“TANGIBLE THINGS”: Susan Howe’s Interdisciplinary Materials

and

Complex Kinships: Five Sequences

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Key to Howe's Works

BU: *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*

C: *Concordance*

D: *Debths*

FS: *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979*

ED: *My Emily Dickinson*

SLT: *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007)*,*

SP: *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*

TT: *That This*

Introduction: Material Constructions

> Whatever poetry may prove to be, Howe's is a material construction.
>
> — Snowden

> It's not a question of drawing the contours, *but of what escapes the contour*, the secret movement, the breaking, the torment, the unexpected.
>
> The drawing wants to draw what is invisible to the naked eye. It's very difficult. The effort to write is always beyond my strength. What you see here, these lines, these strokes, are rungs on the ladder of writing, the steps which I have cut with my fingernails in my own wall, in order to hoist myself up above and beyond myself.
>
> — Cixous 109

> We need to remember the 'press' in an impression.
>
> — Ahmed 6

Tangible Things

Roughly half-way through Howe's 2017 collection *Debths* on the left-hand page, just where a grubby hand might hold the book, are the whorls of a thumbprint.[1]

(D 56)

[1] Howe originally exhibited *Tom Tit Tot* in collaboration with her daughter, the visual artist R H Quaytman. The thumbprint is one of the three prints Quaytman inserted between the texts that were first displayed at Yale Union exhibition space in Portland, Oregon in 2013. The information for this thumbprint that appears on the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) website states that, "[t]hree more of Quaytman's images, printed by letterpress at The Grenfell Press, are bound into the volume. One shows an unravelled knitted baby's sock, and derives from a photoengraving in Thérèse de Dillmont's Encyclopaedia of Needlework, first published in 1886; the second shows a thumbprint on black paper; and the third is an abstract image taken from the artist's frontispiece."

This unexplained and unexpectedly physical mark appears part-way into the collage/text sequence 'Tom Tit Tot' (56). It is a shadow, memory, and ghost of a touch memorialised within the frame of the text. Although Howe has interleaved her poems with pages of images before,[2] there is something about the bodily mark of a thumbprint that is surprising, even shocking in its appearance. It is a non-linguistic pause in the full flow of this textual, material work that both shimmers up from the depths of language and is pressed down upon the surface of the page. If we place our own thumb upon it– turning the page 90 degrees anti-clockwise and re-siting the book in our hands– we are confronted with the centre fold as a new horizon or boundary. The text becomes gestural and presses back toward us: "To reach is to touch." (SP 60)

The press of impressions

Sara Ahmed tells us that "the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. […] [T]he surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others. [And thus] the surfaces of collective as well as individual bodies take shape through such impressions." (10) The objects that are able to hold these impressions "become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension." (10) Memories, feelings and events cling to their 'stickiness' and they become resonant with these narratives, so resonant that they become invisible.

To frame this encounter with the thumbprint as a kind of confrontation brings the materiality of the text to the surface, returning us to our bodies as agents in this relationship between reader and read. Not only does this sticky thumbprint suture the reader into a tangible relationship with the text, but this surface mark signifies hidden, erased and, absent

2 *The Midnight* has a facsimile of a playbill and a protective paper, *That This* is intercut with James Wellings' photograms.

narratives. Like the accidental scars of 'invisible' Scotch tape that reveal, in the stark light of the high-quality scanning machine, the labour of Howe's compositional process of cutting and pasting text onto new text.[3] Further, the absent body and anonymity of this disembodied thumb is contradicted by the systemic use of thumb and fingerprints as sources of personal data and social control. It is a trace of individuals enfolded into the wider erasing systems of Angela Y. Davis' *Prison Industrial Complex*.[4] The data contained in a thumbprint, as revealing as an archive of letters, evokes the world of crime scene evidence; detective investigations; who does and who does not have the right to anonymity; who is and who isn't erased from the records of history.

The materiality of history

History's materiality "press[es] heavily on the present" (TT 18). This thumbprint presses on me associations, connections, and allusions in Howe's own work. By forcing me to pause here I consider the social and cultural references of what a thumbprint means and how I as holder and beholder of the book interact with the printed image. This record of touch is one way Howe articulates and complicates the tangible presence *in* the present of an absent *and* emerging past.

The thumbprint crosses boundaries between image and text, public and private and connects between the different disciplines of Howe's "material constructions". Using this illustration as a point of departure, in this thesis I think through materiality beyond the "merely apparent" (Miller 1) and toward what the materiality of a text communicates on its own terms.

[3] What Jennings identifies as Howe's "facsimile aesthetic" (662) refuses to "distinguish between marks that are linguistic or nonlinguistic, legible or illegible, deliberate or incidental." (667)
[4] In 'Portfolio Notes # 1' I briefly discuss the poetic response to incarceration through the work of Jordan Scott and Mercedes Eng

Over the following chapters I examine the materials out of which Howe's interdisciplinary practice emerges. Language in her works take on the properties of non-textual entities to "[t]ouch at the margin of the writing that always only reaches itself, touch between the meaning of the word and the body, touch at the border which distinguishes those meanings from the body." (Friese 172)

The (art)history of materiality

This practice-based project turns on Howe's own interdisciplinarity. Howe's multifaceted material practice situates her in the context of cross-disciplinary renegotiations of the materiality of language in 1970s New York. Lucy Lippard in her book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* chronicles this shifting attention in the (predominantly North American) visual art world[5]. The term "dematerialization" seems to suggest a turn away from the material, and Lippard points to the inaccuracy of the term in her preface. She writes, "a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material,' as a ton of lead." (5) The works noted in the text center "such ephemeral materials as time itself, space, nonvisual systems, situations, unrecorded experience, unspoken ideas" (5). Lippard's book counters critic Michael Fried's 1967 article 'Art and Objecthood'[6] which named the works collected under this rubric '*literalist* art' ([author emphasis] 307), suggesting the practitioners of this aesthetic and theoretical turn were connected by their attention to objects as "nothing more than objects" (309). Fried refused to recognise insubstantial systems– networks or webs

[5] The full title, which is surely a nod to the baroque titles of early New England sermonisers, is *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted fragmented text, art works, documents, interview, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones)*

[6] Originally published in *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12-23 the version I am quoting from here appears in Candlin and Guins.

say– as having a materiality of their own. Art-objects only 'exist' (in the sense that they have an afterlife in human interpretation and attention) if they demonstrate their artfulness or readability.

What connects the opposing views of Fried and Lippard is the material encounter, what divides them is their conception of what is at stake. For Lippard bringing a historical materialism to bear on the systems that structure all cultural production (and further expanding the definition of what *is* cultural production), is a refusal to accept that the art world is a depoliticised space. Feminist epistemology, ecocriticism and critical race theory inform us that something does not have to be invisible to the naked eye for invisibility to occur.[7] Boscagli, in her text that articulates the possibilities of a new radical materialism of "stuff", describes historical materialism's confrontation of "the subject's experience of materiality in modernity [as] governed by reification—the subject's alienation from the sensual real, brought about because matter, once commodified, had its true nature, the labor involved in producing it, hidden" (4). The politics of examining materiality on its own terms threatens the power structures that believe only human assessment can confer meaning and subsequent value.

Ron Silliman suggests that there is a direct link between late capitalism (with reference to the emerging free-market practices in the mid 20th century) and "the separation of self-consciousness of the art-object from the consciousness of the object itself … in literary criticism." (126) But this separation of product-object and material as agent (what Silliman names "Repression") does not "abolish the existence of the repressed element which continues as a contradiction, often invisible, in the social fact." (126) Adjusting the frame to

[7] I refer explicitly here to Sedgwick's frame adjusting in *Touching Feeling*; the varied re-seeing that occurs in the essays collected by Armbruster and Wallace; and Lorde's insistence on the presence of her body in 'The Master's Tools'.

encompass a 'more than object' materiality risks anthropomorphising matter, but its great advance is to shake up anthropocentric hierarchies between subject and object.

Storied materials

The deeper I go into Howe's work the more contradictions emerge. How can the poem consider fragmented narratives without further enclosing in fixed form? Is it possible for her to reveal the beings of things in a way that doesn't obfuscate real lived experiences? What is invited into the space of the text when it is allowed to traverse material boundaries? These are the questions my three main chapters ask by reading Howe's works through the materials of glass, thread and sound and against and beside the three themes that traverse her body of work: the continual emergence of history in the present; language's potential to resist narrative enclosure; and the construction of the poetic 'I' as a fragmented, temporary, cohesion of memory.

In chapter one I model a way of reading Howe's works alongside one another, taking my lead from Marcel Duchamp's multi-part artwork *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* which frames and structures Howe's own shifting creative practice. Duchamp's window in this work refuses the frame as a transcendental portal with the horizon as a remote site of desire, rather, the glass itself makes visible the 'plane' on which the figures are coexisting. The work complicates the concept of the window depicting it as both portal and barrier. This tension between separation and passage is also a tension between public and private; a metaphor for what is irrevocably there and yet inaccessible. In this chapter I ask what it means to think of poems as prisms (Howe, 'Vagrancy' n.pag) within "a larger historical system of expansionist capitalism." (Bloomfield 675) The prism as passageway and holding space for light forces a delay that fundamentally alters the rays passing through it. I argue that what reflects

and refracts out of the poem when history and memory are held in uneasy and temporary stasis is "the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought." (Silliman 125)

Chapter two takes up thread and the theories of the grid that emerge out of weaving as a textual practice. Thread connects between Howe's texts and is a way through the fields of the sequences that are also fields of history. Howe's identities as actor, visual artist, poet, reader, teacher, parent, partner, widow, American-Irish daughter, and New Englander, all find space on her pages that, as Kathleen Fraser points out, "invite multiplicity, synchronicity, elasticity … perhaps the very female subjectivity proposed by Julia Kristeva as linking both cyclical and monumental time." (175) This chapter is a re-consideration of the "dimensionality" (175) of the page in tension with the textual marks on its surface via a chance encounter with an archival scrap of fabric. Thread, in the poems examined here, models a way to hold in productive tension surface appearance and material depth.

