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**Seeing through Language: the Poetry and Poetics of Susan  
Howe, Lyn Hejinian and Rosmarie Waldrop  
& *Continental Drift***

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the vast amount of critical writing on the Language movement, little attention has been paid to the specific linguistic and cognitive processes involved both in the creation and comprehension of this innovative work. Motivated by the assumption that an experience with literature is an experience with language, this study investigates the poetry and poetics of three writers closely associated with Language writing and their works in the 1980s: Susan Howe and *The Europe of Trusts* and *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*; Lyn Hejinian and *My Life*; and Rosmarie Waldrop and *The Reproduction of Profiles*. The approach taken in this dissertation is to investigate innovative writing with reference to linguistic and cognitive features through the perspective known as cognitive poetics which emphasises the primacy of the reader in the experience of literary reading. The thesis offers insights into both the psychological and linguistic aspects of literary reading, shifting the focus from interpretation—whether that of the author or that of the critic—to the basis of these aspects in textuality. Textuality concerns both the material text as object, but also the connections the reader makes between stylistic features and felt experience. This dissertation thus addresses literary writing as discourse—as a social act of communication, incorporating other voices, viewpoints, times and cultures. It is suggested here that the complex interplay between word and grammar, world and ideology evident in these texts is connected to Language writing and contemporary verse culture more generally, and that cognitive poetics offers an explicit

way to account for the effects of the syntactic experimentation and ideologies of this writing. The collection of poetry that completes this study emerges from these correspondences.

## PREFACE

As a student on the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Kent, I produced a book of poems, *Tokaido Road*, that situated me somewhere on the spectrum between innovative and mainstream within the lyric tradition. This notion of “between-ness” has been a constant feature in my life: as the daughter of a Swedish immigrant, I never felt entirely American; as an adult, I made my home for a time in Japan, where I was known as a “resident alien,” [a]lien. I immigrated to England twenty-four years ago, but my language marks me out as a person between continents. “Continental drift” refers to the geological theory which claims that the continents of the earth were once a single supercontinent which gradually began to break apart and drift into separate locations. The word “drift” refers to both the condition of driving or being driven, or propelled, as by a current of wind or wave until an accumulation of rain, dust or snow is formed, but also it relates to language as the tenor or scope in speech or writing. Out of these personal circumstances of displacement there emerged a corresponding interest in landscape, not only as a natural feature, but as a cultural phenomenon that can be considered, in the same way that language can, in terms of agency. Landscape, according to the OED can be defined as any “tract of land with its distinguishing characteristics and features, especially considered as a product of modifying or shaping process and agents.” Although the agents defined are usually natural, in this dissertation, I am also taking account of human forces which have modified, shaped or [mis]appropriated the land. Thus, these poems assert that landscape cannot be fully grasped without reflecting on the relations of time as well as place and person.

Three American poets have been critical to thinking through my own location in poetry: Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian and Rosmarie Waldrop; each is in some way affiliated with the Language movement. “A frequent target of Language Poetry,” according to Dworkin, has been “the comforting fiction of a unified lyric subject” (“Language Poetry”), but in opposing the lyric subject, many of the Language writers threw the baby out with the bath water. Not so the three writers who are the focus of this dissertation. What drew me initially to Howe was her interest in place and in history, but also that there is an underlying (and unapologetic) element of the personal in her interest. Her poetry engages both with European and American landscapes, and especially, with decisive moments in history. Moving on from my book, *Tokaido Road*, I wanted to investigate this history—especially that related to the prevailing discourse that dropping the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the only way to stop Japanese aggression and end the war. Susan Howe was a wonderful guide. Like her, Hejinian too is interested in both the personal and the autobiographical, as exemplified by *My Life*, but hers is no ordinary autobiography. In that work, Hejinian writes against life story as a bounded and transparent record of achievement in order to query the role language plays in shaping subjectivity. Her innovations centralize process—“My life is permeable constructedness,” or how the self is constructed in language (*Inquiry* 133). Rosmarie Waldrop, who writes of herself as being “Between, always,” rejects the Romantic ideal of the epiphanic poem “in the poet’s mind and then ‘expressed’ by choosing the right words.” Instead, she declares that “the poem is not ‘expression,’ but a cognitive process, that, to some extent, changes me” (*Dissonance* 206-7). Through the lyric poem each of these poets explores issues of gender, power and history in

order to interrogate issues of settlement and misappropriation, both of land and of language. Each probes the lacunae where those forgotten, missing, or marginalised linger, and out of these spaces constructs a poetry that speaks to our moment. Moreover, each enacts that most difficult and subtle enchantment of simultaneously revealing and concealing.

“Between, always” I take to be a positive condition. It connects the poetry presented here to a long tradition: “no longer things, but what happens BETWEEN things,” as Charles Olson said. This project then is a reading and a writing of landscape/*languescape* in order to locate its social contexts, its vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup> *Peripateo*. I walk among.

I am especially grateful to David Herd for his supervision and guidance from my Master’s degree to the present day. I would also like to thank Simon Smith for his comments and suggestions during the Progress Reviews. I have benefitted from participation in and conversations with many individuals and groups including the Centre for Modern Poetry, Zone, the Modern Poetry Reading Group, and the Creative Writing Reading Series.

I am grateful to Tony Frazer and Shearsman for publishing *Continental Drift*. I would also like to acknowledge the editors and publishers in which the poems below originally appeared, often in somewhat different forms:

Thanks to Alexander McMillen and Templar for the 2012 Templar Poetry Prize. Section 4 of the poem “Winterbourne Valley” appeared in the pamphlet entitled *Owhere* as “Undone Business.” The poem “Solid Objects” appeared as

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<sup>1</sup> In her *Drafts* project, Rachel Blau du Plessis writes in “Drafts 68: Threshold”: “Listen. You have stumbled across terrain and / Still could not escape this twisted landscape.” Here I use the term “languescape” to reference Saussure’s distinction between *parole* and *langue*, *langue* being the underlying structure of language, the rules of the sign system, arguably, grammar. In linguistics language is often compared to an iceberg; the *parole* is the visible tip, whereas the supporting structure is hidden beneath the surface. My term then is a blend of language/landscape.

“The Years.” The poems “Mappa Mundi,” “Stress Fractures,” and “Things the mind already knows” also appeared in *Owhere*.

Thanks to Patrick McGuinness and *Poetry Review* for publishing the poem “Flow” in the *Poetry Review* Summer 103:2.

Thanks to Aidan Semmens for publishing “de Profundis,” “Vor Langen Jahren,” and “Dust” in *Molly Bloom* online magazine.

Thanks to Kat Peddie and Eleanor Perry for publishing “Voler” and “Adjacent Borrowing” in *Zone One*.

I wish to thank The Poetry Trust for the generous gift of a week’s protected writing time on the Suffolk Coast, where some of the poems in this dissertation were written.

Thank you to the School of English for supporting my research and for the opportunity to teach Creative Writing.

I have benefitted from conversations with many individual writers: Patricia Debney, Jeremy Scott and Tony Bex.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband; his support makes everything possible.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### “What happens BETWEEN things”

The aim of this project is to investigate how innovative writing functions at the level of language and in particular at the level of syntax by examining works published by three writers associated with Language writing in the 1980s. Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian and Rosmarie Waldrop demonstrate what it means to be innovative within poetry, theory and language. Each woman is not only innovative in the sense of “making it new,” but by inserting ideas into her poems derived from her interests in philosophy, history, theory, translation, poetics, and language, each proclaims that poetry can in fact achieve a great deal more than a mainstream lyric medium would suggest. Susan Howe’s *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* subscribes to Thoreau’s dictum: “A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry” (266), and her interest in history takes her to the archives in an attempt to demythologise the notion of “Manifest Destiny” in early colonial America.<sup>2</sup> Howe’s poetry as exemplified by *Singularities* and *The Europe of Trusts* is written through the discourses of New England history, 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish history, and the history of Prague at the time of The Thirty Years War. Lyn Hejinian chooses the prose sentence (or “new sentence”) for her work, *My Life*, a work in which her own biography is the archive. Her work exemplifies “radical introspection” in the sense of probing the problem of language as representation in order to interrogate the meaning of

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase “Manifest Destiny” itself was not coined until 1845, when John O. Sullivan described it as “the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to ovespread the continent allotted by Providence...” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The sense in which Howe is using it is nevertheless an accurate description in terms of the early expansionist policies of the former colonists in the Revolutionary period.

the self (here defined as an individual person who is the object of her own reflective consciousness). In dialogue with other discourses, she employs syntax as a tool for foregrounding the “conjunction between ideas” (*Inquiry* 45), thereby redefining the genre of autobiography, and of the poem.

In a similar vein, Rosmarie Waldrop takes Wittgenstein as her prime source for *The Reproduction of Profiles*. For Waldrop, the body is the ground of language. Her play with language, particularly in *Lawn of Excluded Middle*, reveals woman as “the excluded middle.” However, the woman’s body, and especially the womb, is not just “the empty center” but also “the locus of fertility” (*Curves* 97). With Waldrop, “We are what we read, turned into the writing we are read by” (Reinfeld 11).<sup>3</sup> As these writers demonstrate, writing forty years after Charles Olson’s ground-breaking essay, “Projective Verse,” it is the organisation of the line at the level of syntax which needs to be investigated. Poetry for them becomes an experience of language rather than a representation of it.<sup>4</sup> Syntax, following Olson, is key to that experience. Howe’s “unconscious scatter syntax” (*Articulation* 36) resonates with Olson’s notion that syntax be shaped by sound and the possibilities of breath; Waldrop chooses the prose poem in order to cultivate the breaks, not at the end of the line, but within and between sentences. In this way, her praxis relates to Olson’s “no longer things, but what happens BETWEEN things.” Robert Creeley, who has written extensively on field composition, says in “Notes *apropos* ‘Free

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<sup>3</sup> Reinfeld makes this remark in relation to the poet Michael Palmer; however, it fits Waldrop equally well.

<sup>4</sup> In his essay, “Projective Verse,” Olson addresses the issue of the line in relation to the breath and the performing body; he does not really address the issue of syntax, other than to say that grammar is “inherited,” a convention which must be broken, that tense must be “kicked around anew,” in order to endow the poem with a greater sense of immediacy, and that the sentence itself is “lightning, as passage of force from subject to object,” the “VERB between two nouns.” (Allen 386-394)

Verse”): “I am myself hopeful that linguistic studies will bring to contemporary criticism a vocabulary and method more sensitive to the basic *activity* of poetry...a more viable attention paid to the syntactical environment” (493). It is Creeley’s call for attention to “the syntactical environment” that this thesis aims to answer. Writing after Olson, and in the case of Howe and Waldrop directly out of his influence, these three poets have continued to ground poetic inquiry in syntactic experiment, rendering syntax central in ways that criticism must now address.

The analytical techniques that are used in stylistics offer the opportunity to bridge the study of language and literature in the way that Creeley calls for by focusing on three main areas: the formal and linguistic properties of a text, the text as a communicative act that draws on other texts, and the text within its context. The approach taken in this dissertation will consider whether innovative writing, or writing which is in some way extraordinary in the sense of altering established traditions by introducing new elements and forms, can at least be partly explained with reference to stylistic features. The central tenets of stylistics, or the analysis of literary text using linguistic techniques, centralize foregrounding through deviation, or breaches in language norms, a salient feature of this writing. The approach is integrative, bringing together aspects of textuality and cognition in order to explore the deep texture of the poetry. The term *texture* here refers to how readers experience textuality (Stockwell 2012), the sum total of the lexico-grammatical choices and linguistic patterns across the text as a whole. Literary critics and theorists offer innovative interpretations; stylistics is concerned with close textual analysis in order to reveal how language is mediated through poetic voice. Each chapter will

demonstrate this integrative approach through the selection of appropriate strategies and practices to explore the linguistic processes involved in each poet's construction of the text and the reader's own construction of meaning.

### **Implications of Context: Language Poetry**

Innovation has been the watchword in avant-garde poetry since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Language poetry was an avant-garde movement that started in the 1970s and gained strength in the following two decades. As an avant-garde movement, it is oppositional, as Peter Bürger's familiar statement attests: "It radically questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art" (51). It stood in opposition to the confessional poetry of the East Coast establishment—poets such as Robert Lowell or Anne Sexton. It had a particular interest in theorizing, in order to create a larger space for poetry than had been the case in the 1970s workshop-oriented poetry. Language writing came onto the scene alongside the publication of Lyotard's *La condition Postmoderne* in 1979, translated into English as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1984. This book employs Wittgenstein's model of language games and concepts from pragmatics in order to raise questions of legitimation. Wittgenstein was likewise a major source of inspiration for poets writing in the eighties: "Distrust of grammar is the first requisite for philosophizing," from his *Notes on Logic (Notebook 93)*, became a kind of mantra for the Language movement (cited in Perloff, "Toward," para. 3). A number of Language writers

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<sup>5</sup> For a general discussion of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde see, for example, Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, 1984; Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*, 1999.

point not only to Wittgenstein, but also to Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze amongst others, to animate both their poetry and their theoretical writings. Moreover, for both poets and theorists, language itself became the central issue. Equally, hostility towards subjectivity (the expression of the personality or individuality of the poet) is one of the key tenets of Language writing. This critique of “self-presence” as Silliman called it is part of the larger postmodern discourse on the death of the subject put forward by Barthes contemporaneous with the Language movement’s appearance.

The term “Language poetry” itself emerged in the mid-1970s concurrent with the publication of the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein. By the mid-80s, those poets with some affiliation to the group numbered over a hundred, including the three writers who are the subject of this dissertation. The editors of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E described it as a “spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, programme, or subject matter.” The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book (1984) set out the framework of this new poetics: the irresolution and multivalency of words and images designed to be “non-absorptive”—no direct lines of communication, avoidance of the lyric “I,” focusing on what is seen and understood without reference to the poet’s personal life. The movement was a radical departure from the status quo, producing, amongst other phenomena, a series of long poems, for example Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life*, Susan Howe’s *Thorow*, plus a substantial body of poetics.

Steve McCaffery’s 1977 essay, “The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered



Writing,” was influential in setting the agenda in the early days of the movement. He proclaimed (in his original version) that “the foremost task is to demystify the referential fallacy of language,” what he later called, “the arrow of reference” (cited in Perloff, “After Language,” para. 7). McCaffery derived this idea from the Russian Formalists, who posited self-referentiality in language as a problem, although the idea had been put forward much earlier and remained salient throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> McCaffery believed that poetry had entered a period of crisis: “a crisis of the sign” and that it was the main task of writers at that time to “demystify the referential fallacy of language.” To do this means that the roles of producer and consumer of text need to be renegotiated, so that the text becomes “a communal space of labour” (para. 9). Whereas McCaffery’s original essay was concerned largely with language at the level of the morpheme, when he came to revise it for *North of Intention* (1986), he transferred his attention instead to “the critical status of the sentence as the minimal unit of social utterance and hence, the foundation of discourse” (McCaffery, *North* 13). By then, what Silliman referred to as “the new sentence” was becoming one of the Language movement’s core principles.

Although Silliman published *The New Sentence* in 1987, he was thinking and writing about it a decade earlier. His book-length poem, *Ketjak* (1978) made use of parataxis or the conjunctive logic of the new sentence. In his essay, he takes aim at philosophy, literary criticism and linguistics for their failure to provide an adequate definition of the sentence. While his remark may be accurate in relation to literary criticism, it is significantly less so in relation

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Osip Brik, a member of *Opojaz* or The Society for the Study of Poetic Language, a prominent group of Russian literary theorists, proposed in 1916 that “there are no poets or literary figures, there is poetry and literature” (cited in O’Toole). This statement echoes T.S. Eliot (1921) “Poetry...is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (2212).

to philosophy and linguistics. Philosophy of language has largely been concerned with the truth propositional conditions as applied to sentences, and Chomskyan (and post-Chomskyan) linguistics, the dominant paradigm from the 1950s, has aimed to analyse the constructions that occur, rather than trying to provide a definition of the sentence. Much of functional linguistics in particular has been concerned with the relationship between stretches of discourse whether conceived as sentences or longer stretches of language, though the term “sentence” only makes sense in the context of written language. To offer a simple definition: the sentence is the largest unit to which syntactic rules apply. Thus, when analysing a sentence, the linguist parses components within it through a process called segmentation. A five-level hierarchy is most commonly used in this type of analysis (morpheme, word, phrase, clause, sentence). Standing in opposition to hierarchical structures, the “new sentence,” Silliman argued, is the minimal unit of discourse, and as such illustrates that “there is no such thing as a non-ideological or value-free discourse” (*New Sentence* 74).

In terms of poetry, the new sentence is particularly prominent in the prose poem where “the torqueing which is normally triggered by line breaks, the function of which is to enhance ambiguity and polysemy, has moved directly into the grammar of the sentence” (90). This disrupts the syllogistic force of the sentence by interrupting the logical chains from which arguments and propositions flow. Language-centred writing then began to focus on the new sentence, where parataxis (structuring sentences and lines in such a way that they stand independently, rather than in a grammatical hierarchy) became intrinsic. His essay concludes by setting out seven defining characteristics of

the new sentence. While Silliman's essay is both political and proselytizing, it is helpful in setting out a procedure and it marks a significant move in establishing an awareness of poetry as both a social and an intellectual enterprise. However, neither McCaffery, Silliman nor their cohorts addressed concurrent developments in cognitive linguistics. It is the absence of such a connection between such manifestly related ways of thinking (language poetics and cognitive poetics) that this dissertation sets out to redress.

It is crucial to mention, when discussing this early phase of its development, that the Language movement was a social movement. Language poets came together concurrently within the wider social and political context such as the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movement, including the impact of the Vietnam War, the Watergate affair and the resignation of President Richard Nixon. These events had a major impact on the American psyche, an effect which is still felt today. Thus, one of the major characteristics of the Language movement as an avant-garde was the intersection of the aesthetic and the ethical as a critique of Western capitalism. In particular, Language writing had a strong Marxist thrust. "Language has been saturated by ideology, it is not at all an objective ground," Hejinian states (*Inquiry* 161). Subverting Adorno's (1955) famous dictum, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," Hejinian declares that it is "*necessary*" to do so in order "to remove poetry...out from under the shadow of atrocity" (320). In her essay "Barbarism," Hejinian argues that the poet must "assume a barbarian position" by taking "an oppositional stance, occupying (and being occupied by) foreignness—by the barbarism of strangeness" (326). Such an enterprise is not only communal and political, but also it is a question of language and

especially syntax in terms of the way the poet responds to such encounters and engenders connections, not as a marginal, singular “I” but as “non-I”—the inquirer who exists in a transitive relationship with poetry, with language. Defining the poem as a social text also means that theory is implicated in praxis. For the poet to continue writing in the romantic tradition using the simple, subjective, expressive “I” of the lyric poem is to persist in the reification of the same culture that produced the atrocity.

Language writing as a group practice encompassed a great many writers with a number of conflictive perspectives. A number of writers have commented on a division along gender lines, with the male writers pursuing the notion of language as commodity fetish, and the female writers taking “gender as an object of critique” (Vickery 7). Although Vickery’s comment is sweeping, one area of consensus was the desire to throw light on the power relations hidden in grammar, within the sentence. Unlike feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich who were pursuing a wider readership using a more accessible “common language,” female Language writers addressed a broader range of cultural concerns via an innovative, less accessible poetry. The dominance of the white, Anglo-Saxon “founding fathers” of the Language movement is particularly noticeable in the late 1980s. However, women Language writers began to be noticed, Perloff argues, largely as a result of Hickman’s editorship of *Temblor*, which began publishing not only Language, but other poetries by women, as well as international poets writing in other languages (“After Language,” para. 18). What Perloff fails to mention, though, is the significant role women writers played in shifting the paradigm as they began to contribute to critical debates. For example, Hejinian made significant

inroads with her “Two Stein Talks,” published in 1986 in *Temblor* 3. Here she takes up Silliman’s theme, but expands the view to take in not only the sentence, but “Grammar and Landscape.” Landscape, she asserts, can be seen as a temporal as well as a spatial phenomenon. As she puts it, “It is the convergence of these elements—that is, time and space—with language that provides the excitement of grammar” (*Inquiry* 113). Susan Howe brought both emotion and the lyric back into the equation, particularly with *My Emily Dickinson* (1985).

The lyric voice was abrogated by the Language poets, which as Kinnahan has said, “almost automatically marginalizes [a woman writer’s] experiments with the lyric” (cited in Vickery 40). Howe writes of Dickinson:

Pulling pieces of geometry, geology, alchemy, philosophy, politics, biography, biology, mythology, philology from alien territory a ‘sheltered’ woman audaciously invented a new grammar grounded in humility and hesitation (*My Emily Dickinson* 21).

For Dickinson, as for Howe, “...life was language and a lexicon her landscape” (*My Emily* 27). As Howe noted in relation to Emily Dickinson’s work, there is a “vital distinction between concealment and revelation”, a characteristic which is equally true in relation to Howe’s poetry (27). Further, Waldrop showed through her superimposing of political and philosophical discourses onto the personal, especially gender, that: “The idea that women cannot think logically is a not so venerable old stereotype. As an example of thinking, I don’t think we need to discuss it” (*Curves* 97). By the mid-1980s, Language writing began to gain acceptance—many of its practitioners got jobs in academia or in publishing—but women Language writers remained largely sidelined. As Vickery notes: *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993) names only one woman (Hejinian) in relation to Language writing; in Bob

Perelman's *The Marginalization of Poetry* (1996), Lyn Hejinian is only mentioned in relation to Silliman's "new sentence," and Susan Howe is reduced to half a chapter. Even Linda Reinfeld, who in fact does consider Howe at some length in *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue*, does so with "little contextualization of Howe's work in light of other feminist innovation" (40). What these three writers show us is that "gender is not a 'lens' one may as easily choose not to look through, it is a material fact in determining one's relation to language, knowledge, power" (Russo, para. 4).

### **A Poetics of Languescape**

By now, it should largely be apparent why I have chosen to focus on these three writers. To clarify, however, the reasons for the grouping: first of all, they are of the same generation, born either before or during the Second World War; it could be said that their social and historic consciousness emerges from this fact. Important also, as the argument of the thesis will make clear, is the fact that each of these poets, for all their close affiliations with Language, can be understood to write within the lyric tradition. Although their poems are not always brief, they are replete with an urgent intensity. While not transparent, they convince the reader of their sincerity. While not expressive or subjective, they are grounded in human subjectivity. While not metrical or schematic, they manifest sophistication in the use of soundscape. In short, their relation to the lyric matters. Moreover, each writer re-visions subjectivity whilst retaining an interest in person. One of the principle ways they do this is by their rejection of the univocal "I" through Bakhtinian heteroglossia; their poetry is interwoven with the discourses of others. Howe's achievement is simultaneous concealment and revelation of the self; for Hejinian, "The 'personal' is already

a plural condition”; and for Waldrop, the poem is not expression, but a cognitive process. She offers the reader an optical instrument (the mirror) in order that “[s]he make self-discoveries perhaps not otherwise possible” (Adorno 183).<sup>7</sup> Each poet sites language in an environment (both the physical surroundings in which they live, but also the conditions that affect their lives) in order to create what might be called a poetics of *languescape*. While this aspect of their shared writing has been less dwelt on in the critical literature, this thesis addresses it.

Susan Howe adopts the Renaissance traditions of pastoral and masque in order to explore issues such as social authority and colonization arising from the arrival of Europeans into the “New World.” Staging her investigations in the forest, Howe, though largely concerned with the American colonial period, is also interested in her Irish ancestry and in European history. *The Europe of Trusts* in particular speaks to these concerns. As Montgomery has written, when Howe writes in her preface that she wishes to “tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate” what she is doing is “organizing a lyric poetry of history around this transaction between the dead and the living” (“Renaissance” 623).

Hejinian’s environment is personal, aesthetic and socio-political; it is the crucial background to her foregrounded exploration of “the consciousness of consciousness.” Hejinian spent a significant period of time in Russia and learned Russian; her politics of “person” derives from Shklovsky’s concept of *ostranenie* (остранение) or estrangement. She believed that “personhood”

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<sup>7</sup> Adorno writes about Proust in *Prisms*: “Proust says in the second volume of *Le temps retrouvé* that the work is a kind of optical instrument offered to the reader in order that he make self-discoveries not otherwise possible” (183). This same point, I would suggest, applies to Waldrop’s use of the mirror in *The Reproduction of Profiles*.

could help to bridge the gap that existed between Russia and the U.S. in the Cold War period.

For Waldrop the circumstances of 20<sup>th</sup> century history are ever present. “Between English with a German accent....Phonemes float in mid-Atlantic....I enter at a skewed angle, through the fissures, the slight difference” (*Dissonance* 223). Waldrop, as has been mentioned, was born in Germany; German is her first language and she is fluent in French. She is steeped in continental philosophy. As a translator, her ultimate goal “is to bear witness to the essentially irreducible strangeness and distance between languages—but its immediate task is exactly to explore this space” (159). Moreover, each has created a significant body of critical work on poetry and poetics. It is crucial to their praxis, and a further point of connection between them, that each shows that poetry belongs in the same sphere as philosophical, historical and political discourse. In structuring the dissertation I have chosen to focus primarily on a single work published by each writer in the late 1980s when each writer had reached poetic maturity and was making major statements both in their poetry and in their writing about poetry. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, investigating each text will provide information about what Leech calls “implications of context,” or the situation in which language occurs.

### **Approaching Language Poetry through Stylistics**

In terms of critical method, this dissertation is situated in relation to literary linguistics. The dissertation will therefore explore what such a method can reveal about the innovative work under discussion. If poetry, like critical reading of poetry, is a mode of epistemological inquiry (as these writers assert),



then what does their mode of writing reveal about how we arrive at what we know—both as writers and as readers? Anglo-American literary criticism, the emerging discipline of linguistics, and European structuralism, especially Saussure's semiology and Russian Formalism, led to the development of stylistics. Early stylistics focused on close analysis of a literary text within the various levels of language: the phonetic, lexical, graphological, discursal, metrical, semantic, morphological, pragmatic and syntactic environments, and those aspects are still relevant. In the late 1970s and early 1980s developments in sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis, drawing on John Austin's (1969) work in speech act theory and Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory, began to focus on the interpersonal dimension in literary texts. By the 1980s, stylistics was a coherent discipline. Within the last 20-30 years, socio-cultural and psychological factors have come to the fore, and with a re-consideration of rhetoric, stylistics comes full circle. Stylistics offers several advantages: it can help "to demystify literary responses" (Carter and Stockwell 296); it can show how it is possible to have varied responses to the same text, and it can shed light on features that might not have been noticed in any other way. Stylistics is both "a descriptive tool and a catalyst for interpretation" (297).

Literary criticism has been suspicious, if not hostile, toward linguistic approaches to literature, and linguists have criticized literary theorists for being impressionistic. What I am proposing here is a rapprochement. The timing is right for this, due to recent developments in our understanding of how the mind works, and in particular, how cognitive processes involved in general comprehension might help to account for linguistic creativity. Cognitive

poetics developed over the last 20 years or so. The term itself originated with Reuven Tsur (1983) and then broadened to take in cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980 and Lakoff and Turner 1989), conceptual integration theory or blending (Fauconnier and Turner 1994, 2002), text-world theory (Werth 1999, Gavins 2005) and cognitive stylistics (Semino and Culpeper 2002). At stake is the means by which cognitive processes can both shape and explain what Tsur calls “the specific effects of poetry.” Semino’s account is particularly clear in this regard:

Cognitive poetics therefore combines the detailed analysis of linguistic choices and patterns in texts with a systematic consideration of the mental processes and representations that are involved in the process of interpretation. Within cognitive poetics, literary reading is assumed to involve the same mental processes and representations that are involved in comprehension generally. However, special attention is paid to linguistic creativity and its interpretation, since creativity is a central part of the literary experience (cited in Kristiansen 405).

This dissertation employs these modes of investigation in order to explore innovative poetry. The concept of iconicity has been used to account for “the means by which poetry creates a semblance of felt life” (Freeman, “The Fall” 423). My intention is not to offer an interpretation of the meaning of the work, but to engage with the means by which this poetry enables the reader to encounter it as an icon of reality in the way it resembles felt life. My intention is not to replace literary approaches, but to enquire into the cognitive and linguistic bases for this engagement.

The selection of which aspects to focus on is part of its interpretative activity. “It could even be said that the mark of a good stylistician is someone who selects a particular analytical tool best suited to the passage in hand”

(Carter and Stockwell 297). These new developments in cognitive linguistics mentioned above offer the potential to arrive at innovative explanations of textual phenomena. Like previous approaches, cognitive poetics is based on linguistic analyses which are systematic and detailed in linking theory to stylistic choices and cognitive processes. Stylistics is located at the intersection of linguistics, literary studies and cognitive science, and thus it is well placed to provide an explicit account of the relationship between text and reader. It is important to note that stylistics, like Language poetics, begins with the premise that the literary text only exists in the mind of the reader. Throughout the course of my discussions of each poet, I will take account of the socio-cultural and ideological dimensions of a text, which is fundamental both to literary study and Language writing. The choice of analytical frameworks will be based on what is appropriate for each individual text, as explained in the section below. In my exploration of the text, I will engage with a plurality of readings, in order to construct arguments that are rigorous, rational and open. The approach advocated here, I would suggest, is the best approach to take in the study of these three writers whose work is so linguistically-focused. In fact, it is rather surprising that the Language writers have not received greater attention from stylisticians. One explanation may be that stylistics declined in the US because of the dominance of Chomskyan grammar, whereas in the UK and Europe, stylistics has risen to prominence, largely as a result of the importance of Hallidayan functional grammar and its usefulness in terms of providing a framework for analysis.

## **The Lay of the Land**

This dissertation is comprised of two parts: one critical and one creative. The critical part comprises this introductory first chapter, a chapter for each of the three poets, a conclusion, and a bibliography. The creative part comprises a collection of poems entitled *Continental Drift*.

