. The structure of the MA, with a taught Part 1 (representing one third of the credit value of the whole), and supported independent study and practice as Part 2 (the remaining two thirds), is very much designed to bring all students across subjects together for both theoretical and methodological study, for developing a shared critical language and for developing means of supportive and collaborative activity. A subject narrows down the skills range and a body of knowledge. A subject is seen then as a platform for practice and enquiry which crosses over into a neighbouring boundary or finds itself, as it were, in an epistemological and pragmatic no-place, between boundaries, itself not bounded.

When someone fills in an application form they have to choose one of five subject boxes to tick. A high proportion finds this choice difficult to make. Is their practice better placed in relation to Visual Performance or Devised Theatre? Where should a

writer who comes out of a fine art education go? Continue the writing practice in relation to the visual art discourses of Visual Performance or bring that art training to bear on a focused attention to textuality? Of the 7 of our own graduates who were accepted on to the MA, 3 crossed over from their undergraduate subject to another one: one from Theatre to Visual Performance, one from Music to Visual Performance, one from Theatre to Performance Writing. Another applicant, not a Dartington graduate, after being accepted on to Performance Writing, wanted within a day or two of starting to relocate herself within Devised Theatre. Roughly half of all applicants have said that they wanted to tick more than one box.

This is likely to remain an unresolved issue for some time. In relation to contemporary practice, existing subject fields no longer operate either as guilds or clear ontological frames offering 'natural' recognition of belonging. Fit is in many cases approximate, suggesting that for practical purposes these taxonomies are always obsolescent. For an independent study MA this need not be an issue. The skills and conceptual curriculum could be tailored to individual need, as with a practice-based PhD. Taking responsibility for a syllabus or – to put it another way – for providing the second term in a dialectic, forces an issue, and brings tension and challenge.

At validation one panellist invited us to consider flipping the solution: naming the award after the whole and allowing for options within that, perhaps showing up in brackets after the award name. We were clear. Our interest in interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinary work required the discipline of a discipline, the defining of a field.

(In)conclusion

All of these considerations are still live for us. There is no one magical solution that will address all of them in one blow. Academic structures are always constraining – sometimes creatively so and the scheduling constraints of combining part-timers with full-timers are considerable. What we have tried to do is create an environment in which reflective practitioners have the opportunity to question their own sense of direction and learning need, reflect productively on questions of methodology, engage with contemporary cultural discourse, pursue a relevant research question and develop their work in a context which gives permission to concentrate on learning from practice and from peers.

I started by saying that the design is as yet untested. We are seven weeks in. The questions are complex but the design solution needs to be simple. It is too early to say how well our very simple adopted structure will deliver what we want of it.

Appendix: Two-part academic structure of the Dartington MA**Part 1**

(60/180 UK credits): taught, structured, designed for re-orientation and leading to a negotiated proposal for Part 2.

3 parallel modules

1 Diagnostics and methodologies; leading to proposal for part 2 work (cross-disciplinary group)

2 Questions of practice; practical workshop sessions aimed at challenging existing sense of practice (subject-specific group)

- 3 Critical theory – cross-disciplinary framing sessions with some subject specific work

Part 2

(120/180 UK credits): supported independent study in both theory and practice

- students choose ratio between dissertation and practice
- explore relationship between them
- work on them both with tutor support

Published in the Proceedings of the conference: 'Further and Continuing Education of performing artists in the Nordic Countries – a Nordic Task' (Videre og affermdanneelse for scenekunstere i Norden; Oslo: Norway 12th – 14th November 1999, pp.77-85; ISBN 92-893-0578-9; ISSN 0908-6692)

¹ This preamble is a written version of a short spoken commentary aimed at linking the paper with some of the presentations of the previous evening.

F.3

Review Of

The Anxiety Of Interdisciplinarity

Alex Coles and Alexia Defert (eds) (Vol Two of *de-, dis-, ex.*

Interdisciplinarity: Art / Architecture / Theory) 168 pp.,

London: BACKless Books and Black Dog Publishing, 1998

ISBN 1 901033 75 9 (£9.95)

Reviewing this book for Performance Research poses a problem that the book itself might be expected to help solve. If 'performance' is a name for a contested interdisciplinary field of contemporary cultural practices, here is a book whose title finds no single name but which commits itself to an 'interdisciplinarity' in relation to Art / Architecture / Theory. What should a review do? Take this designated interdisciplinary field as quite other, to be viewed over the hedge as it were? Consider if there are issues that can valuably be researched in relation to performance that are entangled – 'imbricated' as Barthes or his translators might say – with issues considered here? Gauge correspondences? Or look at general issues for attempting to establish or operate within interdisciplinary fields? Each of these questions implies not just a different review but different models of interdisciplinarity.

At the time of writing, this series of 'volumes' – carefully not referred to at any point as a journal – has reached Volume Three. 'Interdisciplinarity' appears in both this

volume title and the series title, suggesting that it is the key topic, not just a mode of operation. There are other aspects to the layering of titles that snag. At least two of the dislocated prefixes are open to ambiguity and, after reading the collection, make me wonder what happened to 'inter-' and 'post-'. And this interdisciplinarity is quite specific: Art / Architecture / Theory. Given the discussion that goes on within the pages it is surprising that so many troublesome unities can be invoked in the title.

Perhaps two anxieties for interdisciplinarity should be (1) the temptation to essentialise its contributory disciplines and (2) the fragility of any shared understanding of what is meant by the term. Are we to expect a concern with hybrid or collaboratively cross-disciplinary fields of practice? Or an attention to the named component fields that draw on the discourse of the others? Will architecture be treated as though it were 'art' and if so what would that mean? Or is this really about theory and practice – the conjunction of disciplines from these two larger domains? And so on – the questions could continue.

Of all the unities implied in the titles the most troubling of all to me is that last: Theory. Have we reached a point where Theory is a discipline, where there is a canon of primary texts or authorities (in a medieval sense) marking out the field? Perhaps by now an interdiscipline of cultural theories has fully achieved disciplinary status. A fairly short bibliography could be elicited or inferred from this collection and it is an increasingly familiar one. There are noticeable absences: anthropology, for example; Bakhtinian/Volosinovian approaches that insist that language is nothing if not context bound and is only encountered as 'speech'; J.L. Austin's approach – recently most productively applied by Judith Butler – that attends to what signification does, not just what it is alleged to say or mean; and lastly, the line of theorising of the everyday, associated most notably with De Certeau.

The volume is topped and tailed with two interviews, forms that on the face of it give an opportunity for editors to fix an agenda but which in practice are usually subverted by the authority of the interviewee. In this case, neither interviewee is particularly interested in giving detailed responses to questions about architecture, the main focus of the volume. The first is Julia Kristeva; the second, Hal Foster. The first article is by Rosalind Krauss, like Foster a Professor of Modern Art and editor of *October*. These three all have an authority that extends beyond the disciplinary fields cited above.

What I am circling is this question of a discipline, what it is, what any of us can do with it, and what can we do without it. The articles in the collection allude to but never directly confront this question. Julia Kristeva very helpfully relates the issue both to her own individual intellectual trajectory and to the pedagogical aspirations of an educational institution. Her early ambitions to study nuclear physics or astronomy were not realisable in the political context for her family in Bulgaria at the time. I suspect that many connect with that: for any individual a discipline is as likely to be a response to contingencies as to a call of destiny. One way or another choices are made – or land upon us – which locate us in divisions of practice and knowledge-labour which are already very much in place. Some of these take years of initiation during which we take on – at least to an extent – an identity that belongs to the specialism. It is not just something we know about or know how to do; it is what we are.

These specialisms are both epistemological and pragmatic. They are to do with what it is felt necessary to know, what form that knowledge should take, how it should be acquired, what is pertinent and what is impertinent. Knowledge is a set of institutional and individual processes so that there are always performances, practices, involved. Putting it crudely, how do you do knowledge? By ‘making art’? By designing

buildings for others to construct, use, walk past unknowingly or knowingly to comment upon? By adding directly to the genre pool of knowledge – for example through writing articles or reviews?

No one can do all of this, know of all of this. Disciplines are in part melancholy responses to the unavoidable trauma of ignorance. Both Kristeva and Foster point out how much work is required in an interdisciplinary approach; there is so much less that you are allowed not to know. This might make the anxiety attributable to interdisciplinarity more burdensome but it would need arguing. Why be interdisciplinary, why 'do' it? This question of motivation is all: what gaps or flaws in the divisions of knowledge and practice, in the defining of boundaries with immigration control, drive you this way?

There are modalities, technologies and institutions of knowledge – for its acquisition, storage, transmission, its economic status. These are historical; these change. A 'discipline' is every bit as much to do with networks of vested interests as it is with 'pure' differences in topic, angle of knowledge, career. The so-called 'knowledge revolution' has not yet had a profound effect in this respect. The new technologies of knowledge do not operate on the same categorial principles that produced the current array of 'disciplines'; nor are they likely to be respectful of the current systems of authority that protect the boundaries.

A structure of disciplines represents a massive investment in specialisation. An anxiety of specialisation, unless it is approached as a platform for any number of adaptations or transformations, is the threat of anachronism, of pertinence becoming impertinent overnight. Both Kristeva and Foster touch on this. The last words of Kristeva's interview are these: 'Thus, let us learn to draw again. (21)'. Foster expresses a related

anxiety about 'what might serve as a medium in a post-medium age (168)'. There is a specialised sense of discipline here: the craft or trade discipline.

The other contributions to *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity* are focused on instances, appearing to operate within the brief of 'art / architecture / theory' rather than addressing the general problematic in a more systematic way. A number of themes do emerge and more than once I had the experience of an article later in the collection providing a response to questions raised in my reading of earlier ones.