Howe's poems take language as a material both in the 'literalist sense' where it is allowed its own space to resonate without being fitted in to a poetic form, and highly worked constructions that bear the imprint of several layers of labour. Her works affirm the meaning of material on its own terms, but they do not suppose the artist/poet can ever truly be erased from the work's productions. Even a lump of raw rock has been quarried, transported and deposited and so bears the "impressions" of the systems that brought it there. To ignore those traces is to repeat a narrative of 'naturalness' and 'wilderness' as separate from human-natures, human-wildness. The rock resists its use by its very heaviness, it tells the narrative of deep time via the internal/invisible fissures, it resonates within the networks it comes from and in its new placement moss, lichen, and bacteria grow and form their own networks of nature-cultures. My third chapter sutures Howe within the network of objects and beings of a cultural landscape. Here the material of sound examined in two of her audio collaborations

with David Grubbs opens up the 'prism' of the poem to make 'silent' space for un-speaking voices to 'be'.

Practices in reading

Howe constructs "Tangible Things" (D 46-7) with language, and language itself is a tangible thing, hinging between the materiality of the surface and the invisible depths of history. Via specific materials and objects I bring in to focus ways of reading the accumulation of feeling that clings to the texts as well as expanding the definition of what is considered 'material'. Howe emphasises the very graspable nature of the typed, written text, but her works are not only pure pictural surface. Rather, Howe navigates this space continually, showing us a "materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension." (Bennett 20) Her works invite us to embrace an intangible dematerialization; a flexible resonance; the invisible beside; as well as partaking in a crucially felt and touched material encounter.

Leaping points

In my own practice this expanded definition of materiality sits alongside Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews' insistence that 'reference' (i.e. meaning or significance) "like the body itself, is one of the horizons of language" (ix). These expansions that traverse the social and the personal are really forms of adjusted attention that is itself a political project. Bridging between the chapters and my portfolio of poems, *Complex Kinships: Five Sequences*, are three portfolio notes that indicate ways into the five sequences. The texts variously consider; how my own prism/poems create polyphonic spaces of exchange; the material resonances of texts and

objects that thread within and between my sequences; and ways sound makes more expansive spaces out of which new future-histories can emerge.

This thesis that began in austerity and ended in a pandemic couldn't help but read interconnected traces that structure the world. But to imagine that these surface connections are natural constructions is to contribute to "a materialism...in which materiality conveniently never gets in the way", where the "[h]ierarchies and contradictions —between texts, between horizons of the social, between texts and contexts—are dissolved, replaced by a kind of ecumenical lateralness" (Lesjak 240). Howe's career-long project of disrupting linearity and shifting between surface and depth narrative spaces, is not just about making memory into a tangible thing– an attempt to re-collect the lost loved being/object/emotion– but has wider implications in the politics of mastery and subjugation.

To master narrative is to enclose it thus maintaining the existing power structures that find everyday form in the institutions that govern at a local and global level. These institutions are material in that they exist in specific buildings, built with specific materials (the "soaring glass and steel" (D 13) and "Vermont marble [that house] acquisitive violence, the rapacious 'fetching' involved in collecting" (SP, 43)), but they are also structured by feeling, narrative, discourse, website mission statements, electoral pledges. To understand the multiple levels on which institutions function is to read them both materially– what land they occupy, what people (do or do not) inhabit them– and textually, how does language and narrative structure the space? For Howe these large abstractions, as for Walter Benjamin, are realised at the level of the encounter with the archive of a writer; the immediate felt non-human environment; with one's own memories. The 'texture' of language touches through text. These encounters are not episodes on a linear path from innocence to knowledge, but are disruptions in perception. Benjamin writes, "It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of

[*The Arcades*] to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization." ([N2,2] 460) Material here does not create objects that demonstrate progress, but indicate and interrupt the already existing narratives within things created. A materialist pedagogy that centres "*dis*continuity" ([author emphasis] Buck-Morss 290) is able to imagine an alternative to the smooth progress of inherited narratives, objects, ideas, and identity.

Wouldn't we want to imagine a different world? Wouldn't we want to find paths toward it, first in articulation and then on the road?

"*Delay in glass*": Susan Howe's transparent and transactional surfaces

> *The story is coming to its end. Turning, and returning, in a closed space,* an enclosure *that is not to be violated, at least not while the story unfolds: the space of a few private properties. We are not going to cross a certain boundary line, we are not going above a certain peak. That would have forced us to find another style, a different procedure, for afterward. We would have needed,* at least, two *genres. And more. To bring them into articulation. Into conjunction.*
>
> — Irigaray 19

> It is the peculiarity of *technological* forms of production (as opposed to art forms) that their progress and their success are proportionate to the *transparency* of their social content. (Hence glass architecture.)
>
> — Benjamin [N4,6] 465

Susan Howe observes that the "poem is a glass, through which light is conveyed to us" ('Vagrancy in the Park' par.9). "Light" here is knowledge, understanding or clarified perception, and it comes to the reader via language distilled in the reflective and transparent glass of a poem. But this light does not simply appear, it is constructed by the "'subsidiary rays' of history [the] record[s] of mistakes" (FS 18), and intercepted/interpreted by the "looking-glass hands" (SP 41) of the archival pilgrim. In this chapter that reads the interdisciplinarity between Howe's prose and her poetry, I focus on certain properties associated with glass. Via reflection, refraction, viscosity, and transparency, I argue for a way of reading Howe's work that leads us beyond the "merely apparent" (Miller 1) surfaces of her poems toward the contextual depth that structures them.

Glass is a key material touchpoint throughout Howe's practice. Appearing variously as the visualised speech of "mirror languages" (TT 34); an architectural "minimalist glass and steel corridor" (D 13); and the linguistic "free-moving mirror phoneme [that] corresponds to unexpectedly unconquerable hopes" (C 17), glass often troubles the distinctions between material definitions in her works. In this chapter I focus on glass in two of her works; the direct

references to the material in her 1995 prose preface 'Frame Structures' and the indirect way glass structures her 1974 poem sequence 'Hinge Picture'. By reading 'Hinge Picture' against 'Frame Structures' I show the ways glass represents non-linear narrative construction and models a form of material practice. The whole chapter turns around the "*Delay in glass*" ([author italics] 26) passage that appears toward the end of 'Frame Structures'. In this section I read a framework through which to approach Howe's wider body of work.

Situating this passage of the preface– and the preface itself– in relation to the sequences that follow is a bit of a long-winded business, not least because of the temporal lag between the publication of the collected sequences and its own composition. While the full title of the book *Frame Structures: Early Poems: 1974-1979* suggests we are reading work from within a neatly defined period, the poems collected here are both a context through which to view her transition from visual artist to poet, and also a set of principles or structural ideas that span the whole of Howe's practice. In the fragmented prose work of 'Frame Structures' Howe explores the temporal relationship it has to the following poem sequences, as well as its own complex internal timeframes. Howe notes that "prefaces are usually afterimages" (13). An afterimage, usually thought of as the ghostly visual impression of an image or object after it has been removed from sight, here also refers to the way prefatory narratives are retrospectively constructed in order to make linear sense within an overarching narrative.

By combining a glassy materiality and disruptive concepts of time Howe questions the 'naturalness' of linearity. The preface's non-linear zoom through history connects global trade and industrialization with specific personal, colonial, and literary moments. Writing from the mid-1990s back over two decades Howe gives the reader a context to the mid to late 1970s that is not located in a single point of origin, but constantly shifts through time. As well as

speaking across a two-decade divide, the narrative of 'Frame Structures' moves erratically between the dates 1941, 1779, 1905, 1692, 1861, 1914, among others. Land at any passage and a different date will locate you. In the space of two pages the reader is pinballed between 1901, 1850, and the eternity of death, before being shot out into the new dawn of 1920 (14-15). This refractive sense of time provides an opportunity for events to alter– or parallel narratives to emerge– without a narrative drive. Howe writes *against* a retrospectively written linear history of "private space [and] objects … arranged in position (witnesses and vanishing points) not looking both ways at once" asserting instead that "Space is a frame we map ourselves in" (9). Reading "ourselves" within this spatial frame allows timeframes to coexist in uneasy, non-linear, and productive tension. History is not something invisible and far away, it is present and all around us; "we are in the field of history" (25).

The interdisciplinary focus of this thesis leads me to situate Howe between Marcel Duchamp and Robert Smithson, visual artists whose theories on glass's material properties are responses to the socio-economic and historical moments out of which their practices emerge. Howe's work is studded with windows, glass vitrines and mirrors that, via Duchamp become portals, hinges and displacements. Further, the material's complex cultural significance in the early 1970s is bound with Howe's complex identity as a poet, woman and American citizen. Reading the highly personal and biographical preface alongside the 'Hinge Picture' sequence that refuses a singular lyric 'I', turns the concept of a delay in glass into a delay in *language* out of which a feminist, anti-capitalist, anti-war, critique emerges. Beyond Gerald L. Bruns' contention that Howe is "a *fluid* or [...] *porous* subject, not the sealed-off, punctual ego of modernity" (29), I argue it is the *poem* through which the "singular whispering skeletons" (SP 41) of history pass into the present.

This chapter begins by contextualising the phrase "*Delay in glass*" and reads the material and temporal space of Howe's preface 'Frame Structures'. By thinking about the root and meaning of this phrase that appears as a subheading in the preface, I explore how the text becomes a transparent and transactional space that is able to reflect, hold, and connect different timeframes, images, and histories. It is by thinking of the work as a glass portal and mirrored site that Howe puts in tension the ideas of identity and historical context, destabilising narratives that appear to have become fixed coordinates on a predetermined landscape.