Chapter 2 “Consonantal Drift” considers the work of Susan Howe. Susan Howe’s work is marked by the desire to be present in and to interrogate the discourses in which her poetry is shaped, particularly history. Howe is a lyric poet, whose project is the continual making and re-making of the text. Literary critics such as Perloff have called Howe’s syntax “demilitarized” and “dysfunctional” in terms of the severe fracturing of language; stylistic analysis will offer a detailed account of Howe’s process which leads literary critics to account for it in such terms. I will call upon cognitive poetic approaches (possible world theory and schema theory) in order to arrive at a more nuanced sense of the way that Howe repositions language in the wilderness through her radical praxis. Howe seems to suggest we might do better, if we can, to reflect on what experience itself presents to us. By seeking to articulate pre-reflective experience, she constructs a dialectic between what Merleau-Ponty terms “perceptual meaning” and “language meaning.”

Chapter 3 “Radical Introspection” is an investigation into the poetry and poetics of Lyn Hejinian. The term “radical” suggests a departure from tradition, and “introspection” a close examination which goes beneath the surface; Lyn Hejinian uses this phrase to refer to the creative process. Cognitive poetics offers the reader precisely the kind of radical introspection that Hejinian argues for in relation to her writing. As mentioned earlier, a

salient feature of Language writing is non-referentiality. Writers such as Hejinian and Waldrop are interested in the word as a material entity, which is suggestive of other words and associations. Rather than starting with subject matter, theme or idea, language-based poetry teases out the unconscious connections, exploiting the relation between signifier and signified; it plays down the self-referentiality typical of earlier poetry in order to privilege other kinds of referentiality. Thus, in *My Life*, Hejinian throws open the questions: who is the self, who speaks for the self, and how is the self formed in language? In writing the self, she performs theories of self as praxis. The fact that she brings this reflexivity into her writing, work which is normally done by the critic, alters the relation between the reader and her work. Particularly the cognitive approaches of mind style and blending yield insights into the complexities that give rise to what Hejinian calls “the contextualized and contextualizing subject, a person” (*Inquiry* 63). This method also shows what makes such writing resonant. Literary resonance suggests that which remains in the mind after the reading is finished. The cognitive approaches that I present here offer an insight into this phenomenon.

Chapter 4 “Language of the Body” explores the work of Rosmarie Waldrop. Like the Language poets with whom she is associated, Waldrop is interested in the tension inherent in the boundaries of the sentence. As with other avant-garde feminist poets, her experiments in grammar have feminist applications and implications. A significant trope in Waldrop’s writing is the mirror, which serves as a device of reflexivity. As an object it serves as a trope for the mimetic function of art, but it also enables the subject to perceive itself as an object, and in this way, the mirror enables the writer to

reveal herself as “the other” created by the word. By extending the ways in which subjects and objects interchange, not only is the hierarchy of main and subordinate clauses brought to task, but also gender stereotypes. This is a central preoccupation in *The Reproduction of Profiles*, a book in which Waldrop is in “multiple dialogue” with other texts—particularly with Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. A significant feature of *The Reproduction of Profiles* is Waldrop’s representation of the mind and body via metaphor, and especially personified abstractions. Of particular relevance to Waldrop’s text is Mark Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind* (1987), which develops the concept of image schema as an aspect of language and thought. Image schemata organize and structure information at the level of bodily perception, but they are also available as metaphors to provide an understanding of other experiences via transference from target to source domain. This mode of analysis reveals the tension in Waldrop’s work between containment and force as “preconceptual gestalt structures” originating in the body and its interactions within its environment.

Cognitive poetics draws on research in cognitive science and applies it to literary texts. The cognitive turn has been increasingly dominant in stylistics in the last two decades. As the German philosopher Harald Fricke has observed:

[W]e should not expect literary theory to yield anything fundamentally new in its own field: we will continue paraphrasing Aristotle’s basic insights. I can only see one possibility for moving beyond what has long since been known: interdisciplinary engagement with the advancement of knowledge in other disciplines, at present above all, a new field that has emerged only recently and consists of the philosophy of mind, psychological cognitivism, the affective sciences, cognitive linguistics, and neurological brain research—a cognitive turn to follow the linguistic one (193).

While Fricke is being deliberately contentious, his recognition that literary criticism needs to engage with these more modern paradigms offers us an opportunity to extend our understanding of what we mean by literature. There is no better time, then, to bring stylistics to bear upon discussions of innovative poetry. At the end of the first section, the themes and concerns of the poems in *Continental Drift* will be addressed as part of the conclusion to the scholarly work. The second section of the dissertation consists of poetry as praxis. These are poems as cognitive process.

## Chapter 2: Susan Howe

### “Consonantal drift”<sup>8</sup>

Susan Howe’s work is marked by the desire to be present in and to interrogate the discourses in which her poetry is shaped, particularly history. This desire is apparent in her prefatory statement to *Singularities*: “I assume Hope Atherton’s excursion for an emblem foreshadowing a Poet’s abolished limitations in our demythologized fantasy of Manifest Destiny” (4). Howe aims to reinterpret Manifest Destiny—the expansionist impulse that was borne out of the belief that the new Americans would take the forest and redeem the old world—in order to expose its illusory qualities. To do so, she takes up the persona of Atherton as a pictorial and symbolical (though imperfect) representation, a “foreshadow.” By adopting his “excursion” (a journey, a running outward, an escape from confinement, and digression in route and in discourse), Howe as a poet is able to annul the sense of entitlement that Manifest Destiny has conferred.

Susan Howe writes within the lyric tradition while exploring issues of gender, power and history. This tendency, it has been noted, is at odds with Language writing, which, according to Ron Silliman, is “anti-romantic, anti-mystical and anti-lyric” (Montgomery, “Renaissance” 615). Howe is a lyric poet, and her work is both mystical and visionary. A central question occupying her work within the lyric poem in the 1980s is, “What happens when a woman becomes the speaker and not the

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Collis writes: “*Singularities* is the resistance to enclosure as the process is written onto the ‘open’ continent of the New World. It tracks this as poetics—the tone leading of vowels, consonantal drift—stutter, shatter, pivot and scatter” (*Through Words* 55).



addressee"? (626) In 1985 Susan Howe declared that she wished to "...tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate" (*Europe* 14). In this statement, Howe projects an alternative world which, while desirable, she recognises is impossible. Instead, as Montgomery claims, "she is organizing a lyric poetry of history around this transaction between the dead and the living" ("Renaissance" 623). The contexts that she chooses are what Bruce Andrews terms "the raw materials of a society, a collection of practices & avowals & disavowals, governed by discourse" (cited in Ma 470). Her "trail" leads her away from the I-centred poetry that was prevalent in American confessional poetry and into history, myth and language, "all three, it should be added, as informed by an urgent, if highly individual, feminist perspective" (Perloff, *Dance* 299). Howe, the "library cormorant," absorbs her cultural heritage and writes it new.

But how to make poetry out of history? Reading and re-reading her sources, Howe's aim is to breathe new life into them: "it's the articulation that represents life" (*Birth-mark* 172). To recognise "an other voice," to "attempt to hear and speak it" ("Encloser" 192) means to look into sources which have already been articulated. Re-reading, and then re-writing these sources is a way to address issues such as: "Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence?" (*My Emily* 11). Her goal then is to break words and ideas free from the "repressive mechanism" (McCaffery) of grammar, of history and of pre-conception. Her method is to "release the coils and complications of Saying's assertion" and thereby enact "an enunciative clearing" (*Birth-mark* 11-12, 136). The word "enunciative" is more than a

synonym for articulation; Howe's project is to make a public declaration. The word "clearing" relates not only to Manifest Destiny in terms of the pioneers who cleared the land as they moved westwards, but refers to the removal of obstructions in order to elucidate. The term "clearing" also allies her with Olson and his concept of field poetics. In what way, then, might Howe be situated in/by the "field"? According to Fredman:

...the field is at one level a nest of particulars in which self-exploration can be conducted, toward the end of regarding one's territory from the vantage point of a witness. On another level, the field is a contained social space, in which the resistant individual enters the resistant community through the agency of an initiatory secret (*Grounding* 72).

The territory that Howe occupies in order to enact her poetry of witness is 17<sup>th</sup> century New England; she positions words in the woods,<sup>9</sup> or language in the wilderness and engages the poem as a "contained social space" in order to reveal the "secret" that is the myth that forms a nation's foundations. In a similar way to Olson adopting the persona of Maximus, Howe adopts the persona of Hope [Atherton], as the "artist [poet] in America"<sup>10</sup> (*Singularities* 4). Like Olson, Susan Howe is powered by a rage to know, but whereas Olson turned to history as well as other discourses in the conviction that there exists a way through language to arrive at a state of knowing, Howe develops a different trajectory, one

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<sup>9</sup> Howe's earlier poem, *Pythagorean Silence*, opens with a reference to the wood. It also alludes to Ovid's Daphne, who is turned into a tree in order to avoid Apollo's attentions. Moreover, as Montgomery notes, a number of modernist poets including Pound, Eliot and H.D. use the tree as a motif. As we will see in the next Chapter, the tree is a significant motif in Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* too.

<sup>10</sup> As stated in Chapter 1, in "Projective Verse" Olson addresses the issue of the line in relation to the breath and the performing body; he does not really address the issue of syntax, other than to say that grammar is "inherited," a convention which must be broken, that tense must be "kicked around anew," in order to endow a poem with a greater sense of immediacy, and that the sentence itself is "lightning, as passage of force from subject to object," the "VERB between two nouns" (Allen 386-394). What Howe does is to remove even the verb, and hence tense; there is therefore nothing between two nouns, thus enacting a clearing.

which acknowledges that “the content is the process” (*Birth-mark* 166), or as Cixous puts it: “There is no closure, it doesn’t stop” (Cixous 53). History cannot recover the truth; neither can writing, but by putting pressure on language, there is something a poet can do that a historian cannot in terms of clearing the field. As Montgomery has noted, “her poems containing history offer...a polyphony that gravitates around manifestations of authority and a stuttering energy” in which “the retrieved words” threaten to run dry (*The Poetry* 96). But they do not.

A number of literary critics and theorists have offered innovative interpretations of Howe’s work. There is a large body of critical work on Howe, including work by Marjorie Perloff, Rachel Tzvia Back, Rachel Blau du Plessis, Linda Reinfeld, Lynn Keller, William Montgomery, Stephen Collis and Peter Nicholls. There is also a large body of essays on poetics and praxis written by Susan Howe, including some information about her method and intentions with regard to *Articulations of Sound Forms in Time*. This thesis takes the view that a different set of tools is required to orient ourselves to what some writers refer to as “post-linear poetry.” The approach taken in this chapter is concerned with close textual analysis in order to reveal how language is mediated through the poetic voice. I call upon stylistics approaches, including possible world theory (Ryan 1991), text world theory (Werth 1999 and Gavins 2007) and schema theory (Schank & Abelson 1977 and Cook 1994), in order to create a dialectic between close analysis and context that will lead to a more nuanced sense of the way that Howe repositions language in the wilderness. Stylistics involves the systematic collection of data about the

language of a text in order to draw new inferences or to support existing perspectives, thereby establishing connections between linguistic form and literary effect. I shall take as example texts Howe's *The Liberties* and *Singularities*, in particular, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*. These works have been described by Collis as part of "Howe's continuing excursus on the American literary wilderness" (*Through Words*, last paragraph).

*Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* was first published in 1987 in the form of a chapbook by Awede, and there were only two sections; Section I "The Falls Fight" was added later in order to provide historical background to the Hope Atherton story. The book was later re-published as *Singularities* (1990), together with *Thorow* and *Scattering As Behaviour Toward Risk*. Howe originally trained as a visual artist, and the visual element is an important aspect of meaning in her poetry. In the Awede edition, the title page contains an illustration with a circle made of two red, double-tipped arrows that do not join. The epigraph which appears underneath a drawing and the title in *Singularities* appears on a blank page in the earlier edition. Each individual "articulation" or poem is placed on a separate page, but in the later edition, a number of these are unfortunately combined onto a single page, presumably in order to save space and cost. Some sections which are centred in the original text are now moved to the left-hand margins, and a poem "Light inaccessible as darkness" in the section called "Taking the Forest" has been omitted. Reproduced on the cover (and on the title page inside the Wesleyan University Press edition) is a woodcut depicting a massacre of the native Indians by the colonial

soldiers. The troops are firing muskets; the Indians are dying next to and in the raging waters of the river. This massacre refers to the “Fall’s Fight” of 1676. The local white settlers of Deerfield in the Massachusetts Bay Colony feared the native tribes and soldiers were sent for. These soldiers slaughtered some 300 people—mostly women and children. The colonists were then pursued by the Indians. Although most of them eventually returned home, some were captured and burned alive—a few, like Hope, were spared.

The new title, *Singularities*, derives from algebra, as Howe explains in the *Talisman* interview (1989):

The singularity...is the point where there is a sudden change to something completely else....It’s a chaotic point...predation and capture...I thought this was both a metaphor for Europeans arriving on this continent...and a way of describing these poems of mine. They are singular works on pages, and grouped together, they fracture language; they are charged (*Birth-mark* 173).

*Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* then is a phenomenological project in which Howe reduces things to their essences. The work comprises three sections: the first is the prose account of “The Falls Fight” in which Howe announces her aim in the work; Section 2, “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings” is purportedly Hope’s fractured account of his wandering through the wilderness. However, as a captivity narrative, it is a discredited account. We are told in an extract from a letter dated June 8, 1781 which appears prior to Section 2 that Hope was never captured by the Indians, who were “afraid and ran from him” (5). The account certainly reads like the tale of someone “beside himself.” However, in the final poem of the section, he seems to be restored. Section 3, “Taking the Forest,” comprises 25 “articulations” or poems, which look normative on the page (many are

ordered into neat couplets), yet semantically “broken and made strange by the history it seeks to articulate” (Reinfeld 127). As in Section 2, so too in Section 3 does the final poem offer a lyric, first-person consolidated account which has grown out of the previous incoherent testimonies of those banished or lost in the American wilderness. The individual poems in both sections however quickly cast off the historical discourse; ultimately, the work is not about history: it is about how language has been misappropriated by history/his story. Hovering between sense and nonsense, the fractures reveal what has been hidden in those discourses that place primacy on coherence. This notion of hiddenness is crucial in relation to Howe. As Collis states: “A poetic text is one which hides its meaning, however, the hiddenness of the hidden matters more than the finding” (*Through Words* 67).

As in *The Liberties*, where Howe also explored the possibilities within a name, here too we have the possibilities (not the least of which is gendered) embedded in the name of “Hope” Atherton, Hope normally being a woman’s name. Susan Schultz claims that Howe “un-mans the Puritan Hope Atherton” (para. 4). In the preface to the poems, Howe reminds us, “In our culture Hope is a name we give women” (*Singularities* 4). Schultz asserts, “As if by fiat, she begins an American epic of reduction and reconstruction through a simple linguistic sex-change operation...‘Hope’ for the American poet...becomes a feminine aspiration” (para. 4). Moreover, with the substitution of a single letter, Hope becomes Howe. While as a name Hope is a proper noun, as a common noun it can refer both to the “expectation of something desired,”

but also to “a piece of enclosed land in the midst of fens or marshes or of waste land generally.”<sup>11</sup> In England, the fens are land which has been reclaimed from the sea, or border on the sea, this reclaiming another process of clearing the land for cultivation. Such landscapes are significant to Howe; they enable her to write against the pastoral tradition in order to explore issues of settlement and misappropriation both of land and of language. Howe’s “entanglement”<sup>12</sup> with historical narratives relates to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century concern in American poetry about those who appropriate language as enclosure—to thwart, to silence, to liquidate or remove from historical record. In *The Birth-mark* (1993), Howe writes “I am trying to understand what went wrong when the first Europeans stepped on shore here...Isn’t it bitterly ironic that many of them were fleeing the first devastation caused by the enclosure laws in Britain, and the first thing they did here was to put up fences” (164). For Howe, the matter of enclosure is also a feminist issue, as evidenced by her interest in captivity narrative. She writes in relation to Mary Rowlandson that even “the beautiful Connecticut River is just another barrier to get across. Rowlandson’s apprehension of nature is an endless ambiguous enclosure” (96). Unlike Howe, the landscape would never transfix her.

### **The Matter of Syntax: “The Liberties”**

The matter of syntax is fundamental to Howe’s process. In order to show Howe’s “content is the process,” I quote below the poem “THEIR”

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<sup>11</sup> “hope.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. [www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk](http://www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk) Web 23 October 2013.

<sup>12</sup> “Entanglement” is the word Montgomery chooses to discuss the lyric poet’s situation with relation to “the wreckage of war,” particularly the Vietnam War, which ended in 1975 but has left an indelible mark on the American psyche (“Renaissance” 620).

in *The Liberties*. My analysis will reveal not only the way that Howe dissects syntax, but that she does so in order to interrogate the source of linguistic power in its various guises, as well as to locate the missing:

Her diary soared above her house

over heads of

those clouds  
are billows below  
spume  
white  
tossed this way  
or that

wild geese in a stammered place  
athwart and sundered  
for the sea rose and sheets clapped at sky  
and sleep the straggler led the predator away  
(Say, *Stella*, feel you no Content  
Reflecting on a Life well spent?)  
Bedevikke bedl  
bedevilled by a printer's error  
the sight of a dead page filled her with terror  
garbled version  
page in her coffin....  
Do those dots mean that the speaker lapsed  
into silence?

Often I hear Romans murmuring  
I think of them lying dead in their graves.

This poem, published in 1980, introduces Jonathan Swift's amanuensis, Stella, born Hester Johnson, in March 1680. In "FRAGMENTS OF A LIQUIDATION" Howe tells us that Stella met Swift at the age of eight, and he became her tutor. She then spent twenty-eight years of her life until her death as his shadow, acting as scribe and servant. She had no official role in his life, and Swift, a bachelor, never asked her to marry him as far as we know. Whether she kept a diary or not is unknown, but Howe



imagines there to be one in the opening line of the prologue. The poem is not arranged in a regular pattern with stanzas, and most lines do not use sentence-initial capitalization or personal pronouns. The use of the third person pronoun indicates narratorial orientation, but the deictic forms imply a characterological orientation, that is they articulate Stella's thoughts and perceptions directly to the reader in such a way that they are simultaneously intimate and impersonal. The use of the present tense establishes it as an immediate world focalized through the imagined consciousness of Stella, the "her" of the opening line. A polarity emerges in "clouds," being both the grammatical object of a prepositional phrase as well as the subject of a new clause: "clouds are billows." The freedom of her words soaring up to the clouds and merging with the sea is in counterpoint to the "stammered" place, where "a dead page" fills her "with terror" and she lapses "into silence."

This silencing is at the core of Howe's work; it appears first in the preface of *The Europe of Trusts*, "THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER: For me there was no silence before armies" and again at the end of the introduction, as personalised pronouncement.<sup>13</sup> There is a lack of agency in this 23-line poem, the sole example being a medium agent: the "dead page" which "filled her [Stella/Howe] with terror." Howe has enclosed in brackets a quotation from Swift's poem "Stella's Birthday March 13, 1726": ("Say, *Stella*, feel you no Content / Reflecting on a Life well spent?"), but by placing the vocative "Stella" in italics, Howe recasts it as a patronizing

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<sup>13</sup> "I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate" (14) quoted earlier.

taunt. The unknown word “Bedevikke” suggests “bedeck,” which means to adorn, or “bedet”: “a horseman’s boy employed to carry his bags” or “bedevil”: “to treat diabolically, with ribaldry or abuse,”<sup>14</sup> and seems to imply, together with the quotation from Swift’s poem already mentioned, her inferior role in Swift’s life. Following the ellipsis, the perspective shifts to the speaker or narrator, reading the imagined diary. The final two lines are set apart, both spatially and syntactically from the rest of the poem, as they are punctuated as a sentence with an initial capital letter. This material is cast in a different register, with a self-referential first-person pronoun, an assertion of closure, but what precisely is asserted is ambiguous.

Significantly, a preponderance of prepositional modifiers, especially locative, establish place as a topic of concern, Howe being “a poet of place” (Back 86). These prepositions also aid in giving the reader a mental picture or schema in which to locate Stella as Figure against Ground (her house above which the clouds soar and merge with the sea), her minor impact measured against that of Jonathan Swift. Of the fourteen prepositional phrases used, half express location: “above her house,” “over heads,” “in a stammered place,” “at sky,” “in her coffin,” “into silence,” “in their graves.” Most significant are the prepositions of containment (in/into): “in a stammered place,” “in her coffin,” “into silence,” “in their graves.” These prepositions of containment struggle against those that semantically imply a change of location: “above,” “over,” “below,” but containment, or enclosure, predominates. Moreover,

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<sup>14</sup> “bedeck.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. [www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk](http://www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk) Web 23 October 2013.

there is a set of lexemes related to the struggle with language: “stammer,” “sheets clapped,” “a printer’s error,” “a dead page,” a “garbled version,” ellipsis and lapsing into silence.

Linguistic deviation in this poem, then, is immediately noticeable at the graphological and syntactic levels, but also, and significantly, at the semantic level. Semantic deviation appears from the opening line: “her diary soared above her house,” which presents the first conceptual metaphor in the poem. It is based on the dual notion that WORDS ARE BIRDS and WRITING IS UP (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). It evokes Hamlet’s line: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go”<sup>15</sup> and is one of many bird references in the long poem. It is also one of many Shakespearean references, the poem invoking both a major figure, Cordelia, and two of the marginal characters in the play: Bastard and Fool. Another semantic deviation occurs in line nine: “wild geese in a stammered place / athwart and sundered.” The term “wild geese” was widely understood in Swift’s time to refer to the Irishmen who fought as exiles in continental European wars, scores of whom died in such conflicts. These “wild geese” were in reality “athwart” or cast asunder, as Stella is, following Swift around Ireland. The image of the sheets clapping at the sky suggest the wings of the departing birds, but also sheets can refer to bedding hung out to dry and therefore imply women’s domestic roles. Back interprets these sheets to mean paper, or even the ashes of paper, suggesting that Stella’s diary, if it ever existed, was burnt (68). The juxtaposition of “stammered” and “place” is a deviant

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<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene iii.

collocation, creating mild readerly dissonance, as the verb “stammer” requires a human agent; however, the reader conflates this reference with Stella, due to the phonological parallelism. Importantly, the phrase links Howe’s two central concerns: language and place. Thus, Howe allows for trains of associations to arise from linguistic units in order to accrue, expand, and revise.

In her essay “The End of Art,” Howe writes on Ian Hamilton Finlay’s concrete poem, “Fisherman’s Cross.” That essay, which purports to respond to Finlay’s poem, offers a precise account of her own procedure. Like him, Howe is fond of word squares. These are visual-textual poems arranged in squares or rectangles and containing words, sometimes without spacing between them, partial words, nonce words, or other cryptic clues. As can be seen in *The Liberties* Howe includes word squares titled “S” and “C,” presumably referring to Stella and Cordelia. In *Articulation*, there is a similar cryptic reference to “M” and “R” in poems 3 and 4 of “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings,” which Vickery sees as “iconic ciphers of identity” referring to Mary Rowlandson (185). In a 1985 article she wrote for *Temblor*, Howe states that such narratives as Mary Rowlandson’s are “a microcosm of colonial imperialist history, and a prophecy of our contemporary repudiation of alterity, anonymity, darkness” (*Birth-mark* 89). As these two works demonstrate, then, Howe is fascinated by “wanderings” (Stella in *The Liberties*, Hope in *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*) and so it is to them “we must turn to hear the voices of barbarians almost lost at the edges of our culture” (Reinfeld 11). Using prosopopoeia she rescues the lost or disenfranchised; she even

rescues language itself. Her aim is not to reflect the subject (be it Hope Atherton, Stella or Mary Rowlandson) as a subject of alienation, but as an exemplar of what can be called “the pre-reflective dimension of experience”<sup>16</sup> (Mildenberg 261). By foregrounding these historic personae as reflective subjects, Howe’s pre-reflective self hovers in the background. Howe’s pre-reflective self then is experienced through the subject-personae without any conscious reflection on herself.

### **Uncommon Words: *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time***

Although Howe does not refer to herself as a “Language poet,” if by using the term we imply “a poet committed to intellectual investigation and experimentation with the formal qualities of language,” Reinfeld writes, “Howe surely is a member in good standing” (126), as an analysis of *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* reveals. In her choice of title, Howe claims authority; Part I then proceeds to revile the authoritarian power of the English settlers. At the same time, the title also initiates the reader into the difficulties of reading the text. First of all the word “articulation” is a multivalent word. The first sense relates to anatomy and biology, the second to speech and expression. In the first sense, it has to do with a joint or connection; in the second, it relates to the way humans form speech sounds by controlling the flow of air in the vocal organs. Moreover, it also relates to “the manifestation, demonstration or expression of something immaterial or abstract, such as an emotion or

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<sup>16</sup> Mildenberg is writing on Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*; however, there are many parallels between Stein and Howe in their experiments with the formal qualities of language, and what motivates these.

idea.”<sup>17</sup> Added to this is the ambiguity of “Sound Forms in Time.” Is the word “forms” functioning as a noun or a verb? Similarly, “in Time” can mean at a suitable time (not too late or too early), in the fullness of time, or rhythmically timed. In the *Talisman* Interview (1990) Howe said that she thought the title derived from the first sound we experience as we enter the world:

We are slapped and we cry. Before we know what meaning is. So to be born would be to hear sound you couldn't understand. And to die is to hear sound, then silence. So it's the articulation that represents life. And Hope has that sort of experience. And Hope is in me. In all of us. (*Birth-mark* 172)

As has been mentioned, it is part of Howe's practice to preface her work with prose. This historical account of the subject matter helps to orient the reader. In stylistics terms, this material provides basic deictic reference: who, where when—the parameters of a text world. A text world is “a deictic space, defined initially by the discourse itself, and specifically by the deictic and referential elements in it” (Werth 180). In other words, a text world is a conceptual construct—a construct the reader develops through an encounter with a text. However, in *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, these sources (a historical account and an extract from a letter), tend to limit meaning, to restrict and contain it, as opposed to the openness suggested by the title. Indeed, as Peter Nicholls has discovered, the text she must have used (George Sheldon's *A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts*) documents not the wanderings of Hope Atherton, but of a man named Jonathan Wells (596). Perloff, Reinfeld and Nicholls have all

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<sup>17</sup> “articulation.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. [www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk](http://www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk) Web 23 October 2013.

commented on her use of source material. For example, with reference to the opening poems of Section 2, the source passage reads as follows:

J.W. was glad to leave him, lest he shd be a *clog* or hindrance to him. Mr W. grew faint, & once when ye Indians *prest* him, he was near *fainting* away, but by eating a *nutmeg* (which his *grandmother* gave him as he was going out) he was *revivd*. (Nicholls 596)

Howe's title then is integral to the poem, because it signals to the reader that language, rather than history, is a central concern. Quoting Charles Olson, Susan Howe says, " 'The stutter is the plot.' It's the stutter in American literature that interests me" (*Birth-mark* 181).

### **The Escape of Language: "Hope Atherton's Wanderings"**

"Hope Atherton's Wanderings" comprises 16 individual untitled poems, beginning with the line: "Prest try to set after grandmother" (*Singularities* 6). In this poem, and in the 15 which follow it, there is a noticeable lack of 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun reference. We assume and infer that the subject is Hope Atherton, because of the preface, the title of the section, and the reference to "Mr. Atherton's story Hope Atherton." Verbs or verbal elements shift between past and present, so it is also difficult to grasp the time element in specific poems, although dates and a time are mentioned at the beginning: "abt noon," "April 1" (6); "March or April" (7). Place is represented via naming of specific places or geographical features: "deep water," "Turner Falls" (6), "Medfield Clay Gully" (7), "quagg" (10), "maize meadow" (11), "salt marshes and sedge meadows" (12). These features function to orient the reader in the world of the text so that it is possible to build up a mental picture of the scene. Moreover, a particular style of the text surfaces in relation to naming and

describing through a phenomenon called nominalization. Taking the second poem as example, there is potentially one verb: “flood”; the remaining words are nouns or noun phrases. These nouns label things which we presuppose to exist: “nutmeg,” “cano,” “muzzell,” “foot path,” “sand,” “gravel,” “rubbish,” “vandal,” “horse flesh,” “ryal tabl,” “sand enemys,” “sun,” “Danielle Warnare Servt,” “Turner Falls Fight,” “Next wearer” (6). This naming process reifies, thus creating a real and present text world, but only in the background where time is distilled into a single moment. The foreground will comprise descriptions and events which move the *story* forward through time. Due to the ambivalent status of many of the verbs in the poem, the reader must work hard to supply action, change, variation from one state to another. Moreover, when there is an absence of verbs, there is either an absence of agency, or agency is played down. For instance, in the third poem: “hobbling boy/laid no whining trace no footstep clue”; “he must have crossed over” (7), the “hobbling boy” is, in Hallidayan grammar an *actor* of the verb “laid,” but the process is behavioural (“laid [no] whining trace” is a metaphor for *did not whine or cry out*; “laid no footstep clue,” a metaphor for *did not leave a footprint*); plus, the verb is negated; the assertion that “he *must* have crossed over” is an example of negative modality—it states the perception or belief, not the fact of crossing over, and in any case, the phrase *cross over* itself is ambiguous, as it refers to the possible crossing of the river, or a euphemism for death. The effect of eliminating the verb is to give the reader a sense of action which has already taken place; it also removes the presence of the speaker so that all the perceiving, experiencing,



understanding activity is apportioned to others—the previous wanderers of the forest, the reader. Thus, Howe cedes authority to the forest (woods/words), and in this way language becomes the central focus. By situating language in the wilderness, Howe gives the word a central role. Moreover, by removing the verb between objects, Howe places focus on the process of perception before syntax takes control, and as Collis says, “Language therein escapes itself” (*Through Words* 54).