Appropriately for a publication addressing interdisciplinarity, some different discursive modes are used. Apart from the interviews, the prevailing mode is the theoretically informed art-historical article, but there is also a sequence of six photographs of institutional interiors by Candida Höfer and a piece by Howard Caygill which combines photography with a more open form of narrative commentary interspersed with theoretical meditation.

The Rosalind Krauss piece is a republished 1977 article that uses a discussion of Peter Eisenman's Houses to plot a narrative leading to the emergence of the post-modern. In a lucid explication Krauss characterises formalism as the rendering of the transparent into the opaque (Compare Julia Kristeva: 'In many ways theory is pursued because something is hidden behind the visible. But we need the visible side of the equation first' (21)); structuralism as 'the dispersal of unities into a field of differences'(45); and then, finally, the post-modern as the expression of differences 'without positive terms'(50). Operating powerfully on this is an interesting contradiction: the importation from literary theory of an expanded notion of text in relation to predominantly visual discourse – that architecture is not only a 'language' but is in the main a visual one. There is an attempt (this is 1977, remember) to explore

the notion of subjectivity in relation to architectural space but it is constrained by the chosen linguistic model and by reliance on phrases like: 'The work of art pictures more than its own contents; it also pictures its beholder'.(47)

Who is the 'beholder' in relation to a house? In this article the house is treated – and perhaps was by the architect – as a sculpture, as an 'object' in a subject-object relation. This is a decontextualised house, as it were isolated in a gallery, not pushed up against other houses in social space where people get on with their lives. This is also the effect of Höfer's black and white photographs of institutional interiors – with one exception empty of people and therefore of the immediacy of institutional function. As soon as people move through spaces like these the geometry is disturbed. This emptiness troubles the point of view but in these photographs – unlike the Robert Smithson piece described in another article – technically there is one. Site lines are organised perspectively: as beholder I am outside emptiness; I am excluded but I am excluded from nothing.

The counterpoint this offers with the first paragraph of Louis Martin's article on the architect, theorist and teacher, Bernard Tschumi, is an example of the sequencing I referred to above: 'The project was based on the statement that the success of urban life depends on the relationships established between peoples, ideas, objects'(61). This article concerns itself with architectural practice as cultural and political strategy.

Tschumi lends himself to the book's thematic in a number of ways. He was fully aware of the theoretical preoccupations of, for example, the Tel Quel group, was aware of their attempts to incorporate architecture into semiological theory, saw architecture as an expanded discursive field with actual buildings as only a part and, according to Martin, was prepared to extend Derrida's privileging of writing over speech :

Just as Derrida had replaced speech with writing, in arguing that architecture was a form of writing anterior to textual writing, Tschumi proposed to replace writing with architecture. (80)

This particular article touches usefully on one of the possible mechanisms for – and forms of – interdisciplinarity: ‘transposition’. Can you transpose a theory of language to the practice of architecture? If you do so are you acting on an intuition in productive analogy or are you assuming – as Saussure did at first with his famous anticipation of semiology as a meta-discourse subsuming linguistics – that there is a meta-discourse or perhaps an Ur-theory from which others can proceed:

Thus the logic of language appeared to be the primordial symbolic material from which to start in order to understand other signifying practices. (Kristeva, 4)

I take ‘transposition’ to be itself an analogy taken from musical composition and arrangement. Analogy is the more general conceptual device: to what extent can we treat these as alike? Analogy assumes equivalence. Homology assumes structural identification rather than equivalence – that there is a deeper structure underlying different forms. Some compositional concerns across arts practices seem to me to be homological rather than analogical. These can be intuited fairly rapidly. A compositional trick is to start by saying, for example, what happens if I treat this poem as though it were a piece of music, as though it were a visual image, and so on? This kind of discussion raises questions about the productiveness of certain interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary strategies.

The article by Timothy Martin on Robert Smithson moves straight in on a parallel between Lacan and Smithson in their conceptions of a split subject. There is no indication given that either had read the other. The article relies on two careful explications of work by Smithson against the notion of the split subject, of binocular

(split) vision, the desire of the subject to see the gaze and the idea of an architectural unconscious. This involves detailed accounts of the lost Enantiomorphic Chambers and of the lecture on the Hotel Pelanque in Mexico. Both are accounts of refusals of any kinds of unity or happy closure. The Hotel Palenque is a long way from Eisenman's Houses.

Beatriz Colomina's piece on another house, that of the Eames couple, is anecdotal, descriptive, unusual in this context in not appearing to need to validate itself through theoretical exegesis. The Eames shared something with Tschumi in viewing architecture as part of a larger game – according to Colomina in their case a 'life-style' game – and something with Smithson in a playful interest in what could, borrowing his phrase, be called 'de-architecturisation'.

The final piece – apart from the Foster interview – is the dual text (perhaps not dual; perhaps as in the other articles the photographs are illustrative?) by Caygill of a visit to Naples deliberately undertaken in full knowledge of the powerful superstitions already at work on the place itself and on the place as site of the kinds of tourism that the author wants both to acknowledge and outwit. It is an engaging piece whose photographs could not be more different from Hôfer's. These don't record 'architecture' – instead his Cageian game catches buildings that get in the light and that in doing so are usually shaded or blurred – the blur of passing without attention to form. What is avoided is the projection of a narcissism on to building. The text is kept unified through the discursive (talkative even) presence of the author. Though this is a kind of practice that genuinely muddles 'theory' and 'practice', there is no doubt which is the dominant mode.

Like the Hôfer piece, the work is recent (1997 in this case). The work discussed in the articles can be dated as follows: Eisenman Houses – dates not given; probably mostly 1960s; most of the references to Tschumi activities are 1970s and early eighties; the Smithson references 1965 and 1969; the Eames house, 1949.

What do these dates tell us? Perhaps that so much intellectual discourse operates within an inter-temporality in which a speaking subject supposed to be split calmly views across time texts which stay still long enough to annul the threatening anxiety of their fragmentation?

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SECTIONS G, H & I

APPENDICES

G: APPENDIX 1 (CD)

Visual and sound material and links to web publications

1. Visual material prepared for viewing through Microsoft PowerPoint
(1a. Continuous slide show for computers with enough memory)
2. Offline copy of *Through the Gap* from Shearsman website
3. Offline copy of *Changing Lines* from Great Works website
4. Sound treatments of *Couldn't You* by Birdie Hall
5. Links to works published on web

H: APPENDIX 2 (DVD)

Works in Three Houses (domestic frames *in situ*)

photography, sound and editing by Birdie Hall

I: APPENDIX 3 (following pages)

Evidence of intention to publish two articles awaiting publication: copies of letters from editors of *Salt Companion to John James* (E5) and *The Gig* (E6).

The Gig

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9 May 2005

Dear John,

My apologies for taking so long to get you these proofs; I got the basic quote checking and copyediting done a few months back but since then my attention's been mostly preoccupied with trying to get the stragglers into the fold for the book.... But I've just gone through it again and made a few further adjustments (notably, I shortened "Karen Mac Cormack" to just "Mac Cormack" in most instances for brevity's sake). There's actually very little to query here – it's very clearly written, and I found little to quibble with. I might as well list the handful of queries now:

... *(four editing queries omitted JH)*

& that's it! Thanks again for the piece – it's one of my favourite contributions to the volume. I do hope there's a "collected essays of John Hall" in the works at some point....

Anyway, if you can get me any corrections to the proofs in the next two weeks that'd be ideal; just send me a list of changes in a list via email. Tell me if the attached PDF file doesn't come through correctly; in that case I'll mail a hardcopy version. The book itself should, if all goes well, be appearing in July – a few months behind schedule (I'd hoped for April), but not too bad. I've got about 180pp typeset, another 30pp still to typeset, and a few other pieces that are supposed to be incoming by the end of the month.

all best,

Nate

The copy of this submission of published works has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no quotation from the collection and no information derived from it may be published without the author's prior written consent.

Signed

John Hill

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1st August 2005

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CONTENTS

- Untitled poem ('such stumbling...') / 9
- BETWEEN THE CITIES / 10
- 'to have these records...' / 10
- Song / 11
- an argument / 12
- a poem / 13
- Between the Cities / 14
- Walking Song / 16
- The proud eyes of the black cat / 18
- New York Pastoral 1 / 19
- New York Pastoral 2 / 19
- Remember the City / 20
- Routes : for John Temple / 22
- Routes 2 / 24
- Lustre / 26
- Lust / 28
- A Version of Dominion / 30
- Poems for Dreamers / 32
- In Difference / 34
- of the spheres / 35
- Poems for Strangers / 36
- Mundana / 40
- song / 40
- DAYS / 41
- 10 'nothing to be gained...' / 42
- 16 10th June 1969 / 43
- 21 'driving the same road back...' / 44
- 22 Work / 45
- 25 'doing the same thing often enough' / 46
- 31 'inconsolable mists' / 47
- 33 'my love wishes' / 48
- 44 'things were left unfinished...' / 49
- 45 'for the indolent...' / 50
- 48 'love is anguished...' / 51
- 49 'things were left unfinished...' / 52
- 53 SONG ('some pain...') / 53
- 55 'the empty bar...' / 54
- 69 'it is mid-winter...' / 55
- 71 'they mock me..' / 56
- 75 A303 Song / 57
- 74 'to the eastern surfaces...' / 58
- 79 index / 58

MEANING INSOMNIA / 59
 'the slender meanings...' / 59
 Apostrophe / 60
 Pedals / 61
 The Perilous Night / 62
 Support Rhodesia / 64
 Meaning Insomnia / 65
 Four Frames in a Row / 66
 Reeves Timber Yard / 70
 Where shall we go to hear truth spoken ? / 71
 Latter Days / 72