I then move to read Howe's first published poetry sequence 'Hinge-Picture' and use the idea of delay to think through the multiple ways the hinge and hinging connect and hold-apart spaces within Howe's texts. The kinesis of the hinge troubles fixed terms and forms that surface in Howe's texts. Finally, I turn to read the ways Howe, alongside her contemporaries, uses the complex idea of the mirror as a form of displacement. The looking glass, instead of revealing a hidden self, rather reveals absence, exposes history, signals to technological change, and frames the literal and figural sites of the present.

The three object-forms of the frame, hinge, and mirror are crucial ideas in Howe's transition from visual artist to poet. The corresponding spatial actions of framing, hinging, and mirroring find form in Howe's thematic attention to the continually emerging violence of history, and the difficulty of constructing oneself in language. These problems that we look to poetry to confront, by their very nature cannot be narrated in linear or neatly concluded ways. Thus, Howe's poems are glassy prisms of language that work to make sites where multiple narrative threads and temporalities can be experienced "both ways at once" (FS 9).

Delay as a form of frame structure

The section in 'Frame Structures' that appears under the subheading "*Delay in glass*" is itself a form of arrested momentum where objects and perspectives are held within the temporary frame of a memory. I quote the section here in full:

> *Delay in glass*
>
> In my memory the transparent cabinet is nearly five feet tall though breakable so it's in arrest on a small table made for the purpose of holding both because the exquisite pagoda, mythic and legendary, coexists with glass. It must have been acquired in China by a predatory d'Wolf or an entrepreneurial Quincy and brought back to Bristol or Boston as loot. I don't know how or why it arrives at Louisburg Square. A pure past is it speakable? Sounds have paper-thin edges. Thus time dies and is not slain. See, deaf to us. Each fantastically carved stage or floor of the pagoda consists of a miniature room with a door but even the walls are open as a sieve is. A tiny ivory bell hangs in each entrance. If there is a sudden vibration in the dining room on our side of being, if someone speaks too suddenly, even a draft from the window is enough, all the skeletal bells shake as if the present can coexist in thin paper dress. Writing from perception to recollection I imagine a carved human figure at the door on each landing, semitransparent. Innocency. A pure past that returns to itself unattackable in the framework. Restoration. The light of twelve must be one or separate from what it merely represents stepping into the heart of metaphysics. (26)

This object, remembered from Howe's childhood seemingly "coexists with glass" in the same way "the present can coexist in thin paper dress". Glass is the site on which this coexistence takes place; memory, object, text exist simultaneously in a way that disrupts a singular origin,

purpose or perspective. The passage's disjunctive timeframe allows the memory of child Howe revering the object to coexist with adult Howe's future knowledge. In this section we hold in 'delay' the materiality of the object and the immateriality of the memory itself. In this suspended space time becomes one with the glass case in a way that ruptures syntax and un-anchors words from their meanings. What should preserve a moment actually causes a disruption and radical change.

The phrase 'delay in glass' comes from a note in Marcel Duchamp's index-artwork *The Green Box.*[1] The original artwork is collection of handwritten and drawn epigrammatic insights, diagrams, ink blotches and future plans that accompany, explain and complicate the companion work of free-standing sculpture; *The Large Glass*. Designed to be approached "as an equal mixture of verbal and visual concepts" (Tompkins 4), these two works are together known as the total artwork *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*[2]*,* which Duchamp worked on between 1915-23 when he declared it "definitively unfinished" (Duchamp qtd. in Tompkins 3). The unpaginated, often draft-like notes in *The Green Box* document Duchamp's process of making the sculpture but are also more generally about art objects and perception. Artist Richard Hamilton writes, "the text exists beside the glass as a commentary and within it as a literary component of its structure. Without the notes the painting loses some of its significance and without the monumental presence of the glass the notes have an air of random irrelevance" (R.Hamilton qtd. in Steefel 44). The note– and theoretical framework– that Howe borrows for her preface reads:

1 Originally produced as La Mariée mise à nu par célebataires, même (La Boîte Verte) (94 documents; facsimiles of manuscripts, drawings and photographs, in a green box; edition of 300), Édition Rrose Sélavy, Paris, 1934. The notes I refer to in this chapter are taken from Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton'S typographic translation of the notes.
2 For more information see this Tate article about the different versions and attempts of reframe Duchamp and his work: https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/26/through-the-large-glass

> Use ‘delay’ instead of picture or painting; picture on glass becomes delay in glass–but delay in glass does not mean picture on glass– it’s merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture–to make a delay of it in the most general way possible, not so much in the different meanings in which delay can be taken, but rather in their indecisive reunion ‘delay’–a delay in glass as you would say a poem in prose or a spittoon in silver. (27)

Lawrence Steefel describes the notes in the box/book as attempts to formulate "a visual language in poetic terms" (44). Steefel reads the work as "an alphabet of relationships" that is used to describe "a still center beyond time in the midst of the turning world" (44). Duchamp’s work uses stasis to reconstruct relationality between subjects, thus allowing for equivalents to be drawn between things unlike one another. What Steefel reads, and what Duchamp states, is that delay is not only related to time but is a site of material alteration. Within the frame of ‘delay’, and upon the specific site of glass– that can be lens, mirror, or window– unexpected shifts occur to the relationships between the figures viewed within it. The stasis of delay is a way of thinking how the work can be both a self-contained system and an open site of encounter. In this space of eternally deferred conclusion, Duchamp brings together several contradictory or unequal elements in “indecisive reunion”.

The glass of *The Large Glass* is a large window horizontally split in two parts or panels with abstract or theoretical figures (a ‘Bride’, nine ‘Bachelors,’ and various household objects and geometric shapes) inscribed on the surface with wire, paint and leaf metal. When on display it stands independent of the gallery walls and viewers can move around it looking through and at it. As suggested by the title, the work depicts multiple tensions. It is both a self-contained system of kinetic exchange independent of an external world, and an infinitely open space, holding within the glass whatever the viewer frames as they walk around it.

Writing about Duchamp's practice, Rosalind Krauss suggests that it is the "physical transposition of an object from the continuum … of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image" (Krauss, 'Originality' 206) that transforms static conjecture into energised form. It is in the material realisation of the work, in the "isolation or selection" of its individual components that the narratives surrounding an object are revealed. Stasis is not a fixed condition, it is a particular state that makes an object's material conditions and historical context visible. The "transposition" that Krauss pays attention to, is both a changing position of the art object from movement to a moment of pause, but also the changing position of the viewer. In both parts of *The Bride Stripped Bare*– as a box and as a glass window– Duchamp creates a work designed to be walked around and looked though. As a transparent window the sculpture allows visual relation and juxtaposition to what is held in stasis on the surface of the glass, though the resolutely un-porous nature of glass enforces the separation of surfaces. Krauss writes:

> [T]he window is experienced as simultaneously transparent and opaque. As a transparent vehicle, the window is that which admits light–or spirit–into the initial darkness of the room. But if glass transmits, it also reflects. And so the window is experienced by the symbolist as a mirror as well–something that freezes and locks the self into the space of its own reduplicated being. (Krauss, 'Grids' 58-9)

The original French title of Duchamp's sculpture further contributes to this sense of doubled, paused, reflective introspection. Though this work emerges during a period where he was making sculptures that play with the private/public dialectic of the window[3], Duchamp referred to it as *Le Grand Verre* (glass), not La Grande *Fenêtre* (window). This deliberate choice points

3 I'm thinking here of Duchamp's window sculptures 'Fresh Widow' (1920) and 'La Bagarre d'Austerlitz' (1921)

the viewer toward the material of glass and glass's multiple meanings in English[4] rather than aligning the work with the symbol of the window. Gloria Moure points out the disruptive potential of glass, writing; "it is the material best suited to the representation or momentary arresting of a 'continuum' of greater dimensionality captured in a two-dimensional axial plane." (21) Alongside the glass pane as lens and glass as vessel that transports, when we think of glass as meaning mirror, further perspectival interruptions emerge. The mirror is something that we look *in*-to in order to see reflections. But in narrative the beholder of the mirror passes through the glass surface both physically and conceptually into a space of interior self-reflection (think Alice's voyage into her own psychology in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*)[5]. What is viewed in mirrored glass is an alternative perspective, a distorted version of our own face, or some understanding that is only gained through this visual confrontation. We pass "through a glass, darkly" and arrive "face to face" (*King James Version*, 1 Corinth. 13.12) with ourselves. This consideration of the mirror as self-revelatory portal is not about making the glass invisible, rather it is about becoming coexistent with the material, passing through it *and* dwelling within it.

Referring back to the above passage in 'Frame Structures' Howe borrows this theoretical and material conception of delay to frame the relational limitations– what might be brought together but can ultimately never touch. The section considers the impossibility of communion with ghosts on the other "side of being" as a way to reframe the connections between reader, writer, text, and history. The glass of the cabinet, as with Duchamp's sculpture, is a transparent *and* impenetrable barrier. If we further imagine the reflective

4 The *Oxford English Dictionary* online lists glass as a noun, adjective and verb. Within each grammatical structure there are further delinations.

5 I look here to Luce Irigaray's theories on the looking glass which focus on the patriarchal and psychological significance of the mirror in literature. For further reading see Carolyn Burke, 'Irigaray through the Looking Glass', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 288-306; Veronica L. Schanoes, 'Book as Mirror, Mirror as Book: The Significance of the Looking-glass in Contemporary Revisions of Fairy Tales', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (75) (2009), pp. 5-23

potential of clean glass and the double meaning of it here, a complex set of relations emerges where the viewer is allowed a mediated access to the desired object, as well as their own reflection appearing to look out. Rather than a memory passively consumed, the material properties of glass introduce a sense of active transaction between text and reader, but one that cannot be fully realised.