Beginning with the eighth poem, the syntax becomes what Perloff calls “demilitarized,” the language severely fractured, abridged, dysfunctional. Any connective devices are missing, words are only suggested by their roots: e.g. “velc” could refer to velocity or Velcro; “chondriacal lunacy” suggests hypochondria—which is a kind of madness, but how it relates to “rest” is anybody’s guess (10). By now the reader infers that someone named Hope who may be male or female is wandering and suffering in the wilderness: “Redy to faint,” “slaughter story” (6), “comfortless” (9) and in “Danger of roaming the woods at random” (12). The estrangement the reader experiences mirrors the notion of displacement the subject experiences wandering. This aspect of the poem (and other poems in Howe’s oeuvre) is an aspect of the poem’s iconicity<sup>18</sup>, with its strong correspondence between form and meaning. On Howe’s page, form and content are one.

In cognitive linguistics, the term “implications of context” (Leech 183) refers to the ability of language to convey information about the

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<sup>18</sup> Iconicity is “a metaphorical image mapping in which the structure of meaning is understood in terms of the structure of the form of the language presenting that meaning” (Lakoff and Turner 156).

kind of situation in which it occurs. The words that are particularly crucial in helping readers reconstruct this scenario are those words which have a deictic function; that is they point to some feature or some person in the environment that helps to situate the discourse in relation to the speaker. The implications of context with reference to this poem are complicated by the fact that there are different situational levels—the factual one, and a fictional one. Fictional worlds are complex, not only because of the different locations and times in which events occur, but also because of the people involved in the fiction, each with their own beliefs, dreams, memories, experiences and so forth. We assume that the text we are reading is the story of “Mr. Atherton...Hope Atherton” (6), so that the language employed reflects Atherton’s perspective and experience of things—his mind style. Mind style is a term that describes the linguistic presentation of an “individual mental self.” Mind style originated in 1977 with Roger Fowler (*Linguistics* 173) as a way of explaining how language reflects an individual’s world-view. The theory is particularly useful for analysing prose, as we will see in Chapter 3. As we read, we may detect other world views present, including that of the author, who calls upon readers to activate their own schemata through the process of reading. The beginnings of poems are important in terms of establishing the text world, and deictic words, especially those which have definite meaning, are often used to establish the situational context at the beginning of the poem.

Having provided the preface, Howe assumes we already know the story, so she concentrates on the immediate experience. The title aids in

specifying the situation, as does the past tense aspect of “Prest” (6), which tells us that there is a definite occasion in mind. So we are directed toward a factual situation, but can we infer a fictional situation? As we have seen, the poem evokes a poetic persona as deictic centre: Hope Atherton, even if there is no explicit first person reference made to him in the poem. However, there is ambiguity in terms of whether Hope is an observer or an experiencer, and a similar stance is taken up by the reader, so that we can read the text both as a specific example of one man’s wandering, but also universally—as any person wandering in a wilderness. To be sure, it is difficult for the reader to anchor the speaker, who is both a participant in the discourse situation of the poem and an external onlooker, in a specific location. The role shifts, however, at the end of Section 1, and Hope assumes that of external commentator. In poem 16, Hope’s first person observation takes place within the imagination of an external persona, *aka* Howe. The first obvious clue to Howe’s taking up this position occurs earlier in the cycle in poem 10:

Otherworld light into fable

Best plays are secret plays (11).

A fable is a fictitious story; Howe sheds new light on her “fable” from her “other world”; the poem itself is dramatic, using dramatic devices in the telling—its message is thus hidden, secret. Because Hope is long dead, his observations are made possible by conventional poetic license—“articulation of sound forms in time.” Coding time in the poem is constructed both within Hope’s own time of existence and within the modern day. There are two voices, two contexts of voicing. The presence

of the authorial voice is revealed by other linguistic choices too—for example, anachronisms, nonce words, word play and so forth, choices characteristic of Howe’s mind style. The double-voicing signals a blending of both personae (Howe/Hope) and contexts (past/present) so that in the blended space the reader perceives a contiguity between Hope’s excursion and Manifest Destiny; both are un-founded. Using the model of text world theory, I will now investigate further Howe’s construction of these implications of context.

### **Cognitive Stylistics: A Text World Theory Approach**

According to text world theory, communication begins with discourse production and reception. To participate in communication, a discourse world is generated by participants who engage willingly in the negotiation of a text world. “Meaning and understanding are not pre-determined or fixed in any way, they are continually evolving concepts, negotiated by all those involved in the discourse world” (Gavins 20), in this case, the author Susan Howe, and the reader(s). Text world theory distinguishes between the “discourse world” and the “text world.” The discourse world is the situation where the communication takes place. In face-to-face communication, for example, this means the actual physical location where the communication is occurring, and identification of the participants involved: addresser/addressee, speaker/hearer. In such situations, the actual physical surroundings can become part of the topic of conversation, and so this becomes part of the text world. However, in the case of written communication, the writer and reader do not often share the

same physical or temporal space, and so these details are not salient or accessible; however, what is salient are the details relating to the background of each participant in terms of their cultural context, their background knowledge, beliefs and so forth, or schema. Schema theory was developed in the 1970s by scientists working within the area of artificial intelligence; it is now an influential concept in cognitive linguistics, where it refers to the conceptual knowledge that readers possess and access through reading. Because readers' individual schemata differ, readers respond differently to text. Text world theory and possible world approaches are based on ideas in psychology, philosophy and logic, together with grammar. When the writer, the reader and the text come into "collision or collusion," as Howe would have it, meaning is negotiated and a text world is constructed, as if it contained actual people, places and events. Werth (1999) in particular was interested in how deixis activates this process, whereas Ryan (1991) sought to define the qualities of the fictional world in relation to the actual world by proposing a typology to account for the differences. In *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, Howe gives us a fictional world whereby we, like Atherton, have to find our bearings through linguistic wandering. Howe has erased the linguistic connectors, and hence the sequence of events; it is now up to the reader to make sense of what is presented.

Ryan (1991) differentiates between the actual domain (text actual world) and hypothetical worlds (text alternative possible worlds). When we read, we assume that the text actual world complies with aspects of actual places and events mentioned in it and which we understand because

of our background knowledge. Ryan refers to this as the “Principle of Minimal Departure” Schemata (Schank and Abelson 1977, Schank 1982, Cook 1994) help us to mentally construct a text world and thus to comprehend what we read. For example, in *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, a number of lexical items are used which readers will recognise: “grandmother,” “driftwood,” “sand,” “travel,” “bone,” “bullet,” “corn,” “hay,” “meadow,” “vineyard,” “grass,” “weeds,” “woods,” “marshes,” “meadows.” Comprehension is based not only on possession of the relevant schemata, but also on the ability to activate it. This process of activation is facilitated by “headers,” which are explicit linguistic items. Without these, the reader is blocked.

One of the factors linked to this blocking is what Fowler terms “underlexicalization” (*Linguistic* 152). This occurs when a character or narrator lacks the linguistic resources demanded by a particular text. Arguably, the stuttering delivery of the poem can be regarded as a type of underlexicalization. “Overlexicalization” involves further incongruities in that a character or narrator may employ vocabulary which leads to miscomprehension on the part of the reader. In the poem a number of lexemes are used which may be unfamiliar to a reader. For example, words like “Nipnet,” “Nipmunk,” “Panset” we assume to be local language words with which Atherton is knowledgeable, but other lexical items belonging to complex, abstract or theoretical domains are employed here as well, which seem anomalous if not incomprehensible in the context: “Kantian,” “empirical,” “destructivism,” “velc,” “Maoris.” How could Atherton have known about Kant or Maori culture? Kant lived a century later, and

Captain Cook arrived in New Zealand nearly a hundred years after the Turner Falls Fight. Up until this point, the reader is able to imagine that the language of the poem reflects Atherton's experience (even if some of it is incomprehensible to the reader), but now we have to construct another domain which contains aspects of a more contemporary reality, so that we perceive one through the other. The circumstances of the text actual world make it impossible to realise this alternative world, or in Ryan's terminology there is chronological incompatibility (anachronism). Moreover, this alternative world is not the intention of Atherton as a character, but of Hope as a projection of the author. Fictional worlds break what Ryan (1991) terms "accessibility relations" in terms of chronology: "We can contemplate facts of the past from the viewpoint of the present, but since the future holds no facts, only projections, it takes a relocation beyond the time to regard as facts events located in the future" (32); the other criterion which is broken here is linguistic compatibility ("TAW is accessible from AW if the language in which TAW is described can be understood in AW") (33).

Looking at *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* through these frameworks, then, the world projected is close to the actual world (AW); in Ryan's terms, that is the poem's text world. There is identity of properties and inventory: the text actual world (TAW) is populated by the same people, places and objects as in the actual world; however, real people are described in terms of imagined details. There is chronological compatibility, as the reader can contemplate the facts of the past from the reality of the present. There is physical compatibility, as both TAW and

AW share the same natural laws. There is taxonomic compatibility, as both worlds contain the same species, characterised by the same properties. However, there is relaxation of the inventory in the bottom three areas of the typology: logical compatibility (both worlds do not share the principles of non-contradiction); analytical compatibility which specifies that objects designated by the same words share the same essential properties, and linguistic compatibility, which specifies that the language in which TAW is described can be understood in the AW. The main effect of this relaxation for the reader is that it frustrates the attempt to make sense of the text; at the same time it throws light on the fragmented and chaotic nature of reality. The poem is what Ryan terms a text world with an “empty centre,” what Howe calls “the gaps and silences where you find yourself” (*Birth-mark* 158), or in Ryan’s discourse: “The text limits its assertions to worlds at the periphery, avoiding the representations of an actual world” (39). It is Howe’s intention that we attend to the other voices that haunt the margins of fluency.

### **[In]definiteness: “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings”**

Like deictic reference, definite articles also embody the semantic quality of anchoring a reader within the context of a text world. Additionally, definite articles facilitate unique identity on the basis of shared knowledge between the receiver and the sender: i.e., between the reader and the producer of a text. Indefiniteness, on the other hand, marked by the use of *a*, *an*, *some*, *any* or zero reference is used when there is nothing in the discourse or within our general knowledge that identifies the



referent. Indefinite reference, therefore, is used to introduce new information, or as generic reference.

The basic function of the definite article (*the*) or determiner (*this, that, these, those*) or by possessive form (*my, your* etc.) is thus to indicate that the noun can either be identified within the text or in a situation or from general knowledge. As a general rule, when information is known to a hearer, it is Given information, and a definite referent is used; when information is New, indefinite reference is used. Given information is a term in Discourse Linguistics which refers to information that is already known to the reader, as opposed to new information which is not known. However, in fictional writing (or poetry), definite reference is often employed in order to position a reader within the perspective of a particular character, speaker or viewpoint.

Analysing the second section, “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings,” only six of the sixteen poems employ definite reference:

Poem 3: “if you love your lives” (7)

Poem 4: “this winter”; “set the woods on fire” (7)

Poem 5: “clearing the land” (8)

Poem 6: “the site of Falls”; “the corn” (8)

Poem 12: “the figure a myth of a far-off Wanderer”; “the face”; “knowledge whose bounds”; “roaming the woods”; “Men whet their scythes” (12)

Poem 16: “our camp”; “the beaten track”; “the artist in America”; “my birthday”; “the old home trees” (16)

In poem 3, “your lives” is identifiable from the immediate context: the Socoquis is the French name for a tribe known locally as the Pocumtuck, and as war is mentioned in the next line, we surmise that this conditional clause refers to those who are hoping to survive the battle. In poem 4, “this” represents deviant usage, in that it does not comply with the norm that definite referents should be identifiable either from the context or from shared knowledge. Previous poems mention March or April, so it is unclear which winter “this” is. However, the use of unanchored definite reference of this kind is not atypical of literary discourse, and in particular, of poetry. As we have seen, literary communication, unlike face-to-face communication, does not rely on a specific given situational context. Thus, writers create a sense of shared context by various linguistic means—deictic reference and definite reference being two important ways writers create implications of context. Deictics and determiners then can be employed to construct a non-factual possible world. Furthermore, definite reference does not simply rely on or imply shared knowledge, it can produce shared knowledge. Semino explains: “This is because definite articles carry in themselves a presupposition of the unique existence of referents of the noun phrase they introduce” (*Language* 21). Thus, the examples of unanchored definite reference in poem 4 (“this winter,” “set the woods on fire”) lead the reader to assume their existence. In other words, the use of definite reference helps the reader to imagine a world in which the specific context evoked exists, and to identify with it. The literary effect most commonly identified with unanchored definite reference is the *in media res* effect, and the classic example of its use is the

dark wood (*selva oscura*) where Dante finds himself. In *The Inferno*, the wood signifies disorientation; it is a product of the imagination, but his use of the expression at the beginning of the poem places the reader there beside him.

Looking at the other examples above, the majority of referents are anchored and recoverable: “the land” in poem 5 refers to “the woods” which are now being cleared for “the corn”; “the site of Falls” in poem 6 refers to Turner Falls (poem 2); “the figure of a far off Wanderer” in poem 12 to Hope Atherton (preface and poem 1); and so on. But there are two further unanchored referents, both occurring in the relatively normative last poem: “the artist in America” and “the old home trees.” Definite reference is reader-oriented; that is to say, it reflects the author’s view of the reader’s present position and frame of knowledge. However, in certain situations, the use of definite reference can be said to be writer-oriented, in which case it gives the impression that the writer/speaker/character is speaking to him or herself. In such a case, the reader/hearer is in a privileged position as confidant, overhearing an intimacy. Thus, in this line Howe reveals much. She inserts herself into the text as “h(H)ope”, “the artist in America.” Having avoided the personal so pervasively, we find her here, in Perloff’s words “trying to come to terms with her New England past, her sense of self, vis-à-vis the colonial settlers’ actions, her re-creation of the Hope Atherton story” (*License* 310).

The indefinite article, on the other hand, functions to introduce items which are not uniquely identifiable in relation to context by addresser and addressee (Quirk 272). Therefore, indefinite reference is used to assert

rather than to presuppose. In “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings,” indefinite reference is used in only two poems:

Poem 12:

Impulsion of a myth of beginning

The figure of a far-off Wanderer

Poem 16:

We are a small remnant

I would argue that definite reference in the poem is employed to establish the background of the scene, whereas indefinite reference, although used sparingly, has a much more crucial function—that of introducing the foreground or topic of the poem: the myth of a nation’s beginnings, in which “we are a small remnant” of [insignificant] wanderers. The opposition between definite and indefiniteness, then, can be attributed to the speaker’s perception of these different elements and their status in the world.

Readers have various reactions to the final poem in “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings.” Perloff (1990) sees it as “excessively sentimental and unwarranted”; Linda Reinfeld as “a marvellous tour de force” (144). Another way to see this final poem is as a dramatic device. Leech identifies certain figures of speech as using language features that are somehow inappropriate to the context. One of these is apostrophe. Apostrophe can be defined as an orator’s interruption in order to address the audience or a third party. It normally consists of heightened language and enables an addresser to express his or her gratitude to someone or something. Poem 16 comprises this type of contextual incongruity. It may

be taken as theatrical license in that the reader may understand that it is a special device enabling a character/speaker to convey feelings directly. It is a dramatic device, just like soliloquy in dramatic performance. Because it is a device used in the poetry of the past, it tends to be the subject of parody in contemporary poetry, but Howe employs it here to give voice to the subject, and as a terminus to the first person section “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings” so that the second section, “Taking the Forest” can begin. Moreover, to locate its referent, we need to look more widely at Howe’s earlier work—e.g., *Pythagorean Silence*, where she writes: “world is my way in sylvan/imagery” (*Europe* 89). It is the wilderness, the forests of America, where poetic consciousness is formed. What has been true for Thoreau, Whitman, Stevens, is no less true for Howe. As Stevens said in his essay “Connecticut Composed”: “It is a question of coming home to the American self in the sort of place in which it was formed” (Stevens 896).<sup>19</sup>

### **“Taking the Forest”: A Radical Poetic Praxis**

The resistance to syntactical and logical closure in Howe’s poem in particular exemplifies a radical poetic praxis, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the section “Taking the Forest.” This third section of *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* is comprised of 25 poems, which, while individually lacking in syntactical regulation, taken together, are remarkably fluent. In a sense it could be said that in this section Howe

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<sup>19</sup> “Stevens says somewhere that you turn with a sort of ferocity to as place you love, to which you are essentially native,” Howe notes in *The Birth-mark* (156).

abandons history, because she abandons discourse. Here is the opening

poem from “Taking the Forest”:

- 1     **C**orruptible **f**irst **f**igure
- 2     **B**right armies **w**olves **w**arriors **s**teers
  
- 3     scorned **w**arning **c**aptive **c**ompulsion
  
- 4     **L**ove **l**eads to **e**dge
- 5     **P**rogress of **s**elf into illusion
  
- 6     **S**ame and not the same
- 7     **C**herubim **i**ntone their **o**wn **l**itany
  
- 8     **U**niversal separation
- 9     –**D**istant **c**oherent **r**ational system
  
- 10    **V**ault **l**ines **d**ivergence
- 11    **A**tom **k**eystone
  
- 12    **P**armenides **p**rohibition
- 13    **E**nd of **p**assageway **p**erceive surrounding
  
- 14    **C**onsciousness grasps its **s**ubject
- 15    **S**tumbling **p**henomenology
  
- 16    **i**nfinite **m**iscalculation of **h**istory
  
- 17    **G**reat men **t**hicker **t**han **t**heir stories
- 18    **s**itting and **s**tanding
  
- 19    to mark **s**uns **r**ising and **s**etting
- 20    **R**idges of **s**and **r**ising **o**n **o**ne **a**nother
  
- 21    **M**athematics of **c**ontinua
  
  
- 22    **f**athomless **i**nfinitesimal **f**raction
- 23    **s**abbatical **s**afety beyond **s**even
  
- 24    **E**mpy arms **c**loud **c**ounterfeit
  
- 25    **a**ntecedent **t**error **s**tretched to a **w**hisper (*Singularities* 17)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Features of sound parallelism are highlighted in bold.

On the page the poem looks normative, but when we examine it more closely, we see that it is not. Who is speaking? The text is marked by absent referents, ambiguous syntactical relationships, virtual non-existence of articles, absence of a subject/speaker, but, as my emboldening demonstrates, sound matters. Alliteration, assonance and consonance are used as devices to form the poem's soundscape. Howe creates what Back terms a "sphere of sound" (48); sound repetition is played off against syntactic "stuttering," in the use of sound parallelism. Note the frequent clusters with strong sound patterning: alliteration ("first figure; wolves warriors; thicker than their"), assonance ("on one another"), slant rhyme ("Distant coherent") and consonance ("warriors steers"). Syntactically, we can describe the lines as follows:

- 1 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifiers
- 2 four nouns in a series with one adjective pre-modifier
- 3 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifier x 2
- 4 complete clause (subject + predicate + prepositional phrase)
- 5 noun phrase (noun + prepositional phrase + prepositional phrase)
- 6 adjective + adjective phrase (negated)
- 7 complete clause (subject + predicate + object)
- 8 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifier
- 9 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifiers
- 10 ambiguous: noun phrase or complete clause (subject+predicate+object)
- 11 noun phrase
- 12 noun phrase
- 13 noun phrase (noun + prepositional phrase) + verb (?) + adjective
- 14 complete clause (subject + predicate + object)
- 15 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifier
- 16 noun phrase (adjective + noun + prepositional phrase)
- 17 noun phrase with adjective phrase as post-modifier (comparator)
- 18 compound adjectives (present participles)
- 19 infinitive phrase with adjective post-modifiers
- 20 noun phrase (noun + prepositional phrase + adjective + prepositional phrase)
- 21 noun phrase (noun + prepositional phrase)
- 22 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifiers

- 23 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifier + prepositional phrase
- 24 noun phrase + noun phrase
- 25 noun phrase with adjective pre-modifier + adjective phrase (past participle and prepositional) as post-modifiers

These are not sentences broken into lines; instead, we have lines comprised almost exclusively of phrases or other fragmentary elements, shorn of syntax. The phrase is Howe's unit. Missing in all but three of the lines (or possibly four—line 10 is ambiguous) is the clause with subject+predicate, so where clauses do appear, they are foregrounded: "Love leads to edge" (l.4); "Cherubim intone their own litany" (l.7); "Consciousness grasps its subject" (l. 14). Though these are complete grammatical units, in semantic terms they create readerly dissonance: what is the "edge" love leads to? What is the "subject" that "consciousness grasps"? However, the phonetic patterning weaves a kind of coherence into the text, and the reader may begin to comprehend through, what Montgomery calls, "the gradual accumulation of small utterances" some semblance of meaning ("Renaissance" 628). The question is how might the reader's exploration reveal the hidden?

### **Schema Theory: The Woods [words] "occupied me"<sup>21</sup>**

Schema theory is based on the assumption that we make sense of new experiences based on pre-existing ones. Schema refers to background knowledge that each person possesses in regard to people, places, situations and events. These schemata differ from person to person and from one culture to another; however, activating them allows us to make

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<sup>21</sup> "The Adirondacks occupied me." (*Singularities* 40).



inferences about the world. According to this view, meaning is not preserved in the aspic of the text, but is constructed through a reader's interaction with the text and the activation of particular schemata, in this case, the text. We are able to project a text world as a result of external input and construct it on the basis of prior knowledge activated through reading. We develop this ability through repeated exposure to experiences until the process becomes part of our "semantic memory" (Eysenck and Keane 250). Semantic memory needs to be distinguished from "episodic memory," which is grounded in particular situations and events. As Semino observes, the notion of schema goes back to Kant's (1787) *Critique of Pure Reason* (Language 125), however, the way linguists use the term today is closer to the thinking of psychologists such as Schank and Abelson (1977), Eysenck and Keane (1990), and Cook (1994). In what follows I shall adopt Schank and Abelson's model.

Schema theory was developed by AI research and psychology, and Schank and Abelson's (1977) research was especially influential in terms of cognitive linguistics. They developed the notion of "script" to account for the way memory retains knowledge of familiar events. Scripts are structures that contain a sequence of events in a particular context. They define particular situations with which we are familiar. Scripts are crucial in providing connectivity. They are based on specific detailed knowledge about situations we have experienced and stored. When a text makes reference to a familiar script, all the reader need do is fill in the missing parts. However, problems may arise when a reader lacks the world knowledge to make these connections, or when the connectors (e.g.

syntax) are missing. The smooth operation of scripts can be blocked by interferences or distractions, which may prevent normal continuation of a script, in which case the reader may try to supply the missing connective information, tolerate the error and carry on, or abandon the activity.

In Schank and Abelson's (1977) framework, a script is a specific but universally accessible framework of knowledge, whereby readers will share knowledge related to a particular schema. A reader may therefore activate a PREDATOR/CAPTIVE schema in order to make sense of the text. As I mentioned earlier, the poetic persona is constructed as captive (Hope Atherton, Mary Rowlandson, Ann Hutchinson, Howe/Hope). The use of present tense throughout "Taking the Forest" indicates both the time of experiencing events and simultaneously highlights the persona's perception of them. Definite reference, used sparingly, reflects the personal nature of the discourse situation and primarily introduces referents which are Given for the poetic persona but New for the reader (e.g. "the legionnaires' banner," "the extended hand," "the ramparts," "the Iron Woods"). Definite reference tends to relate to elements of the schema concerned with location (the sky, the house, the woods, the hill) and thus forms the background. Taken together, the definite noun phrases indicate schema which are active for the poetic persona, but also that readers need to activate in order to interpret the text.

Moreover, various types of foregrounding occur in the poem to form what Leech (1969) calls "congruence" of foregrounding. The first of these occurs in the alliterative first line of the opening poem: "Corruptible **first figure**." This can be interpreted in retrospect as an indirect reference to

Embla, Eve and the mothers—including the captive women, who become the focus of this section. Their history, their story is the “same and not the same” (17) as “Face answers to face” (30) and “All things double on one another” (28). A significant chain is formed with reference to thinking: “Distant coherent rational system,” “Parmenides prohibition,” “consciousness grasps its subject,” “stumbling phenomenology” and mathematics: “infinite miscalculation,” “mathematics of continua,” “fathomless infinitesimal fraction” which, taken together, suggest that phenomenological understanding has been hidden by the dominance of scientific and mathematical practices. These chains of associations are foregrounded and connect the personae of the poem to themes and concerns. The settings and events of the poem to some extent can be accommodated within the model. The description of the physical scene evokes the passage of time: “suns rising and setting” (17); the location: “Mountains pitched over to westward” (19) where “cries hurled through the Woods” (23). Social relationship is evoked with reference to “Great men,” “warriors,” “spectators,” “messengers,” “sharpshooters,” “captive,” “assassin,” “kinsmen.” Political entities are also evoked by “Commonwealth” and dominions where “Latin ends and French begins.” The goal, if one can be identified at all, might be to “prosper our journey.” The main function of schemata is for readers to form predictions about what is likely to occur, so while these details may facilitate the activation of a JOURNEY schema with predator/captive roles, the absence of explicit syntactic connectors frustrates the reader’s ability to infer what is not explicitly mentioned. So while Schank and Abelson’s model of script can

be used to show how the instantiation of such knowledge can help us to process the text, the text itself does not submit easily to such measures. The cognitive effort required to fully activate the schemata may therefore not be justified in terms of their contribution to a reader's eventual understanding and interpretation of the text.

In 1982, Schank further developed his theory to incorporate "A theory of reminding and learning in computers and people." He posited that we make sense of new experience by recalling earlier experiences. This happens because memory contains structures with stored knowledge pertaining to specific situations. He terms these Memory Organisation Packets (MOPs). MOPs contain information about how different scenes can be connected as part of a larger structure. There are three types: physical scene (setting); social scene (relationship); personal scene (goals). What differentiates this newer model from the previous one is that scenes can be applied more flexibly to a wider range of experiences. As we have seen, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* depends on the activation of schemata having to do with history, voicing and conceptualizing. The poem evokes an incongruous configuration of schemata and therefore projects a complex and unstable view of reality. The people and events in the poem can be related to each other on the basis of shared knowledge. Howe establishes the persona of Hope Atherton, but she also connects Hope's story to a female entity or entities, "the artist in America" in the first section, which we understand to represent Howe herself. As readers, we try to connect these scenes to a larger structure. Moreover, Hope as a captive evokes other captivity narratives, specifically Mary Rowlandson,

who is alluded to here. In “Taking the Forest” the word “face” appears often:

“Shuttle face lost” (18)

“by face to know helm” (19)

“Face of the voice of speech” (19)

“Puck’s face of earth” (21)

“Smoke faces separate” (22)

“Face to visible sense gathers moss” (26)

“Face to fringe of itself” (27)

“Face answers to face” (30)

“Face seen in a landscape once” (37)

These faces share a particular setting, a wilderness. They also share a social role as women and mothers: “Mothers from their windows look” (18); Sarah and Rachel (20); “Straw mother” (20); “Mother my name” (23); “Mother and maiden” (24); “girl with the forest shoulder,” “girl stuttering out of mask or trick” (31); “Eve or Embla” (32); “Little figure of a mother” (37); “she is and the way She was” (37). Further activation of our knowledge of the text world may help us to identify the “goals” or connections between these women who populate the poem. Sarah and Rachel are biblical figures, whose contribution was motherhood—giving birth to man. Rachel experienced a long period of barrenness before giving birth to her sons, before “God opened her womb” (Genesis 29:31). Embla, like Eve, is the first mother in Norse mythology; her name means elm and she is associated with woods/trees. Besides Mary Rowlandson, the other significant historical female presence is Ann Hutchinson. Ann

Hutchinson, Howe writes in *Birth-mark*, was “banished by the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, then murdered in the natural wilderness by history” (4). The final poem in “Hope Atherton’s Wanderings” discussed earlier invites the reader to perceive parallels between real people and events and other areas of experience, particularly “the artist in America.” In other words, we are asked to make multiple connections between separate schemata. In “Taking the Forest,” from the second poem to the penultimate one, mothers appear: “mothers from their windows look,” and in the penultimate poem, “Little figure of mother...She is and the way She was...Face seen in a landscape once.” As Reinfeld puts it: “...our writing is constituted by what it excludes” (151). Howe as poet, then, achieves what the historian cannot. By fracturing the language by which the myth is perpetuated, she fractures the history it articulates. How then do we face the wilderness?

### **Conclusion**

By suspending the connection between words, Howe seems to suggest we might do better, if we can, to reflect on what experience itself presents to us. By seeking to articulate pre-reflective experience, she constructs a dialectic of “perceptual meaning” versus “language meaning” (Merleau-Ponty 176). Howe shifts the reader’s understanding from the world of fact to that of essence. Meaning is not inherent in a text; it is not Howe’s motive. Rather, her project is the continual making and re-making of the text. It is a dynamic process that happens between the writing and the reader. By reducing language to its elemental parts, what has been

hidden (the forest—pre-reflective experience) becomes visible through the trees (the words--manifestation). In this way, Howe over-writes the notion of “Manifest Destiny.” In this chapter, stylistic theories have been employed as a method of analysis to illuminate this dynamic. It is useful to remind ourselves that the word *analyse* comes from Greek roots: *lyein*, to break or loosen, and *ana*, up. Thus, the intention in this chapter has not been to offer a definitive interpretation, but through close analysis to reveal what might be hidden in the fractures. The wonder of it.

## Chapter 3: Lyn Hejinian

### “Radical introspection”

Lyn Hejinian uses the phrase “radical introspection” to refer to the creative process, and in particular, translation. She describes it as “the otherness of seeming nonexistence—the coming into being of nonbeing, the disappearance into language of ourselves, the world of which we speak, the poem itself” (*Inquiry* 303). What interests Hejinian about the concept of nonexistence is its potential to renew perception, “to restore palpability to the world” (301). Hejinian resorts to tautology to describe what is involved: it is the “consciousness of consciousness” that revivifies, and it is language that is the “medium for experiencing experience [and thus] provides us with the consciousness of consciousness” (344). The term “radical” suggests a departure from tradition, and “introspection” a close examination which goes beneath the surface. This chapter takes as its mode of inquiry cognitive poetics in order to enact radical introspection. One of the basic tenets of cognitive poetics is that we understand language (and literature) on the basis of our experience in the world, and in particular, an embodied experience in that world. Cognitive approaches bear upon knowledge—both conscious and unconscious, and the various ways in which knowledge is represented, organized, and used: an eclectic approach, that is not only textually engaged, but is interested in what is happening below the level of conscious awareness, both in terms of reading and writing. Cognitive poetics offers the reader precisely the kind of radical introspection that Hejinian argues for in relation to her writing.