MALO-LACTIC FERMENT / 73
 'actually where he was...' / 73
 Scrap-book for 1973 / 74
 Prey / 75
 Malo-lactic ferment / 76
 European History / 78
 The Gunman's heart / 82
 Bonfire / 84

COUCH GRASS / 85

REPRESSED INTIMATIONS / 93
 Picking up Stones / 94
 A Diagram / 96
 Forgetting / 97
 Repressed Intimations 1 / 99
 Repressed Intimations 6 / 100

NOT WRITING / 101
 to-whit-to-woo / 103
 Not writing / 104
 another story, in four parts / 105
 I's story / 108
 Various exiles / 109
 a poem for this room / 110
 what do we do with tongues / 111
 it's stranger / 112
 Dear No one / 118

INDEX OF TITLES / FIRST LINES / 121

such stumbling

fluency

as the grass has

now stubble, or

colour, now

only the wind

does it

from BETWEEN THE CITIES (1968)

to have these
records, to say
there was
this, &
this

it was not always
as it is

SONG

under the flower
ing chest
nut trees with

my love I
walk: green

light showers
upon

pink flowers &
white. it is our
choice. I
say,

whether we
flee love or
force it, hope

fully:

an argument

the big ship, in the mist, moves
past. / that is right, that
is accurate: there was
mist if you say there was. the ship
did pass.

notions of love & significance
gnaw at her. she finds
true colour in dreams of an island, blue
& beaches

oh
loveless one, oh gnawed by
notions — to see a city
in light like that / so far
as I know you
never did get fog
in the desert.

a. poem.

it grows in
differently, comes up
what will

thus sweet harmony
was daughter of the foam-
born and the destroyer
of cities (who lay
together while the artist
was away.

tho he caught them sweet
harmony was already there.

Hesiod

has it these two also
produced panic and fear.

Walking Song

*(the crisis, where it comes,
is a seizure of the heart)*

never both feet off the ground
at the same time: walking
is the movement of the legs to
wherever it is

& my heart does not hurry
to it, nor my lungs strain : a sense
of continuity, or, of space ahead, to be
moved into, at my pace (or if we
get together we'll come to an arrange-
ment.

I begin to see the year (next year?
overlapping this place, & the year
is another measure.

how to keep up this
continuity of the walking pace: my heart
beats no faster
than that, and that's what it is:
walking at that pace through the year
my eyes moving to the surrounds

the sway

of the trees, the beat
of the heart
the heart has no certainty
but its own measure: the insistence
of the pulse / to continue: its
persistence as a warm place. who
wd put the cold brain higher ?

I put my hand to my head when
it aches, as it does now
& it goes on. I have
walked here through the evening
& I do not shout it because
these are questions the year puts me to
& how much comes in by

going thru there?

The Proud Eyes of the Black Cat

the arm is now brown & seems
to have the shape of its greatest
strength. the surface (the skin and hairs
swell and ridge to the exertion, the tensing &
it is not the complexity of such leverage that
is lovely it is so simple & I can
do it & I do do it. it happens
in my sleep even, & I know that the bones
in all their loveliness are
white. they are the lilies of my purity &
do not break or fester, and are my skeleton.
& the song is the muscle & the skin
I know it all by.

it is the song
of the black cat in the grass. heartless
& completely beautiful.

& how you find it doesnt matter at all
because from here it is outward to the skin & for
Narcissus there was no problem
of anatomy. all water
reflected. & now
I find it easier to say it
moving because that way there is only one organ-
isation I am the centre of and there's no
mistaking that proud moment.

New York Pastoral (1)

woke up 2.30 am
with the city in my gut.
how stand the trucks
passing all night. how
sleep. the lights
down at the intersection
holding them at red.

in green sleep the trucks
flowed down the avenues.
the beasts of my night
prowled the streets.

New York Pastoral (2)

the things on the kitchen table
were trees
growing very green
& quiet.

a hanna barbera glass. an ashtray. a coffee
cup. my cigarettes.

Remember the city ?

february may be known
as the month of the dead, or at least
of the way the dead
prepare libations for us. the nerves
act out what they endure, which is to say
the surface cleanness of the skin or the deciduous
trees or the night sky: the form of knowledge
is the organisation of such sensation.

there is not a flower to be seen. not a spring
flower. my knowledge of such a song is pure
ly memory of the orbit which as any other
form of knowledge is so
complicated it is the inversion of a
beautiful energy system with the colour of geometry
completely replacing spring flowers.

the metric is the memory of the earth's
passage through known colours.
my god I remember the city. after 8 years
could find my way, where? how much has changed
how have I kept my skull balanced, when I
as the weapon of cunning
am caught up in the dance. the ceremonial of it. &
it's such a compact cavity, the bone is so close
to the fine tissue of nerve

I is the hunt gone wrong
I is the body no longer on the prowl. muscle
on bone, viscera, tissue of nerves

see how it does move:
muscle or blood or neural charge or
just food thru my gut

on the move it goes thru
all the old places, this earth does, how much choice
do I have about this yearly motion
of mine) thru all the old places, or at least
it is the same world as I so
impurely endured, as nearly ruined me, but the hunt,
or the dance, is on, in, or thru, the streets of the city
thru the streets of the city of my memory
the old or new city

the prowl. there I ate, shat, loved, fought etc
the dance getting so close to a destination that
every tree I passed I took care not to crackle
the twigs in the grating, I took great care
not to rustle the newspaper

until we moved in on, when it was so quick,
the timing was so important I was thru the
square & into the subway station...

it is an effort of memory
because the dance is re-formed & the hunt
that is on, that we are in on, what is it
for?

tho this is january & nearly the month of the dead
I remember the flowers very distinctly: there is the precise
point in orbit when the tilt becomes more favourable
to this northern climate

which is an effort of memory
(february the one time we are all
that we are — gloom in it certainly) the knowing slack
of muscle in sling, thru the streets, or wherever, & to be
returned from.

Routes : for John Temple

the spread was of what we cd see
thru the large wind-screen of the truck
on our way down the A1. we passed the
county signs which are a measure of
distance more than anything else & in any case
you know the road pretty well. later on you sd
border! talking of the line that divides Essex
from Cambridgeshire & laughed, rightly. the condition
of travel southward (for me *back*, to Cambridge after
a day's absence, for you a *revisit*) has nothing
to do with *borders* or even with the fact
that we call this England.

the truck-driver used his side-mirrors often. we cdnt
they were angled for his use & anyway we
werent driving, why shd we want to look behind. as it
got dark we cd see the red tail-lights
of the cars ahead, not following them so
much as sharing their direction, the road
moving out from under us. it struck me
that was something to share, John, & towards sunset
sitting high up in the middle of the cab I was
proud with the various friendships, the men
who had stopped to take us & you there
caught up with directions
I thought I'cd recognise.

& then the cars — why this poem
hasnt changed much
in these few days we've
been together — the cars
taking the same road south, my
own thanks for the companionship
signalled by those red lights. this poem
for three days riding my mind
in the condition of shared direction. in these
days we've been talking I've this

to thank you for, the loveliness
of the moving backs of
our countrymen, the loveliness
of yr friends across the Atlantic,
as unspoken a matter as
the back view of the shoulders of our
species. the beasts of the field walk
yet in all their splendour, we see
what's ahead of us, always, travelling
is that condition of attention: the steady
companionship of the red tail-lights &
you & I talking
 in this condition in
 which we are
 companions.

what we call this land's heritage, by which we mean
all that lumber we can no longer
use.

it all slopes down to
where I am, as the force
of inheritance, & what is
right, what is left to do, I wish to
inherit only
as the force of the spirit I have
earned & can
move with.

Lustre

the earth
is a moon
or a similarly wandering planet
moving in her ellipse
through the shine of galactic night, alight
with whatever her surface can reflect
bright
with this generosity of presence, how with
beautiful negligence we all disperse
what we go on having.

on the dark
side the glow of cities & the stirring
in the night of the animals
I always dream of, the smell of
the vegetation they move in.

& on the bright face is
all fair ? how does the light
shine back from the desert spaces of
the sands & the gleaming ice-caps ? I sense the green
darkness of the latitudes of my origin
as I move about now
in the clarity of these northern cities & call it
my fortune to be talking of origins
in the grasslands of my own life
which may have been the grasslands also
of this species, where the nights
were not too cold for the naked men
& the herds
moved in their numbers through the tall grasses.
it's not wind-blown pollen we know
the animals by but the feet we have
always moved with, as our migrations have always been
an actual movement over this
reflecting surface. the land is to inhabit
where best it may be & I am possessed

again & again by the movement of the herds
through my blood, in search of where next
to eat,

again & again by the
movement of the earth & what moves
on it

the moon lighting my darknesses.

Lust

learning to talk in the
grasslands of my origin, what
rose in my throat, listen : lust, lustre, the beautiful
radiance of desire, the lustre
of speech.

nothing is as beautiful
as desire is.

keeping to the throat & tongue though, to the
limitations (definitions) of speech: the actual
exchange of particles in the act
of kissing is negligible. our bodies remained
distinct & entirely our own, giving very generously
what adheres to our bones, as we got up,
moving away, the muscles in her back
filling me with desire to see her moving
away from me, & the casual elegance
of her return,

the casual eloquence of her reply. it is difficult sometimes
to want to reach across the words &
not to be able to, & to find in reaching
a world never dreamt of or a sequence of events
never imagined. in the strain set up, which
can equally be a dead-locking one, gathering our desires
& moving beyond.

how far we can get
is the assessment. & the gaps that form &
close up & reform,

making love to the object
of my desire, knowing that many of the things I want
I cant have. my language
cant have everything it wants. this is the definition
of my desire & the lustre of my throat
is the muscular restraint
of this fact.

there is difficulty
in speaking as there is difficulty
in lust & it is our knowledge
that we must never demean
what we desire.

the great ones
have all been great lovers: Eros
had the arrows, not Caesar, for all
his unlovely cupidity, making that stupid boast
about his conquest of this island. all his desire
he brought with him — how could he recognise
the list of the coast of Kent. Eros can never
be conquered & the conquered in war
are also unlovely. the true bindings
of love. what was it he wanted then?
to lead her in chains through Rome as though
that were a triumph worth anyone's having.

in the finest ages the lovers
have been our acknowledged
statesmen. in others they are the hated
of the state, never knowingly released
from a service hateful to them. they need
food & shelter & they must get it
at the smallest cost

to their rampant desires.
it is right to fear & beautiful. it is this fear
we call wildness, the strength
expressed in our bodies
that we must be so
careful to get what we want. the wildness to know
that we must go on getting it.