Carolyn Lesjak suggests that rather than viewing this irresolution in the text as a failure, a productive and dialectical reading (i.e. a reading that holds in tension surface appearance and contextual depth) depends upon *maintaining* the "occlusion[s] that structure the surfaces being privileged" (247), rather than working to resolve them. In Howe's text the gap is not just the surface depiction of impassable glass, but the gaps and absences in knowledge that surround the object itself made visible by the enforced delay of the transparent cabinet. The adult Howe can only guess at the origin of the "mythic and legendary" pagoda, admitting that "I don't know how or why it arrives at Louisburg Square". Howe uses the occlusion itself as way to convey the questions that will go on to structure her poems. She writes, "A pure past is it speakable? Sounds have paper-thin edges. Thus time dies and is not slain. See, deaf to us." The contradictions of sensual communication; the inability to speak a pure past; the continual dying *and* immortal quality of time, are all unresolvable tensions. They play out the aporia between Howe's desire for a reinstated "innocency", and the recognition that it will always be held at bay by the context of personal, familial and national-colonial violence that sticks to it. Howe's memory— like the artwork her subheading references— is an assemblage framed by a "spatial dialectic" which holds "the visceral, affective, and local textures of experience [alongside] the global, virtual, derivative-driven flows of capital" (Lesjak 264).

The object of the ivory pagoda, Howe's memory and the gap-filled history that surround both sites of attention are able to dwell in an indecisive reunion that makesa visible the wider

socio-economic and global rhythms of capitalist-colonialism that surround them. But Howe is not simply urging us as readers to consider the complex relations between (and with) ourselves and others, she suggests we cannot escape them. She writes, "We have always been in contact with one another, keeping on never letting go, no distance as to time, nothing such as liberty because we are in the field of history." (25) History is an inescapable collective experience always already structured by multiple interconnected conditions and acts. Sarah Ahmed reads emotions as "not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made" (10). Our private spaces and individual experiences are collectively produced. They emerge by coming in to contact with others. Judith Butler emphasises the materiality of identity formation, questioning the authority of a unified surface, and demonstrating how identity is formed within a social space as it comes into contact (collides, transacts, dwells) with others. Butler writes, identity formation is a "*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*." ([author emphasis] Butler 10-11) As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, this process of materialisation where emotions cohere around objects, is characterised by Ahmed as a stickiness. The framed memory of the ivory pagoda– a highly personal and private memory of a unique object– when 'delayed' by situating it within the field of history, is not read as repeated, but is continually remerging with the traces of violence clinging to it. This pivot in the momentum of Howe's text makes objects visibly resonate with traces of "personal and social tension". In doing so, this passage forces the reader outward, to reflect on the wider social and historical context, as much as they are invited in.

If the preface gets us thinking about what is generated when memory is "held in arrest", then turning to Howe's first printed poetry sequence– which embodies the concept of the

hinge– will help us think about language in continual motion. 'Hinge Picture (1974)' draws from and works against Duchamp's experiments in space. The sequence depicts the female body simultaneously as a construction in language, and as a hinge-like being of kinetic and spatial fluidity that resists fixed (and enclosing) form.

Hinged Pictures & Bodies

'Hinge Picture'[6] is Howe's first published work in her newly formed identity as poet. The work is a two-part sequence of open form poems made up of short fragments of biblical and historical texts interleaved with Irish and American folk tales and songs. While a note from Howe on the copyright page names Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as the principal source for the poems, 'Hinge Picture' is not a straightforward response to that work. Here, via the frame of the hinge, the text invites us to think about what rises as something else falls; the complex and enduring violence of empire; and what happens to individuals who transgress the definitions language and history inscribe for them. This is not a work that aims for a definitive account of history, but rather seeks to open up how scholarship can be a political act. The text works against the depiction in 'Frame Structures' of archives as "bourgeois Victorian women" who are protected, even "Honored", but also "boxed […] shut up […] available only to particular researchers (husbands or bachelor machines)" (18).

The various unnamed sources of 'Hinge Picture' validate a history told via collaged fragments of text assembled into multi-voice layers that build to an overall texture rather than toward a conclusion or resolution. Howe's resistance to narrative enclosure and experiments of disrupted form can be traced to these pages. The poems engage with the whole space of the page, use repetitions, hinging line breaks and fragmented voices to enact narrative

6 First published as a chapbook in 1974 by Telephone Books, I refer here to the sequence re-printed in the collected early works.

interruption and make room for "anonymous, slighted—inarticulate" (Howe qtd. in Quartermain, 'And The Without' 79) voices to emerge. These voices that refuse easy categorisation are echoes of Howe's own transitions from visual artist to poet, from wife to divorcee to wife again, from daughter straddling the identities of her Irish mother and American father, to herself as mother straddling her relationship with her own body. None of these identities or roles can be contained by the existing spaces language keeps for them. By evoking the contradictory and multiple figurations of the 'bride', the text addresses the feminist work being done at the turn of the decade and into the 1970s, and in Howe's own changing relationships, roles and identities.

The epigraph, that opens 'Hinge Picture' is another partial quotation taken from Duchamp's *The Green Box*. It reads:

> Perhaps make a HINGE PICTURE. (folding yardstick, book. . . .)
> develop in space the PRINCIPLE OF THE HINGE in the displacements 1st in the plane 2nd in space. (Duchamp qtd. as epigraph to 'Hinge Picture')

The hinge as imagined by Duchamp contains a duality– a simultaneous mirroring and bending away from itself– that signals both to what has come before and to the potential for what is to come. This movement acts as a kinetic connection between the "plane" and "space", displacing air and light as it swings in-between the two fields of surface and depth. A hinge is both a "still center" and a moment of action in a continuum of movement. The movement of the hinge is best characterised as an exchange where the 'hinging' itself is the moment of significance, think the turning of a page or the opening of a door. By traversing an inside/outside, the perspective of the hinge provides a spatial and temporal site where the "displacements … in

the plane[s]" can reconfigure hierarchy or undergo some form of exchange or transference. However, unlike with the delay discussed above, it is not stasis that is the agent of change, but rather the continual motion between different planes that interrupts narrative linearity by preventing different points of the continuum from entirely dissolving into one another.

This sense of separate spaces is emphasised by the structure of the poems which are presented to the reader as isolated blocks of text, fragmented even within themselves. However, when examined closely the 'stanzas' that lack clear lyric continuity, emerge as connected by repetition, line breaks and mirroring across and within pages. "Magi" trek across multiple pages of the first section (36-7, 40), and then reappear as a "*magi*cian who controls the storm" ([my emphasis] 53) in the second half of the work. The "stark" naked zealot who sits in a "numb/ numb covering/ qualm" (42) returns via the mirror echoes of the words; "a stark/Quake//a numb/Calm" (51) at the opening of the second section. The subtle connections between sections reveals the whole two-part sequence to be an interconnected system that mirrors the split-window structure of *The Large Glass* as well as the two-part nature of the total artwork. As with the figures of the sculpture that continually perform unresolved actions, the figures that are spread throughout the text of 'Hinge Picture', by following non-linear patterns in the text, might undergo transpositions, but similarly resist resolution. The complex kinesis of the structure is displayed in the relationship between the opening and closing poems of the sequence which exists on two separate planes connected by the centrefold hinge of the book.

The two poems– neat little squares set in the centre of their respective pages– are distorted echoes of one another. The first poem opens with an unnamed "invisible angel confined/ to a point simpler than/ a soul" (33) who struggles to hear "mute vocables/ of God" or to form a "stuttering" response. The closing poem is sightless and lightless, depicting an anonymous constrained figure stumbling around in "dread/ blindness" (56). The stymied

senses of the figures are countered by the actions of the holy agent, “blessed Paul”, who Howe depicts pulling “shut the door which had/ been open and bolted it” (56). The biblical language evokes the fall from Eden; however, the ambiguous figuration of subjects complicates the sense of expulsion by introducing a ‘verso’ of potential openness. The invisible angel reappears at the end of the sequence, stripped of wings, but no longer confined. By thinking of the book-form as ever-moving hinge, although the sequence ends with a closed door, Howe retains an inconclusive openness, and reorients the text away from a narrative of naming and containment.

This spatial function of the hinge when read through Lesjak’s formulation of dialectical reading, complicates the surface connections of Howe’s poems. Lesjak suggests we approach a text by noting how its “surface and depth can be seen in productive tension or unease with each other” (248). Lesjak’s reading practice that refuses to privilege or ignore either a text’s material surface or historical context is a way of resisting the “ecumenical lateralness” (240) of neoliberal globalisation. The hinge, by keeping states, conditions and timeframes resolutely apart though also related, makes visible the conditions of the production of the text alongside the conditions of reading. The two planes the hinge connects are affected by one another, without being subsumed. Rather, as Duchamp’s theoretical epigraph suggests, they are displaced. It is important to note that Lesjak acknowledges dialectical reading as an impossible task; resolving a narrative in text, even to articulate its occluding aspects, performs some of that containment she warns against. Lesjak’s concern is that without practicing this impossible, productive tension– between continual historicising and preventing the past from becoming ‘historical’– we risk losing sight of the "[h]ierarchies and contradictions—between texts, between horizons of the social, between texts and contexts” (240).

How can language refuse resolution and still maintain the specificity of historical events in the clarity they need to be fully understood? Can Howe reproduce patriarchal power structures and historical violence in text as a way to demonstrate their ongoing impact on the events of the present, without simply reinforcing already rigid narratives of history? Or, as Marjorie Perloff puts it: "If Howe wants to talk about [...] Colonial greed, Puritan zeal, the fruits of imperialism, the loneliness of exile, the inability to communicate with the Other [...] why doesn't she just get on with it?" ('Collision' 526). Perloff answers her own question as she goes on to think about the role of fragmentation to interrupt narrative and formal linearity. She suggests that Howe's "breakdown of articulation" is not a way of mirroring through text a fragmentary universe but is rather a "response to the all too ordered, indeed formulaic syntax" that emerges out of the "'workshop' poem" (526). Perhaps Howe's poetry is responding to a kind of formulaic strand of contemporary writing, adjacent to the rise of academic creative writing that Perloff is referring to,[7] but I see her fragmentation as having a much wider and more political scope than that. On the one hand Howe is responding to the formulaic way socio-historical and national identities are created and then imposed via text. On the other, she is reversing her own perspective to examine how linguistic traces indicate a deliberate fragmentation of history.