Hejinian's association with Language poetics is well documented. However, unlike the radically experimental, largely white, Anglo-Saxon male writers at its core, Hejinian does not reject the narrative and lyric impulse in her writing. Language writing generally opposes the personal, lyric voice as well as the conventional content of the quotidian life. Beginning with the title, *My Life*, Hejinian makes it clear that she is thematizing autobiography, centralizing subjectivity. However, while the first person possessive pronoun of the title foregrounds the biographical self, the work itself moves out of the realm of the conventionally subjective and into the realm of language, of writing. Hejinian may use conventional language, but she does not use standard patterns of syntax. Through juxtaposition and fragmentation, Hejinian disrupts the narrative voice, and thus the transparency of direct communication. By simultaneously withholding and revealing, Hejinian not only critiques the self, but offers a fresh awareness of the creative possibilities inherent in writing the self.

As we have seen, a salient, identifying feature of Language writing is non-referentiality. Although Lyn Hejinian's writing is on the non-referential scale, no discourse can be truly non-referential in the sense that it is always bound to thought, and to history; discourse is, as Bakhtin (1935) contends, both dialogic and positioned within history, within place.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it is significant that at the same time Language writers were eschewing notions of referentiality, subjectivity, and transparency in

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<sup>22</sup> "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape of a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue (267)...The language of the poet is his language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it" (Bakhtin 285).

their poetry, in their critical writing, they re-occupied this ground in order to express their individual views, as well as to offer guidance in the reading and interpretation of their work. Hejinian is no exception to this. Like other Language writers, Hejinian has written extensively on theory and on writing, her own and that of others. She throws open the questions: who is the self, who speaks for the self, and how is the self formed in language? In writing the self, Hejinian performs theories of self as praxis.<sup>23</sup> The fact that she brings this reflexivity into her writing, work which is normally done by the critic, alters the relation between the reader and Hejinian's work. The cognitive approaches that I argue for here offer an insight into these questions.

*My Life* has attracted considerable critical attention; however, much of this critical commentary has not gained the traction on the material that Hejinian's writing demands. For example, a number of critics have examined *My Life* in relation to the generic conventions of autobiography; others have interrogated her writing in relation to philosophy, including the philosophy of person; still others look at her work in relation to influence, but none of these approaches examine the writing through the lens of literary linguistics.<sup>24</sup> Different texts require different approaches; as a proponent of close reading, I situate myself in relation to literary linguistics (stylistics) and thus wish to explore what

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<sup>23</sup> See in particular her essays "The Person and Description" and "The Question for Knowledge" both reprinted in *The Language of Inquiry*.

<sup>24</sup> Some useful critical writing includes: Jacob Edmond's documentation of Hejinian's travels to Russia between 1983-91 in terms of the influence on her work; Craig Dworkin's comparison of Hejinian's technique in *My Life* to quilting in order to examine its architectural qualities; Juliana Spahr's, Hilary Clark's and Ann Vickery's examination of *My Life* as autobiography; Majorie Perloff's extensive contributions which offer both useful critiques of excerpts as well as positioning the writing within modernism, postmodernism and avant-garde communities.

that method reveals about Hejinian's acts of construction. Style is not simply a matter of ornamentation, but "is motivated by personal and socio-cultural factors at every level and is correspondingly evaluated along these ideological dimensions by readers" (Carter and Stockwell 295). Thus, stylistics is a form of hermeneutics. There is the actual material text, plus the text as a "literary work" which only comes into existence when read (296). Over the last three decades since the original and re-publications of *My Life*, socio-cultural and psychological factors have come into a consideration of style. Thus, the inter-disciplinarity of the approach taken here, rooted in philosophy, sociology, linguistics, cultural theory, psychology, literary theory and criticism, offers an insight into what Keith Oatley calls the "writingandreading" process (cited in Gavins and Steen 161). It draws on linguistic description and cognitive poetics in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of this process, both for the writer, and the reader.

That Hejinian is familiar with these approaches is obvious both in her creative and theoretical work. Hejinian constructs the self through various theoretical and cultural engagements, as we shall see below. Her interest in the sentence in particular is reflected in Language poetics generally. Ron Silliman, thinking back through Stein, as well as through linguistics, philosophy, literary theory and poetics, was developing his work on "The New Sentence" in the early eighties, at a time when Hejinian admitted to "finding the sentence extremely limiting and even claustrophobic" (*Inquiry* 194). Of the qualities Silliman attributes to "the new sentence," most notable in Hejinian's writing are the "charged use

of pronouns”; “terms extending from the same bank of images...to create or convey an overall impression of unity”; and the use of “the blank space as the locus of literary meaning” (Silliman 63-93). Likewise, in the 33<sup>rd</sup> section of *My Life*, she refers implicitly to work originating in the late 1970s by philosophers on metaphor, George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s contemporary theory of metaphor: “In the metaphor, life is a landscape, and living it is a journey, for which one is provided a limited amount of time, with which it is wise to be thrifty” (*My Life* 118). Thus, I suspect that the approach taken here will not show the text something it does not already know, but rather, if successful, will draw out what it knows and has re-concealed. Like literary criticism, cognitive poetics focuses on the author/text/reader paradigm; however, it shifts the focus to literary reading and its psychological and linguistic dimension in order to account for the “literariness” of a text, or its texture. Closely related to texture is the notion of resonance, or the impact a text has on its reader, in “its ability to linger in the mind after reading is completed” (Stockwell, *Texture* 14).

In a poem called “The Person” as well as in her essay, “The Person and Description,” Hejinian asserts that the person is what Edmond calls “a key middle term between everyday life and the estranging effects of art” (“Lynn Hejinian,” section 2, para. 11). Estrangement is the thread that connects the text to everyday experience, via the figure of the person. Whereas her later works explore the phenomenology of personhood, *My Life* is concerned with the way the self is situated in language. It is a work that is not so much “about a person” as “like a person” living everyday

life as “both the agent and the agency of the making of the quotidian, doing things which are hardly notable, hardly noted,” Hejinian says. (*Inquiry* 203, 207). Underpinning it is the question of identity, especially the debate of identity as essentialist or constructed. Writing about Stein, Hejinian elaborates on this dichotomy: “Identity is one’s selfsameness, the consistency of what is perceived of one now with what is remembered of one from the past and expected of one in the future” (*Inquiry* 368). In her autobiography Hejinian declares herself on the side of constructedness: “My life is as permeable constructedness” (133).

However, while *My Life* is concerned with identity, Hejinian eschews the notion that her experience is in any way unique. “Repeatedly, I come upon the ahistoric thought, particularly as it characterizes an idea of private life—an individual’s thinking or wishing to think, of him- or herself not only as unique but as uniquely experiencing” (*Inquiry* 10). Instead, Hejinian creates in *My Life* what Gertrude Stein called “*Everybody’s Autobiography*” in that “the individual life is interwoven with language, perception and social constructs in such a way that one cannot delineate where ‘Lyn Hejinian’ leaves off and the word begins,” as Stephen Fredman writes (“Lyn Hejinian,” para. 4). In other words, identity is not fixed, or as Hejinian puts it: a person “posits its self-consciousness in consciousness of the environment and detail, in work and language” (*Inquiry* 208). She probes the problem of language as representation in order to interrogate the meaning of the self. In so doing, she calls into question the genre of autobiography as it has been traditionally understood. In *My Life*, this

results in viewpoint shifts which unsettle the boundary between subject and object. Furthermore, as a post-modern autobiographer, Hejinian is writing in a period characterized by self-consciousness and reflexivity. While personal memories form much of the archival material, she re-routes this material through other discourses, thus challenging the notion of life narrative as “a bounded story of the unique individual narrating subject” (Smith and Watson 67).

By writing and re-writing her life, Hejinian shows that both memory and history are crucial. From Proust, she had discovered the continuities arising from historical conditions, but her own experience also led her to include “radical discontinuities” (*Inquiry* 183). Hejinian’s interest in Proust and others is not allusive, but situated and relational. In a similar way to Proust and the petite madeleine, for Hejinian the lost father exemplifies the unattainable past, but the words used to reify him are more compelling than the actual person himself is.<sup>25</sup> The place the father might have occupied becomes an open field for Hejinian’s imagination. The move from the visual image to the written element thus enacts both the loss of the father, but also the liberation from the father. By placing herself simultaneously in the past and mediating her experience through the language of the present, Hejinian shows that it is *language* which is the means for constructing a history in which the self is both subject and object. By using words as objects, she shows that

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<sup>25</sup> Hejinian comments on this sense of loss in her essay “Comments for Manuel Brito.” She is asked whether the prose of *My Life* is influenced by Proust or Mandelstam, to which she replies: “In some way my emotional response resembles my feelings toward death, the deaths of certain people I’ve loved and, in fact, continue to love, and especially to the death of my father” (*Inquiry* 184).

memory is a dynamic process of production—a process that is creative rather than reflective of an unattainable past.

In their book, *Reading Autobiography* (2001), Smith and Watson propose a useful framework for addressing the issue of who is the producer of the text. Whose viewpoint is it? They discriminate four “I”s embedded within an autobiographical subject. There is the real “I” whom we can verify as a living entity. Although we gain access to her thoughts and memories in this narrative, the real “I” remains largely unknowable. Second is the narrating “I” who is available to readers, even though we must keep in mind that within the voice of the narrating “I” are the multiple voices of others. There is the narrated “I” or “the object ‘I’” who is “the version of the self that the narrating “I” chooses to construct through recollection for the reader. For example, when Hejinian begins her narrative with her memories of childhood, she is the object “I,” a memory of her younger self. The child is not the one remembering or speaking; it is the adult narrator with the benefit of greater knowledge, experience, and linguistic resources. Finally, the ideological “I” is situated in a particular time and place, and is therefore a product of her cultural, historical and social milieu. Like the narrating “I,” the ideological “I” is also multiple—and “conflictual” (Smith and Watson 62). Moreover, Hejinian’s *My Life* is a serial autobiography, published in more than one volume, and this raises issues related to the time of telling, as well as the time of composing and publishing. These issues are relevant to the material which is added later, especially in terms of the

contradictions and conflicts that arise from shifting notions of subjectivity, identity and their location in language.<sup>26</sup>

As well as who is producer, questions of reception enter in. To whom is this narrative addressed? Who is the ideal reader? In terms of her procedures Hejinian refers to the text as “open-ended.”<sup>27</sup> She develops her theory of the open text in an essay titled “The Rejection of Closure.”<sup>28</sup> Not only does open-endedness mean that the work is never finished, it also implies that it is “open to the world and particularly to the reader...[It] invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies” (*Inquiry* 43). It uses a number of what have been termed “disruptive” techniques; these include the form itself (the prose poem), organized in paragraphs as “a unity of quantity, not logic or argument” (Silliman, *New Sentence* 91), where each new section (unnumbered) begins with an inset phrase or sentence that is subsequently repeated, though often slightly altered. Repetition is used to re-contextualize, emend and extend. For example, as David Jarraway has observed, the phrase “as for we who ‘love to be astonished’” is repeated twenty-seven times in the work (“*My Life through the Eighties*,” para. 8). This phrase, each time it is used, accrues new meanings, but ultimately it

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<sup>26</sup> The first edition of the book was written when Hejinian was 37 and contains 37 sections, each with 37 sentences for each year of her life. This shaping of the work with a given number of sentences is meant to convey the impression of arbitrariness, as well as continuation. The second edition was written eight years later and adds eight new sections, as well as eight sentences, to each of the earlier ones, plus makes some other minor revisions in phrasing or layout.

<sup>27</sup> Hejinian told Susan Howe that she would write a third edition of *My Life* when she was 60; *My Life in the Nineties* was published in 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Although this is an early essay (1983), it is important in setting out the theory of the text in relation to *My Life*, first published by Burning Deck in 1980, and later revised and republished by Sun & Moon (1987).



is a decompression of the narrating “I” across multiple temporal spaces. In the absence of transitions, “the reader...must overleap the end stop, the period, and cover the distance to the next sentence”; in a similar way to Waldrop, Hejinian is exploring what happens between sentences as much as what is contained within them, for what remains there is “crucial and informative” (*Inquiry* 46). In semiotics, the analyst is interested in the systemic relationships between signifier and signified, and especially the meanings that arise from the differences in syntagmatic (position) and paradigmatic (substitution) relations. So just as a sentence is a chain or syntagm comprised of words, so too is a paragraph. Syntagmatic relations foreground part/whole relationship, and while they are typically seen as sequential, and hence temporal, they can also be spatial. Hejinian has written of this in relation to Stein’s work. In particular, she notes the “change and exchange of names” (*Inquiry* 118) as one of Stein’s favourite devices, one which Hejinian herself employs for the highly suggestive quality it evokes.

As this discussion demonstrates, Hejinian is writing in dialogue with other discourses. The ideal reader, then, would be steeped in poetics and linguistics, particularly the post-modernist and post-structuralist theories subject to intense discussion and debate in the decades following the 1960s. The discussion of the theories mentioned below is not intended to be comprehensive but illustrative of the type of ideal reader imagined by the implied author.<sup>29</sup> Certainly central to an understanding of Hejinian

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<sup>29</sup> “Implied author” is a term from Wayne C. Booth which implies “the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work” (Rimmon-Kenan 87).

is the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup>-century linguist, Saussure, and his concept of the sign. According to Saussure, language is essentially a system of signs where meaning is produced through the unity of two elements, the signifier “parole” (that is the articulation of the sign in speech or writing), and the “signified,” or “langue” (the rules of the system, or grammar). Of particular interest to Hejinian is Saussure’s approach to the study of language systems through syntagmatic or associative relationships as opposed to the diachronic or the way language developed through time. Hejinian’s mode is resolutely syntagmatic. Moreover, she engages with phenomenology, especially in her writings on Stein, in which her thinking can be traced back through Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Quoting the preface to Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, writing, Hejinian claims, is an “exploration of ‘realness’” (*Inquiry* 97). Her interest in perceptual experience as an aspect of relationality is not only influenced by Heidegger, but also Hannah Arendt and the poet George Oppen (Nicholls, “Numerousness” 77). Her reading of Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, which she quotes in her essay, “Reason,” is especially important. In that essay, Hejinian identifies the Greek concept of “polis” as “the space of appearance,” an idea she derives from Arendt. Polis is not an actual state in a given location, but “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together” (cited in *Inquiry* 366). It is a sphere of freedom, in contrast to the domestic sphere which required “mastering the necessities of life.” This distinction is important to Hejinian, as it was to Stein. In *My Life*, Hejinian explores how “the ‘personal’ is already a plural condition” (*Inquiry* 207).

The notion of the self as complex and multi-faceted has been studied with the help of cognitive science recently, especially mind style and blending theory. Theories of mind style and blending are particularly useful to examine the ways that language reflects ideological point of view as well as world view. Mind style, according to Semino and Swindlehurst, refers to “the way the [fictional] world is perceived and conceptualized by the mind whose point of view is adopted....Ideological point of view captures the evaluative and socially shared aspects of world views, while mind style captures their cognitive and more idiosyncratic aspects” (“Metaphor,” section 2, para. 5-6). It is important to add a note about ideology, a multivalent word, with political as well as socioeconomic connotations. In the context of the present chapter, the definition of ideology employed is closest to that of Althusser, to whom Hejinian refers in her essay, “Strangeness.” Althusser recognized that institutions (not only formal, coercive ones like the government or the police), but those such as the family have the power to subject individuals through various practices and discourses. It is commonly held that a writer’s style is indicative of how she experiences the world, but the concept of mind style is used to examine, in a systematic way, different domains of style that together represent mind style. It is my contention that Hejinian’s stylistic procedures reveal the cultural conception of the self through which the different viewpoints (the narrating “I,” the object “I,” and the ideological “I”) are compressed. This allows for the different

viewpoints to merge into a blended space where a new understanding of agency and its manifestation in postmodern autobiography is yielded.<sup>30</sup>

### **Speaking from Experience: Mind Style in *My Life***

Mind style originated in 1977 with Roger Fowler (1977, 1986) as a way of capturing “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self” (*Linguistics* 73). Fowler’s classic definition is as follows:

Cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world-view, what I shall call a ‘mind style’ (*Linguistics* 73).

In the 25 years since, the theory has been elaborated on, and different definitions have been offered for key terms: *mind style*, *world view*, *ideological point of view*. This makes it somewhat confusing, so in this chapter I adopt the terminology as used by Semino (Semino and Culpeper 2002). *World view* is the umbrella term for referring to the “text actual world” (Ryan 1991) as conveyed by the language of the text. *Ideological point of view* and *mind style* refer to aspects within the text or its world view. *Ideological point of view* aims “to capture those aspects of world views that are social, cultural, religious or political in origin, and which an individual is likely to share with others belonging to similar cultural, religious or political groups.” *Mind style* aims “to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and

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<sup>30</sup> Here the term “manifestation” refers to thematic role. In sentence semantics, different roles can be identified. They include agent (an actor who initiates an action); patient (an affected entity); theme (an entity whose location changes as a result of an action); experiencer (an actor who is aware of an action or state but does not initiate it; instrument (the means by which the action occurs). (Saeed 149-50)

which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics” (Semino and Culpeper 97). To put it simply, ideological point of view refers to shared world-views, whereas mind style refers to those that are grounded in individual experience and cognition. While mind styles can vary on a scale from normal to deviant, the more deviant the linguistic choices, the more cogent the concept of mind style.<sup>31</sup> Initially, mind style was applied to elaborate the discourse structure of the novel in order to study authors, narrators and characters and their conception of a fictional world. For example, classic studies have focused on the character of Benjy in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Lok in Golding’s *The Inheritors*, or Clegg in Fowles’ *The Collector*, because of those characters’ “preference for non-standard cognitive functioning” (Margolin 287). However, not only are deviant choices of interest, *any* significant choice proves salient in terms of understanding a character’s, narrator’s or an author’s mind style.

Mind style, then, is one of the newer approaches within cognitive linguistic theories which helps to identify how language reflects world view. It is particularly salient where the narrative is told by a single focalizer whose viewpoint is the only viewpoint: i.e. the narrative is “coloured” by and “bound to” a narrating subject. It is important to remember that mind style (and ideological point of view) is not the same as fictional point of view, where point of view refers to the angle or perspective from which a story is told. While most studies have

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<sup>31</sup> Linguistic deviation is one of the basic concepts in stylistics. It is a linguistic phenomenon that has an effect on readers because that element will be foregrounded.

demonstrated its usefulness in terms of character insights in prose fiction (Fludernik, 1996; Halliday, 1971; Semino, 2007; Palmer, 2004; Margolin, 2003; Leech and Short, 1981), it is possible to apply mind style to authors and to poetry, thus gaining a deeper insight into the way a poet presents her apprehension of the world. As Lisa Zunshine states, “Style brings in mental states” (349). To illustrate how this happens, let’s examine the opening section of *My Life*:

A moment yellow, just as four years later, when my father returned home from the war, the moment of greeting him, as he stood at the bottom of the stairs, younger, thinner than when he had left, was purple—though moments are no longer so colored. Somewhere in the background, rooms share a pattern of small roses. Pretty is as pretty does (7).<sup>32</sup>

The first sentence contains at least four embedded mental states:

- 1) A moment is yellow.
- 2) Four years later, the moment was purple.
- 3) Father, when he returned home from the war, looked younger, thinner than when he had left.
- 4) Moments are no longer so colored.

A significant stylistic feature of this opening is the lack of agency. The narrator is not an actor who initiates, but an experiencer whose state changes as a result of events that affect her. Observable here is the sense of disorientation and longing, which permeates the work as a whole and is a characteristic of estrangement. The extract employs a number of stylistic features which illumine the mental states outlined above.

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<sup>32</sup> All page references to *My Life* in this chapter refer to the 1987 edition.

Hejinian uses the figure of synaesthesia, which transfers meaning from one sensory domain to another. Certain images like these are potent in *My Life*, and they are recycled, sometimes with slight variation, thus functioning as motifs.

The syntax too calls attention to itself. The first sentence is a complex sentence comprised of four clauses. The main [independent] clause is interrupted to embed new information; marked focus adds emotive overlay when “a moment” turns into “the moment,” so that the clause without these parenthetical insertions would read: “A moment yellow, just as four years later the moment was purple.” Theme and rheme are the two elements which comprise the thematic structure of a clause; the theme is the first element introduced, and is therefore important because it is that which appears in the initial position (for both addresser and addressee), so theme signals the basis of the message, and what follows (rheme) says something that relates to it. Here, the theme, “a moment,” is detached from the second part of the message, “was purple.” It is a dislocated element where the reader needs to make the connection by inference. Such a structure is more common in spoken than in written discourse and suggests that the speaker spontaneously introduces what she wishes to speak of without quite having worked out the structure of how she will present it. It demonstrates that “the process of writing...is a primary thinking process. Thinking explores, rather than records, prior knowledge or an expression of it” as Hejinian explains in her essay “Strangeness” (*Inquiry* 143).

Moreover, the main clause is “enhanced” by providing three subordinate clauses of time, place and concession. The theme is continuous and maintained via lexical cohesion (the repetition of the word “moment”). The two embedded clauses provide new information, which is also continuous with the use of lexico-semantic cohesion in terms of “father” and “he.” What is particularly noticeable, though, is that whilst the topic is clearly dealing with senser/phenomenon in terms of transitivity relations, the senser herself has been omitted. In this way, Hejinian minimizes her role as agent in order to foreground herself as object (or medium target in transitivity) and thereby emphasize the experiential function of language. Due to the selections Hejinian makes, the first two sentences evince her world-view or mind style. What characterizes Hejinian’s mind style is the foregrounding of perception over knowledge, a concern with the awakening consciousness. So, by a close examination of linguistic forms, we can arrive at an understanding of the cognitive processes at work in the production of the text, the construction of the self in language.

### ***My Life as a Complex Blend: Life Imitating Art***

Blending theory (also called conceptual integration theory), like mind style, is a theory of cognition (Fauconnier 1997, Fauconnier and Turner 1996). Blending theory provides a cogent account of the cognitive processes by which poetry is created and interpreted. It explains how we construct meaning in terms of mental spaces:

These spaces include two ‘input’ spaces (which, in a metaphorical case, are associated with the source and target of CMT [Conceptual



Metaphor Theory]), plus a ‘generic’ space, representing conceptual structure that is shared by both inputs, and the ‘blend’ space, where the material from the inputs combines and interacts (Grady et al. 103).

Considering *My Life* as a whole, the blending model helps to account for how the individual maintains a sense of self, despite the various changes that happen as a result of growing up, living with others, leaving home, finding a partner, having her own children, growing old. “Compressing various images of ourselves along the dimensions of Time, Change, Cause-Effect or representation allows us to recognize the same person in a photograph of a five-year-old, in a valentine card written by a teenager to his sweetheart, and in a resume attached to a job application” (102). To illustrate how blending operates, we will analyse the opening to *My Life*. The long, complex sentence which opens the work uses the past tense, so there is a generic space of the past. Input space 1 situates the author and her father in a moment of time coloured yellow, while input space 2 situates them both in a moment four years later, coloured purple. Hejinian is giving her (then present) view on the child she was in these two past “moments.” The active, narrative space is Hejinian’s present. She is viewing a scene from an early period as if it were happening concurrently; when she switches to past tense, she establishes the two temporal spaces. This signals a blending of the temporal space, this “present” space a blended space combining moments coloured yellow before her father went to war, and moments coloured purple after he returns; it is the retrospective perception of memory. This blend is based on the cognitive metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, presented alongside the counterfactual “moments are no longer so colored.” In this way,

Hejinian establishes a distanced view in which she describes her experience of seeing time in colour, and it is presented as real and resonant; it is an aspect of her world view.

Rooms that share a pattern of small roses are also a part of the blended space, as indicated by the modality of the verb “share” which requires a perceiving subject and implies cross-temporal mapping. As this example illustrates, Hejinian transforms the cognition of quotidian experience by prolonging it, making the familiar unfamiliar. In this, Hejinian echoes Shklovsky’s “Art as Device”: “The function of art is to restore palpability to the world which habit and familiarity otherwise obscure; its task is to restore the liveliness to life. Thus it must make the familiar remarkable, noticeable again; it must render the familiar unfamiliar” (*Inquiry* 301). This analytical framework throws light on this radical poetic, and also it reveals the mental model a reader constructs as the narrative unfolds. It also provides persuasive evidence for Boym’s claim that *My Life* is an example of “reverse mimesis” in that “life imitates art, not the other way around” (515).

According to Perloff, “Hejinian’s strategy is to create a language field that could be anybody’s autobiography, a kind of collective unconscious whose language we all recognize...” (*The Dance* 225). One of the strategies she uses to do this is the generic sentence. Children learn not only by observing the world around them, but by hearing what people say. In the opening section, the third sentence, “Pretty is as pretty does,” provides an example of a generic sentence. It thus has subtle social implications. In addition to its primary meaning, generic sentences also

imply that the information contained within them is essential. It is also commonly stereotypical. The statement itself is an Americanized revision of the British English proverb: “Handsome is as Handsome does,” which appeared in diverse works from Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath” Tale to Goldsmith’s Preface to *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It means that behaving well or having good manners is more important than appearance. As a speech act, it has rich implications in terms of the social aspects of language, and especially the language of approval/disapproval, and thus tells us a great deal about middle class American values. The formulaic nature of the statement hints at how deeply embedded it is; moreover it is significant that it is addressed specifically to females and acts as a way to perpetuate their subordinate role in society. Likewise, as Turner and Fauconnier explain, it demonstrates:

...that expressions do not mean, but are prompts, usually minimal, to construct meanings by working with mental processes we already know.... Understanding an expression is never understanding ‘just what the words say’; the words themselves say nothing independent of the richly detailed knowledge and powerful cognitive processes we bring to bear (“Mechanism” 409).

Theories of mind style and blending are particularly useful for examining the ways that language reflects ideological point of view as well as world view in sentences such as these. This third sentence of *My Life*, which would be very familiar to American women growing up in the 1940s and 50s, exemplifies ideological point of view. It serves as a strategy to connect with the reader at the same time as holding the values and norms it professes up to criticism. In the early section of *My Life*, representing childhood, there is a minimizing of the role of agent with an emphasis on the role of patient. This in turn reveals the experiential function of

language, and the corresponding ways that a person is constructed in language. So we have now seen that cognitive linguistics (in particular mind style and blending theory) provide powerful analytical frameworks for a reader to gain traction on Hejinian's apprehension of the world.

### **The Person in Language**

One of the ways that "style brings in mental states" in *My Life* is through the foregrounding of images and metaphors that reflect Hejinian's conceptualising what it is to be a person. Particular words and images reveal consciousness in the same way that they do in modernist fiction (Woolf, for example, or Proust, as mentioned earlier). Certain images function as motifs that continue to be recycled, sometimes with slight variations, to reveal the changing self. Hilary Clark states: "These potent images are derived from things repeatedly seen over the course of the life...water, windows, mirrors, pebbles, trees, animals" ("Mnemonics," section 3, para. 7). Taking the example of trees, twenty-nine of the forty-five sections contain an image of trees. Trees are particularly a part of the child's world, and appear often in the early sections, as in: "The shadow of the redwood trees, she said, was oppressive" (*My Life* 7). While the referent is not retrievable, we later infer that this is the grandmother's perception: "the boughs of the redwood trees, and of which my grandmother always complained" (31). Trees and their shadows "close in around the house" (14), the shadows growing deeper, their roots "lifting the corner of the little cabin" (15); or

the redwoods hang “in a fog whose moisture they absorbed.” For the writer, too, they foreground consciousness and its linguistic character:

The leaves outside the window tricked the eye, demanding that one see them, focus on them, making it impossible to look past them, and though holes were opened through the foliage, they were as useless as portholes under water looking into a dark sea, which only reflects the room one seeks to look out from (17).

This sentence appears in section 4, corresponding to the fourth year of life. Not only are the images striking, they are metaphoric, and as such, contribute to the creation of mind style. Although this is the narrating “I” reflecting on the child’s consciousness, Hejinian accurately captures the claustrophobic atmosphere of “afternoons, when the shades were pulled” at nap time. What light there is “heavy as honey,” “a dark yellow,” “it made me thirsty” (18).<sup>33</sup> The clause, “the leaves tricked the eye,” is a humanistic metaphor, which makes the leaves an active agent, and the “eye”/I a target medium or acted upon entity. Both metaphor and metonymy are based on association, but metaphor is based on similarity, whereas metonymy is based on contiguity. Both are operating here: openings in foliage are like portholes in ships, a transference that indicates metaphor, but both are similar in that they are devices that trick the eye into thinking that a distant view is possible, but no real view of the outside is permitted for the child confined to a room at naptime, nor for the passenger confined to a ship’s cabin with only a porthole to look out at the sea. Moreover, the phrase “tricked the eye” is a conceptual

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<sup>33</sup> In the essay “A Thought Is the Bride of What Thinking,” originally published in 1976 as a larger manuscript entitled *The Inclusions*, Hejinian writes: “My earliest memory (though not necessarily my first) is of a yellow — I’ve always thought it to have been a single brilliantly yellow flower, a buttercup. From the earliest period of my life, the period before language, come other purely visual memories...I lay bored in my crib through an interminable ‘nap time’” (*Inquiry* 14).

metaphor which evokes the notion of the split self (the “eye” is separate from the body). An aspect of mind style, this separation of the self relates to Hejinian’s view that the “personal” is plural: “one is not oneself, one is several...coming into view here and then there, and subject to dispersal” (*Inquiry* 207). The blend gives rise to additional associations too. It was a ship that took her father away to the war (*My Life* 15). Thus, we can conceive of the child Hejinian in one input space, and the father in the other; in the blended space, the child and her father co-exist; both are in a bounded space, in the dark, amongst strangers or enemies. This further suggests that writing has the power to dismantle the distance between people through the estranging effects of language. The blending model, then, facilitates the way the reader is able to interpret the contiguity between narrated events.