A Version of Dominion (notes for Peter Riley)

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness : and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

man // animals: the distinction to be worked against, that man was from the first a genetic special case, *apart, lonely*, without instinct but educable; master of the world shit. the paradox that to ennoble man thus is to deprive us of our heritage: the cooling of the earth.

domination

is at first the easiest means to food & shelter & what distinguishes finally the animals

is that they *breathe & move*, & move as breathing creatures do. it's in their name.

every creature that lives is master of its own territory. this is necessary for survival.

so what to do: a living. all he has ever done is get a living out of his surrounds. that means keep alive, & growing erect his surrounds were also the distant music, the lights burning in the sky. how to improve the living, his head set into the sky on the now vertical column of his spine? the work he had so long done working a slow refinement in his muscles & the finer articulation of his hands, his fingers learning too the practice of his imagination as an act of will, to acquire power over the image thus conceived

to set the course
of the hunt or the movement
of himself & his companions, to practise in his
imagination the surface nature & movements
of his entire territory, finally

throwing his mind out
to the limits of a cosmology that werent
just coastal, to the new territory won for him
by no force except the muscular pumping
of his blood to his spine & brain,

those untouchable & regular phenomena, the
sun, moon & stars, with their daily & sidereal
movements obviously to be revered
& not feared only but

looked up to (literally) the correspondence
derived from its height, the first distant
ligature, the re-ligion,

the vault with the many stars, the light
burning for its specific city,

the bearing taken
being of such high-vaulted value, so
travelling under them, by their actual
guidance, was to be continually
under their light.

& travelling now north under a grey sky
rain falling into these lush fields, I notice again
the correspondence of the vault of the preferred sky & the vault
of any man's cranium. the ground we're travelling over which
is this Sussex one isnt changed
by this. the rock
is already hard. the green is there & cant be seen
to appear, but I go on ahead over it, this ground
I dont know, it is the ground
the lights shine on
always.

Poems for Dreamers

1. SIR ORFEO

May. the path I walk
is the usual one. the meadow
is sweet with daisies &
thick grass. it is in May
the dreamer
passes what he is used to. in the
meadow he has always known
he dreams of love, or possibly
the people from the other side
come & get her. he is quite
prepared for this.

looking up again
at the tall chestnuts
he looks for love too
for her accustomed bounty.

2

the city
is the planned forest
of the dream, this morning. green
hangs from all the branches & far blossom
thickens my breathing. am I lost
in the enchanted wood
of my literal surrounds? do these sweet
sounds this morning seduce me
to my own wanderings, while, in the mantic eye, in
his sleep, shines
the wide sky, his serene year.

in the middle
of the green wood I look up & the blue
is white with an unserene brightness. in his sleep, while
I tilt eagerly where my earth
points me, I hold my hopes in his dreams
that shine above these woods.

3

I cried for love to trip
gently the enchanted way.
her nimble feet left
increase
of nature's goods.

she passed among the people
who gave off her light.
the fields
show forth their increase &
your words, poet,
are fragrant again.

4 THE JEWELLER

the dreamer, the persistent literalist, who even so
has converse with the dead &
because he fails altogether to understand
brings back an exact account to the living. Jerusalem,
he says, isnt that in Judeah, it cant be in these woods. the
brightness of the woods, the shining jewels
in the stream he has not recognised as the shine
in his own dream of the walls of the city of
the dead. calling across the river which Lancelot
thought he had crossed. a sword-bridge indeed! the land
whence no man returns or the city of the matchless
brides. the dead live normally & cannot return or else
they are adorned with pearls & live across the beautiful
river in the new city of light, into which the living
may never enter. gazing in wonder across
the brightness, even weak with the fragrance
of the wood & dazzled by the hopeless splendour
of the dead, in his eyes & ears the dreamer
cannot hold the radiance but is ravished
with its bliss & returns to the living.

In Difference

in the sky the sun
recedes southwards daily & autumn
approaches slowly
down the island.

there are some
who figure their lives as a
sequence of crises, but they enter
the bar, they enter the village, sometimes
I am immoderately in love with her, sometimes — that is to say
I dont at all know what will happen.

at this point I dont even say 'my life'. there are the
strophes, the apparent turning points
of the sun
which is the earth's true bent, no real turn
but the axial tilt circling as
usual. what I go out to do or
what comes in as a consequence
of a changing sky, the trope or strophe, it could
be the same question
given the tilt held & my lungs
working evenly, circling slowly & in
differently a changing circumstance. yesterday
she entered the bar & as I say
was again very beautiful

of the spheres

the reason he sd
we didnt hear it
the motion of the bodies is
without pause, the music
attends us always

in the chamber
of the ear of the very pure
of the noble in heart
is the joy it brings tracking
across our sky

the treble voice
so pure I recognised in the chamber
of my ear a love that was
for the passage & rotation
of the earth, a music so
distinct I heard the galaxy
wheel about its axis

the small bone
at the base of the skull
on which the head turns
which upholds the chamber music
of the skull, the exquisite
chamber of the ear, hearing
these sounds which are more
earthly than I can say.

Poems for strangers

1 SONG

even in the framing
of the quest
 ions a hope
in their order
 & having come
back to where we are
 we are
where we have never
been
 though the song
is still the song of the
world & no less
rapturous for that.

2 STRANGER-POEM

a photograph of the earth, the land
not easily distinguished from the sea.
they have added arrows for guidance, each
with its legend, as, for example, 'The
Arabian Sea' or 'Italy'.

it is a message in the
daily news-paper from earth's
own satellite that earth is as strange
as the moon or men are, men in their strength
seeing finally the outside of things, how the celestial bodies
appear as luminous points.

moon is an emblem for such, how closely draws
this same strangeness, men unable to see
the sun & missing the point (lit as it is, as all
heavenly bodies are) & calling themselves 'alike', confounding
the earthly with the familial spirit.

sun, moon and stars, even the earth
a messenger from the exterior. all these
& men too, angel-strangers
who visit the city.

3 METROPOLIS
(or the stranger at the gate)

the living return
from the City of Death the beautiful city
of their vision of the dead

they return
to the earthly city, the Old Jerusalem,
where the living
hold converse with the living
 & await the dead await
the clear account of the man
who also died, who describes as his journey
or his sleep a converse held
with his own dead & in his speech in the account
he helplessly gives the living
 declares his return
 to us.

the city is any city.
it is his city
only because he lives there

he wakes to the sound of rain falling, he rises
to hear the news

the news went round that he had returned
& was much changed

the living go
out, of the city, leave
themselves, in the night
journey to a different part
of the same
or another land

in streams of traffic now
the cars leave the city, later
to divide for their separate destinations

he watches them go

one by one or in their numbers
the friends return. I was away
or was there to greet him. he came back
or failed to return. he gave no account save to say
he had been to such-and-such a place
(naming a city)
or had done such-and-such a job.

he had been away,
in his face & eyes, in his movements
was the account
of what he had brought back — the untold
& unasked cost

I was away or was there
to greet him, the friend the stranger
to whatever city, to wherever it was
he had once left

guarding the radials, the ways
of the living out
or into
the city of strange light

of the stranger-companions, for whom the city
is always other, though
they might live there

uncertain always
of the journey or where you had been

I returned
to the sound of rain falling. I rose, I
shaved off the old beard & the skin
that had been there all along was strange
to the hand guiding the blade

making these efforts
to return somewhere
which has been defined
as love

I had lurched backwards

from the mirror & had fallen
backwards into the bath. the mirror
was before me
as I pulled myself out & the face
& the beard
were unsteady in it.

I waited.
sometime I would have to
come back.

I would have to wait
for the white face, steady & strange
in the mirror.

as I say I arose to the sound
of rain falling.

Mundana

oh lady of the foam
Aphrodite
a friend asks me
about Harmony
who is your daughter

what am I to say?

I have heard her
enter the bar, have known her
to be amongst us, & lady
have looked up
suddenly in pure love

to find the strangest company
of angels & otherwise.

song

down Broadway without
a cent, the goods
shone like purity like
the mineral kingdom
in his eye.

from DAYS (1971)

| | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|----------|
| days | seditions | faster | prized | brows | argon |
| daze | saves | need us | what size | browse | ergo |
| dais | paves | haver | wise | bows | farrago |
| day-muse | ways | have a | wised up | blousy | iago |
| dice | waves | wager | wired | soused | paragon |
| dissect | haven | waver | wireless | rice | hardon |
| trace | leaven | treasure | stress | suffice | tried-on |
| trays | leading | raver | impress | sisal | dont |
| maze | leaders | pressure | distress | lavage | redone |
| dismays | o reader | precious | district | reprisal | reads on |
| size | speed us | apprise | very strict | leverage | soon |
| says you | heavenly | prised | stern | age-old | seared |

nothing to be gained from the sea tonight
but the sea itself. in Aylmer Cove there are no
boats to be lost, nothing to be lost or gained, the sea
is just the sea, even the heavy swell
which seems to be some obvious statement
of — what could it be a statement of? —
lies below me as something to be watched merely, which is
such a different kind of act from
George's, who kept awake last night in the
heavy winds, anxious about the boats
in Newton harbour. in this case the mind
trades on some certainty of profit, in
which any sequence of events
is action & some feeling
might be gained in the wind, before
passing inland. this isnt
how I earn my living, I hasten
to add, though again maybe it is. money comes in
from boat-building, but this business of poems, nothing to be gained
from the poem tonight, is, as in the sea's case, a
patent lie. the image of the sea & the hopes in a poem
this is what I set out
to calculate, as though owing myself the answer:
what is to be gained tonight?