Fractured history & refracted narratives

In 'Hinge-Picture' Howe uses the narrative frame of *Decline and Fall* as a provocation. The poems trouble the whole idea of when the 'past' ends and the 'present' begins. Rather

[7] It is true that Howe has spoken about feeling on the outside of the academy, only ever holding temporary posts where her contemporaries (and indeed her sister Fanny) were able to embed themselves within more secure tenured positions. But on the broad canvas of poets in the world, I don't think we can truly say that Howe has been ignored by the academy and has even benefitted hugely from positions even if they were in the cold and blasted city of Buffalo.

than attempting to give events, people and objects a singular origin and conclusion, Howe, as already examined in the disjunctive timeframes of the preface, uses language to free these things from the realm of the 'historical'. The sequence, as a whole, stands in opposition to the ideas summarised in the neatly enjambed text that imagines;

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This fragment of text, with its arrow-slit structure speaks to the reality of violence at pivotal events, as well as to the violence of attempting to neatly confine and package history to decontextualized slivers. Perloff reads the breakdown of articulation and fragmentary syntax as a "felt need to remake a language that, in its ordinary, which is to say formulaic, state [...] cannot approximate the difficulties of what the postmodern poet and her/his readers perceive to be a multitrack experience" (528). Textual fragmentation, in the preface used to complicate the unresolvable desire to recover memory, here speaks to a resistance against oppression via

narrative erasure. As an intertextual work, 'Hinge Picture' is not trying to condense history to a single story, but rather trying to examine how stories take form at all. The sequence is not just conveying the "multitrack experience" of the poet, but the "multitrack" condition of being in the world.

The transitions in 'Hinge Picture' do not lead inevitably to the productive states of 'decline' or 'progress'. Howe sets up transitions against productiveness and against the idea that history can ever be contained as a linear product. Again, the fragment is useful as a way to read the isolated snapshots of war and violence that Howe depicts in the poems. The work lights on an image of "nine sacks [filled]/with the ears/of his enemies", "Tartars" crossing the Danube, a King "in com/plete armor" leaping ashore (47). Unlike poems chronicling war that either turn it into a ballad, or write against it, Howe here demonstrates war as an ongoing state, where there can be "nothing such as liberty because we are in the field of history" ('Frame Structures' 25). These poems, that were finding published form as the Vietnam war was coming to its messy conclusion complicate ideas of capture, liberation and invasion. If one of the great justifications for war is liberation, Howe holds this term against the light of America's overt imperialist and ideological role in Vietnam to interrupt its stability.

Liberty is a powerful and palpable term in the American psyche. The contradictions within the country play out in the juxtaposition of realities presented by the Statue of Liberty– that great symbol of welcome– versus the continued difficulty the country has in addressing its economic strength as founded on the forced introduction of enslaved people to those same shores. The Pledge of Allegiance, recited by every schoolchild in the country, leaves no room for dissenting opinion that the flag does not represent "one Nation […] with liberty and justice for all" (4 USC Sec. 4). The hinge of the poetry sequence interrupts the appropriation of liberty as a stable term, by connecting the state of *liberation* to the historical context of oppression.

The sequence is not fragmented because Howe is trying to represent the fragmentation that comes from war, it is fragmented because she is writing against the unified message of nationalism. For Howe, the violence of historically containing narrative finds specific form in the way women are figured throughout both the preface and the sequence 'Hinge Picture'.

It is impossible to think about turn of the century American poetry that concerns itself with the nuances of liberation without thinking about the women's liberation movement and second wave feminism. Though Howe's own relationship to feminism is complicated and unsatisfying for a female scholar and activist seeking heroes in the line breaks, much of her wider practice– from her work claiming spaces for Emily Dickinson, Anne Hutchinson, Mary Rowlandson, the women of the Edwards family, Margaret Fuller[8]– pivots on the ways women are enclosed and erased by language and narrative. This first sequence, however, and the framing preface, are much more explicit about violence toward the female body. Fanny Appleton Longfellow burns to death while she is making a scrapbook for her children (FS 14); Weetamoo, who is variously inscribed under the labels, "Queen of Pocasset", "wife" and "sister-in-law" drowns during an escape attempt (21); a nameless and mutilated woman /giantess is discovered on a seashore (36); Biblical "LEAH" is furtively "WEDDED" (35); the folk-song oarsman boasts at having just "dismembered the Queen" (52). Bearing this in mind 'Hinge Picture' fulfills Perloff's promise that "in substituting 'impersonal' narrative–a narrative made up of collage fragments realigned and recharged–for the more usual lyric 'I', Howe [suggests] that the personal is always already political, specifically, that the contemporary Irish-American New England woman who is Susan Howe cannot be understood apart from her history." ('Collision' 533)

8 *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (Grenfell Press: 1992), *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (2014), *Concordance* (Grenfell Press: 2019)

Howe's shift in practice from visual artist to poet followed her divorce from painter Harvey Quaytman and remarriage to sculptor David von Schlegell, and coincided with second-wave feminists re-thinking the family unit and bringing new scrutiny to bear on the institution of marriage. The rallying cry that personal choices are political choices actively sought to draw attention to the false separations between the home and the workplace. The wages for housework movement that began at the Manchester National Women's Liberation Conference in 1972, led to Silvia Federici's manifesto *Wages Against Housework*. Shortly after, Christine Delphy wrote 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Marriage and Divorce' in which she argued that "divorce is not the opposite of marriage, nor even its end, but simply a change or a transformation of marriage" (94). Delphy's attention to the structure of marriage suggests that while "divorce reveals the nature of the marriage contract [it can also] shed light on what made this contract possible in the first place" (95). Howe's penultimate poem in 'Hinge Picture' that opens, "Divorce I manumission round" (55) highlights the equivalence between institutions of marriage and slavery,[9] which both define and confine people in language. The terms wife and slave are not equal in their inequalities but placing them on the same line indicates the totalising power of language to bring into existence and to destroy. Just as Delphy writes that divorce is forever indebted to marriage, liberation can never be uncoupled from the original enslavement. In the delayed space of the poem and the hinging that the words themselves suggest, Howe makes equivalent these two states of liberation, and simultaneously causes the reader to question the structures that enabled the marriage/enslavement in the first place.

Howe is writing into and simultaneously against this political consciousness, using Duchamp's bride as a hinge that puts into indecisive reunion the historical present with the

9 "formal release from slavery or servitude" ('Manumission' *Oxford English Dictionary*)

contextual past. Reading cohesive terms like bride, mother, daughter, through the frame of the hinge destabilises formerly fixed labels. The transitional state of Duchamp's bride is visible in Duchamp's own descriptions of her as variously the "Pendu femelle" (27) and "the shadow, the copy of a copy of an idea." (qtd. in R. Hamilton, 'Unknown Object' ix) The figure inscribed on the surface of the sculpture is literally suspended in space between the panes of glass while simultaneously in a transpositional relationship with the viewer as they walk around her. These material expressions of her fluidity disturb the solidity of the narratives attached to the terms of 'bride' and 'bachelor'. Yes, she is held aloft and subjected to a continual stripping, but her multiplicity of perspective reverses the scrutiny, or at least complicates the path of the gaze from viewer to viewed. Because she is "drawn to look from as many analytic and personal positions as she can muster. [she becomes, herself] A polymorphous, polyauditory scrutiny" (Duplessis 74).

Another way of visualising the disruptive fluidity of the bride is Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio's 1987 experimental dance and architectural translation of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.* The performance-artwork doubly titled 'A Delay in Glass' or 'The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate' explored the "narrative spatial condition […] of the moment of coincidence between image and glass" (64) that Diller and Scofidio saw in Duchamp's original work. The dance reanimates the suspended bride and fully realises the kinetic potential of the figures delayed in glass. The "moment of coincidence between image and glass" which spatially alters perspective, is the same hinging moment of coexistence that Howe brings the reader to in the "delay in glass" section of 'Frame Structure'. Diller and Scofidio describe their version of the 'Bride' as "an exoskeleton. [Whose] anatomy is a hinge" (63). In the dance the embodied hinge is simultaneously, "a generatrix, a form of spatial contradiction, a strategy of reprogramming, androgyny, meanings that rotate about the axis of a word, a fluctuation

between written and pictoral text, a DIATEXT" ([*sic*] 64). This animation of the bride as a "strategy of reprogramming" is more than simply a shift in perspective, it is a way of radically rethinking systems, structures and authorised histories, that have become invisible. The spatial bride becomes a site that displaces narrative. The textual body that hinges between "meanings that rotate about the axis of a word" is another way of thinking about displacement. Glass's reflective, refractive, and transparent properties refuse narrative fixity and divert narrative linearity in multiple and tangential directions.

Displacements

The mirrors that appear in Howe's work perform a complex set of relations. The transactional nature of the mirror's reflective surface obscures both the thing being looked at and the thing within. But mirrors can also become a hinge that displaces a constructed linearity to narrative.