Moreover, as Spahr has noted, the tree serves as a metaphor of the self in *My Life* (*Everybody’s* 70). This is seen in the reference to the highway “that they had tunnelled” through the redwood tree, making it “something it had not been before” and separating it “forever from any other tree” (*My Life* 37). Running the blend, if the tree is a metaphor for the self, and the tunnel stands for Hejinian’s autobiography, in the blended space the traveller/reader proceeds through the tunnel/book which leads to a new understanding of the self. This image works together with another image, that of the mirror “set in the crotch of the tree [which] was like a hole in the out of doors” (15) and can be related to Lacan’s concept of “the mirror stage.” According to Lacan, the infant acquires an image of the self as an object from the age of six months or

so, which the child does not recognise to be him/herself until several months later. The mirror in the crotch of the tree, then, serves as a metaphor for Hejinian's autobiography in which the object "I" is the version of the self Hejinian chooses to project. The hole, however, is empty—thus providing not a reflection of the self, but a way of passing through to a new understanding of the self. By reflecting not the self, but "the out of doors," the mirror/autobiography blurs the boundaries "between art and reality—in order to describe a person" (*Inquiry* 207). Moreover, these potent images operate, in Shklovsky's (1929) terms, as a "device of art" that not only returns "sensation to life" but also heightens the effect of the perception, as well as prolonging it (cited in Edmond "Lyn Hejinian," section 1, para. 4). As was stated in Chapter 1, it is a way of perceiving "the otherness of seeming nonexistence—the coming into being of nonbeing, the disappearance into language of ourselves, the world of which we speak, the poem itself" (*Inquiry* 303).

#### **"A name with colored ribbons"**

Another example of language choice that reveals aspects of mind style is naming. That a perfect identity exists between a name and its referent is continually called into question by Hejinian. Like Stein, Hejinian aims to show that "a dependency on names (nouns) tends to obscure experience" (*Inquiry* 93). Here Hejinian's view is closely aligned with the principles of cognitive poetics. Despite the various strands within cognitive poetics, there is a shared belief in experiential realism: "This is the view that there is a world outside the body that exists

objectively (realism), but our only access to it is through our perceptual and cognitive experience of it” (Stockwell, *Texture 2*).

Tracing the way naming is treated in the whole of *My Life* shows this preoccupation. Noticeable is the child’s fascination, as well as the adult poet’s, with sound as a mnemonic device; the associations of sound work to create semantic echoes throughout the text, as Hilary Clark has written. For example, the rose-patterned wallpaper is picked up again and again in the phrase, “A pause, a rose, something on paper.” The phrase reverberates in numerous ways: a pause arose; applause, a rose, a name as something that exists on paper, as well as referencing Stein’s famous sentence from her 1913 poem “Sacred Emily”: “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.” Here, naming and changing of names is also linked to sound as it relates to meaning. This notion, as well as the “colour” of words, is traceable to Gertrude Stein, on whom Hejinian has written extensively. We see the foregrounding of sound in “mane” and “name” with the oft-repeated phrase of “a name with colored ribbons” appearing here as “his mane trimmed with colored ribbons (19), and “Murree with Marie” or marriage, as in: “My sister was named ‘after’ my aunt, the name not Murree but, like marriage, French, Marie” (25). In her sixth year, she ponders the associations in relation to her teacher: “Miss Sly was young and she might have been kind but all the years she had been named Sly so had made her” (25), and in relation to identity/entity, as a mature woman she considers women surrendering their maiden name at marriage: “my mother’s mother had married her cousin, thus keeping her maiden name” (161), though her mother-in-law objects to children being associated with



goats in the moniker “kids.” Stein, according to Hejinian, experienced language as an entity greater than “names”: “a dependency on names (nouns) tends to obscure experience with a pre-established concept, a ‘simulacrum’, of it” (93).

Like Stein’s “nameless naming of single objects in *Tender Buttons*,” Hejinian repeats things over and over again not only to place them in position, but also and importantly to establish them in relationship with others, relationships that could be accidental, simultaneous, reversible. A particular phrase recurs: “a name with colored ribbons,” sometimes accompanied with: “I wrote my name in every one of his books.” In the 27<sup>th</sup> year, Hejinian tells us: “A large vocabulary finds its own grammar, and, conversely, a large grammar finds its own vocabulary” (97), or in her essay “The Rejection of Closure”: “What ‘naming’ provides is structure, not individual words” (53). In this way Hejinian problematizes the relationship between language (naming) and what it represents (named), and in an analogous way, the relationship between the self and the “truth.” Smith and Watson explain it thus: “As a system language operates outside the individual subject; and so entering into language, the individual becomes more ‘spoken by’ language than an agentic speaker in it” (124). Drawn from multiple inputs, notions of the self are discursive and dialogical, the self a blend of different discourses and experiences. Naming, then, is a way to foreground the concepts of identity/entity.

**“If I couldn’t be a cowboy, then I wanted to be a sailor”**

Counterfactual reasoning enables us to imagine different alternatives to perceived events as we shunt between the real situation and the imagined alternative. As a structural choice, counterfactuality reveals mind style. In *My Life* counterfactuality includes wishes whereby the subject expresses the desire for things to be other than what they are. The use of counterfactual structures facilitates the representation of an unrealized text world.<sup>34</sup> Hejinian frequently employs the verb “want” or its counterparts to establish a hypothetical or wish world that stands in opposition to the present reality. Through counterfactuality, different attitudinal variations can be revealed in relation to both actual events as well as unrealized events in the discourse world. Moreover, it is possible to describe different types of attitude related to these opposing states of affairs as follows:

<u>Attitude to present reality</u>	<u>Attitude to counterfactual world</u>
Positive	Positive
Positive	Negative
Negative	Positive
Negative	Negative

(McIntyre & Busse 301).

In the early sections of *My Life*, the author discloses a negative attitude to her present reality. In the 6<sup>th</sup> year, Hejinian confides: “In the school bathroom I vomited secretly, not because I was ill but because I so longed for my mother” (*My Life* 26). This sentence reveals not only a sense of estrangement, but a longing for connection with others from whom she

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<sup>34</sup> Here text world is a term developed within narratology which implies the creative interaction between writer, reader and context in the construction and negotiation of meaning.

feels separate, so her attitude to the present reality is negative, whilst her attitude towards the counterfactual reality (i.e. being with her mother) is positive. The notion of “homesickness” is a recurrent one. For example, in the next section, it is expressed as a desire for connection with others in the same neighbourhood, but this time the addressee is unspecified:

I remember worrying about lockjaw. The cattle were beginning to move across the field pulled by the sun, which proved them to be milk cows. There is so little public beauty. I found myself dependent on a pause, a rose, something on paper. It is a way of saying, I want you, too, to have this experience so that we are more alike, so that we are closer, bound together, sharing a point of view—so that we are ‘coming from the same place.’ It is possible to be homesick in one’s own neighbourhood (28).

Or, at camp (year 9) she writes that she was always racing ahead, “urgent with alienation and anxious to be alone, since I hated camp and was persistently homesick” (36), and on the following page:

I would be aloof, dark, indirect and upsetting or I would be a center of patience and material calm. So that later, playing alone, I could imagine myself developing into a tree, and then I yearned to do so with so much desire that it made me shapeless, restless, sleepless, demanding, disagreeable (38).

In year 10, she writes: “I didn’t want a party for my tenth birthday. I wanted my mother, who was there, of course, at the party, but from whom I was separated by my friends and because she was busy with the cake and the balloons” (41). In all these examples, the positive scenario depicted by the counterfactual situation casts a shadow on the present reality, which stands in opposition to what Hejinian claims is an “indulged childhood” (7), thus leading the reader to question the reliability of the teller, of memory. In these examples the decompression of the “I” across two spaces becomes particularly noticeable. Although it

is unlikely that Hejinian as the 9-year-old child she was then would describe herself using words like “alienation,” the choice of this word serves as a useful prompt that the active narrative space is occupied by Hejinian in the present. As these options begin to accrue, they give rise to a mind style/world view that is particular to a given individual and a social milieu because these choices are grounded in that individual’s experience, but at the same time, a plurality, a polis.

Elsewhere, Hejinian imagines different identities through the structure: *want + to be* which again implies a negative attitude to the present reality. “I wanted to be both the farmer and his horse when I was a child” (29); “I wanted to be a brave child, a girl with guts” (32). In year 10, her Sunday school teacher asks her what she wants to be when she grows up, and she answers, “I wanted to be a writer or a doctor” (39). Later, this desire becomes sexual: “the idea of infinity or eternity elicited a sort of desire, a sexual side of thought. Wild horses couldn’t keep” (44). “Meanwhile,” she says, “I was growing up as a cowgirl, a child doctor, a great reader” (45). However, she is not happy being a cowgirl: “If I couldn’t be a cowboy then I wanted to be a sailor” (47). As this example illustrates, conditional clauses, particularly those that express hypothetical or unfulfilled conditions, are counterfactual, so here attitudinal variations are observable, especially in terms of what is permissible. While a child can play at being a horse, ontologically, a human being cannot be a horse. Semantically, the verb “want” is emotive, and with the infinitive “to be” structure, expresses potentiality.

More interesting, though, is her selection of the role of cowboy. Here the counterfactual is explored in terms of gender roles. In the sentence: “If I couldn’t be a cowboy then I wanted to be a sailor,” “couldn’t” expresses impossibility, but in that “couldn’t” the reader detects another voice, other minds. Hejinian is “switching the emphasis from a stable self to the constructed nature of self, to its language” (Spahr, “Resignifying,” “Only Fragments” section, para. 2). The narrative then is double-voiced, though the negative attitude shown in relation to the present reality is implicit. The “I” is an actor or agent who initiates the “wanting,” the semantic emphasis is on theme, because the actor is an entity whose location/state changes as a result of outside forces or events.

**“...of a person, we’ll call it Asylum”**

It is generally believed that each of us possesses a unique and coherent sense of self. Moreover, our concept of self tends to be based on all those aspects that comprise the self, including physical appearance, gender, age, character and so forth. So in a sense, our concept of self is a blend, compressed from all the experiences and changes we undergo in the course of a life time. Earlier, it was stated that Hejinian rejects the notion of her individual experience as unique. Instead, she perceives her life as “permeable constructedness” (*My Life* 133). In blending theory, compression occurs when we combine different input spaces to create a blend or compression of a single unit, in this case, identity. “Pretty is as pretty does” is an example of a compression in that in the blended space good behaviour equals an attractive personality; there is a compression of

cause and effect. Metonyms work by compression. Decompression works in an opposite way in that the concept of a unified identity is now “decomposed” or “made strange.” Lakoff’s (1996) classic example is the expression, “I’m not myself today.” Such an expression offers a view of the self as split, rather than coherent. “Decompression of identity...satisfies the speaker’s need to temporarily suspend the myth of a unique and coherent sense of self,” according to Dancygier (“Personal” 169). Thus, Hejinian maintains a critical distance through perspectival shifts indicating the split self.

Prominent is her use of pronoun referents: the reflexive pronoun, referring to the self in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun, or the impersonal “one.” An analysis of the opening to section 27, “The Years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking” reveals this division:

I remind myself, I don’t exactly remember my name, of a person, we’ll call it Asylum, a woman who, and I’ve done this myself, has for good reasons renounced some point, say the window in the corner of the room, and then accepts it again. ...My mother-in-law didn’t like us to refer to ‘the kids,’ said, ‘Kids are goats,’ insisted we call them ‘the children’ or use their names. If I were Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim I would shape me a bit of allowing homunculus. Anyone dead has one white eye. Thus gossip is alone. Farmers fear it. If words matched their things we’d be imprisoned within walls of symmetry. As for we who ‘love to be astonished,’ thicken the eggs in a bath Marie. A cold air full of rain or snow and the smell of the deep, deep sea (*My Life* 97-98).

What is significant in this extract is the movement from one narrative space to another, but on the whole, it is anchored at a particular point in time, her 27<sup>th</sup> year, when Hejinian’s father was dying of cancer. The extract begins with the construction “I remind myself,” but here the use of the reflexive pronoun is not only anaphoric, but an indication of the

split self. In Lakoff's terms, the subject cannot remember the self. She even refers to herself as "it," whose name is "Asylum." Asylum suggests two meanings: on the one hand, it offers shelter, refuge and protection; on the other it is a place of restraint—particularly for the mentally ill.

In this extract, then, fragmentation or estrangement occurs not only as a stylistic device, but as mental phenomenon. As a child, the author often worries about doing the right thing and often finds herself under the controlling eyes of others; moreover, she has internalized the moral code of her milieu. The splitting of the self thus gives her the freedom to construct imagined subject positions, in this case, the license to imagine delivering a blistering attack on her mother-in-law. She achieves this through the invocation of the 15<sup>th</sup> century figure, Paracelsus (Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, physician, astrologer, alchemist). The word "bombastic" originated from his arrogant manner of speaking. This is a double-scope blend arising from two input spaces; input space 1 is the mother-in-law, while input space 2 is Paracelsus. In the blended space the mother-in-law is the bombastic Paracelsus. However, the whole attack is relayed within the subjunctive mood: "If I were...I would..." which is hypothetical and conditional in meaning and hence a product of Hejinian's private world, not her overt action. The blend throws light on the chasm that exists between the two women: "If words matched their things we'd be imprisoned within walls of symmetry," Hejinian believes, echoing Turner and Fauconnier's "the meaning of an expression is 'never right there in the words'"

(“Mechanism” 409), whereas for the mother-in-law, words *are* their referents.

Further, this prompts Hejinian to recall the phrase “as for we who love to be astonished,” only now with the knowledge that “Marie” is not only like marriage, but like *bain marie*.<sup>35</sup> The phrase, “thicken the eggs in a bath marie,” chimes rhythmically with another idiom, “Stick that in your pipe and smoke it.” Using these procedures, Hejinian transforms subjects into objects in order to interrogate their innate qualities. Questions such as what is the relationship between an object or person and its name are made explicit by being contiguous, and thus interdependent. In this way, the reader gains access to Hejinian’s private world which can be seen as a mental space which is itself a blend of her own “reality” with a fantasy scenario. Not only does this reveal a progressive development in her sense of self, it also reinforces her belief that it is not possible “to find a language which will meet its object with perfect identity” (*Inquiry* 53). Taking Section 27 as a whole, Hejinian’s mastery of language is revealed. As she zigzags from topic to topic—the typewriter at night, the memory of a childhood camping trip, her father’s cancer, snakes and bees, making candles and soap, the “wet” that “quiets the trees,” the plow that “makes trough enough,” she creates a textual kaleidoscope that largely conceals, yet offers rare, momentary glimpses that spin us into real life: “It seems that we hardly begin before we are

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<sup>35</sup> Or possibly Marie, Countess Larisch, who features in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:  
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke’s,  
My cousin’s, he took me out on a sled,  
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,  
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went (63).



already there”; “Is this bulk aesthetic discovery”; “through a lozenge of sea glass, gone with the tide” (*My Life* 96-98). Though the procedure looks accidental, such prose could only be constructed by a writer with a high degree of linguistic self-consciousness and control. Encountering such writing, the reader cannot help but be “astonished.”

Crucially, as the writer matures, we see closer and closer identification with writing, rather than with the reflections and uncertainties related to what she wanted to be. The earlier reference to “something on paper” is transformed into “a person on paper.” The concept of the self that is projected is thus compressed and decompressed along a number of dimensions. The two aspects of identity that are most significant throughout *My Life* are those of gender and writing. Although gender has been a constant theme, beginning in her 30<sup>th</sup> year, it now intervenes between herself and the text: “What is a gender on paper. A fatigue in the cold” (*My Life* 106). Significantly, this occurs in the 1970s, the era of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of feminism. Later, in this same section, she states, “Pronouns skirt the subject,” which is a wonderful expression to suggest not only feminine attire but also the passing around a subject rather than across or through it. The phrase thus recalls the earlier tunnel through the redwood tree, which as we have seen, and Spahr notes, is an apt metaphor for autobiography as a whole. Twelve years later, Hejinian avoids gender identification by referring to herself: “As such, a person on paper. I am androgynous” (150). The “I” then is not unified or stable, but subject to constant revision. It reveals that Hejinian is in an active and ongoing relation with her past, which writes her, as much as she is

writing it. In this way language assumes the role of agent in constructing the life, and “permeable constructedness” gives way to “permanent constructedness” (133-34).

**“What she felt, she had heard as a girl”**

The stylistic features employed by Hejinian throw light on the theme of double-consciousness throughout the whole of *My Life*. Not only is the self divided, it is subject to various forms of subordination, as we have seen, in relation to processes of gender socialization. “What she felt, she had heard as a girl,” Hejinian tells us in the 17<sup>th</sup> year (*My Life* 66). According to Alan Palmer, “Our identity is situated among the minds of others...and the situating of identity between individuals and others requires endless negotiation” (*Social* 205). Palmer, a cognitive theorist, has written extensively on the social mind in fiction. Any fiction worth reading, he asserts, engages equally with public and private thought processes. Studying the social mind sheds light on the individual mind; moreover, this approach is adaptable to all kinds of narrative, including poetry and autobiography.

*My Life* is made up of a large amount of what Palmer terms intermental thought. Intermental thought encodes the subjectivity of others, or group minds, with an emphasis on continuity of consciousness. It is part of a living exchange, in that each expression is formed in relation to others’ words and expressions, and in relation to a community, in time, and of place. To use Bakhtin’s terminology, the discourse is marked by heteroglossia, or [an]other’s speech, and is double- or many-

voiced. Unlike the secret thought processes of the private mind, the social mind is publically available; furthermore, studying the social mind sheds light on the workings of the individual mind.

When we look at the first edition of *My Life*, we find many references to anxiety, restlessness, and self-criticism. For example, she worries about her handwriting: was it “pretty or afraid?” (60). The judgements she makes are largely about behaviour, disposition, manners and attractiveness. In them, we can detect the pressure that the individual mind exerts on the self, a pressure that meant she “often felt jittery and took long walks trying to get a long way from what [she] actually felt” (62). This restlessness is not only an aspect of the private mind, but also of the social mind: “Learning to listen, that is taught not to talk” (52). Throughout *My Life*, Hejinian thus employs repeatedly clichéd signifiers of femininity for ironic purposes.

The contradictions and conflicts arising from shifting notions of subjectivity, identity and their location in language are particularly apparent in the material added in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. In the 14<sup>th</sup> year, she is learning what sentences can do: “From hypochondria come senses and memory” (55), which she slightly changes three sections on to “Language is the history that gave me shape and hypochondria. And followed it with a date, historically contextualized its contents, affixed to them a reading” (65). In the 19<sup>th</sup> section, she adds: “I am a shard, signifying isolation—here I am thinking aloud of my affinity for the separate fragment taken under scrutiny” (71). Later, she refines this into “not fragments but metonymy. Duration. Language makes tracks” (83), asserting that “To

some extent each sentence has to be the whole story” (93). Moreover, she shows that she is in dialogue with other writers/other writing throughout *My Life*, but especially in the material added in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. For example, in the 27<sup>th</sup> section, she inserts in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: “No ideas but in potatoes,” referencing Williams’s famous “No ideas but in things” as well as Stein’s “Roast potatoes for” from *Tender Buttons* (339). Beginning in section 38, all the material is new, and increasingly, her judgements concern poetics and praxis: “A paragraph is a time and place not a syntactic unit” (137), “Of course, this is a poem, that model of inquiry” (149), “A sentence is a metaphor since when” (150), and “We can no longer ignore ideology, it has become an important lyrical language” (161). In these later sections, Hejinian focuses on the events of her intellectual life (reading, listening to music) as contemporaneous with her experiential space. One striking example of this is the AUTHORS FOR WORKS blend, in which she writes: “My Lives on a shelf by Trotsky, George Sand....the year in which I was reading Montaigne” (136). The later chapters too consider the notion of establishing a relationship with the reader. This happens in the use of the question mark for grammatical questions (which had not appeared before section 37), in the use of direct speech for the words of others and in direct reference to the reader: “An extremely pleasant and often comic satisfaction comes from conjunction, the fit, say, of comprehension in a reader’s mind to content in a writer’s work” (121), and, “I have said, and meant, that I want people to ‘get’ this, and yet with expansive sensations, I hate to ‘lighten up’” (162).

The difficulty of locating the “ideological ‘I’” is that it is both visible and invisible. “Because every autobiographical narrator is historically and culturally situated, each is a product of his or her particular time” (Smith and Watson 62). Ideologies of identity are so internalized that they are often implicit. Hejinian’s move is to make these ideologies explicit, and thus subject them to interrogation and critique. In showing her resistance to the ideologies imposed on the “I,” Hejinian defamiliarizes them, therefore neutralizing their ideological force. Hejinian’s stylistic procedures act as a klieg light to defamiliarise the familiar. By making language strange, she questions and critiques received wisdom about gender, autobiography, language, *our* lives. By exposing the fissures, she constructs a new form of autobiography which, like the tunnel through the redwood tree, is “something it had not been before” (*My Life* 37). Through close analysis of the language Hejinian chooses to construct the self, it is possible to penetrate the veil of enchantment she weaves, to separate the aphorism from the oracular, the mind of the individual within the fabric of the social. By examining her work through the lens of mind style and related cognitive approaches, we are able to make explicit how Hejinian situates the self in language.

## **Conclusion**

If, as we saw in the previous chapter, the phrase is Susan Howe’s unit, in this chapter we have seen that the paragraph is Lyn Hejinian’s unit, the situation in which language occurs. Moreover, Hejinian’s paragraphs are measures of time in which she succeeds in making

perception perceptible, offering “a picture of knowledge underway” (*Inquiry* 23). As she has stated in relation to *The Guard*, here too she takes in elements of “psychology, personal history, the influence of class background and an individual’s attempt to challenge it” (63). What she has created is a book about being in language: Entity, “a lively, enduring, pastless and futureless present, creative force of mind--neither woman nor slave, unclaimable and free” (368). Examining her work through the lens of cognitive poetics reveals the complexities that give rise to what she calls “the contextualized and contextualizing subject, a person” (63). Cognitive poetics, and especially the models of mind style and blending theory, offer the reader the kind of radical introspection that Hejinian calls for in relation to writing. It has helped to throw light on questions such as who is the self, “when the self speaks for the self, who is speaking,” and how the self is formed in language.<sup>36</sup> As well as allowing the reader access to the functioning of the authorial mind, the reader’s understanding of her own personal experience, and of the human condition, are enhanced.

A central concern for Hejinian, as for all three writers here, is alienation, estrangement and its various manifestations. For Hejinian, such a state is a positive condition; it restores palpability to the world, and to language. This reader, like many others, has found herself bewitched by the lyric and aesthetic sensibility involved in this writing. Such writing creates resonance, the prolonged sensation that remains

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<sup>36</sup> “But when the self speaks for the self, who is speaking?” Virginia Woolf, “The Unwritten Novel” (36).

after the first encounter with a text.<sup>37</sup> “Among the principal tasks of a poetics is to ask how reason reasons its reasons--how it discovers, identifies, and acts on them,” Hejinian states (*Inquiry* 337). Cognitive poetics has provided one route for me to account for the allusive quality of resonance--what makes a work enduring and significant.

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Stockwell, who works in cognitive poetics, elaborates the quality of resonance in *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*; see chapter 2.

## Chapter 4: Rosmarie Waldrop

### “Language of the body”<sup>38</sup>

Rosmarie Waldrop is a “conceptually sophisticated” writer; she operates both as a poet and as a “politically and philosophically oriented intellectual” (Reinfeld 3). Like the Language School poets with whom she is associated, Waldrop is interested in exploring the tension inherent in the boundaries of the sentence. Also, as with other avant-garde feminist poets, Waldrop’s experiments in grammar have feminist applications and implications. By extending the ways in which subject and objects interchange, not only is the hierarchy of main and subordinate clauses brought to task, but also gender stereotypes:

I accepted the complete sentence (most of the time) and tried to subvert its closure and logic from the inside, by constantly sliding between frames of reference. I especially brought the female body in and set into play the old gender archetypes of logic and mind being ‘male,’ whereas ‘female’ designates the illogical: emotion, body matter (*Dissonance* 210).

This preoccupation is paramount in *The Reproduction of Profiles* (1987), which is the primary focus of this chapter.

Waldrop was born outside the United States in Kitzingen-am Main, Germany, in 1935, so for her English is an acquired language, and the United States, her adopted home. She explains this early history in the introduction to *A Key into the Language of America*:

I was born in 1935... ‘on the other side,’ in Germany. Which was then Nazi Germany. I am not Jewish. I was born on the side of the (then) winners. I was still a child when World War II ended with the defeat

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted from the poem “Adam Laments” in *Continental Drift* (23).



of the Nazis. I immigrated to the US, the country of the winners, as a white, educated European who did not find it too difficult to get jobs, an advanced degree, a university position... Like Roger Williams, I am ambivalent about my position among the privileged, the 'conquerors' (xix).

Waldrop's experience of the early years in Nazi Germany led her to explore a concept which has shaped her writing throughout her life: that of the empty or absent centre. This figure is primary in both *The Reproduction of Profiles* and *Lawn of Excluded Middle*, and superimposes the political/philosophical onto the personal, in particular gender, as she tells Matthew Cooperman in a 2002 interview for *How2*:

I've worked with absences, esp. in *Lawn of Excluded Middle*: absence of center, empty center, the womb, the resonating space of a musical instrument, the space between words that makes them words, words carrying absence as a sea shell carries the roar of the sea (question 10).

Much of her work concerns issues of gender identity and the body, not as an optional "lens" one can choose, but "as a material fact in determining one's relation to language, knowledge, power" (Russo, para. 4), and this theme becomes her poetic practice in what she labels "gap gardening," cultivating absence as a matrix of transformation and possibility. This notion of corporeity relates to Merleau-Ponty: "it's through my body that I understand another person....The body is our means to have a world"<sup>39</sup> (*Dissonance* 236) as well as Husserl, who describes the body as "a thing 'inserted' between the rest of the material world and the subjective sphere" (*Ideas* II, 161). Of particular relevance to Waldrop's text is the notion of the visual field. Husserl posits: "Naturally one would not say that I see my eye in the

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<sup>39</sup> "It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (Merleau-Ponty 135).

mirror. For my eye, the seeing qua seeing, I do not perceive” (*Ideas* II, 148). In other words, when we look at ourselves in the mirror, we can see our eye, but we cannot see our eye seeing. That is not the case, however, with the sense of touch. As Carman (1999) explains: “When I touch something with my hand, not only do I feel the qualities of the object, I also feel and can turn my attention to, the tactual sensations localized in the hand itself” (211). This in turn implicates the verb “feel” as both transitive (in which case the “I” is an agent) and intransitive, where the “I” is experiencer. Seen in this light, we can say it is the “flesh” or skin which makes knowledge possible. Like Olson, Waldrop is “one / with [her] skin,” and “geography...leans in [on her]” (“Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [withheld]”).

The mirror serves as a significant trope in *The Reproduction of Profiles* (the cover of the book depicts the classical profile of a woman whose image is partly reflected in the mirror, and Part II is titled “Inserting the Mirror”). In 1979 Waldrop published an essay titled “Mirrors and Paradoxes” which arose from her translation of Edmond Jabés. The paradox, she claims, is a fundamental device for exploring the equivocal. Moreover, the mirror as an artefact has been favoured in times of conflict and contradiction; for example, in the Renaissance, the Italian painter Francesco Parmigianino privileged it in his “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror.” In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one writerly response to these conditions has been reflexivity, whereby writing reflects on its own process. Arguably the most important poem to explore this tendency is John Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” which takes as its subject Parmigianino’s painting. Significant to both the poem and the painting is the mirror—in the

case of Parmigianino, his portrait reflects his image, as he was gazing into a convex mirror, commonly used by barbers in his day, as the poem, referencing Vasari, tells us. The poem allows Ashbery to articulate his own relationship with the painting, “revealing himself as the other of his subject” (Herd 167). Herd argues that from Ashbery’s perspective, the portrait is “both an immaculate instance of art telling the history of its own coming into being and a radical manifestation of the self-absorbed artist” (163). Ashbery began writing the poem in 1973, and it was published two years later. Its publication established him as the most important avant-garde poet writing in America at that time. Similarities can be drawn between Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” and Waldrop’s *The Reproduction of Profiles*, published in 1984, with her use of the mirror as a trope, and as a device of reflexivity. Ashbery’s work does share some features of Language writing (his early work such as *The Tennis Court Oath* was embraced by the Language writers because of its resistance to interpretation, and he published in some of the same journals as the Language poets—e.g., *Sulfur* and *Temblor*). However, Ashbery never saw himself as a Language poet. *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* would position him as the most important poet of his generation, whereas Rosmarie Waldrop’s book, though well received, did not establish her as a major poet, nor win her any awards. Yet importantly both were actively re-inscribing what it means to be avant-garde.

What does the mirror mean in Waldrop’s text? At its most obvious, the mirror is an image of self-reflection:

It pretends to confirm us, to let us see ourselves as others would. But in doing so, it turns us into a multipliable object and confronts us with an image that looks back at us, questioning our identity and reality (*Dissonance* 85).

As an object it serves as a trope for the mimetic function of art; moreover, it allows the subject to perceive itself as an object. But more than that, Waldrop, like Jabés, conceives of the mirror as language.<sup>40</sup> The paradox at the heart of Jabés, according to Waldrop, is the “indissoluble unity of signifier and signified” which demonstrates “the two are not one.” By sharing this duality, “The word is indeed our true mirror” (94).