JUNE
Number 10

10 JUNE 1969

I'm not surprised you're surprised

if I followed your logic
I'd be surprised too

JUNE
Number 16

driving the same road back, alone now, in twilight
which at this time of year is perhaps the hour we draw
back to ourselves, before any possible offering in the darkness
does come, I catch the road in the driving mirror as a
memory little more than an hour old, as it curves back
through Buckfastleigh, offering no alternative destination, but an
accompaniment to our talk, the curve round the bridge & up
the hill an apt but not chosen notation
for what I was saying at the time, which was exactly
one of the conversations & returns which spins through the mirror,
a memory continuous with this poem, and as she recedes
behind me she is constantly ahead like the central white lines
feeding themselves through the rear screen
on to the reflecting glass before me.

JULY
Number 21

WORK

at work I work slowly
down a long & new
pencil, keeping
it sharp by
rotating it slowly
against the blade
in the conical hole of
my foreign
made al
uminium pencil sharpener.

JULY
Number 22

doing the same thing often enough, any simple act
can become a personal metric, offering a not necessarily relevant
shape to some casual thought or possibly a cerebral rite especially developed
within this sense of occasion. yesterday, walking & running
down the familiar cliff, & thinking
of the behaviour of singular people, how the old,
if they have been attentive, can say with modesty, 'that
doesn't interest me', or, of the prevailing order, 'that isn't
my world'. and we, being young, are more arrogant when we say this &
even in saying it, really again and again, have
to find out if it's true, & that could take
half our life. but then so what? we spend
that much time finding out what world
we live in, anyway, & I think from time to time
we find ourselves within some fixed purpose also, having never
guessed at it, & it is from there
we remark about the others. I don't think I ever
wanted to be what I am.

the shape is a fall & a curve, down & around
over the beach, & a family
of visitors overtaken, greeted — exactly how I look up
to see how the slate is
against the sea tonight, nothing
is going to be changed by this, I just
make myself familiar with the familiar, as a more careful poet
might look to his metre occasionally, & I find, reaching the bottom,
on the beach, that our canoe has gone,
& this opens the field to further speculation
as to how, when etc.

AUGUST
Number 25

my love wishes to ask a simple question
concerning our love. I think she wishes
me to say some simple words
expressing love & reassurance. she knows
that I find nothing quite so simple
least of all love & so she phrases it
differently & I answer her I hope
truthfully & with great
difficulty.

AUGUST
Number 33

things were left unfinished, as they usually are, &
the small car carries me away without any clear sense
of what I'm leaving: 'well, so that's final' or 'now at least
I know how we stand' would be more definite places
than the towns along the A303, but like those towns, we by-pass more of them
now, & the defined abstracts, gracing occasions with their
precise sense of honour, slip past
as signs on the roundabouts reading TOWN CENTRE, &
you have to have some good reason for visiting those, though there is
a certain orderliness about them when you do. & the people in them?
ah yes, each one tries out the unqualified statement
to themselves in their bath or their small car & then wanders out into
streets laid out in a pattern of loyalties, & the qualifications
of love, & the qualities, of love, betray the simple statement. the common-place road
leads straight to the abstract clarity of 'others' or 'the future' or 'the truth'
& all the feet in the town centre — which bears off to my left as I
circle another roundabout — walk the road or soak in the bath or press
the pedal of another car. and *her* feet, because
that's how I got here, well, things
are usually left unfinished & 'I dont know'.

OCTOBER
Number 44

for the indolent there were days
of tender October weather. the land
lay there on its back the cropped grass
received as due the gentle
influence of the sun, while the exposed slate
took the caress of the now sweet
tempered expansive sea. it is October &
why not?

OCTOBER
Number 45

love is anguished because of the attendant circumstances &
there are always
the attendant circumstances, circling
our every action like the moon the earth. for example
the stars

are anguish, & the wind
blowing wetly outside the window, are the circumstances
I extend into & attend, because
of the circumstantial loneliness of my love
for my love

left yesterday, & in the terms of the poem
I confuse my love with its object & in the terms
of my life I try helplessly to disentangle
my love from its objects. the anguish

of love is in its imperfections & nothing is perfect
long enough for any poem as it attends
to the circumstances, passing
through the same absences & silences & mis
understandings as we
do on our way through, ah? through love on our way to
love is anguished on account of all finite statements, on its way to
tomorrow?

OCTOBER
Number 48

things were left unfinished, as they usually are, & I keep
gunning the sentence, like this other small car, towards some conclusion
in which we all
reach the blessed state, no one is hurt, & there's nothing
left to do except remain there
in the expanse of bliss, whose original
is a feeling that at the time passed unnoticed. but the car
keeps running smoothly into the now misty darkness & I cant
hold down the ending for longer than the attempted ecstasy
keeps me there. I dont know where I am exactly, safely lost
in the metaphor night-travelling always becomes, but as I rise
into the mist I stare through a murky windscreen at the road
immediately ahead & gradually lose the other conclusions, all of them
possible moments in time that could occur, & none of them preferable really
to the way things now are, & of course
every time we leave somewhere we do so
headed in the direction of somewhere else, the boot laden with
regrets or hopefulness or just empty maybe
with that familiar bland indifference.

OCTOBER
Number 49

SONG

some pain

hovers about my heart &

really I dont care

to be more precise

than that

NOVEMBER
Number 53

the empty bar on a November evening seems desolate
because it suits me that it should & the lack of company
reminds me of all the abandoned friendships
in my life, left behind because I moved
or they moved to the next continent or because too much
effort seemed to be needed to keep the thing going (laziness) or else
a sense of impending difficulties made it politic to withdraw (cowardice).
because, because.... the logic of all this lonely speech
leaves much to be desired, is redolent
with grievous desire. because I am alone, lazy & cowardly I start
all my sentences with 'because' because just about everything I say
has to become an explanation of how
ever I got to be here. & now that I am here
in the empty bar-room on a November evening I want
help of an immediate kind. you dont have to
say you love me .

NOVEMBER
Number 55

it is mid-winter, yesterday
a light snow lay on the ground
& I lay in bed, ill with flu
reading some plays by a man very
afraid of death for us all. it is mid-
winter & as usual the threat
of birth is everywhere
over us, with its usual challenge
that we should go on
trying to be more than would seem to be really
most comfortable for us.

the clamour

of the very young
for all the attention they rightly assume
growth will give them is all
over the house & the baby (Sara), who is usually
so quiet, rages for some quiet essential
in this case her mother's milk, which
in her mother's quiet time
she will get, her rage counts on it. the certainty
of her anger & the assurance of snow
are both songs I go along with
happily, wondering at this threat of birth which is
so certain I can rage quietly for the usual
inessentials, totally absorbed
in the way things go on
growing up against each other & I fear
death for us all
only as I would the approach
of some great simplicity.

JANUARY
Number 69

"THEY MOCK ME"

a loneliness settles on me
as I long for the company of two women
I cant have

behind the two of them
is all the company I've ever had, a really
plaintive gathering tonight for some reason

I move among the ghostly company
of all the poems I might have written
& might yet write, & they mock
me rather cruelly tonight

JANUARY
Number 71

to the eastern surfaces of the trees a sudden
whiteness of snow. what cold rage
finds this jagged edge to catch on, or is the affect
clings now to a cragged mind? what drift of love
piles from an easterly memory?

FEBRUARY
Number 74

INDEX

tenderly as the yellow of primroses

a soft-eared violet

APRIL
Number 79

from MEANING INSOMNIA (1978)

the slender meanings of daily communications with their thin resonances
the past
and its many syllables
washes out on the outgoing hiss of future cries
whose rhymes with lines of the past
whose rhymes with lines of the past

Apostrophe

you don't make it easy

you speak

so coherently making your coloured points
in one of those dreams of Miro's where
a ladder leans on our dark intelligences
for the chaste moon to stalk upon

your words like reasons

in the Incredible String Band's "This Moment"
entwine their several aspirations in
tendrils of ascent down which your later cadences
tend to slide, gracefully

what could be white blossom in the sky
is white blossom, tight and gleaming

what did you say?

Pedals

(after a photograph by Bernie O'Regan)

follow the dark wheel forward

the bicycle is lost
in forsythia petals

there is a glass in our hearts
held firmly in place by the door there
that opens on an aery arbour of petals
and scatters their light about

we know which way we look

is that light there
beyond the intense aggregation of flowers

words assume the lightsome disposition of petals
in an aery arbour
taking their place among the blinds
in the open doorways of the heart

you assume causality
in the linkage of twigs and branches

you can't see the roots and heart
where it all starts

petals are a translation of the soil
the bicycle rolls on

The Perilous Night

the room is scolloped out of some larger darkness
at whose edges flicker the lambent forces of a pent world.
the business section rumped in the grate under dry kindling
will ignite later to welcome two women who move
lightly in the surrounding gloom, still far from the hearth,
their destiny this perilous night.

early flames crackle, hopes in the night
that fawn on the bleak chimney breast, that darkness
in my heart, cavernous centre of a world
grown cold lately through lack of mirth or love as kindling
to its native fire. will these two move
this heart back into its glowing hearth?

two flames sputter and leap in the lurid hearth
held to a source of coal and burnt kindling
that glows blue in its sabotage of a darkness
mirthless now that the hopes of my world
have the guise of two women out in the night
of a city in whose blue light they move

their emotional burdens about, always on the move
with guilty hearts, resisting the hearth
that lures them in the sorcerous voice of the night.
these are ways of the heart's darkness:
as I wait I lose hope of kindling
the joy at your return that will light my world.

and now your absence is my whole world
and the longer you stay out in the night
the more grievously you will move
me. ah the cold hearth
of your hearts lies bleak in the darkness:
it's no good searching the city for heart-kindling,

for in your own home is the natural kindling
you need and secretly crave. move
yourselves back here, guilt-free, to the hearth
of the home where I wait for you in the night
with no one else in the world
to save me from this terrible darkness.

this darkness is the last in the world.
there's no kindling left. why move
from the cold hearth when the night is total?