In 'Frame Structures' the reader steps into a complicated and fractured kaleidoscope of perspectives; "Idealism a mirror where everything disappears to nothing Realism [Fragment/ slash/ quotation] [..] Intuition is a mirror […] Poems reflect the play of light its shadows on the mirror its splinters […] it is so it itself it doesn't burn them." (27) The mirror distorts and damages, alters beyond recognition the original reflection, and is *also* a form of protection. Howe depicts the mirror as a site that can briefly contain the "shadows" of history, which is also a way of mediating the harm that can come to those who experience the image ("it is so it itself it doesn't burn them"). The poem as mirror that operates on all these complex, fragmentary, and non-linear levels, is a way of representing narrative as fugitive, as much composed of absences as solid facts. The self-reflective potential of the surface of glass, here is figured as a material that displaces the objects, images or events by disrupting the solidity of the image. For Diller and Scofidio, this displacement is read as a radical "reprogramming" and

happens on the hinged body of the bride. However, the mirror's material prevents visual comprehension by breaking up and distorting the shape of the thing it covers. Mirrors are like the black rectangles of redacted official documents. In trying to wrest control of narrative, redactions actually fragment the text in a way that breaks the document's sense of cohesion and further indicates cracks in the overarching ideology the document seeks to maintain. 'Reading' history depends upon encountering and acknowledging the gaps and occlusions that make it up. There is a difference between continuity and linearity. Continuity allows us to think of history as always ongoing and refuses conclusion. Linearity is a way of falsely parcelling history into isolated events from the past and rejecting their impact on the present. The mirror breaks narrative linearity, but in that very action can potentially block the passage of narrative continuity un-anchoring events in the present from history.

Turning to the artist Robert Smithson and his *Yucatan Mirror Displacements (1-9)* helps us to read the mirror's disruptive action in the service of, rather than against, historical obfuscation. In 1969 Smithson published photographs and writings in an artwork titled *Incidents of mirror-travel in the Yucatan*.[10] Like Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare*, Smithson's work was part physical sculpture and part notes and images. The images and texts of *Mirror Displacements* recorded nine 'incidents' of Smithson embedding 12 smallish square mirrors into the Yucatan landscape. The mirrors were dug into sand dunes, cantilevered onto rock faces or balanced in trees. Smithson then photographed the mirrors before moveing on to the next site. Describing the first mirror displacement Smithson writes:

10 I use Robert Smithson's, Yucatan Mirror Displacements 1–9 as an example here because of the particular coincidence of language between his work, Duchamp and Howe, but he was working as part of a trend of mirrored sculptures. The works of Robert Morris, 'Untitled', 1965 (reconstructed 1971): Four Mirrored cubes. Mirror plate glass on board, each 36 x 36 x 36 (91.5 x 91.5 x 91.5); and Donald Judd. Untitled. 1969. Clear anodized aluminum and blue Plexiglas. Four units, each 48 × 60 × 60" (121.9 × 152.4 × 152.4cm), with 12" (30.5 cm) intervals are just two instances of many works produced at this time.

> Bits of earth spilled onto the surfaces, thus sabotaging the perfect reflections of the sky. Dirt hung in the sultry sky. Bits of blazing cloud mixed with the ashy mass. The displacement was *in* the ground, not *on* it. Burnt tree stumps spread around the mirrors and vanished into the arid jungles. (Smithson 121)

The word 'displacement', meaning "shifting [or] dislocation", can be found, among many other places, in politics, psychology, pharmacology and physics. It is "the removal of a thing from its place" as well as the "relation between the initial position of a body and its position at some subsequent instant." ('Displacement' *OED*) If we think about the water that is 'displaced' when an object is dropped into a brim-full glass, we can see how displacement indicates both the movement of the thing examined *and* what is affected by the positioning of that body. Smithson's mirrors by "displacing the solidity of the landscape and shattering its forms," (Guggenheim) cause us to think about the temporal, spatial and therefore narrative displacements happening simultaneously. Further, by displacing material from the land, they not only disrupt a solid and linear idea of history, but they *give space* for alternative and unauthorised voices to whisper through. By embedding his mirrors into the landscape of the Yucatan, Smithson is drawing our attention to the specific histories told or hidden within the naming and narrativising of that place. The mirrors serve as a site on which we can read the fleeting coincidences of bodies passing through space, the reflections of birds or clouds, as well as the intrusions from outside that sabotage the reflective space.

The photographs of the *Mirror Displacements* record an impossible attempt to keep in motion and visible the gaps and openings that the mirrors create, while the text of Smithson's artwork provides specific context. As with Duchamp's total artwork, the dual parts of Smithson's work need each other in order to perform the active reading the work requires.

Hinging between the reflective surface of the mirror, the transferential surface of photographic film and the transactional exchanges of the text, Smithson's *Mirror Displacements* are as much about the shadows of the surrounding earth, the pieces of sky held in the body of the reflections, the interposing grains of dirt, as they are about the apparently solid reflective surfaces. Reading acts of displacement as showing "the play of light its shadows on the mirror its splinters" (FS 27) rather than the *reflection* helps us "develop a type of 'anti-vision' or negative seeing" (Smithson 130). This 'negative seeing' is a method of negative reading, giving our attention to what is absent or missing by looking to what is displaced beside the thing in-front of our eyes.

As well as relying on the material properties of the mirror to create this tension between surface and depth in his work, Smithson is pointing the viewer to the cultural significance of the mirror in the context of mid-century 'materialist/minimalist' art. Mirrors, having already travelled from the privacy of the boudoir to the semi-public space of the gallery, thanks to new emerging technologies in glass manufacture were more and more a part of the city-scape. Smithson's mirrors– that reveal by displacement and narrate through fragment– respond to and anticipate the building boom and the rising use of mirrors to clad the exterior of buildings. In the early years of conceptual art, mirrors were used as a provocation that relied on interpreting the material as a reflective/revealing surface.[11] But in this new era of super-bank, big oil, pharmaceutical incorporation, the mirror became a symbol for how the matter of something might be obfuscated and transformed by the power of the reflective surface to displace. Reinhold Martin reads the use of mirrors in mid-century American architecture as a form of narrative totalising. Martin describes mid-century oil industry headquarters and the

[11] I am especially thinking here of Michael Baldwin's 'Untitled Painting' (1965) made under the banner of collective Art and Language, which was a mirror mounted on canvas.

way they use mirrored facades "to channel these objects and the forces flowing from and through them—amplifying some, screening out others—architecture helps quite literally to build this phantasm, the existence and effects of which are inescapably real." (97) These facades obscure the inner workings of the buildings *and* signify the way petro-industries refuse responsibility for American imperial projects abroad (Gulf war) and at home (pipe-line protest arrests). These massive buildings encompass and eclipse the physical and economic landscapes in which they sit. Smithson's fleeting and fragmentary work challenges the totalizing structures of petro-capitalist narrative by quoting the shared material of its surface within his partial, ephemeral, explicitly anti-monumental *Incidents*. The works attempt to transubstantiate the narrative of the mirror from one of total power to one where action is embedded in context.

1974, the year the poems of 'Hinge Picture' were first published in book form was also the year the mirror-clad Bonaventure Hotel in L.A was built. Frederic Jameson, in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* describes the building's exterior as a "great reflective glass skin" which;

> [A]chieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventure from its neighbourhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel's outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it. (42)

For Jameson the hotel is a display and act of power, connected to the Vietnam war. The mirrored exterior obfuscates, not only the fact of the building itself– which can only be seen as "distorted images of everything that surrounds it"– but also the ability of those inside it to understand what they are inside of. He links this sensation of displacement to the way the

individual subject is adrift in the systems of financialisation under late capitalism, but the analogy works equally well for those so immersed within authorised versions of history they cannot see the narrativising woods from the mythmaking trees.

What is destabilised and what is evoked when we read the works as emerging out of and into their historical moment? Maureen Lane writing for *The Paris Review* describes Howe as a "serious war poet" (n.pag) but fails to mention the war in Vietnam. The war, a watershed moment for so many reasons was the backdrop to everything happening in the United States in the late 60s and into the 1970s. 'Hinge Picture' is filled with warring figures separated by a few lines or interwoven and indistinguishable. Yes, the poems refer to the second world war, as stated in the preface, and to the chaotic historical ur-war that has always existed in cultural imagination, but they also sketch an entire mythology of an American imperial project and the uneasy colonisation ongoing at home. We create enemies in order to categorise allies, we draw borders to contain and to shut out: defining who is 'out there' is as much about understanding who is 'in here'. Identities are interconnected, even dependent on one another, just as the past and the present are inextricably linked, and reading one is only produced by understanding the other.

In a pleasing rounding of corners, Smithson suggests that it is the *delay* of the artwork that has the potential to resist this narrative dislocation. He suggests;

> [Art] brings sight to a halt, but that halt has a way of unravelling itself. All the reflections expired into the thickets of Yaxchilan. One must remember that writing on art replaces presence by absence by substituting the abstraction of language for the real thing. There was friction between the mirror and the tree; now there is friction between language and memory. A memory of reflections becomes an absence of absences. (129)

What we can take from this specific moment in architectural history and its textual afterlife is this: Mirrored glass "repels" context and overpowers the subject by dislocating the individual from comprehending the systems that contain them. It is through a renewed attention to the kinetic possibilities in narrative that reveal a way of reading out of and against those systems. By breaking the work into this two-part structure Smithson halts the passage between the different events of witnessing, creating, recording and remembering. The 'final' version of the *Mirror Displacements*, which now only exists as a written anecdote in a collection of writings, looks backward as much as it looks forward. The work does not imagine a unified past, but one fragmented across different national and intranational borders, disciplines, media and sites. The "friction" between language (surface) and memory (depth), between memory (surface) and history (depth) feeds the productive dialectical reading where neither form is allowed to obscure the other.

Conveying light

Can two absences make a presence, or is Smithson's "absence of absences" a form of doubly obscuring the already erased bodies of the past? Howe suggests it is a question of framing. In 'Frame Structures' she writes "[a]bsence is always present in a picture in its right relation." (6) By holding parallel readings of history and the present; thinking the material alongside– even intertwined with– the textual; by keeping language and image in motion we can reach an idea of the event of the text and resist uncritically reproducing the violence of erasure. Absences, aporia, displaced material, the event of the reflection, and the event of recording it, all signal to a moment of change. When historicised within their "right relation", the examined events make space for the ghosts of history "to step forward a muffled form" (27), rather than further

reproducing their cultural silencing. Placing 'Hinge-Picture' in the context of a mid-century obsession with mirrors as signifier of power and capital, suggests the 'displacement' performed in her text is an attempt to find new ways of reading and thus resisting the new totalising systems. Howe seeks the ways her work can continually historicise, without making historical. As soon as something repels an historical context, just as the Bonaventure Hotel repels the context of its neighbourhood, it becomes unanchored and cannot be fully confronted. Like the matter displaced but not destroyed in Smithson's artwork, Howe's poems are sites of connection where the lyric 'I' is displaced by the narratives of history. By paying attention to the shadows, the fleeting images, what is partial and fragmented by the displacing body, can we resituate history in the present and work to read the productive failures of the texts. Disjunctive timeframes and displacements can reserve space for alternative and unauthorised versions of history that repoliticse what has been presented as natural, unconstructed, and neutral.