In contrast to Ashbery, whose poem exemplifies literary ekphrasis, Waldrop references philosophy. In *The Reproduction of Profiles*, Wittgenstein’s phraseology is used in an associative free-form, either as direct quotation, or by replacement and substitution. The poems thus demonstrate the Chomskyan notion that the “‘grammatical’ cannot be identified with ‘meaningful’ or ‘significant’ in any semantic sense” (Chomsky 15). For example, Waldrop writes: “The proportion of accident in my picture of the world falls with the rain” (poem 3 of “Facts”). Although the sentence is grammatical, most readers would agree there is an element of the a-logical in semantic terms. What does it mean “proportion of accident”? An appropriate or pleasing relation of size? Can accidents be accounted for proportionately, and if they can, how does such a phenomenon “fall with the rain”? According to Chomsky:

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<sup>40</sup> “Man’s mirror and instrument of self-knowledge is, above all, language. Therefore we must turn to Yaël, the book that openly allegorizes the relation of man and woman as the relation of writer and the word. Throughout the book, Yaël—the woman and the word—has the function of the mirror” (*Dissonance* 86).

Any grammar of language will project the finite and somewhat accidental corpus of observed utterances to a set (presumably infinite) of grammatical utterances. In this respect, a grammar mirrors the behaviour of the speaker who, on the basis of a finite and accidental experience with language, can produce or understand an indefinite number of new sentences (15).

This would appear to be a precise account of Waldrop's method: to "cultivate the cuts, discontinuities, ruptures, cracks, fissures, holes, hitches, snags, leaps, shifts of reference, and emptiness *inside* the semantic dimension. *Inside* the sentence" (*Dissonance* 262). In her poems, words take on new meanings creating an accidental picture that one senses surprises the author as much as the reader. In this way, Waldrop nudges her reader into wakefulness and dialogue with language.<sup>41</sup>

In an essay entitled "Why Do I Write Prose Poems When My True Love Is Verse?" Waldrop discusses her intentions in *The Reproduction of Profiles*. She turned from verse to prose (poems) because she began to crave the space to digress in the "long complex sentence." She describes the complete sentence as "excitement" and "terror," as she moved the "box" of verse to the "center" around which the "dance of syntax" could take place. Her intention was "to undermine the certainty and authority of logic," especially as a masculine domain. Waldrop then is writing an epistemology. What this mode foregrounds is how we arrive at what we know—both as writers, and as readers, and that "we come to know anything that has any complexity by glimpses" and because this is so, the more different perspectives the better (Retallack and Waldrop 361).

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<sup>41</sup> In "Alarms and Excursions" Waldrop writes: "I hope eventually there will be readers who through my poem will in their turn enter into a particular dialogue with language and maybe see certain things as a consequence" (*Dissonance* 172).

One of the first observations a reader makes when encountering this work is the way she positions the reader. Her opening gambit frequently includes negation, modality and interrogation. In poem 30, for example, she uses the imperative form to realise a speech act of command.<sup>42</sup>

30 Look at that blue, you said, detaching the color from the sky as if it were a membrane. A mutilation you constantly sharpen your language for. I had wanted to begin slowly because, whether in the direction of silence or things have a way of happening, you must not watch as the devil picks your shadow off the ground. Nor the scar lines on your body. Raw sky. If everybody said, I know what pain is, could we not set clocks by the violent weather sweeping down from the north? Lesions of language. The strained conditions of colored ink. Or perhaps it is a misunderstanding to peel back skin in order to bare the mechanics of the mirage (*Reproduction* 86).

But, as Waldrop explains in “Mirrors and Paradoxes,” language exists not only as a means of communicating information, but also as a mode of action, and thus “a speech act is not a simple individual application of an existing system” (*Dissonance* 81).

Moreover, Waldrop’s speech acts lure us onto the page, and then she disappears. One of the procedures she uses to do this is the interleaving and subsequent transformation of her sources. Below are the relevant sections from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations I*:

275. Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself “How blue the sky is”—When you do it spontaneously...

276. But don’t we at least mean something quite definite when we look at a colour and name our colour-impression? It is as if we detached the colour-impression from the object, like a

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<sup>42</sup> Speech Act Theory originated in the work of J.L. Austin and J.R. Searle. Their model describes language as performative, comprising locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts and functions. The word “act” is important as it specifies that language functions to achieve particular goals.

membrane.

288. ...”Oh, I know what ‘pain’ means; what I don’t know is whether this, that I have now, is pain” (Wittgenstein 97-101).

Employing palimpsestic techniques, Waldrop is in “multiple dialogue” with other texts. In *The Reproduction of Profiles*, it is primarily Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, with the *Tractatus* serving as a structural guide. On the back cover of *Reproduction*, Waldrop writes: “I used Wittgenstein’s phrases in a free, unsystematic way, sometimes quoting, sometimes letting them spark what they would, sometimes substituting different nouns within a phrase.” However, as Perloff points out, “What Waldrop is too modest to say ... is that her knowledge of Wittgenstein’s writings—not only the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, but the minor writings as well—is remarkably thorough” (“Toward a Wittgenstein Poetics,” section 3, para. 4). Moreover, the connections that Waldrop makes not only invoke Wittgenstein’s logic, but by “quoting or turning a phrase, misquoting, following of phrase to its logical or illogical conclusion” subverts “the certainty and authority of logic” (Russo “*The Road is Everywhere*,” para. 2), thus placing philosophy and poetry in apposition—in *play*.

Michael Davidson has invented the useful term “palimptext” for this type of writing. In her essay “Form and Discontent,” Waldrop writes: “Many of us have foregrounded this awareness of the palimpsest as a method, using, transforming, ‘translating’ parts of other works” (*Dissonance* 204). Just as Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* is working out the relations between language and mental images, between what we would imagine, and what we actually express, so too is Waldrop, but she

juxtaposes these concerns alongside gender inequalities and stereotypes. The obstacles she confronts, what Wittgenstein calls “the application of the picture” (a phrase often used in Waldrop’s poem cycle) frequently concern female containment. Both writers reject the notion that a word’s meaning derives from shared pictures; instead, those pictures arise from experience. However, in Waldrop’s case the experiences she foregrounds are those formulated within the sediment of patriarchal cultural tradition. By borrowing Wittgenstein’s language, then, she not only reformulates his masculine logic, but also does so with her woman’s body and her feminine mind. The fact that she does so by invoking the empty space and absence inside of her, as represented by the womb, is indicative of the deconstructive nature of the process required for the generative process to take place. As poem 17 illustrates, “This is where grammatical terror opens a distance between you and yourself in order to insert the mirror” (*Reproduction* 73). Or as Waldrop explained to Matthew Cooperman, referencing Heidegger, “We experience language as language exactly when it fails us” (Cooperman, question 13).

Significantly, Waldrop’s use of this material is not citational (i.e., quoted as an authoritative source) or evidentiary. Waldrop collages her sources for texture the way artists such as Braque, Picasso, or Schwitters glued objects such as metro tickets, scraps of newspaper and other found objects into their paintings. Whereas in painting these separate elements tend to be visible, in writing, they are less so. “At her best, Waldrop is able to keep a reader deliciously off balance, unsure what is original, what borrowed” (Reed, “Splice of Life” section 5, para. 4). By revealing “the



slippages *within* the language of her source texts,” Waldrop’s writing manifests the estrangement that results from these juxtapositions as a form of resistance. Waldrop’s poetry is well-known for its use of chance procedures, particularly of juxtaposition and xenonyms. The term xenonymy is used in semantics to refer to the dissonance that arises when lexical units are combined within a phrase or syntagma that are in some way deviant (Cruse 106). The collage technique gives rise to strange and “difficult” juxtapositions that resist literal interpretation. From a surrealist point of view, the greater the distance between these juxtaposed elements, the better.

In the sections below, I will apply cognitive poetic approaches to explore some of the effects arising from the surrealist landscape that Waldrop creates in *The Reproduction of Profiles* through her use of image schemas and metaphorical elaboration. Cognitive approaches began to appear in the 1980s, at the same time when Waldrop was writing *The Reproduction of Profiles*. Of particular relevance is Mark Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind* (1987) which argues that the body and the mind are not two separate things, but a single organic process. Johnson goes on to develop the concept of image schema as an aspect of language and thought. Image schemas are non-propositional; they work to organize and structure information at the level of bodily perception. Image schemas (or experiential gestalts) emerge from an individual’s contact with objects, events and phenomena in space and in time, and therefore serve as imaginative structures which, together with our bodily, social, linguistic and intellectual experiences, form a network of meaning. Through an application of

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) I will focus on metaphorical elaboration in order to explore how *The Reproduction of Profiles* enters the world as an oppositional text, and in particular, in relation to the social, subjective and cognitive self.

In Chapter 1, Steve McCaffery's essay, "The Death of the Subject" was named as influential in setting the agenda for language writing. The three writers here have transcended this narrow view and developed a complex way of thinking about the relationship between writer, text, reader and their environments. These writers see poetry as a mode of epistemological inquiry. The implications of this can be seen if we make use of the concept of intentionality. Intentionality can be defined as "aboutness. Intentional states represent the world as being a certain way" (Block and Segal 20). A writer can have intentionality, and the words on a page can have intentionality, but "the intentionality of words on a page is only derived intentionality, not original intentionality" (21). A character or a poem can only have the appearance of intentionality vested in it by the author. This, however, makes it possible to examine the mind style of an author, of characters and of poems and their inter-relationships. Furthermore, for our writers the interaction with the reader is an essential part of the process and these complex relationships are set within a context without which they could not be fully understood. Thus, Howe can explore her New England past, Hejinian can centralize subjectivity, Waldrop can see the poem not just as expression, but as cognitive process. Cognitive poetics, as stated in Chapter 3, is thus an eclectic approach that is not only textually engaged but

open to the insights from a number of disciplines: philosophy, psychology, literary theory and criticism.

The notion that metaphor operates at the level of thought is widely accepted today. Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) developed in response to Lakoff and Johnson's and Lakoff and Turner's ground-breaking work in the 1980s. Underpinning this body of work is the belief that metaphor is not simply a linguistic phenomenon, but it operates at the level of thinking. Thus, a particular poem may give a unique linguistic expression to a concept which is basic and universal. Furthermore, CMT theorists believe that such metaphors are "indispensable to comprehending and reasoning about concepts like life, death and time" (Lakoff and Turner 50), as it is difficult to discuss such abstract concepts without using metaphor. Since the 1980s, a convincing amount of linguistic evidence has been presented to support this position. Analysing a metaphor both as a linguistic and a conceptual expression grounded in bodily experience enables us to gauge to what extent its use is a creative aspect related to an individual writer's mind-style. To return briefly to the metaphor of the mirror, this time not only as linguistic expression, but also as a cognitive expression, in *The Reproduction of Profiles*, the mirror as language enables the writer to reveal herself as "the other" created by the word. Language is a mirror in the sense of being an instrument of self-reflection. As a linguistic expression, these words have derived intentionality. As a cognitive expression, they assert both the intentionality and the mind style of the author. In stylistics terms, the mirror is a surface feature which Waldrop employs in order to interrogate both the unity and the disunity of the signifier and the signified.

### ***The Reproduction of Profiles***

There are 69 short prose poems in *The Reproduction of Profiles*. Waldrop writes in this form, adhering to Pound's assumption of "a center around which, not a box within which" (*Curves* xii), not only here, but also in the subsequent volumes, *Lawn of Excluded Middle and Reluctant Gravities*, which Waldrop re-published as a trilogy titled *Curves to the Apple* in 2006. The sentence is the primary unit of composition, although some units are fragments, or relative clauses standing alone that force the reader to try to pinpoint the direction the clause points. Taken together, the poems affirm the poet's attraction to language—her desire to be lost in it in order to learn to "breathe differently" (*Reproduction* 83).<sup>43</sup> The collection is presented in two parts. Adopting the structure of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Part I, titled "The Reproduction of Profiles," contains five sections: "Facts," "Thinkable Pictures," "Feverish Propositions," "If Words are Signs," and "Successive Applications." *The Reproduction of Profiles* is comprised of brief prose poems, but each one is self-contained; their relation to the others needs to be constructed by the reader. While putting forward little narratives, they are fragmentary and surreal. As McGann claims, "Narrativity is an especially problematic feature of discourse" for Language writers because "its structures lay down 'stories' which serve to limit and order the field of experience" (638). Hence, Waldrop subverts these norms and thus establishes herself as an oppositional poet. Taken together, the two parts unfold something like a love story, in which the female "I" interacts with a

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<sup>43</sup> "Not for the first time has a wave broken on a hammer, anvil, or suddenly, which is a deep space where sentences breathe differently and the rider rocks in the stirrup" (poem 27 in "Inserting the Mirror"). The phrase echoes Adrienne Rich: "and besides / you breathe differently down here" in the 1972 poem "Diving into the Wreck" (162).

male “you,” the speech acts comprising their interactions; such interactions amount to what Wittgenstein calls language games.<sup>44</sup> The dialogic quality of the poems is related to the way the work brings into play gender stereotypes; their “arguments” shed light on the two very different ways of perceiving. Moreover, as Davidson asserts, it foregrounds:

...the verbal means by which any statement claims its status of truth. By foregrounding the abstract features of the speech act, rather than the authenticity of its expressive moment, the poet acknowledges the contingency of utterances in social interchange (cited in Beach 74).

This happens largely as a direct result of the indirect speech mode and the fragmented nature of the discourse, which renders reading “critical” rather than “recuperative” (74).

As has been noted, the mirror serves as a significant motif throughout the work; Waldrop takes this one step further: the “I” asserts/inserts herself inside masculine discourse, and the phrase “inserting the mirror” invokes the notion of the [empty] space into which such an object might be inserted—in particular, the vagina, and this sexualizes the textual space. Part II comprises a semantic field of the female body, including “neck of the womb” (poem 9), “dilate” and “labor” (poem 15), “stirrup” (poem 27), “canals” (poem 27) and “membrane” (poem 30). It is tempting to read the “I” of the poems as the female poet, but Waldrop cautions readers in the preface to the poems that “it simply indicates that language is taking place” (*Curves* xii). Moreover, the use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun always problematizes discourse: the reader wants to know the identity of the “you.” Is it the re-

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<sup>44</sup> Speech Act Theory derives from Wittgenstein, who also conceived of language as concrete action. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives examples of language games as “giving orders and obeying them...asking, thinking, cursing, greeting and praying,” etc. (11-12). These examples have their counterparts in Speech Act Theory.

imagined self, as in poem 9, where “the sentence goes wrong as soon as you do something...”, a lover as in poem 22: “As long as we can see the facts, you said, your eye frantic for touch...”, or the actual or implied reader as in poem 20: “It [the fog] will cling to you no matter how heavy your boots”? In any case, the ambiguity means that the actual reader becomes part of the communicative environment and the problem of communication is foregrounded.

Grammatically, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person personal pronoun does not distinguish between singular and plural except for the reflexive case (yourself/yourselves). “You” can be used in the indefinite (ambiguous) sense, however, the reader tends, at least initially, to adopt the position of the addressee. This is because of “the summons of unspecified *you* [which] restlessly tugs at us, begging identification” (Waters 15). Likewise, the use of this pronoun makes the discourse more dramatic, as there is the possibility of reply, interruption, challenge, dialogue, so that when a poem uses direct address, the “you” becomes a generative force, an axis of concern. By inclusion of a respondent, the speaker’s role is validated. Semantically, what is immediately obvious in this poem is that the male’s observations are rendered as second-instance utterances and are thus meta-propositional rather than metalinguistic. In other words, the female speaker reports the content of the proposition rather than quoting it in direct form. The poems are thus an internal monologue in which the female speaker “ruminates upon (and perhaps misremembers or misrepresents) the words of her male interlocutor” (Russo, “*The Road is Everywhere*,” para. 2). In this way, she serves as a “double-mirror,” or the mirror of self-consciousness,”

or as Waldrop suggests, “The double mirror, which is also the mirror of self-consciousness, is a wound, at best a scar. The center is empty” (*Dissonance* 184). This particular image resonates with Hejinian’s mirror in the crotch of the tree, which also reflects an empty centre.

### **A Cognitive Poetic Reading of “Inserting the Mirror”**

Cognitive analysis starts with the basic premise that the meaning of a text is not contained *in* the text, but is assigned to it by the language participants and their own mental representations. Thus, a cognitive analysis will involve examining the discourse situation, the implied meaning of words/sentences as well as what the text presupposes.

Here is the opening poem from “Inserting the Mirror”:

1

To explore the nature of rain I opened the door because inside the workings of language clear vision is impossible. You think you see, but are only running your finger through pubic hair. The rain was heavy enough to fall into this narrow street and pull shreds of cloud down with it. I expected the drops to strike my skin like a keyboard. But I only got wet. When there is no resonance, are you more likely to catch a cold? Maybe it was the uniform appearance of the drops which made their application to philosophy so difficult even though the street was full of reflection. In the same way, fainting can, as it approaches, slow the Yankee Doodle to a near loss of pitch. I watched the outline of the tower grow dim until it was only a word in my brain. That language can suggest a body where there is none. Or does a body always contain its own absence? The rain, I thought, ought to protect me against such arid speculations (57).

The poem begins by establishing the figure (“I” who opened the door) against the ground (the rain outside), but soon the figure is occluded by the appearance of language and the dissonance of the collocation: “inside the

workings of language clear vision is impossible,” which moves language into the foreground. It too is instantly replaced by another attractor: “you.” The “you” is placed on the same cognitive level as “language” because of a shared semantic field (vision); however, against the indefinite or abstract quality of vision, a new and somewhat startling distractor is introduced—the ambiguous “you” who is “running your finger through pubic hair.” As distracting as this is, the “you” soon disappears, and the reader’s attention is drawn to the speaker again, who is outside getting wet. The reference to fainting which arises here is a recurrent motif in the cycle (related words are “dizzy,” “vertigo,” as well as the notion of falling and fear of falling), and recalls Nick Piombino: “Poetry is like a swoon/with this exception: it brings you to your senses” (cited in Bernstein, *A Poetics* 78).

In the middle of the poem, the reader’s attention is taken from the sky and its clouds, down to street level and back up to the sky again with the image of a tower, until the “you” reappears at the end as an absence, which is still felt to be present as an “outline” or profile,” in the same way that the “tower” is, through its reduction from image to word. So not only is the speaker in a room that she has to get outside of in order to experience the nature of rain, so too is a “tower” only a “word” which is contained in her brain, and neither image nor word offers direct experience of the object.

Moreover, her desire is to get “inside” language, to see how it functions, but she is blocked by various obstacles. In the same way a person standing inside cannot understand the nature of rain, neither can we understand the “workings of language” when we are inside it, because meaning is not contained “in language”; language provides us with the tools



to construct meaning. Waldrop, it would appear, is alluding here to a classic study published by Michael Reddy in 1979, in which he researched core expressions, concluding that metaphor, far from being simply figurative language, is conceptual.

Of particular interest is his discussion of the CONDUIT metaphor, which refers to those figurative expressions used for communication or language. The framework Reddy outlines claims that language provides containers (e.g., words and sentences) for thoughts that are conveyed to receivers who then “unpack” them. The problem with this objectivist view of language, according to Reddy, is that it requires little effort. An alternative view is “the toolmaker’s paradigm” of language, which is “radical subjectivist,” in that it requires constant attention, negotiation, exchange and effort to achieve effective communication. Significantly, too, the poem ends with the word “speculations” [from Latin *speculum*, *mirror*] ““speculum” being the term for the medical instrument used to dilate an opening in the body, especially the vagina, to permit inspection)<sup>45</sup>. Gradually, then, Waldrop draws together two mental spaces: language and the body for comparison and reflection. The poem is surrealist in the way it accumulates images that are cognitively difficult, so that each previous one fades into the background as a new one is introduced. While selecting lexical items that are semantically related, Waldrop juxtaposes them in such

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<sup>45</sup> The word “speculum” moreover recalls Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and its advocacy of the overthrow of syntax “by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits, switching the connections, by modifying continuity, alternation, frequency, intensity.” But also the use of this word recalls Ashbery: “The words are only speculation / (From the Latin *speculum*, mirror” in “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (159).

a way that creates dissonance. There is a veneer of cohesion at the textual level, but a lack of coherence at the conceptual level.

In a similar way to pictorial art, in language too we not only think in terms of figure and ground, but also in terms of depth. A trajectory is on a path moving through space; movement derives from experiences such as journeys with starting points and destinations, and directional movement takes place across a series of locations and in association with time. As with containment, abstract domains are also possible—for example, we can conceive of purposeful journeys (paths). However, movement along a path is rarely straightforward. We encounter impediments; we may pass through by removing constraints, or alternatively, be side-tracked, or diverted. The linguistic indicator of the path schema is typically a preposition, as Stockwell notes: “In prepositions such as ‘into’, ‘through’, ‘out’, ‘over’, the figure is seen as a moving trajectory that describes a staged *path* in relation to a grounded *landmark*” (Gavins and Steen 22).

Applying this approach to the poem, then, we can explore the speaker’s (the figure’s) movement across the poem’s sentences. What is immediately noticeable is the static nature of this figure’s trajectory. The only movement in fact is the finger running through pubic hair—seemingly, an empty gesture. The opening scene has been compressed to speculation about what is absent, and the speaker’s expectation of what the rain “ought” to protect against. This sentence is not an abstract proposition; the epistemic modal “ought” in the final sentence is subjective, and the modality belongs to the speaker who draws this conclusion on the basis of her own experience in the world.

### **Embodied Experience in *The Reproduction of Profiles***

Metaphor, it has been demonstrated, is more than a linguistic expression or a rhetorical figure, it is the basis of our thinking, reasoning and imagination (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Gibbs, 1994; Turner, 1996). A significant and enduring observation is that a great number of conceptual metaphors reflect notions of embodiment. In other words, metaphoric expressions arise from our ordinary experiences related to the body acting, doing and sensing. We have already encountered schemas (Chapter 2) as a set of structured frameworks or “scripts” with characters, settings and events. These frameworks help us to organise our knowledge and understanding of typical situations that we encounter in our daily experience. Now, however, I wish to elaborate on this earlier explanation by suggesting that schemas also help to structure and organise our knowledge and experience at the level of bodily perception and movement, including force.

Consider Poem 11:

Heavy with soot, the rain drummed on the tin roof of the garage, eager to fall into language and be solved in the manner of mysteries. I tried to hear the line between the drumming and the duller thud on the street, like the phantom beat between two rhythms. An umbrella would have complicated the score. No gift of the singular: the sounds merged with traffic noise too gray to make a difference between woman and mother, or grammar and theology. Not like the children playing tag, throwing their slight weight into flight from the ever changing ‘it.’ Though the drops hit my face more gently than an investigating eye, the degree of slippage (67).

An embodied view claims that we take different perspectives when we encounter the complex of actions and events described in a text such as this.

We might take up the perspective of the 1<sup>st</sup> person speaker who is listening to the rain drumming on the roof, or we might shift our perspective to take in the traffic noise. We next view the children “throwing their weight” to escape the tag of the “it,” and this force is further elaborated by the drops hitting the face “more gently than “the investigating eye.” So, our comprehension shifts across four perspectives: the drumming of the rain, the traffic noise, the children playing tag, and the raindrops hitting the face. In each case, though, the subject is responding to some type of external force, so that these different perspectival shifts result in a rich, *embodied* spatial engagement.

Through metaphor, then, we use physical experience to organize abstract phenomena. In *The Reproduction of Profiles*, Waldrop makes her case for an embodied view of linguistic meaning via metaphor and image schemas. Image schemas provide a conceptual model for exploring the ways thought can be structured. An image schema is a mental pattern that helps us to understand immediate experience by giving a structured understanding of that experience, but the mental pattern can also provide an understanding of other experiences via metaphor. These mental patterns derive from our physical experience of being and acting in the world, which can then be extended to more abstract domains. In other words, the body is the ground of language.

As we have seen, containment is one of the primary examples of schema as a perceptual and movement structure (Johnson 1987), because containment in the womb is a universal, preconceptual experience. Containment, or spatial boundedness, is a kind of physical orientation

“which involves separation, differentiation and enclosure, and implies restriction and limitation” (Johnson 22): “inside the workings of language clear vision is impossible” (poem 1). According to Johnson, five consequences arise from this: 1) when a person or object is contained, it is protected from, or resistant to, outside forces; 2) being contained also limits the force of the contained; 3) the contained object is in a fixed location; 4) this results in either its accessibility or inaccessibility to an outside observer; 5) there is transitivity in terms of containment. For example, if a desk is in a room, then whatever is in the desk is also in the room. In-out orientation involves many complex interactions every day, from which patterns emerge that help to structure the processes by which we make sense of our world.

Image schemas, then, are not the same as image metaphors (rich mental images which are mapped from one domain to another); instead, they are general conceptual structures, for example: bounded regions, paths, centre/periphery, where no transference across domains takes place. Moreover, they comprise internal logic, so that if a spatial metaphor in a physical domain (a person in a room) is mapped onto an abstract domain (language in the mind), the attendant logic holds. So a preposition such as “in,” which relates to bounded space—can be used for abstract categories as well, and the attendant logic of this mapping is preserved. Image schemas are generalized forms with “relations in a shared basis of meaning,” thus making “concepts and propositions possible” (Johnson 168).

An examination of the thirty poems that comprise “Inserting the Mirror” reveals that all but two employ in-out orientation, and in terms of containment schema, in all but two poems these schemas are operative. It is

axiomatic that something is either in or outside of a container. Extending this notion metaphorically, then, “we have the claim that everything is either P (in the category-container) or not-P outside the container. In logic this is known as the Law of the Excluded Middle” (Johnson 39). Because we intuitively understand most things as “Either P or not-P” this principle holds true most of the time, and enters our conceptual understanding. Waldrop’s poem cycle, beginning with its title, is saturated with image schema of containment; “sliding between frames of reference” enables Waldrop to be both contained, but free.

Further, it could be argued that in her mobilization of the containment trope, Waldrop situates herself within a particular poetic tradition that extends from Olson back to Thoreau. As Fredman argues in *The Grounding of American Poetry*, in the absence of a unified tradition, American poets have sought different ways to respond to the modern condition. Containment is one of the ways that poets have done so; illustrative of this is Charles Olson, for whom containment is salient.<sup>46</sup> Containment in Olson’s sense is not a negative quality; instead, as Fredman asserts, it “ ‘frees’ by offering a kind of psychological certainty that is based upon investigating one’s own condition” (Fredman 39). Seen in this light, it could be said that Wittgenstein guides Waldrop on a quest of contained self-exploration. Further, examining Waldrop’s work through the perspective of CMT reveals the significance of containment to the text.

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<sup>46</sup> To cite a single example, *The Maximus Poems*, “Letter 5”: “Limits / are what any of us / are inside of“(21).

The key point about metaphor in cognitive linguistics is the transference from one domain to another; the process that facilitates this blend is an integral part of cognitive processes. A domain is a coherent knowledge structure which is “either experiential, derived from embodied experience, both sensory and subjective, or conceptual...not directly derived from experience” (Freeman, “Aesthetics” 735). Waldrop has noted that the impulse of a number of innovative writers (both American and continental) has been to move poetry away from metaphor and its application to the poet’s inner state. Her 1989 essay, “Shall We Escape Analogy,” addresses this topic. In it she argues that since the period of the Romantics, poetry has been identified with metaphor; linguistically, this has foregrounded the vertical axis or paradigmatic selection as opposed to the horizontal (or syntagm). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the paradigmatic axis works by relation, or similarity, whereas the syntagmatic works by combination, sometimes termed a “chain” (Saussure) with rules and conventions. More recently, Waldrop has argued that poets emphasise the syntagmatic and this foregrounds “by implication, a view of the poem as constructing a world through its process rather than expressing or representing an experience or world existing prior to its formulation” (*Dissonance* 105). Yet, it is difficult to escape metaphor. In *The Reproduction of Profiles*, and especially Part II, “Inserting the Mirror,” metaphor is significant. Language writers, in embracing Saussurean principles, wanted to change the emphasis from the vertical axis (which is where metaphor is located with its relation to analogy) to the horizontal axis,

which emphasises combination, and metonymy. The motivation for this shift is the foregrounding of process.

A feature of *The Reproduction of Profiles* is Waldrop's representation of the mind and the body via metaphor, and in particular, personification—especially personified abstractions. The relation of mind and body is arguably the most fundamental question in the philosophy of mind. One familiar view, sometimes called popular dualism, sees the body as a container for the mind. This dualism is mainly associated with Descartes: Cartesian dualism, and Waldrop's project is to navigate these conflicting dichotomies, not only between body and mind, but subject and object, reason and emotion. For example, Waldrop plays with this duality in poem 2. The "I" (mind) sends the body on errands, even coaxes it into marriage: "It trembled and cried on the way to the altar, but then gently pushed the groom down on the floor and sat on him." These are actions that the body performs independently of the mind's "I." As the poem progresses, personification is further employed in terms of flagstones "rocking"; the fuel which "consumes us." The last three sentences appear to be spoken by neither the mind nor the body, but perhaps someone else, or a blend of the two. In any case, the dualism that arises here comes as a result of personifications that Waldrop employs. They are more than simply metonyms for the speaker—because they are disunited, but both are realised via the same conceptual process. In a later poem, she refers to "the mind-body gap" as a bridge that enjoys gazing downstream (poem 7). In poem 17, grammar, which serves as a metonym of language, is personified in that it acts as an agent which "opens up the distance" between "you and



yourself,” in much the same way a speculum opens an orifice, and in poem 25, “Never mind the wholeness...How can I approach the task without all of me gathered in one fist?” In all of these examples, Waldrop employs metaphor, in particular, personification, as a strategy to insert the body in order to cultivate the gap itself, and thus to address questions about the mind.