Support Rhodesia

This is highly selective.
He's on the common
 walking his dog.
The sun hurts his eyes.
His attitudes are at perfect ease.
It's the week-end.
An oratorical fervour in the leaves
appeases a notion of urgency
that has been mounting recently.
Isn't
Nature wonderful he says.
Doesn't
She leave one with such a sense
of perspective
on the issues that disturb our days.
Look at the ducks.
The squirrels
leap to the requirements of our present
thoughts of them.
The trees
stand rooted
for the duration of the point
we're making.
Oh man
it all makes you feel
 so good.

Meaning Insomnia

where the language dreams in derision
sleeping at the felt tip
of the red muscle where the lioness yawns
corpuscles of dream speech into her lungs

& words in an appalling irresolution of
undisclosed destiny need their sleep where

green eyes in the night of peaceful dreams
like the dreams the stars have
flicker in our dark
eyes points of the life that moves
through the darkness
in the green painting where black
comes to its senses as an outer limit

and lying in the crumpled sheets bound
in the appalling poverty of insomnia
a language tosses fitfully about
its daily affairs in the heavy drapery
of a towel over an empty suitcase

or clings to the pedantic contours
of the ancient wall asleep three hundred years

the words slip let them sleep
in the night where their green dreams
already move unwaveringly

Four Frames In A Row

1. HOW ABOUT THAT

hush:

nouns push out for sunlight here
in an undulant cluster
of tuneful logic:
feather-grass or clover in an odour
heavy in close air, mingling with the attributes
of other nouns at nose-height. back
along the skull, down a little, puff
balls
elude their matronly substantives
having less
sense of identity than
shining stalks of feather-grass or
yellow and pink fingery
blossoms of honeysuckle

all bouncing upon
the taut tympanic skin.

in tunnels of clover and mounds of
cow-parsley insects
suck sweet juice which squirts
into nerve cells beyond the timpani this
time: wild life
in a song from which a lark
escapes, flexing its throat in meadow
music of territorial
melodiousness. truly
there is no repose: wild things
scurry out of reach of the names
we have at our immediate
disposal.

what shall we pose
of what remains?

hush:

2. WATER

the names gathering and flowing together
a cool and common property
where green light reflects from beeches
and stones and water moss
glow with liquid clarity wrinkling the surface

here the names are here and here are
the names
a valley music they flow through
in long melody born in moor rock
fluting in deliquescent meanings
of serene browns and greens
to the wide and ravished ear
of the supine ocean

flowing to the right over the still
body of a diseased salmon
an ineffable anguish the names
keep referring to
holding its life steady
in the dark persuasive liquor
not all pain yields to the song

3. BUTTERCUPS

words in rows like sheep turds. there is
little in nature to equal this, the bee
his snout in clover.

light through buttercups
goes straight to the heart
of yellow
a sap-route to the mineral
pastures where sallow Eurydice sips a pale fluid
with queen ants and their cattle
in stalls where our resources are
beneath the surface textures of the sounds
we make. the champions also
depart from separate stalks secretly
to meet within a single appellation
not far from campanula. pages away
stitch-wort hides in the w's just
below worship. unannealed
the unnamed and the dead
supplicate mutely in the lean margins
spaniels (or Spaniards) with lachrymose eyes.
let's not decry water
crashing distantly over the weir, or
where a moth flaps about
that too holds us together.

4 SONG OF THE PRECEDING

it is buttercups my poem disturbs
as it bears greenly
in its nonchalant wrinkle and mound
sweet clover, sprinkled campion

looking behind to the dense trees and
looking beyond to the tense and moody verb and
the water of my poem through and through

where betimes it sips its
savage temporal responsibilities
rising to the numinous
a green storm in a nominal world

love the oblate spheroid that turns
into wild thyme, or the green bug
that climbs my arm

what harm will ever come here where
there's pagan noun-haze in the middle-air

Reeves Timber Yard

breathe on the mirror
the way the river
breathes on the valley

the heart of the syllable
lying as the one true plain: a litany
sung to the music of Thomas Tallis

so the medium be a good man
that is have a clean tenor voice
and the water be the thin skin
that separates two banks
of images

where we are

all returns or rises
it is a subtle and moving medium
that repeats piles of timber with its reddened tips

it is a poem it is a singer it is the glistening
surface of water swelling under reflection into the space
between lined piles of images
of timber and its Orphic voyage
into the space behind

where an artful thought might
move subtly and cleanly
across the valley's one true plain

and repeat earthly
things

and erode them

Where shall we go to hear truth spoken ?

He speaks. Music projects in his imagination a Texture. of sounds to be made by five So. his. Imagination allows for the imaginations of five who must also project the. Texture of sounds made according to assumptions about the possibilities of musical instruments and the hopes of men. he believes. in the possible tenderness of a tenor saxophone of the Sounds. It makes in a musical environment where the ease of tenderness is denied. By trombones and drums which too win from the associated harshness sounds the ear. Interprets as sweet speaking. For the need for the kind of peace. Sleep and art bring by. Which life continues in the strange equation so that taking the bow to the bass It. Sings it. Is gentle with generosity because we know it. Could be otherwise and when. they enter the imagination of an old melody words could fall. Into the story of the shadow. Of your smile. Where we are. the allusion of five musicians who leave. The melody behind to. Clapping and perception. Is in the act memorised.

Latter days

our days occur in
green under blue in dark
love could start this line

we work:

 there is white
light burning in the grass the world
is seized
by the neck of time where

we work driving
our car down its rusty
tracks in
 & out of
 light
in the grass
 where

does green come from
 Art
is the whole world
children Art
is a whole
world when

beautiful our nights
are modest when
afraid our days
are occulted where

do we go through

time so

true the oranges
in the bowl are
so true

from MALO-LACTIC FERMENT (1978)

actually where he was
was in the middle of the most beautiful country

though at the time that
was hardly the point and like all points not

the point most distracting for example
what did he mean by "beautiful"

when he himself expressed the situation
that way

Scrap-book for 1973

the diesel oil in the lighting plant
squirts cheerfully into the firing pot
with all the latent historicity
of 1973's unspent bullets

(here imagine pink fuel coursing sweetly and secretly
down fine-gauge copper tubing — gravity fed)

and finally we couldn't help noticing
that a lot of sinister people had actually
been guarding us

(if I say we had to call the police in?)

into the emotional field of the room
the added complication of a pine spinning-wheel
its modest whirr beating off the news
with unhurried centrifugal assurance

on three legs, which given the quadrilateral
shape of everything else in sight
including the news

tell me: where does pine come from and what
was paid for it

wang!

I say this as though I shall finish the sentence and then
the sentence can be cut, curl and die, green
manure under the next thing to say

against gross fear and guilt, tissue repair
of words : I have tried to move myself
right out of this

ancient harts-tongue in its diffident curl
will open and grow

European History

tragedy is when it is the beautiful
who are doomed
and under a clear sky snow
lies poignantly between the trees

the poor all draw together in grief
and have beautiful resigned faces
and Europe's grand houses are left in sweet desolation
the tennis-court broken with weeds
celandines in the lawn

death is as without detail
as the space in the air
the minute after Mahler's Ninth Symphony
has ended

it is the artists who do all this
amazed at their own power
insisting on beauty as a livelihood

those who rage go mad and the snow
doesn't even melt with their warmth it
just gets dirty

here are some chapters on European History. the chronology is that of poignant grief. as I have said when her brother died there was snow on the ground. she was beyond tears but we weren't and the snow made it unbearable. that is one chapter. the next is that adagio I've already mentioned from Mahler's Ninth. there is one on all those whose children have left home and another on those children. this is where it gets depressing and tragedy isn't depressing believe me. so we have a chapter on Bertolt Brecht and lose our theme. here we find all those who want to know how to go on living.

it is frustration that lies under the snow and it is the snow that makes it beautiful. (where is our chapter on gentleness? shall we call it America and keep our eyes tightly closed?) there is no room for frustration in Mahler's adagio which celebrates the comfortable despite itself. our chapter on poignancy is really about comfort. everything else is just a quiet choking sensation, feeble rage burning as too much acid in the stomach. our three chapters on ulcers aren't a bit comic. here you find the gentle who have been betrayed by their own insistence to..... if I could finish that sentence we wouldn't need three chapters. Karl Marx's chapter lies buried under the soft weight of continuing sentiment. it is the first of a series on mortal weapons and shows what fangs ideas have. the Sigmund Freud we call Africa, 'the European sub-continent'. the story begins with wonder and pilfering just like poetry.

- (1) wonder
- (2) pilfering
- (3) outrage
- (4) beauty
- (5) wealth
- (6) power
- (7) the long chapter distinguishing (5) from (6) — this is the one called gentleness
- (8) poverty
- (9) the sense of beauty — this all these together: the late Duke Ellington at the White House
- (10) rhythm — ie we go on living anyway
- (11) melody — this is where we can't any longer leave love out. just when we were beginning to find the whole business totally shitty we found the old bastard was "in love". this took our breath away, for it and the Atom Bomb might go off under Europe any time. "he had a deep yearning for something more fulfilling in his life. he was very lonely."