Howe's poems are not literally made of glass, they are 'merely' acts of language that have a physical and material effect. Traces of history remain in the language of the present, and the language used in the present can obfuscate by displacement events from the past. What I have made an argument for here is paying attention to the kinetic possibilities in narrative as a way of reading out of and against those systems. Hinging moments of change are also connections, Howe's pivoting works exist in a field of continuity that is about instability as a pedagogical tool rather than progress as a natural route. Glass destabilises because it is itself unstable, both as a semi-viscous material and as a cultural artifact. Because of this the mirror can both frame and displace the horizon of desire, holding in indecisive reunion a bordered self-contained system *and* an open site of encounter.

My second chapter turns to the material properties of thread and fabric. The grid of the loom that structures woven objects shimmers behind Howe's practice, connecting poems across disparate textual encounters. This chapter's consideration of the poem as a prismatic holding space for language and history to cohere is complicated by the axial tension introduced by the weft and warp of thread. Howe's material interdisciplinarity, that began by crossing over from visual art to the printed poem, takes another turn as she collages surface text with the deeper layers of language her poems address.

Text, texture, textile: Susan Howe's woven narratives

> the hands-on construction of a poem being searched out, breathed into a lifted through the page, fragment by fragment, from the archeological layers of each individual's peculiar life—revealed the complex grid of the maker's physical and mental activity. Its *it*.
>
> — Fraser 176

> And just as it is possible to go from any place to another, so also, starting from a defined and specialized field, can one arrive at a realization of ever-extending relationships.
>
> Thus tangential subjects come into view. The thoughts, however, can, I believe, be traced back to the event of a thread.
>
> — Albers 15

There is a tension in Howe's works between the malleable tactile surfaces of her poems and the hidden grids that structure them. This chapter examines Howe's intertextual practice as an inter-material practice that enacts the power of loose threads to undo the structures that seek to contain and enclose history, narrative and the formation of the poetic subject. The tension in Howe's works between the grid and the texture of the surface is a tension of reading between the structural axis on which textual practice operates and the "felt fact" (SLT 9) of language. These felt facts are both the way the resonances of language are literally felt in the real events of the world, but also the non-linguistic feelings that exist only at the margins of communication.

The texts this chapter focusses on are concerned with the formation of an American imaginary and its perception as a complete entity despite its multiple and contradictory narrative roots. Howe's poems examine how in the face of unknowns– a strange and seemingly ungoverned land, or the infinite openness of death– the collective and individual psyche falls back on known structures. However, these structures are themselves constructed by potentially loose and fugitive narrative threads. Howe's poems trace American domestic and foreign policy to the Puritan drive to domesticate and control both a collective imagination and

an unruly, unmapped land. Her works think about what happens when those narratives unravel, and the extent to which we can or cannot escape the narrative grids we are invisibly ensconced in. It is only through the continual emergence of grids in tension with one another that a productive reading of history emerges.

This chapter pivots on the fragment of a wedding dress that Howe uncovers in the course of her archival work. In her discussion of 'The Imaginary Body', Susan Stewart writes that "[t]he wedding as marriage ritual marks the transformation of the self from physical body to a networks of social and property relations, from play to production, from circularity to linearity. Of all bourgeois rituals, it is the most significant, the most emblematic of class relations" (117). I open this chapter by reading the closing sequence of *Souls of the Labadie Tract* via this object that Howe returns to in several texts. In the work the poet emphasises the connections between language, fabric and land enclosure. Three frameworks commingle, each contributing materially or theoretically to one another. The dress fragment signifies a rupture *and* connection between the family unit as private space, and the family unit as colonising force.

I continue to examine this boundary crossing between public and private in the light of Howe's two essays 'Encloser' (1990) and 'Incloser' (1993). These essays, via the interweaving of political and spiritual structures, think about domestic economy as enmeshed with the imperial project of American foreign policy. The life of religious non-conformist Anne Hutchinson is the loose narrative thread that runs through these texts, making visible and confronting the unified structures of church and state.

Finally, I turn to the re-emergence of the wedding dress in Howe's elegiac poem 'untitled' from the 2010 collection *That This*. Here the grids of visual art structure and give perspective to two figures bound by marriage and separated by death. The wedding dress

fabric which Howe unravels in *Souls*, in this later work is used to weave disparate narrative threads together. Here, following the death of her third husband, Howe constructs a poetic 'I' as a fragmented, temporary cohesion of memory using chiasmatic grids to depict and make sense of a chiasmatic and interrelated life. The textual practice that borrows from the weaving, stitching, tracing of thread allows Howe to construct a swatch of poetry that both contains the texture of their marriage and allows it to be an unfinished and ongoing interaction.

The Problem of the grid

To begin I want to turn my attention to the concept and figure of the grid. Redell Olsen states that "[m]inimalism, and the questions it poses with regards to the potential limits of representation, is for Howe, an alternative grid through which to return to earlier tracts of writing not considered as such." (par.22) This structure that is so evocative of the construction of American land and urban space, emerges in Howe's work through her textual practice. The inter-materiality of Howe's work addresses the grid in three distinct forms: the indexical grid of the concordance or dictionary that emerges in her poems as "cinders of the lexical drift" (FS 22); the grids of maps that confront American 'wild' or errant nature such as swamps and weeds (Parks); the grid in visual art. This last example and the different forms of the grid in visual art– i.e., undergirding classical studies of perspective; the surface grids of Modernism; and the structural grids of the weaving pattern that give way to the wearable or usable cloth object– will carry my readings through this chapter as I think about ways Howe's visual practice structures her poems.

Rosalind Krauss opens her 1979 essay 'Grids', which surveys the rise of the grid in Modernist art through to the post-war period, by accusing it of carrying to fruition what she sees as "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."(50)

According to Krauss the grid's "para-logical suspension" (55) of narrative is anti-dialectical because it flattens the dialectical dependency upon the tension between two opposing forces. The axial directions of the grid keep narrative in suspense rather than pursuing a linear path.[1] Krauss further describes Modernist experimentation with the grid as an "attempt to grasp the logical condition of vision" ('The Grid, the True Cross' 311), as opposed to the logical condition of language. The visual grid is a "linear network in whose grip [the viewer of a painting is] unconsciously held fast" (303). It is the unconscious here that adheres to the structure, without knowing they are held within its grip. Howe's training and interests as an artist put pressure on these theories that vision and language unfurl in different ways. Or rather, she acknowledges the different constructions of language and vision, but by holding these theories of visual art in paralogical suspension with her poetry practice she complicates readings of both. The disruption between narrative constructions allows other disciplines to unravel or reveal the structures that undergird them. Suddenly a whole political system or the conditions that have formed a sense of national identity can be examined structurally.

Liz Kotz troubles Krauss' rigid reading of the grid. Kotz states that the grid is not "a static pattern or template, but a way of making things, a way of operating, making decisions and moving forward" (346). The possibilities of the grid as space for a multiplicity of experiences depend upon a rigorously self-critical perspective. It is the *manner in which* the framework is viewed– the conditions that position both viewer and viewed– that brings a dialectical tension to bear on a potentially neutral and depoliticised space. Kotz makes space for reading what Krauss refuses to acknowledge: the interactions between the material/multiple surfaces of the grid and the invisible world(s) of emotion. What becomes palpable across Susan Howe's work

1 'Paralogical', according to the Oxford English Dictionary means illogical. An interesting note is that 'para' means alongside not anti which is against. So logic, by its very definition suggests a singular line, a linearity which is antithetical to the logic of the grid.

is how enmeshed the process of language assemblage is with the personal and sensual experience of construction. Attention to the places these interrelated frameworks intersect allows the reader to make visible, and work to confront, the hidden grids that structure surface meaning.

Throughout Krauss' consideration of the grid she returns to the practice and theories of painter Agnes Martin. Howe writes that Martin's paintings, particularly ones from the 1960s and 70s, "with their delicately controlled graphite, ink, or pencil lines drawn across thin washes of colour … have been an inspiration for all my writing life" ('Leaf Flower in the Wind Falling' n.pag).[2] Howe suggests that "[t]he creative imagination, while constantly maintaining the specific, thinks itself through pencilled grids, points, abstract geometric lines, color field washes" (n.pag) . Martin is often viewed as formally linked to the Minimalist artists of the 1960s and 70s, though she herself ascribed her work to an earlier lineage of painting. Krauss concedes to the painter the tension between her fixed attention to the replication of the grid, and her use of fragment, caesura, absence, and atmosphere. Martin's construction and then disrespect at the borders of the grid create gaps in the visual field that not only make the space surrounding the canvases apparent, but also draw the viewer's attention to the complex interrelations rupturing the seemingly unified surface. Brendan Prendville writes how Martin sets up "a dissonance between the square format of the canvas and the rectangular inner grid in order to destroy the 'power' of the square" ('The Meanings of Acts' 70). When we read Howe's poems and prose works as layers upon layers of grids, a chiasmatic tension between surfaces emerges. The problem of the grid occurs when it is not presented dialectially, for example if the axes of a map are not simultaneously read socio-politically or through a

2 'Leaf Flower in the Wind Falling Blue The Dark River' was written for a reading on April 12, 2005 at The Drawing Center in NYC in conjunction with the show called 3Xabstraction which consisted of drawing and paintings by Agnes Martin, Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz.