To better understand the way personification functions in these poems, we will start with the basic generic metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS, which attributes agency to the event an agent brings about. These types of metaphorical agents are often perceived to have human qualities. The introductory poem of “Inserting the Mirror” well illustrates this connection. Waldrop draws an analogy between language and rain. The rain falls (here, “pulls shreds of cloud down with it into the street full of reflection”), and in poem 11, “the rain drummed...eager to fall into language and be solved in the manner of mysteries,” becoming “a play of reflections” (poem 12), in “the reflected light of metaphor” (poem 13). Events are commonly believed to be the consequence of an action; thus, an agent (in this case, the rain) is involved in the action of falling, pulling, drumming. But a simultaneous event occurs in relation to language. Just as the speaker must step outside the room “to explore the nature of rain,” so too must she step outside language to explore its mysteries. Thus, Waldrop creates a complex network of ideas from simple relationships which can be understood in human terms, setting up equations whereby abstract ideas/concepts (language) are perceived as animate or human; furthermore, using knowledge about ourselves and our bodies we can begin to comprehend these abstractions: “I

expected the drops to strike my skin like a keyboard,” keyboard here referring to a typewriter, as well as a musical instrument. As readers, considering the “domains made real” by formal configurations of the metaphors evokes “various contours of meaning” (Bernstein, *A Poetics* 18).

In fact, every poem in Part II employs these types of metaphor. (Other examples include: “detachment spiralled out,” “resonance grows,” “possibility...thickened,” “explanations hanging in the air,” “the idea of depth smells fishy,” “the sun leaned on the shoulder,” “space has folded in on itself,” “objects sat... in their silence,” “the dusk swelled,” “rain...appeases,” “fields stretch,” and “dust...rises to the occasion.”) Frequently, it is language that is animized/personified as illustrated below:

Poem 1: “That language can suggest a body where there is none.”

Poem 5: “this sentence [which] might go on forever, knotting phrase onto phrase ... and still not take me to my language waiting, surely, around some corner.”

Poem 6: “The strength of language does not reside in the fact that some one desire runs its whole length, but in the overlapping of many generations.”

Poem 8: “How high the sea of language runs. Its white sails, sexual, inviting to apply the picture, or black, mourning decline in navigation”; “the words gather momentum.”

Poem 9: “where the sentence goes wrong.”

Poem 11: “the rain drummed on the tin roof of the garage, eager to fall into language and be solved in the manner of mysteries.”

Poem 12: “grammatical rules, the foghorns of language.”

Poem 14: “words will still send me in pursuit of chimeras.”

Poem 17: “grammatical terror opens a distance between you and yourself in order to insert the mirror”; “the motion will wear itself out, its speed braked by words.”

Poem 19: “my language repeats it to me over and over.”

Poem 21: “the alphabet ceases to be a disposition of the mind.”

Poem 23: “I hope the words aren’t idling ...but igniting wild acres within the probabilities of spelling.”

Poem 24: “[eye]lids barnacled shut with adjectives in color”; “Sleep, which cannot be divided from itself or into parts of speech, pushing a whole sea”; “Later, writing would articulate the absence of voice, pictures, the absence of objects, clothes, the absence of body.”

Poem 27: “The labyrinth of language. You know your way as you go in one bony side, but out the other you’re lost”; “deep space where sentences breathe differently.”

Poem 28: “Incestuous words, reflecting reference.”

Poem 30: “Lesions of language.”

The root analogies in these examples include:

WORDS/LANGUAGE=LIQUID (8, 11, 24); WORDS/LANGUAGE = DOING/ACTING or EVENTS =ACTIONS (1, 5, 8, 9, 14, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27); in particular, these exemplify LANGUAGE AS FORCE.

### **Language as Force**

According to Johnson (1987), an image schema is a paradigm that helps to structure recurrent experiences, and it is also available as a metaphor to provide an understanding of other experiences via transference from target to source domain. The predominant image schema that operates in Part II as we have seen is containment schema, but equally compelling is the presence of the force schema. This image schema relates to causal interaction, either of the material or metaphorical kind. While containment foregrounds boundedness and limitation, force concerns motion, action and its direction and intensity. Like containment, force is a “preconceptual gestalt structure” that originates in the body and its interactions with its environment. Force structures have a number of definable features:

Force is experienced through interaction;

Force involves movement of an object through space;

Typically this movement occurs in a particular direction, along a path;

Forces are sources; because of this they have a vector quality and can be directed at a target. This implies agency;

Forces are experienced with relation to a causal sequence.

Johnson applies the term “gestalt structure” here to mean “an organized, unified whole within our experience and understanding that manifests a repeatable manner or structure” (43-44). Of the most commonly experienced

structures, seven are relevant here: compulsion, blockage, counterforce, diversion, removal of restraint, enablement, attraction.

The notion of force as related to poetry recalls Olson's concept of the poem as "a high-energy construct." In "Projective Verse" Olson explains:

A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it...by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct, and at all points, a high-energy discharge (52).

Waldrop wrote an essay critiquing Olson in 1977 in which she asserts that "although it is very likely that Olson came to the concept through gestalt psychology" it has been traced further back to Pound and Williams (by Don Byrd). In any case, Waldrop says, "It is important that, for Olson, the poem is written out of a field of forces and that it remains a field even when finished" (*Dissonance* 59-60).

As has already been noted, Waldrop's work, like Olson's, emerges out of the Second World War. The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development and understanding of atomic energy; the application of that energy ended the war. Thus, it could be said that the emergence of poetry as a process in the 1960s with an emphasis on vector/force/velocity "begins with the atom" (Von Hallberg 115). I do not wish to claim here that Waldrop is re-writing Olson, but to note an affinity. Both locate the person through the physical. Reading Waldrop through linguistic theory, then, is more than a descriptive tool; it is "a catalyst for interpretation" (Carter and Stockwell 297). Applying Johnson's theory to "Inserting the Mirror" throws light on Waldrop's schematic model of language. Language is perceived not only as

containment, as we have seen, but as force. It is viewed as compulsion in poem 5: “it might go on forever,” as a force we are unable to resist “overlapping [...] many generations” (poem 6). In our interactions with language, we may encounter obstacles, such as “this sentence ... knotting phrase onto phrase” (poem 5), grammatical rules redirecting its force (“the foghorns of language” poem 12), or “grammatical terror,” which “opens a distance” (poem 17).

This experience of blockage is one that is repeated, as in poem 19: “my language repeats it to me over and over”; parts of speech, a synecdoche of language, have the power of “pushing a whole sea” or placing barnacles over the eyelids and forcing them shut “with adjectives in color” (poem 24). Sometimes these forces come into collision, or, diversionary tactics are required: “words will still send me in pursuit of chimeras” (poem 17) until “the alphabet ceases to be a disposition of the mind” (poem 21). In such a place “you’re lost” (poem 27). Nevertheless, “the motion will wear itself out, its speed braked by words” (poem 17), and in the absence of restraint, “in deep space ... sentences breathe differently” (poem 27). Enablement is now possible: “language can suggest a body where there is none” (poem 1); words have the power of “igniting wild acres within the probabilities of spelling” (poem 23); and writing can “articulate the absence of voice, pictures, the absence of objects, clothes, the absence of body” (poem 24).

Finally, these experiences are similar to a powerful physical attraction. “The force is not gravitational, in the standard sense, but it is a kind of gravitation toward an object” (Johnson 47-8). And it is erotic. Waldrop perceives of the strength of language as “desire” (poem 6), “its white sails,

sexual” (poem 8); even the rain is “eager to fall into” it (poem 11). The sexual analogy relates not only to Barthes’ application of orgasmic pleasure to reading in *The Pleasure of the Text*, but also to Georges Bataille (1986), who links sexual dynamics and poetics in *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*. Waldrop quotes both these writers in her essay “Alarms and Excursions,” though in relation to Bataille, she addresses issues related to the general economy of writing. She says that “what poems want” is “to attract attention to the word as an object, as a sensuous body, to keep it from being a mere counter of exchange” (179). While Johnson’s theory aims to prove that these force structures show our ability to make sense of our experience is dependent upon a set of “very definite highly structured image-schematic gestalts,” Waldrop’s work provides a concrete application in terms of language as force, particularly sexual force. It is this heightened awareness of self-reflexivity which distinguishes the postmodern avant-garde from the modernist avant-garde. Thus, new approaches are called upon in order to write about such conceptually sophisticated poetry. The inter-disciplinarity of the approach taken here, rooted in philosophy, psychology, linguistics and criticism, shows what is required to be a critic of an erudite writer, such as those at the centre of this investigation.

Taking the idea of the context as environment in which the poem is created, we have seen that Waldrop’s poetry since the late 1980s has been concerned with social and historic contexts, and in particular, evinces her interest in philosophy and epistemology. Her palimpsestic approach to Wittgenstein’s writings in *The Reproduction of Profiles* shows her challenging the authority of propositional logic, and in particular, its

limitations in terms of representation. According to Meadows, Waldrop's use of this material works to "disperse and date language, to place it (or acknowledge the saturated and long history of language) within the socio-political contexts" ("Rosmarie Waldrop," *Language Games*, para. 4). While the procedures she employs may not be unique to her, her interventions enable her to interrogate the assumptions at play in these discourses. "Collage enables her to transform the 'betweenness' from marginality to a mode of intervention and critique" (Reed, "The Splice," para. 3). It also enables her to create new contexts.

One of the final sentences in the collection is: "Lesions of language." The word *lesion* superficially means "cut," but more specifically refers to "damage, injuries, a hurt or flaw, whether material or immaterial."<sup>47</sup> If, as Reed claims, it has been Waldrop's intention "to expose the gaps and slippages within the language" of her source text, then this metaphorical conceptualization with its emphasis on the body is persuasive ("The Splice," V, para. 1). Not only does the metaphor throw light on her linguistic procedures, but also it evokes very powerfully social and historical issues relating to Waldrop's own personal background. As she explains to Joan Retallack in relation to her novel, *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter*:

...any attempt to understand is a construction, and a violence. Keeping that in mind, especially when the subject involves something as horrible as the Holocaust, even if you only touch on the fringes, how can you pretend 'to understand?' ...That is the wound of this book. To know that I have come out of this" ("A Conversation" 341).

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<sup>47</sup> "lesion." *Oxford English Dictionary*. [www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk](http://www.oed.com.chain.kent.ac.uk) Web 31 December 2013.



In her essay, “Nothing to Say and Saying It,” Waldrop addresses Adorno’s famous declaration that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. First, she quotes Jabés’ response: “I say that after Auschwitz we must write poetry but with wounded words.” Then she goes on to explore what writers can do to “refresh the always living, always dying word” (*Dissonance* 274). Waldrop’s personal biography, both as émigré and as coming “out of this” inflects all her writing. As a metaphor, “the wound of this book” (*Hanky*) reminds us that metaphors also help us to talk about difficult or overwhelming experiences.

Throughout *The Reproduction of Profiles*, there are image metaphors related to fluidity, water, rain, and drowning. Frequently language is associated with water, as in the metaphor “the sea of language.”<sup>48</sup> In the poem “Between,” Waldrop writes: “a creature with gills and lungs/I live in shallow water/but/when it rains/I inherit the land.” Waldrop writes of being “Between, Always,” between languages, between continents.<sup>49</sup> She lives on the edge of the North American continent, next to the Atlantic Ocean. She takes this “betweenness” to be a positive condition. For her, LANGUAGE IS FLUID, and “there will be moments of triumph when the fluidity takes over,” as she tells Matthew Cooperman (“Between Tongues” question 15). While her choice of metaphor in this context is no doubt a subconscious one, it provides crucial evidence to the unique aspects of Waldrop’s mind style.

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<sup>48</sup> Bataille: “Poetry is eternity: the sun matched with the sea.”

<sup>49</sup> “Between” is an important word for Olson, too. Repeatedly he says “At root (or stump) what *is* is no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things. These are the terms of the reality contemporary to us—and the terms of what we are” (*Human* 23).

The final sentence of the collection reads: “Or perhaps it is a misunderstanding to peel back skin in order to bare the mechanics of the mirage.” This metaphor relates to the first poem in Part II: “inside the workings of language,” whereby LANGUAGE IS MACHINE. It relates to the functional analysis of language, whereby the brain is conceived as a syntactic engine. It also evokes the earlier reference to “lesion” in the image of peeling back the [wounded or injured] skin, but what is revealed in this case is a “mirage”—empty space.

### **Conclusion**

This notion of the empty space would continue to occupy Waldrop. According to her, it derives, in part from her occupation of translating the seven volumes of Jabès’ *Book of Questions*, “a work that keeps turning around an empty transcendence, a non-existent God” (*Curves* xi). Subsequent work addresses these same concerns. In 2006, *Curves to the Apple* was published by New Directions. It includes *The Reproduction of Profiles* (1987), *Lawn of Excluded Middle* (1993), and *Reluctant Gravities* (1999) as a trilogy. The books share many of the same preoccupations, in particular ideas related to mind and body, emotion and reasoning. In the same way that *Reproduction* collages phrases from philosophy, *Lawn* draws from ideas from fiction, philosophy and physics—both classic physics (A.S. Eddington’s *The Nature of the Physical World*, 1929) as well as quantum physics. While it continues to recycle some material from *Philosophical Investigations*, it also draws from Robert Musil’s novella “The Perfecting of Love,” 1911. Why these selected texts? Keller claims that there is an

intellectual synergy with each of these European writers: “they play into her interest in exploring the limits of linguistic picture-making, in interrogating the relationship between mental experience and physical phenomena” (Keller, “Fields” 383). Like the earlier volume, both *Lawn of Excluded Middle* and *Reluctant Gravities* resist the claim that everything is either true or false; poetry provides “an alternate, less linear logic” (*Curves* 97). While all three volumes in the trilogy are written in the dialogic mode, employing the female and male voices, the final volume in the trilogy, *Reluctant Gravities*, diverges formally from the earlier work, in that the prose poems, organised in six separate sections, are interspersed with sections containing two songs and a Meditation. These interject different rhythms into what is otherwise relatively densely packed squares of prose. A Prologue introduces the two voices, and here, unlike in the previous two volumes, each voice is given equality of time/space in which to speak, with the male’s speech reported in direct discourse, just as the female’s is.

The final question then concerns Waldrop’s linguistic choice as a reflection of an ideological position. *Lawn of Excluded Middle* concludes with ten enumerated statements which act as an explicit manifesto. Among them are the following statements:

- 1.The law of excluded middle is a venerable old law of logic. But much can be said against its claim that everything must be either true or false.

- 2.The idea that women cannot think logically is a not so venerable old stereotype. As an example of thinking, I don’t think we need to discuss it.

- 3.*Lawn of Excluded Middle* plays with the idea of woman as the excluded middle. Women and, more particularly, the womb, the

empty center of the woman's body, the locus of fertility (*Curve* 97).

The rejection of strict dualities is thus at the heart of her thinking. Throughout the body of her work, it is articulated formally, syntactically and semantically; here it is stated explicitly. Throughout this collection, there is a noticeable emphasis on numerous ways to describe the empty centre: absence, separation, what is seen or unseen, what one is blind to. She often refers to this absence as “gap gardening,” as she sees the cultivation of absence as a potential site of transformation. Parallels are drawn between composing / decomposing the text and the body, and as “we cling to the slower proofs measured in mutations,” these forever evade us, and in a wonderful, phonological parallelism, adds: “Poof” (*Curves* 194). The phonological parallelism here calls to mind Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*: “Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? / The sour curd and the iron stool. (Pause.) Revelled / in the word spool. (With relish.) Spoooool!”<sup>50</sup> Over and over again, Waldrop reminds us, language cannot provide a true picture of the world—only embodied experience can do this. Throughout our thinking, we privilege sight over other senses: metaphorically, this is expressed as KNOWING IS SEEING. What Waldrop would ask of us is to select an alternative route: SEEING IS TOUCHING, feeling with the body, with the flesh. To do this, we have to insert the mirror of language, the mirror representing the word, the female, the writing, the written.

In the closing conversations of *Reluctant Gravities*, Conversation 22 is “On Slowing.” In it, the woman says: “But highs are only one element of the

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<sup>50</sup> In an essay titled “Nothing to Say and Saying It,” written after the bombing of the World Trade Centre, Waldrop quotes Beckett.

climate. The shadow of a cloud, and my breasts droop, faintly mournful.” Beckett is the ghost in the text here as well: “Perhaps my best years are gone.” To which the male responds: “Could it be that loss completes possession? Becomes like the ‘with’ in ‘without’, a second acquisition, deeper, wholly internal, more intense for its pain?” Metaphorically we conceive of life and youth as highs; with aging and death we succumb to the force of gravity, albeit with reluctance. Time plays a causal role in this process; thus, time is a metaphorical agent. Metaphor, as we have seen, is the mapping from source to target domain in order to arrive at a new understanding. In his reply, we perceive this metaphorical mapping of youth as a possession which time snatches away from us. Because CHANGES ARE EVENTS, it is possible to personify TIME AS A CHANGER. In a characteristic move, Waldrop perceives presence in absence—pain, a deeply felt bodily event, can only be acquired through embodied experience. Moreover, through its intensity, we arrive at a new understanding.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **Text: Poetry as Research**

This dissertation has investigated innovative writing at the level of language by examining the work of three women Language writers. One of the central features of this writing is the re-negotiation of the roles of producer and consumer of text, with the reader taking a more active role in the construction of meaning. In common with other Language writers, Howe, Hejinian and Waldrop disrupt the syllogistic force of the sentence by interrupting the logical chains from which arguments and propositions flow. Thus, a detailed, systematic and thoroughgoing analysis of syntax is crucial for understanding what makes the work innovative. As a social movement, Language writing also engaged with wider social and political contexts. These three women writers took gender as an object of critique to show that gender is a crucial, material fact in determining a poet's relation to language, knowledge and power.

In Chapter 2 we have seen through close analysis the ways in which Howe establishes place as a topic of concern. While a number of literary critics have commented on aspects of sound patterning in Howe's poetry, this chapter has looked closely at the syntax of the phrase, showing that the phrase is Howe's unit. Howe writes against the pastoral tradition in order to explore issues of settlement and appropriation. This matter of appropriation relates both to land and to collage-based poetic procedures used by these poets. Moreover, through an analysis of figure/ground relations, we have seen how she has been able to rescue the lost and disenfranchised by foregrounding historic personae as reflective subjects. Through the lens of schema theory, we have observed the way that Howe is able to connect Hope Atherton's story to a variety of female

entities, including “the poet in America.” Howe, whose pre-reflective self hovers in the background, cedes authority to the reader by removing the verb between objects, thereby foregrounding the process of perception before syntax takes control. The approach taken in this chapter has led to a more nuanced understanding of Howe’s repositioning of language in the wilderness.

In the case of Hejinian, the poem is not about the world but in it. Her exploration of “the consciousness of consciousness” led her to Russia, and the notion of *ostranenie*. As we have seen, one of the basic tenets of cognitive poetics is that we understand language and literature on the basis of our experience in the world. Cognitive approaches bear upon knowledge—both conscious and pre-conscious, and the various ways that knowledge is represented, organized and used. The cognitive approaches employed in Chapter 3 have offered an insight into this process. This approach offers exactly the kind of radical introspection that Hejinian calls for in poetry. Taking *My Life* as a representative text, this dissertation has called upon theories of mind style and blending to throw light on how language reflects ideological point of view and world view. This has helped us to examine, in a systematic way, the different domains of style that together represent mind style. In particular, it has revealed the cultural conception of the self through which the different viewpoints merge into a blended space where a new understanding of agency and its manifestation is yielded. By examining her work through the lens of mind style and related cognitive approaches then we have arrived at a new understanding of how Hejinian implicates theory in practice.

Like the previous two writers, Rosmarie Waldrop too is in dialogue with language and with place. Through palimpsestic techniques, she borrows Wittgenstein's language, reformulating his masculine logic, but with her woman's body and feminine mind. Examining Waldrop's use of the mirror trope through cognitive metaphor theory has enabled us to see this object as more than a trope for the mimetic function of art, but as a device of reflexivity. Of particular relevance to Waldrop's work is Mark Johnson's *The Body in the Mind*. Thus, we have seen how conceptual metaphor theory, which emphasizes the importance of metaphor grounded in bodily experience, is embedded in her work. Equally affinitive is Michael Reddy's research into core conceptual metaphors. Containment, it has been shown, is one of the primary examples of schema because containment in the womb is a universal, pre-conceptual experience. Our analysis has shown a preference for metaphors of containment in Waldrop's work; moreover, this feature situates her in a particular American poetic tradition leading from Thoreau to Olson. Thus, examining Waldrop's work through cognitive metaphor theory reveals how Waldrop's pre-conceptual gestalt structures originate in the body and its interaction with its environment.

In this dissertation I have worked from the premise that poetry is a mode of epistemological inquiry. A key term in stylistics is that of iconicity—the feature that enables poetry to resemble felt life. Cognitive poetics, it has been shown, offers a body of knowledge which can account for linguistic creativity and its interpretation. It is hoped that this dissertation provides a link between the linguistic processes involved in the creation of a literary text, and the



cognitive processes involved in its interpretation, and thus builds a bridge between linguistic and literary practice.

### **Poetry as Practice: *Continental Drift***

*Continental Drift* is part of an ongoing investigation into the relation of poetry to place. As Steve Collis writes in relation to Susan Howe, my own work aims to enact, amongst other things, a “descent into the past, the conversation with the dead...and the palimpsestic overlaying of sources and cultures” (*Through Words* 38). The title itself makes reference to the geological theory which claims that the continents of the earth were once a single supercontinent which gradually began to break apart and drift into separate locations. The title also implies the collection’s multiple concerns with place/displacement in location/language and with the borders of continent and country, person and language, what Ed Dorn calls “inside real and outsidereal.” *Continental Drift* negotiates this terrain. While grounded in real places, the poems’ cross-cultural accumulations concern not only the various physical locations, but also the human history and natural elements related to their location. Questions such as how language takes place against those forces which are bent on *taking* place in the sense of holding, leasing, capturing or seizing resonate throughout the work as a whole.

The first section, “Crossing the Water,” is comprised of a single sequence of six poems titled “Music of the Phenomenal World,” written as a response to compositions by Arvo Pärt. Individual poems are titled after Pärt’s compositions on the album “Arbos.” The music is both visionary and mystical, and through these properties, I hoped to throw light on pre-reflective

experience rather than conscious reflection of subjective experience. Through sound devices, the poems aim towards a sounding out of place. This sounding concerns vocal utterance, as well as the sounds produced by musical instruments such as bells or horns and the resonant qualities they produce. Moreover, this sounding also has to do with the process of ascertaining the depth of water, usually by means of an echo/eco. In a sense, place evoked in this cycle is an imaginary landscape, though it is grounded in real landscapes of present and past. Moreover, it is meant to suggest, in Olson's words, that "Time is the life of the space" (cited in Blaser, section 1, para. 17).

The poems in the second section, titled "Inclusions," were born in the darkness of the Kentish winter. The term "inclusions" refers not only to the state of being included but also in geology to a foreign body being enclosed in a mineral or rock. A central poem in this section is "Flow," written in the form of a *glosa*. This Spanish form begins with a quatrain of the poet to whom one is paying tribute (here Emily Dickinson, although I've omitted the quatrain as the lines are so well known). Each one of those four lines is then "glossed" in the four stanzas which follow. The poem also pays homage to Susan Howe and her historical incursions, her linguistic excursions. However, the central tension that arises at the end of this section is between the poetic sublime and the nuclear sublime. The ancient concept of the sublime which was reinvigorated by the Romantic poets has been misappropriated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to account for the overwhelming feelings engendered by the doomsday scenario unleashed at Alamogordo on July 16, 1945. Thus, this section begins with lyric poems set in naturally sublime local contexts before drifting to the poems' other locations and more disjunctive and disruptive forms and contexts.

The third section, “po-wa-ha,” derives from a Pueblo phrase meaning “wind, water, breath,” but it also a homophone of power. Landscapes are always subject to history and human impact and interventions, but these poems show what happens when politics invade the landscape. In the “Poets Against the End of the World” protest held in New York on May 26, 1982, Jane Cooper said, “It seems to me almost impossible to address the nuclear threat directly, yet—whether we like it or not—that threat is the undercurrent in all our work now” (Wilson 409). In the 1980s the concept of nuclear sublime continued to be invoked in the name of American supremacy; “po-wa-ha” thus creates a landscape of dread, as the New Mexico deserts of the natural sublime were appropriated by the military-industrial complex in what E.P. Thompson termed the “awful yet sublime doctrine of MAD [Mutually Assured Destruction]” (cited in Wilson 435). As Susan Howe adopts Hope Atherton’s “excursion in order to demythologize the belief system of Manifest Destiny,” “po-wa-ha” adopts the dual personae of Gadget and Spider Grandmother to project a discursive resistance to the ideology of the nuclear sublime. Recalling Adorno’s argument, Jabès’ has written that “we must write poetry after Auschwitz, but with wounded words” (*Dissonance* 274). I would argue that words written after Hiroshima must understand themselves as wounded in a similar sense.

The final section, titled “The Lay of the Land,” recalls not only the arrangement of features within an area of land, but also, idiomatically, the facts of a situation. What are the implications of the situations and conditions evoked in the poetry before Hiroshima in terms of writing afterwards? A central condition now, these poems would suggest, is alienation in its various

manifestations: estrangement, derangement, taking something without authority, land held by someone other than the proper owner, the diversion of something from its intended use. The title of the first poem relates both to geological matters, where sedimentary strata succumb to various stresses such as changes in pressure or temperature, but it also implies language matters with regard to the procedures of the preceding sections. Terminology from Japanese landscape gardening (borrowed landscape) has also been introduced to suggest that landscapes, like languages, are not ours, but something that we borrow for a time. The section (and indeed the collection) ends with the poem [E]scape. In the epigraph to *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, there is a teasing ambiguity: “from seaweed said nor repossess rest / scape esaid.” Howe’s “scape” holds open possibilities; it can be read both as landscape and also as escape. With the various foldings back and in the elided term proposes, it seemed appropriate to end my collection as Howe began hers.

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## Continental Drift



*“Past*

*is past. I salute that various field.”*

*—James Schuyler, “Salute”*

*“The notion of a landscape element escapes precise definition. On the one hand, a site may be a physical entity that reveals certain characteristics of the place...On the other, a site may refer to something imperceptible but nonetheless significant (a past event, a local story, or chronology).” –Christophe Girot*

## Proem

If only it were possible to arrive  
at a condition of knowing  
through language. What the rain  
knows. That the same number  
of planets circle the sun today  
as yesterday. That it signals  
something. Not exactly Gene Kelly  
dancing and singing, but a portent  
borrowed from the sea endlessly  
rocking and powered by a rage  
to meet in time, word to word,  
running rings. The surface may appear  
fragmented but underneath  
a deep and seamless structure. Abides.  
This is not about you anymore  
but you are in it.

## **1 Crossing the Water**

## Music of the Phenomenal World

*"I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played."--Arvo Pärt*

### Arbos

The years wind back  
to an old refrain

*--There isn't a train I wouldn't take  
No matter where it's going*

A memory of you  
fossilised in amber,  
out of time.

Looking  
for moss under stones  
stumbling  
upon you.

Disillusions disappear  
trailing sound.

I carry you encased  
in resin, an amulet  
round my neck.

Time trails.

Sound of keys  
jangling means a corn bunting  
camouflages in the hedgerows.

Feathered choristers utter  
the creed  
    aural symphony of plain  
    song, few notes, much repetition.

Swell  
of a single bell.  
    Here before  
hear after a tone train streaming  
meaning  
    unlimited returns.

Swift flight  
of a winter sparrow.



## zu Babel

Bittern in the reed beds neck the sky and go boom.  
Babbling, inhabiting the borders. That place unreason  
lives. Coppiced chestnuts, conifer plantations woods  
older than Babylon. European oaks tell of eruption—  
yellow fog, dim sun, summer frost, famine. Learning  
to weapon, maraud. Bronze follows copper follows  
bluebell, anemone, dog's mercury, herb paris,  
columbine, bird's nest orchid. Mystery flowers, hordes  
of swords, spearheads, sickles, chisels.

Released from dendrochronology pentatonic monody  
for four voices. Drones. Rare lady orchid fringes the  
escarpment outside time.

\*

Loosening the bands of syntax  
morpheme by morpheme  
mother plaiting pain  
the name she gave you  
all that remains.

A beam of light  
wedges a foot in the door

elongating

*fa    fah    far*

hum and haw,  
random acts of kindness.

You go deep to reassemble  
thought.

*reccheo, reccho, exile  
errant, wretch*

Words aged in the dark  
before us  
stammer past future  
present.  
Time layers.

Find the word for it  
and let it  
go into the forest,  
locate others.

Tuning.

Among them you walk  
in moonlight  
carrying your shadow.

\*

Wandering in a forest of words,  
parsing. Under-script collides  
with the pungency of white geraniums.

You stand on the bank  
testing for affinities. Danger  
of quicksand and disappearing.  
I walk on needles and silence.

In the boreal forest  
memory frays.

Whose children are those  
scrawling in wet sand?

Blur of lore,  
dream-work and grasping,  
finding your name there. Linked  
from the start, your life  
and mine.

## **de Profundis**

What matters is  
not the frame but the space  
inside. Broken glass. The wind  
bellows, curtain billows.

Crows there.

A woman stands in front  
of the hearth, drying her hair.

All around her the old world  
is crumbling. Swathes of red  
dead trees. Must not see, say, so  
lost without you. Falling masonry. Fire  
glances round the room, licking.  
Aspen-glow, tinder-box, wild.

West, we were here.

## Vor Langen Jahren

The rings of the tree know  
something. Radical  
introspection. In here is a world  
the tree wishes to speak of,  
the shadow of a former

*Listen.*

Overcome by beauty  
of wind in the leaves you are  
apt to miss the point.  
A year is made of light and dark  
rings, principle of Limiting Factors. Spring  
wood filled with inner light endarkens  
and hardens by summer. They died  
of heart sickness.

And so a woman  
rich in cognates contemplates  
the heavens:

*str,  
étoile, aster, stella, star*

Flight into darkness. Above  
me sways the fir tree. You are  
here not forever  
forever not here.  
Are you.