I'm not sure any longer whether
I'm talking about

- (12) longing or
- (13) love

I do know that I'm talking about melody and European History. therefore also, of course.

- (14) frustration
- (15) harmony — yeah? you mean like in Duke Ellington's scoring?
- (16) shame — the failure to answer (15)
- (17) fear }
- (18) guilt } see (16)
- (19) America
- (20) Africa
- (21) China
- (22) USSR

for all these see (17)

(23) hope — see (7) and (19). — (21)

don't make my mistake, son

(24) history is bigger than any of us, hence "tragedy"
or, if the doomed aren't beautiful

(25) despair

there is no direct mention of *war*, partly because
the astute always see it coming and partly
because I understand it as little as I do
peace or *poetry*

(26) pastime

this history is about daily life. the details
fill themselves in

The Gunman's Heart

Harry Carney with the whole Duke Ellington
orchestra behind him in La Plus Belle Africaine

well, louder and fuller and still true, the rich
possibilities held off in a halo-effect of rapturous delight .

and yet unhappiness dogs us like the banal weather
speak. I mean put one word in front of the other and you move you
cut shapes in misery, which is banked up like Devon hedges
beside your way. you forget they were misery. you are distracted
by everything in them, their microscopic
life sustains you, you don't need to stop there it is there
in your next footstep, mouldy from the rain perhaps and daunted, like you are
now look what happens
when I mention the corn
small and broken, the fields ripe and wet
you would think we ate that and we do

(imagine all your friends are behind you
as you write this line. they are arranged
by Duke Ellington and you are amazed
at what you find yourself saying. you ascribe
it to them entirely. you say
"I wish to love human possibility through
knowledge of the shape that cuts
through dull pain"

as you finish saying this
it is Charles Mingus with Eric Dolphy:

poems placate pain; pain remains
 but appeasement
is needed:

 the gunman
keeps the lady (desperate with fear) dancing

professionalism keeps her going
only the lover and the connoisseur see the fear there
the falter is in her heart not her feet

the gunman lowers his gun
pain skitters away from her feet
which her heart now moves

this is poetry; the gun lowered

but what of the gunman's heart

Bonfire

ignorance and forgetfulness
the soft print of our lives as in melting snow

celebrate
push the furnishings out
against the bare walls so that light
lies behind them

between is the quality of heat shimmer
talking to our friends through the folded limpidity of space
above the garden bonfire

I am alone in the room and it is cold in here
with German butter and the striking terseness
of Orange Blossom Moisture Cream

the sisal matting stretches towards you
magic carpets never reach their destination the wall
but sustain us through space suspended
in the floor dimension of time

a scratched record of Rachmaninov piano music

COUCH GRASS (1978)

You choose the life or the life chooses you
what you have become being that kind of person
you do not owe yourself to the others
how could you
be sure any capitalist notion of the self
has you as the debtor
if you accept the story the part is fixed

§

(begins as you)

Everybody is laughing
everything at once (particulars)
a sleek black cat plays with your pen
and rubs her head against yours
beech off-cuts blaze in the fireplace
opposite you a white cat
sleeps in sheepskin
you share the room
with discarded shoes and clothes
somewhere you have a lot of paper
whose blankness excites and appals you
there are the notes of the person you were
you could destroy them without loss

but it's my guess that you don't you wish
you hadn't said some of it but if you don't look
the raggedy files are of the 'past'
just the way that you dream
or the crumbly dark compost is

it has rained a long time
it is March 9th
there is blossom everywhere

it is not that everything has moved

§

(into the key of first person plural)

Take our time and daunce it
for the duration of ecstasy we are
where the tongue folds
in folds of time, its tongue
ply for ply on ours
pliant and sweet, don't wait
when I look up there is no ground
there is blue within the curving green
what any of us might come to say
in the rain patience and expectation of survival
it hasn't been said
love of the future
of elasticity, of sponge
we may fear what we suspect but love
what we know we don't know
the grass
is ignorance
a tumulus of words cities
of past and future interslung
with mechanisms of human distance

Turning the soil the plough-shares
slice under the turf and
lifting it free from the ground
twist it over

all the grass disappears under the top-soil
it is lost
everyone knows what will happen
it is held together with the root-systems of couch-grass

§

(and back)

The narrative is given over to time
nothing here will stay the same
if you put your fork into rich soil
you know this
how much do you expect to see
from your window
time is a measure of temperature and light
the potatoes sprouting in your shopping bag
it'll take more than you
to stop the couch-grass
you get up because you are older
and look out of the window
time seems an inadequate agency
for your affairs
how will you succeed
another year comes round and you lose
yourself in beginnings
but the soil won't quite do that
for you you are more than usually
in the middle of everything not too sure
how any of it will turn out lacking
a model of success
listen to the wind

Chain-harrow : drag the barbed contrivance
over the sliced clods and grass
re-appears : the area of choppy waste
illusory, of course; these green slivery dreams
the fields breathe hidden in hunched soil

§

A sense of incompleteness
keeps you from saying
you have finished and after all
you have now mainly to wait

the germination of barley
takes place without you
as it sprouts you roll it again
a further act superseding the past
the sequence saves you
from the mechanics of pure risk

the hiss of the green tassels of the past
swells your thoughts of a cerealist's livelihood

§

Spray-drift : applying the chemistry of poison
to the principle of selection; burnt nettles
show where the wind got under the spray jets
carrying somebody else's negative choice
across into your garden of decisions;
in this border zone the language
is particularly problematic: 'weeds' are quite simply
what the single-minded don't want
and poison re-inforces their point of view
persuasively

from REPRESSED INTIMATIONS (1981)

Picking up stones

1. tenderness not wryness
2. quiet only because everyone else gets on with it
3. quite bouncy on your own
4. truthfulness not ritual
only because there is no ritual
it is absurd to be alone
5. absurdly
trying to whistle up the opposite culture
in which to feel at home
badly needs a better ritual
6. the type-writer a bitter
clackety-clack ritual
of shared signs which the typist
translates
7. paper, slippery ink, black fountain pen
two fingers one thumb keep moving: no one
of these is the tool of your trade
8. talk to yourself / go
to the pub
talking to each other
within the licensing laws
9. the paper the type-writer
(my paper, ink and pen)
10. the paper is more others
than you can dream of

A diagram

an upside-down book spilling

a cup

where the cold meets the warm

thick walls and glass

a terminal

of power caught in the act

of transformation like oil

passing through the kitchen

neither

things nor metaphors

tappings

we pay for if money is a thing

pay

is metaphor

Forgetting

I do not know
to say the obvious
 even
if it
 sounds
that change
lives
change lives
 loss
power and knowledge
 these
acts are for
get full

 a tish you
virtue
 its own
ward

poems forget
full of snow
 auto-
dreaming without
 you

language forgets which
auto biography
 speaks it
lives in the
 changes
yous make

lives
he me she it
the forgotten yous in the snow
a history
of you

snow changes
no thoughts of you
thaw restores
 memory
 snow
thinking of the yous
 language
 need
and for

send your whys
and say
 nothing

Repressed intimations 6

what to do with all the dead the church
packed out "we can't dodge it" consecrated
by a belief which seeps
not desecration but loss of work
the dead do the lost work of all the dying
their skin bathed by nurses handed over
years ago because they do no work and are lost
in the kingdom of consumption emptied of riches
that animate ghosts of love and friendship
as the coffin rolls or clunks
in the new place of the dead at the far edge
of town

the picture that you look at is empty
of the significant dead look at the chaste
sunburnt hero his death
is an empty collapse years away
is a remarkable absence
quite lucid really
it accounts for the brilliance
the way everything flickers
that's what dazes you still
the dead still image is a rosebud moment
yellowing in the sun
the film clinging to a life
which hands its death away
years ago

NOT WRITING (1983-1999)

To-whit-to-woo

voices curl from a source
through air that curbs them
back somewhere else

you see! your saucy curl
throbs in the herbal air
while lack of you catches my throat

knit one purl two
make the clackety round sounds
that lead somewhere

an innate garment of sound
forsake those social racketeers
who feed off air

to wit, to woo: an airy argument
of vowels in the parliament of fowls
or a curb on bird-song

shred the shrewd voice in two
or more: trowel on the air
that bonds the slices

spare me the choice of who
the singer is: one in an air
but here there's a round number

traces of voices back down
tracks in the air: there are
eddies and twists in our number

the lacy inter-facings of choice
back down now, back track
leave you a twister with no voice

back round to the start and beyond
to have got here was not
to have been where

Not writing

The book of the mirror

The book of the breast

The book of silence

The book of babbling

The book of images

The book of idols

The book about words

The book of clenched teeth

The book of birth

The book of remembering

The book of forgetting

The book of loved distances

The book of near-sighted love

The book of frightened love

The book of lenses

The book of passages

The book of porches

The book of the cloister

The book of pathways

The book of reasoning

The book of chance

The book of falling

The book of distractions from the book

The book of the denial of loss

The book of inarticulate loss

another story, in four parts

1. CLARITY

I was there in the room
or there was no door
I was there and there was no door
we were enclosed
perhaps a wall was missing
there was a wall as blank as the back of my head
the train started to move
there was no clarity
there was a door which wasn't open:
light or its lack around a train
precisely the train which was not there
the door

without the clarity of just as
(for example: just as I left, she left me)
and you had loved her
lacking an and
because of no because

no, there was no although about it
nor is there a no either
you knew precisely what you were denying
that there was no door
that there was a wall where the door should be

the train was getting later and later
leaving us with leaving
the sitting room was nearly dark
there was writing on the door in the station
both the women were in the darkened room
back to back