\*

Berthed in straw  
below deck, hemmed in  
and the sea roiling. Farewell  
to small land and heather village.  
Fading. Ruptures,  
transatlantic abrasions.  
Crossings and starting over.

Scattering  
to cheap and fertile  
undesired land. Unfamiliar tongue weeds  
wed wedes.

*Give me your*  
Pour through numbered,  
encumbered  
*No stopping here.*

Stumble into pale light,  
Lake of the Woods,  
someone else's,

dwellers amongst the leaves.  
Taking it.  
The fields too,  
the cistern.  
Dipping.  
Thick as trees and just as good  
at keeping secrets.  
Worm in the wood.  
Up here on the rim  
transubstantiating and wearing  
masks, writing the world.

\*

Fleeting fall turns to winter sleet.  
When they got to the new world  
they called each place by the old names.

Never mastered the broad vowels,  
learned instead to keep quiet,  
tame their speech.

Watching northern geese  
baste cloud to earth,  
wing dips  
pulse in every point,  
long and low  
*herronk* of no return.  
Chaos due north,  
retreat before things break apart.

The heart  
repines.

Suppose I were to find  
words in my pocket,  
loose change. Unlettered.

Blow them over the sea.

*What is this spindrift?*  
asks the cormorant.  
*Dance of the Spirits*  
answer the Cree.

\*

The bark knows.  
Putting on a brave face, it scrutinises  
the sky. Day after day, cloud

hangs there. Leaves come and go,  
then snow. So much time  
spent waiting.

Wave after wave  
of lapwings fly  
over late-winter fields. Lilacs  
in the dooryard  
bloom and everything shooting  
upwards. A blue orb fractures,  
unfamiliar tongue  
cleaving, wanting  
to sing a song  
in a strange land.

Oaks turn  
inward.

*Click-clack*  
*Click-clack*

Shiny refrain of train on the tracks.  
Dashing of little ones against stones.  
Heart, my heart,  
bury my heart.

## Adam Laments

Anthracite waves and growing larger.  
The sea cambers.

*Who goes there?*

Tableaux of ravage continuing  
past port  
past ship  
past hope and tearing  
train from the track,  
sphere slips from its axis.

Little bird too blue to fly  
cannot say  
what it saw, the sea  
took it all.

The palm is the width of,  
a foot is the width of,  
a pace is four cubits.

The length of a man  
is outspread.

Harmony of symmetry  
is yielding.

Nature of the universe  
spreadeagle.

Language of the body  
in sound  
in place.

They fled for the hills,  
bleeding.

Composing themselves  
the moon and the nimbus.

\*

*--They that carried us away  
required of us a song*

The sun dips

yet its beams linger  
on the tree tops to the east.

If I were bark  
If I were canopy  
I would shelter you.

The tracks of the deer  
winnow through trees  
where the whippoorwill calls  
and I cannot.

*--And now down I must sit  
by a little fire, and a few boughs behind me.*

They were  
where they not  
effaced.



## Stabat

Mater. Where everything begins,  
ends. Black is the water  
that covers the earth sweeping,  
pulling them deep into the vortex  
foundering  
and no breathing.

Matter  
light as air ascending.  
Is there a place for them?

There weep  
in deep sorrow  
for those who go down  
into the sea.

Mater  
have mercy, you who can  
stand iniquities. Matter  
in these depths  
descending

*mon munde min muna*

remember.

## **2 Inclusions**

## Sea in Winter

Although the tide fills the space  
between a bank of cloud  
and a band of shingle,  
the sea belongs to the land  
today. Shoals of fish spin  
in a shaft of silver  
light; for a moment  
I too am held  
in that light.

How little we know  
what lies beneath the skin.

My eyes ride the waves.  
The sea is self-sufficient.  
Across this expanse  
the land of my mother,  
her people. They have  
nothing more  
to lose. I am travelling  
faster toward them,  
gaining velocity  
in the wind  
blowing down  
from the north.

There is too much  
sea. We will awake  
one morning  
no longer knowing  
what we are,  
why we are here.  
The words, when they go,  
will leave their shadows  
on the steps.

## Offshore

Among the waves  
a single seagull stays out late  
sweeping the sea.  
Small beacons flash intermittently.  
I wonder if they really exist.

Later I begin to understand  
those flashing lights  
are the amber eyes of my ancestors  
no longer a part  
of the material world.  
Some words remain with them,  
splinters of driftwood, pieces  
of sea glass. They invite me to join them  
in the clavicle of the sea  
where there is just enough  
light to make out the features  
I have inherited.

When it grows dark footsteps approach  
then pass. The stars grimace  
though we know tradition demands  
a wish. Out there they watch  
our comings and goings.  
Their silence makes me  
uneasy. When night well and truly  
falls the only person here  
is my shadow dreaming  
of a threshold  
and wanting to come in.

## Flow

I look into the mirror till one of us  
blinks, alert to the currents of air and waiting  
for the state of flow. I've always wanted  
the river to carry me like that. In deep  
water the body learns to breathe differently.  
Or Millais' Ophelia, her clothes spread wide  
awhile. Breaking off communication sweetens  
the tongue. Without the complication of syntax  
words meet by chance, a reliable guide  
*I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—*

You walked up those tracks to someplace else,  
a grand, solitary woman picking up tools  
the men left behind. In the gaps between  
a world appeared, blending lexicon and landscape.  
A state of tension is not compulsory.  
Rebel vowels sway to the tune  
of a waltz, leaping to an undiscovered place  
of reverence and revolt, pulling text  
from the dark side of noon  
*The Stillness in the Room*

An aftermath of earlier soundings—  
walking through the lives of others,  
an interior corridor where a ray of sun  
touches the mirror and rainbows ricochet  
like bullets round the room. The circumstances  
of your birth spun you from your crib. There  
were unpredictable sequences, spontaneous changes.  
Trauma was part of the landscape.  
You didn't get as far as you'd hoped. That prayer  
*Was like the Stillness in the Air—*

Sea-borne, violent, outside the weather cannot  
be stanch'd. The sky grows dark then darker.  
The farmer abandons his hay, the seagulls  
the plough's churned loam. Lost  
for words. It is time to expose the myth;  
under the waxy sheen stirs the worm.  
What is missing empowers the here  
and now. I must retrace your steps,  
return to the place where histories form  
*Between the Heaves of Storm—*

## **Inclosures**

Most of us have this same piece of ground we keep scratching on. Typically one square metre (or less) marked out sometimes as one of several for studying the rarest species. The best shape is the rectangle. Long short ratio of 25:1. The life histories of individuals passing through—Pioneer, Building, Mature, De-generate phases of growth. They too have memory, their history determined by the substrate. Plant them on smooth bare rock, they will be lichens, on a ribbed surface, tree moss. And it takes generations to learn. To compel memory. To yield.

## Winterbourne Valley

1

The valley's thick with fleece  
mist and mellow. Crows congregate  
picking at things. Propositions  
wouldn't melt on their tongues.  
It's hard to tell if the horizon's black  
shapes are listing ships  
or shadows. Broken  
spectres. Overnight  
giant death's chair mushrooms,  
fairy rings veil gill and spore.  
So cold in the hour  
before dawn, breath clouds.  
If you imagine robin egg blue  
the sky doesn't fight  
them. You lie in a state  
of hypnagogia, trying to  
step into a name. An astonishment  
with all its accessories embedded  
folds. Here is a secret  
hinterland.

2

In my picture window  
seagulls soar, up-lit by late afternoon  
sun, newly planted  
winter. If I could be  
a river running out to sea  
I'd start over instead  
of sitting  
in the same chair  
watching the day  
wane. Having done so much  
that I regret and still  
can't let it go. One keeps  
sawing away at the knot  
in the wood, a dormant bud  
around which the fibres flow  
in cross sections of vowel  
and consonant. Just as a small craft  
approaches a waterfall, I ply

an ocean between us  
and disaster. Sky of blue  
mislaid and later sidewise  
a burst of rain roars,  
flailing. Like the thin edge  
of the wedge, a foot  
inside the door.

3

Chill as October lengthened,  
a shredded vapour trail  
silvered by twilight. I learn  
to speak my father's language  
with a foreign accent. Some  
words are like eggs, they just fit  
in the palm of the hand. Others,  
webs shimmering with hoarfrost.  
I try them all,  
roll them round on the tongue,  
breathe in their must.  
Once I ate a whole  
paragraph a sentence at a time.  
After that I began to hide some  
under the bed. They whisper  
to me at night. Wanting me  
wanting to burst out.

4

The fog encroaches like a migraine  
creeping inward and stealing the visual field.  
Your eyes reflect the room's light  
and emptiness, an aperture to the exterior  
world where the cloud curdles and the sun  
turns inward. The sky is  
falling, says Chicken Licken. Idleness  
bathes the land  
in blue milk and suddenly overcome  
with relief that the trees  
are webbed with wood smoke  
you have nothing  
to say. Though your body is here



it's as if  
you have vanished.

5  
Obscure melancholia returns  
with November. Leaves resemble  
Felina whirling in a West Texas town.  
The twist starts here in the calf and travels  
to the hip, to the brain. Jagged  
veins of lightning thread the sky.  
You stagger out from behind  
the service station door just as the rain  
begins.

    This is the way  
it ends. Tunnel of ivy,  
you at the other end. I am not  
on line, not in the room. I've simply stepped  
out of it on a grey and gloomy day.  
To ask what is this? For  
high in the fleeting clouds the hawks  
draw figure eights, riding  
the thermals to rise higher  
or just for the sheer hell of it.

## **Stress fractures**

When all the houses are painted red  
and made of timber sometimes  
the porches. You assimilate  
but you need somewhere  
else to go.

When you shelter  
under a helmet of stars  
your eyes dilate.  
A room large enough  
to hold millions.

When the wind bangs the door  
and the walls respond,  
stor sorrow in the household.  
Observe the stress  
fractures, the percussion  
of consonants.

When the walls echo  
whispering voices live on  
with only a vague memory  
of what happened  
on the sofa.

When from the trees  
companionable creaking  
bends the bough, there is so much  
we need to clear up  
about memory  
and the night.

## **Solid objects**

We are in quagmire. No one can find  
the malaise, but it's in there,  
alright. Burrowing in the joists,  
reconfigured. In our fifties we  
were alone, but by the time we reached sixty  
there were so many of us. Here I reach for a trope,  
but all I find are some tokens scattered  
around. Like the image of the candlestick that is also  
two faces. Objects, persons, places.  
The background matters, that it's in there, absorbing.  
Sedges and shrubs, mosses and lichens,  
crowberries growing on a treeless mountain  
tract. Mapless space. The lost  
family of water leaving  
the ground soggy. Only a faint glow  
of light visible at mid-day and pursued  
by blue twilight. Who will remember  
the names when we are gone?

**'Things the mind already knows'**

A storm cloud, darker  
denser more volatile  
oozes over the hill  
and dissolves into a plume  
of smoke with a passion  
for flocking. White  
Flag. The surface signifies  
nothing. Stars built up  
from the surrounding merest  
suggestion. Bits of newsprint and fabric  
dipped in beeswax. An open field  
of stripes over-painted with white  
oil and blotted out. Forty-eight  
revenants who want to remain  
anonymous. Spectral  
secrets hidden in the gunk  
hinting. Complicated  
lives, drifters outside  
looking in. Like white  
washing the fence  
it has to be hard to get  
to want it. Wide roads and open spaces,  
squares connecting what isn't.  
Complacency sitting in an easy chair.

## **Mappa mundi**

*A response to Robert Frank's 'The Americans'*

Your external world is my T and O map.  
A circled landmass cut with a T  
and me at the top keeping a difficult balance.  
Like those photographs of the real Americans  
riding along on the crest of a wave, US 285  
through New Mexico, silver ribbon  
heading straight to infinity  
or hell. No people but when you do see them  
they're always looking away. Together  
but solitary. Land lots of and the starry  
sky creating a third voice. Fade  
to cityscape: Hoboken NJ in three parts,  
two windows divided. Brick walls make  
good neighbours inside each  
staring out. The flag hoisted by its own,  
bigger than anything. Bigger than America  
but devoid. Now look below the window,  
at the street, the glass, a bus going by.  
You can see them standing at the rear,  
occluded. If we could only get back to 1959,  
get our bearings. But everything has a schedule  
and you are not what you think ontologically.

## Landscaping the High Plains

Now the prairie life begins—  
thick brakes of alder give way  
to purple sage and wide spreading plains.  
You follow three chords  
and the truth,  
the twang  
of the high lonesome.

Cicadas ratchet it up  
a notch confusing the wind  
vortices. Encounters  
with the workings of Manifest Destiny  
are far from casual.

Odd things happen  
when you get out of town

Hardly a driver

Is now alive

Who passed

On hills

At 75

### **Don't I know it**

To tend water, you need to know the contingencies  
of weather, stay tuned  
to the wind. Directional forces are cyclical.

Take the rain swollen by late spring  
run-off in full flow. Sandy,  
turbulent. The rain falls and it is

not the same world. Later  
on the beach we had a debate  
about the raisin pudding theory.

The nucleus is surrounded by an orbit  
of electrons, you said, it is a question  
of physics. No, it is a desecration

of planets. Where were you in October  
1962? I don't want to sound complaining  
but you know there's always rain

in my heart. I'm the only person  
who knows where  
I slept that night. Escaped

MAD that time. You don't need to tell me  
how close we are to the edge.

## Dust

it begins in the house  
of bad moods  
it begins again  
as a mote  
as memory

it begins as  
a stable structure in the rain  
rainbows of oil  
certain themes  
are incurable

who are you in your prospect  
of puddles

nothing stays in its proper place  
unsettled landscape nuclear  
sublime  
if you don't  
want to know  
look away now



**3 po-wa-ha**

And if he stopped short?

she crosses            the Arkansas  
the trail scattered with sand hills

not a blade  
of grass

                                 false-ponds  
deceive

Farewell   my own            countree

Well inside    fine water  
    sprinkling the dirt floor  
    to keep down    dust

    Amongst  
the “white-faced Warriors”  
    a woman gave birth  
  and after  
    half an hour  
she went to the river  
  and                          breaking ice  
    bathed herself

The Navajo came among them then  
and carried off some twenty

Quiver-full of arrows                      dressed in  
striped blanket                      a string of beads

Oxen turned out  
wagon                      upset  
and all the bales on the ground

*Pity him and pass on*

no more                      Not married

Buffalo horse and gun  
overlanders overhunted  
overgrazed

landscaped  
the High Plains

exhausted the water  
fired

the grasslands

cattle carried tuberculosis  
buffalo cut down

I have come here to stand  
in a grove of cottonwoods surrounded  
by bluffs they reproach  
me for being remiss

The passing of every old woman  
or old man means  
the passing of some tradition

Wide ladder of granite  
ruined walls of yellow sandstone  
wind sings in the cliffs yearning

Silver spruce and aspen pull me  
towards grey exile

a long way North of dangerous

Jornada del Muerto

teriors of commonplaceness  
indelible memory of place [moving on]

Desert of the Anasazi  
Desert of the whirlwind dancing across mesas  
Desert of quivering air  
Desert of the glittering world surrounded by six mountains  
    Sierra-Oscuro-shadowed desert—peripheral,  
    incandescent desert

“For every atom belonging to me as good  
belongs to you.”

Houses, bodies, plants—everything is a temporary abode  
through which po-wa-ha flows.

Pity and pass on, for Gadget’s in the garden.

Dressed in a seersucker suit  
Mister Gadget is brooding

Geopolitical pushing and shoving  
new form of energy accident  
of geography

Constant rain drips  
from the eaves  
from the faucet blotting out  
all sound but itself  
and his thoughts

shift to the wooden shrines  
and temples of Kyoto sentimental  
and highly combustible  
top of his list of targets

He convenes a meeting condemning  
the tender souls  
who advocate a demonstration

No one raises any objection

People do not count



Other echoes

inhabit the sands

*Don't forget me*

The dark-eyed La Tules  
perches on her human footstool

at the junction of Palace Ave & San Francisco St

The Santa Fe trail brings in  
travellers townsfolk wayward youth  
mano a mano  
these boys learned the mysteries  
of Monte by losing

The scalp is the principal  
part of the business

Nooned it

on the bank of the Cimarron

seeing is / seeing as

I pick up a buffalo skull

some brown wool

still attached

Soon a thunderstorm

rejoices me

Inside  
    inside myself  
                    there is a world

Desertum: an abandoned place  
    red land      ore  
colourless selenite crystals cool  
    to the touch    once  
covered by a shallow sea

steep, crescent-shaped dunes  
constantly in motion

*peripateo*

“the verb calls it  
into being”

Gadget was delivered by a Plymouth sedan

final assembly  
a dust-proof bedroom  
in the Valley of the Shadow  
Camino Real / Sierra Oscura

amongst mountain lions  
bighorn sheep  
the succulent yucca

The men advance  
long-trousered & long-sleeved  
they apply sun cream  
sunglasses & welders’ goggles

The radio played *Serenade for Strings*  
O prayed to an atomic god  
to break  
    [b]low  
        burn and  
            [m]ake new

A sustained roar knocked them down  
the flash so bright they could see  
the bones through their hands  
A searing light of beauty and clarity  
“the poets dream about but describe most poorly”  
    says Mister Gadget  
“success beyond imagination”

*peripateo*

Alamogordo

clarity of light  
late evening

watermelon glow            gunmetal grey veil of distant rain  
the Rio Grande rift, geologically young and dynamic

“There is a God and an intelligent purpose back of everything”

Convergence of histories  
Gadget changes everything  
Implosion test

hoisted to the belfries

letting it go  
creating the first cataclysm  
mushroom cloud site  
catechism recite

(goggled watchers stand back)

sand thereabouts turns to glass    earth trembles

Later no one sniffing the trace of air  
can say

who you were            only  
the thud of the    stopped  
clock

Someone with big hands  
speaks across the ages

*No quarter asked or given*

Here at the Heart of the World  
the earth shakes

sheet lightning scrambles  
the upper clouds                      distant storm

Spider Grandmother stoops low  
gathers in her hands  
some sand                      letting it  
run out in a thin stream

spinning it into a whirlpool    she  
steps in

“the flames do now rage and glow”

“Germany will make a most interesting subject for the initial experiment.  
Japan can be used to provide a confirmation.”

If you unite a number of small fires  
and in the case of a congested  
residential area  
drop thousands of cylinders of thermite  
you create perfect conditions  
for setting alight  
a city of paper

You may begin to comprehend

what is lost  
in moonlight and a wind  
from the north

A firestorm more fearsome than ever witnessed  
against which  
every human  
resistance

A strange howling  
of a tornado  
of flame

juttering in the updraughts      the silver tails of the planes  
just visible in clouds of black smoke  
like the embers over a campfire  
“put together of many bright shining splinters”

nothing between them  
and hell      but the air

Some said it was a dream  
come true      properly kindled  
Japanese cities      burning  
like autumn leaves  
(Mister Gadget  
is getting ready

The boys on the hill were finding their way  
through labyrinths of linkage

Piston-driven locomotion

cavorting with          historical residue

disturbance

drive to know

swerving

and falling

off the edge    going back

to connect the dots

you are

therefore

I am

the conditions of occurrence

charged          interactions

with/against

*mokusatsu*



*Don't forget*

Pine River blocked  
by water river's natural barrier  
no exit

Mufu Mountain too many  
to bury too many  
to burn  
bodies dumped in the River  
sea of blood then

“worse mutilated than any I ever saw”

*pikankan*

Let's see a woman open up her legs  
they looked took turns  
profligate overkill

*we try not to kill them—but to take them to the verge*

Beneath the shield of Purple Mountain  
cold sleep of winter time stands still

We are incidental  
to strategic purpose  
We are not born  
to live or even  
to survive

The sun appeared again this morning  
I don't know how it dares  
to show its face

At the mouth of the river  
watery lanes of red lotus blossom  
and dismembered parts  
float  
out to sea

*mokusatsu*

the road to Dead Man's Lake hard  
and level

rapid shifts from irreparable frags

the kindly breeze          aloft

immaculate          radiation  
tensile light

*pikadon*

my whole life

has hung far too long  
upon a lie          flying off  
in bright flecks

Those cities still busy with disposing  
continued to count  
among the corpses

they found an aluminium lunch box  
the lunch still inside  
the shadow only  
the shadow of a human body

Those cities astonished by an energy they couldn't  
grasp  
the complete bands of radiation  
travelling at the speed of light

*eraiyo*  
cried the mothers

Those cities peopled by a ghost parade

*osoroshii*  
cried the children

petechaie the sign of worse to come

“I think it’s good propaganda. The thing is these people got good and  
burned—good thermal burns.”

“That’s the feeling I have,” said Mister Gadget.

The wood warbler spins  
a coin on a marble slab  
slipping in some soft, sad notes

Accident of geography  
Spider Grandmother  
stands in the doorway          overlooks  
the fallen  
        masonry  
the borders  
        blur  
flute-edged arrowheads artefacts  
        linguistic sediment      further layering

we are  
    all of us  
        born of them

*peripateo*

you walk the boundaries  
marking territory      they (mis)took

you cannot  
wipe the slate clean  
    language gets used  
over and over again  
    re-coupling

letting see  
    what has been hidden  
        underneath

“How that red rain doth make the harvest grow”

Stepping into the old river alone  
in this strange world  
the strangeness of red dirt  
water  
wind  
breath

recrossing the old trails still here

you are in the desert  
and it is in you

carrying a corvid feather iridescent  
black luck

its light the void  
where everything  
begins

the initial lines are guidelines  
the web  
beginning from the outside  
in  
replacing one  
spiral with another

Spider Grandmother is waiting  
on the edge

you walk on  
the dead



## **4 The Lay of the Land**

## Calibration

groundswell that information are idealized  
processes a these skimble-skamble  
wi[sh]th to communication otherwise peopled

anxiety hooks  
in the skin alone  
in jokul  
since  
twilight struggle  
reached scattald

memory failure unknown pressure  
pushes down U-tube  
tolerance stacks  
not found  
usable

manometer  
prompts

disaster can be averted by simply  
rotating the object  
a birdsong will be your guide  
avoiding errors like  
“the voluptuous cushion of reassurance”  
(standard equipment may vary)

loss/recovery backups the new absence  
blue twinge gadget

measure / position objects

process / present data  
to stay a step ahead

a missile is just  
a flick away  
flick away  
fl wy

## Unconsolidated debris

O tireless oarsman you  
who open the ways  
know  
the northern gate of the sky

I was in a dream  
and in that dream  
a few polished bones  
and boots at the edge of  
the moraine  
caught up  
in the web of his [s] tory

I was in a dream and in that dream  
I saw a land destroyed  
by water

I wrote you letters  
bent your ear  
to maintain  
the dialogue

The diggers when they came  
discovered the perforation  
the door  
intact

(we had swept away even our footprints)

Those diggers discovered the death mask  
inlaid with precious  
lapis and malachite  
they carried it away

In my dream it is summer  
I am reading your letter  
in the garden  
It says:

*You are here you  
should start  
where you are*

## Voler

traverser of waves  
                  swathes  
of geese fall from the sky  
          whiffling

                          so  
                  lost

          terrified  
                  of winter           they  
steal away  
                  south           we

          min them

                                  every landscape  
is a palimpsest

                                  they afforested  
everywhere  
          they felt like it

                                  repairing breaches  
                                  to keep things  
                                  from disappearing

clean wounds  
          close quickly  
                  in upland air

## **Disharmonic folds**

Distant borrowing takes in  
the mountains  
the foothills  
the pathos of things

across the valley floor a cold wind blows  
the place is seismic

a rotation may not be enough to reach a different  
condition it may be necessary  
to add an imaginary translation

it's easy to lose one's way in the forest  
blue deer move between  
firs pining

they know how to live  
with / out  
leave things alone

above the timberline a sudden snowstorm  
blurs the valley below  
there is never a complete return

a possibility to say  
the only thing you ever wanted  
was to live amongst

## Adjacent borrowing

sentences flow in a single direction  
plucking stones      new fractures  
leave the landscape jagged

human interference builds distinct soil  
horizons      heaped  
though hidden

bedrock plays a role  
in the lay of the land  
see *esp.* the Dentelles

Jurassic lace      Montmirail  
folded and forced into  
admirable spikes

the longer things stay  
the more rubble  
gets dumped

when the train pulls out  
at last      passing towns  
with no names

you breathe in      breathe  
out      leaving  
behind      left

## Grey zone

An occluded front currently lies across southwest Britain bringing patchy rain. An area of low pressure and an associated frontal system will move east and bring rain across southern areas throughout the day. Continued cold with a brisk southeasterly wind. Unseasonably cold for April.

The day is

ashen  
dingy  
dove  
drab  
dun  
graphite  
grizzled  
gun-metal  
leaden  
pewter  
plumbago  
mole  
slate  
steel  
stone

paradigma trying (a)verse  
the day begins  
in silence you silent as a clam lately  
I look where you are not  
it makes you all the more present

on the Eastern Sea Road the boundary  
between is weak  
upward borrowing  
clouds deflect overhead  
a helicopter scrambles the seagulls  
it's getting late

PAC-3 missiles in strategic locations  
whatever happens relations drift  
or  
what does it mean when

## [Es]cape

Landscape of childhood, Midwestern farmland and deciduous forest with excursions into the high plains. Wooden houses, weathered red, low-lit, long-shadowed. A broad brown river and learning to read. The landscape as a complex language nested within a sentence, landschaft, landschap, landskip, languescape. An old house hoards its memories.

Something happens when you dislodge the outward aspect of the familiar. A border has been crossed. You become a world-builder. Place-making means multiple acts of remembering. *Pas à pas* imagination slides between the frames of reference. Not opposition, but apposition. We go by side roads.

It's time to return borrowed things. Distant borrowing of heather village, the Lake of the Woods, the High Plains and those cities of paper. Adjacent Borrowing, Winterbourne Valley, the woods and the fields, the stillness in the room. Upward borrowing, the sound of the farewell bell. Lapwing and crow, millennium glass, plumbago sky. Downward borrowing of mosses and lichens, fallen masonry. *Mono-no-aware*: the pathos of things.

When the work is done it is time to go.



## Notes to the Poems

*“There isn’t a train I wouldn’t take...”*

From “Travel” in *Second April* (1921), Edna St. Vincent Millay.

*“They that carried us away required of us a song”*

Psalm 137:3.

*“And now down I must sit by a little fire, and a few boughs behind me”*

*A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.*

*“I heard a fly buzz—when I died--”*

Emily Dickinson, “465” in *The Complete Poems*.

The poem “Inclosures” uses quotation from Charles Olson’s poem

“Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [withheld].”

*“Things the mind already knows”*

Jasper Johns, speaking about his painting of 1955, “*White Flag*.”

MAD: mutually-assured destruction

*po-wa-ha*

wind/water/breath; the creative life force of Pueblo cosmology

*And if he stopped short?*

“The politician being interviewed clearly takes a great deal of trouble to imagine an ending to his sentence: and if he stopped short? His entire policy would be jeopardized.” Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*.

*the “white-faced Warriors”*

Term used to refer to the American Army, Susan Magoffin’s *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico*.

*Jornada del Muerto*

The day’s journey of the dead man in the Jornada del Muerto desert basin, an 80-mile stretch of desert with no water in New Mexico; site of the Trinity bomb test.

*“For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”*

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*.

*Gadget*

The code name given to the first bomb tested.

*“the verb calls it into being”*

William Carlos Williams, “The Desert Music.”

*“break, blowe, burn and make new”*

John Donne, “Holy Sonnet 14” as quoted by Oppenheimer on the occasion of the Trinity Bomb Test.

*“the poets dream about but describe most poorly...success beyond imagination”*

The words uttered by Brigadier General Leslie Groves, who was in charge of the Manhattan Project. He selected the target cities; he wanted to bomb Kyoto but was over-ruled.

*“There is a God and an intelligent purpose back of everything.”*

Church Deacon and physicist Arthur Holly Compton, involved in the Manhattan Project.

*“the flames do now range and glow”*

Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” Sermon.

*“Germany will make a most interesting subject for the initial experiment. Japan can be used to provide a confirmation.”*

Air Marshall Sir Arthur Harris. The firestorms in Tokyo on March 9-10, 1945 reportedly killed 100,000 people.

*“put together of many bright shining splinters”*

I.I. Rabi said of J. Robert Oppenheimer: “Oppenheimer was a man who was put together of many bright shining splinters”.

*mokusatsu*

Translated from Japanese as, “Take no notice; treat the matter with silent contempt.”

*“worse mutilated than any I ever saw”*

Testimony of Mr John S. Smith, 1865, on the Sand Creek Massacre by U.S. Army Colonel John Chivington and his troops.

*pikankan*

Translated from Japanese as, “Let’s see a woman open up her legs”. This comes from the testimony of a former Japanese soldier who spoke about the rape and murder of Chinese women in Nanking for the documentary *In the Name of the Emperor* (Chang 49).

*pikadon*

Translated from Japanese as “flash/boom.”

*eraiyo*

Translated from Japanese as “It is too heavy. It is too much for me to bear.”

*osoroshii*

Translated from Japanese as “I am afraid of my own face.”

*“I think it’s good propaganda...That’s the feeling I have.”*

Memorandum of telephone conversation between General Groves and Lt Col Rea at Oak Ridge Hospital, 9 a.m. 25 August, 1945.

*“How that red rain doth make the harvest grow”*

George Gordon, Lord Byron, “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” Canto III.

*“the voluptuous cushion of reassurance”*

Harold Pinter’s Nobel Lecture: “Art Truth and Politics”: “The words ‘the American people’ provide a truly voluptuous cushion of reassurance. You don’t need to think. Just lie back on the cushion.”

*Distant borrowing/adjacent borrowing*

“shakkei” or borrowed scenery is a concept in Japanese landscape gardening with four categories: distant borrowing (of mountains and lakes), adjacent borrowing (of neighbouring features), upward borrowing (of clouds, stars, weather), downward borrowing (of ponds, rocks, leaves, earth).

*Mono-no-aware*

Translated from Japanese as “the pathos of things.”

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