2. DOOR

I was reading the same story
that he had been reading
he helped me through the door
and took me home

3. THE SAME BED

every night she and I
have slept in the same bed
we have three children and a house
schooling joins us

in worry

sometimes lying next to her at night

I remember her
and lie there shaking
forgetting I am beside her

no no no no no
and the she who is beside me
comes between
and I do too
remembering the he I used to be
beside her

our lives are happy together she
and I both say
we share so much saying

4. COMING HOME

coming home
the story doesn't end where it ends
it runs into trouble
as he opens the door her hurt hurts him
he turns and parts from the parts which hurt
in the car the warm engine runs him
from her hurt to his
the headlights run past parts
of stories which aren't his
though hurt
has him in part in all of them
sometimes in particular the lights
pick out a she who really hurts him

I's story

I sigh she
says it
amazes they
git away with you
wouldn't believe it

you don't say I
say they
know nothing she
watches I
cry passing reason you
know you don't say I
sigh they know nothing we
grieve breathe-
ing
 heavy

you hear me breathe I breathe I I
stop my breath to stop I make light
of it heavily you make my breath light you
don't
 make my breath away

you leave I breathe less
sighs grieve
it is the season where
 grief passes
 reason
they know nothing who say
I sighs without reason

various exiles

various exiles trying to dream of home
stretched verities
exiled from exile

who is it who speaks
under the name of no-name?

it is so easy to remember
to say, it's me, open the door
perhaps they don't know you any more

but if you say who is it
and they don't know you
you lose a little

they matter they mutter
not knowing not knowing
and you can't hear them

a little lost of course
the silence is deafening

a poem for this room

exult

exalt

lift up thine eyes

depress

deep rest

elevate

levitate

lighten up

alight

aright

all right

are you all right

I'm all right are you alright

no of course I'm not all right

oh well

stair well

stare well

will well

oh well

will win

always win

win all ways

yess

what do we do with tongues

loving each other

folding each other

being bold together

threatening

unthreatening

gossiping

saying how good god is

how frightening

humming work together

knowing more than each other

being wise

being stupefied

the world we live in

loving in make-believe

this is what I mean

saying how cold it is and mean

it's stranger

I speak

who

speaks

I who

speaks

with

out

you

speak

I

I speak

to

you

it

darkens

around

you

don't

know you

know

me but

not

in the dark
we where
as they
(here

the
auto -
e -
rh-
etoric
which misses
(beat

it is but as
for I
'm

others
all of
not they : not
all of I
wasn't for it

I e
means
of
pro-
duct-
shun
(doubt

sh
I
ning d
ou t
frame-
d n named

not no
name no-name-
ing family al
bum o
v no-names

o it
is often felt s
o

s
o care
full not
the one
who
speaks what I
said I
did
say
that I did
what I said

you can say
that (again)
any of us
or them

o my
various
names, you
don't
come
into it

love fear and
hate
you
might
do

o various ways
o' not to be
the
o ne
wh
o

I speak for
you to
speak
I
am

there I am that
's me
that

you is the *one-*
I-love
you leave me
be
the one I love

write to be the (
rite to be he (
right to be e

you is
where *love-I*
is
I is
where love am you
is all
ways there

Dear No one,

I picked up your letter today addressed to Someone. I read it, thinking that I would do, the way I was feeling.

You have chosen to have no name. This suggests to me that there is something that you want very much to say but that you don't want to stand in the place where it is said. You want a reply but you want to come at it indirectly, by surprise as it were, in case it hurts.

In being the Someone I will agree too to have no name. I have one really, of course, and I want to reply but I don't know who I would be giving my name to, so I shall wait.

As a reader I am constantly on the look-out for things that only I know are addressed to me. The writer never knows. It is a lonely business. Lovers need direct address, of course, but value perhaps even more highly an overheard remark expressive of love for themselves. You have to be both in love and not in love to read.

But I know that you intended your remarks to be overheard and that they were not even indirected to me. You say that you are leaving. You don't say what or who you are leaving or why. Just that you are leaving and that you can't take it any more. You don't say where you are going.

I am not sure from your letter that you really are going to leave. Your letter is very unhappy. In fact you say in your letter that you are unhappy. I think that this is the nearest thing in your letter to an explanation as to why you are leaving. But even then I am not sure. It could be that the thought of leaving makes you unhappy. That is different.

Reading it made me unhappy too so I am going to ask some questions, knowing that I may never hear your answers.

I assume that when you said you were going to leave at that moment — at the moment of writing, do I mean, or at the moment when you first thought that that is what you were going to write — I assume that you meant it in an unthought out sort of way. Am I right?

Did you also feel, though, that writing it could somehow be a substitute for doing it, that you needed to be ready to do it in order not to do it. If it was someone you said you were going to leave — and I think it was — rather than somewhere or something like a job, why didn't you say it to them? And if you did tell them, why are you telling me? All it does is make me unhappy too. Though I expect you would say that I would have to have been unhappy in the first place for that to have made me so. And that could be true, I suppose. I have agreed to be the Someone addressed.

What did you hope would happen when you wrote that you were unhappy? Was that an unhappy thing to do? Was there nothing that resembled a smile in you when you said it? I am not at all trying to suggest that you are being devious. Did you hope to become more or less unhappy in saying it? Did you feel that saying it might relieve you of the need to be unhappy? That you could set up, in parallel to your unhappiness, the kind of happy/unhappy gainful game of saying it. I know that you took care over your letter: it is expressed with great felicity. And I am sure that you enjoyed the ruse of planting it where you did, where Someone like me would pick it up.

Did you keep a copy? Somehow I think you did. I know that it would be a very different letter if you didn't. I don't mean that the words would be different but that its purpose and motive would be. A letter without a copy has all the cost of a real gift and truly risks being unwritten. You volunteer its loss. You invite it to leave. Perhaps you hope it will. Oblivion is some peoples' favourite address. They write to forget. (Others – and I think I include myself in this – write because they think they have forgotten and need to search endlessly for the lost memory). But you used a word processor and that is a retentive writing machine.

Say if the person you wished to leave was yourself. Isn't this what unhappiness is? There is a sense in which you can't do it, of course. How could you leave yourself? But in a way you have to, so that there can be two of you and you can really have a conversation. Mirrors can be useful in this respect (and I know from your letter that you know this). You write to yourself in order to differentiate yourself in order to unwrite yourself. Do I make myself clear? This is another impossibility, of course, because the unwritten has to be written.

The written cannot be unwritten. Destroyed, yes. But only if the destruction is casual — itself more than half-forgetful — can the destroyed letter ever be fully forgotten. And even then it could be unexpectedly remembered with a jolt. Wilful destruction ensures memory. But you haven't destroyed it. You have given it away. In other words you have put it where you don't know if it will ever be forgotten. You have put responsibility for remembering somewhere else. Things usually get remembered that way.

You may not have wanted to keep a copy because that would be evidence.

These are my questions but it seems now that I do need you to answer them. I think you will look in the same place.

Yours,

Someone

INDEX OF TITLES / FIRST LINES

- 10th June 1969 (*Days 16*) / 43
A303 Song (*Days 75*) / 57
'actually where he was...' / 73
an argument / 12
another story, in four parts / 105
Apostrophe / 60
BETWEEN THE CITIES / 10
Between the Cities / 14
Bonfire / 84
COUCH GRASS / 85
DAYS / 41
Dear No one / 118
A Diagram / 96
'doing the same thing often enough' (*Days 25*) / 46
'driving the same road back...' (*Days 21*) / 44
'the empty bar...' / 54
European History / 78
'for the indolent...' (*Days 45*) / 50
Forgetting / 97
Four Frames in a Row / 66
The Gunman's heart / 82
I's story / 108
In Difference / 34
'inconsolable mists' (*Days 31*) / 47
index (*Days 79*) / 58
'it is mid-winter...' (*Days 69*) / 55
it's stranger / 112
Latter Days / 72
'love is anguished...' (*Days 48*) / 51
Lust / 28
Lustre / 26
MALO-LACTIC FERMENT / 73
Malo-lactic ferment / 76
MEANING INSOMNIA / 59
Meaning Insomnia / 65
Mundana / 40
'my love wishes' (*Days 33*) / 48
New York Pastoral 1 / 19
New York Pastoral 2 / 19

NOT WRITING / 101
 Not writing / 104
 'nothing to be gained...' (*Days 10*) / 42
 of the spheres / 35
 Pedals / 61
 The Perilous Night / 62
 Picking up Stones / 94
 a poem / 13
 a poem for this room / 110
 Poems for Dreamers / 32
 Poems for Strangers / 36
 Prey / 75
 The proud eyes of the black cat / 18
 Reeves Timber Yard / 70
 Remember the City / 20
 REPRESSED INTIMATIONS / 93
 Repressed Intimations 1 / 99
 Repressed Intimations 6 / 100
 Routes 2 / 24
 Routes : for John Temple / 22
 Scrap-book for 1973 / 74
 'the slender meanings...' / 59
 'some pain...' (*Days 53*) / 53
 SONG (*Days 53*) / 53
 Song / 11
 song / 40
 'such stumbling...' / 9
 Support Rhodesia / 64
 'they mock me..' (*Days 71*) / 56
 'things were left unfinished...' (*Days 44*) / 49
 'things were left unfinished...' (*Days 49*) / 52
 'to have these records...' / 10
 'to the eastern surfaces...' (*Days 74*) / 58
 to-whit-to-woo / 103
 Various exiles / 109
 A Version of Dominion / 30
 Walking Song / 16
 what do we do with tongues / 111
 Where shall we go to hear truth spoken ? / 71
 Work / 45

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