historical lens. Krauss' accusation that the grid is anti-history can be assuaged if the work in question is not taking the grid as its subject, but putting it in tension with what it obscures or supports. Krauss writes, "we need to grasp [the grid] as a structure and not a referent, as the operator of a system and not as the object of depiction." ('The Grid, the True Cross' 311)

Carrying traces

Howe's theme of history as continually emerging in the present is also about the emergence of the political out of the personal and vice-versa. Howe's threads are not solely of the domestic sphere, and they also refuse to become enfolded into the narratives of an historical event of the past. Over the course of three texts (*Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (2014)*, Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007)*,* and *That This* (2010)) that cover nearly a decade of work Howe's attention returned repeatedly to a fragment of wedding dress. Uncovered in the archive of puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards this scrap of fabric speaks to Howe's practice of carrying narrative threads across and within texts as a way to break the power of the 'finished' and completed work. Howe describes the poem sequence 'Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards' that closes *Souls* as "a way to translate into print my reaction to the thrill of seeing the collection of Jonathan Edwards's manuscripts at Yale's Beinecke Library." ('An Open Field' n.p.) The continual emergence of the dress in Howe's texts across many years is a way to think about the unfixed and changing nature of materiality, the insistence of the "felt fact" as a form of ontology, but also as a form of making visible the continual emergence of history in the present. Jessica Wilkinson argues that Howe "employs and combines several textual devices … to enact a shift away from concrete, canonical frameworks, and towards a more inclusive 'open form' of historical writing." (11) And while I agree that Howe's "textual stitchery and collage techniques" (12) that fold the fabric into the

body of her poems is a form of feminist biography that brings Sarah Pier[re]pont Edwards' life into sharp focus,[3] I argue that the continual return of the "Prussian blue scrap" (TT 32), the "tiny blue fragment" (SP 45) is not just a relic of a mostly unrecorded life, but indicates deeper, more structural connections between the various subjects of the texts and national, colonial and industrial narratives. History continues to emerge in the present because it *is* present.[4]

Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives is Howe's most explicit text about the inescapably knotted relationship between text, fabric, narrative, and land enclosure. In this illustrated, lyric essay that moves "stepwise" (46) between the archives of Emily Dickinson, Henry James, Jonathan Edwards, and collected rare textiles of New England settlers, Howe exposes language as "the embroidered manifestation of an earlier vernacular authority (edenic justice) [as demonstrated] through ciphered wilderness and pang." (40) In these pages Howe as contemporary scholar/explorer burrows through archives situated in New York and New England. As she does so she teases out of the words of earlier scholar/explorers a language that bears the weight of an older authority (namely that of Europe and the English language bible) as it works to name and master both the terrifyingly open 'wilderness' of American land and the longing pangs of homesickness. The essay's non-linear "side-step[s] or little jump[s]" (40) between sources, uses language to "stitch" together disparate timeframes, people and archival sources. She quotes a definition of 'stitch' as "to sew with a back puncture of the needle; so as to double the thread […] to *stitch* the leaves of a book and form a pamphlet […] to form land into ridges […] to mend or unite […] as to *stitch up* a rent" (29). The word invokes the domestic and minute, the rhetorical tract, the conscious composition of tracts of land.

3 Howe Sarah's name "Pierpont" in the title of the poem in Souls, but "Pierrepont" in the body of the poem itself, That This, and Spontaneous

4 Also described as a "tiny square remnant" (That This 32) I want to point out the emphasis Howe places on the marginal, smallness, fragile, and fragmentary nature of the relic and it's seeming inconsequence.

Public and private narratives are irrevocably bound together, the meaning of the text pivots on the multiple meanings of the word. This demonstration of the tension between an attempt to contain within a dictionary definition language that spills out beyond its own borders is typical of Howe's repeated use of indexical texts that fail to contain. *Spontaneous Particulars* attempts to make visible the multiple levels narrative is constructed and recorded.

Howe experiences the texture of the archival text as both against an idea of a two-dimensional "portrait of history", and as traceable in the materials and material interactions of history's own self-formation. Archival marginalia captures not just the official, framed accounts of history, but its 'true' portrait in all their "insignificant details. In twill fabrics, bead-work pieces, pricked patterns […] in quotations, thought-fragments, rhymes, syllables […] in soils and cross-outs." (21) These objects and textual traces still retain the resonance of their materiality, the ghostly remains of how they came to be in the first place. The "soils" of the marginalia becomes the fertile 'soil' out of which a living history in the present emerges.

Howe's archive diving is not a simple reconstruction event. Although Howe depicts her own "compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement" (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 91), the poet also refuses to 'rescue' or recreate narratives that are only fully present in partial and fragmentary form. As discussed in chapter one, Howe's desire to tenderly lift obfuscated voices from the dark-side of history does not involve commanding them to speak, as the archivist-as-archaeologist problematically does in Derrida's critique in *Archive* Fever.[5] Rather Howe's hinging theorises a kind of inverted sub-

5 The archivist as archaeologist rather than tourist that Derrida discusses in Archive Fever is drawn from a passage of Freud from "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896). Derrida suggests that reconstructing phantoms through an archive is a form of exorcism, that giving voice to another is just another form of erasure. He writes of the Freudian archaeologist narrative: "[the archaeologist/Freud] finishes by exorcising them [the ghosts of the past] in the moment he at last says […] 'Stones talk!' He believes he has exorcised them in the instant he lets them talk" (Archive Fever 95). Derrida is sceptical of the ability

rosa, where the ultimate act of 'rescue' is to *not* compel the women of history to speak. Howe's is "a search for a precursive relation always beyond us" (Keller n.p.) that uncovers a rich and full history, that can only gesture toward conditions of the past through the remains of a material existence.

Howe provides examples of Jonathan Edwards' hand stitched notebooks made from the discarded paper scraps his daughters use to make fans. The exact communication from the hand of the man evades us, the writing is too spidery, but the felt fact of it is palpable. The objects give the reader a sense of the intertwined domestic situation, the closeness of the spiritual writings to the daily activities of the home, the resourcefulness and probable poverty. Held within the archive as "historical-existential traces … hunted, captured, guarded … then shut carefully away, outside an economy of use, inaccessible to touch" (SP 24) they have little to no relationship to the present. The archived object requires the translation of it into poetry in order to make visible its significance in the world today. Although Howe is here suggesting the nature of a collector is also that of a captor, in practice her text does not work to 'free' a 'real' Sarah Edwards or reconstruct her life. Rather, through poetry, Howe works to complicate what a wedding dress 'means' in the context of settler-colonial America.

The material "[r]elict" (60) of the dress indicates the active participation of Sarah Edwards in the social, political, spiritual economy of settler colonial America, and how those actions resonate in wider narratives of industry, landscape construction and complicity in historical violence. The relic or relict– "a widow, a survivor" (Lane n.pag)– is what is left over but also what endures. Brendan Prendeville paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty describes the chiasmatic relationship between the planes of felt knowledge; "what sees, touches, is also

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to free the present from the voices of the past by airing them. The voices have not been freed but simply trapped within another narrative, and the refusal of the archivist to accept their position is a form of silencing.

what is seen and what is touched." ('Merleau-Ponty: Realism and Painting' 371). Read in these terms, this fragment/ object is a remnant of histories that are irrevocably lost as well as a sign of the way history survives in the present.

The sequence 'Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards' opens with a facsimiled reproduction of the material of the title (SLT 112). In the image we can clearly see the fraying edges and loose threads, as well as the suggestion of a pattern or design. The poem on the facing page echoes the fraying, partial nature of the fabric, while at the same time offering obscured and unreadable lines as the 'threads' that make up the weft and warp of the work (113). The works, as mirror images or translations of one another insinuate the present is made from fragments and traces of history; that fragments and traces of history can be found in anything.

The 'threads' of this first poem situate it in a fluid time and space. The words that draw a picture of nature are really about movement *through* nature. The words "wing", "walker", "snow" (113) depict a nature not 'out there' as seen through the frame of a window, painting or doctrine, but impermanent nature and land felt in relation to the body. Time is in a state of flux and change; "metam[orphosis?]", "becoming". The tense looks backwards to the "past" and is moving by as an aural echo of 'passed' (113). Nothing in the poem is stable and fixed, the words themselves seem to be sliding off the page or shimmering before the eyes of the reader complicating perspective and making it unclear which phrases are on top and which are emerging from 'underneath'.

By setting the text at a "slant" (113) Howe encourages us to note these readings, but slantwise. By 'translating' the dress fragment into a poem Howe articulates the connection between Sarah Edwards' transcendent experiences with God as a bodily relationship with nature, and the spiritual transformation into the married state with the bodily transformations

of childbearing.[6] The institutional framework of marriage, as represented by the dress, is irrevocably bound to the institutions of church and state, the duties and constraints of one impacting the formation and stability of the other. But as the text slides off the page, we are also made to confront the supposed fixity of these institutional frameworks against the unsteadiness and fluidity of nature, and read the fugitive potential of unenclosed narrative.

The facsimile of the dress fabric and this first poem are depictions of what is felt by the senses– what is seen, held against the skin– but the following poems depict what else is structured by the union between Jonathan and Sarah Edwards. The huge amount of written work created as a result of their marriage means paper is a central element both to their married life but also as a way of conveying the remains of their work. In a later poem the phrases "(folded paper)" and "Jonathan Edwards" are centralised (114), while "Sarah Pierrepont" is fragmented and positioned at the end of the lines. This is a simple enough reading since we know all that remains of her is this swatch of blue, however, the complexities of "traced" – the first word of the poem that also returns on following pages (122, 125)– connect an everyday case of domestic erasure to wider ideas of political domestic policy. 'Trace' is variously defined as "The way or path which anything traces; course, road […] A beaten path through a wild or unenclosed region"; "a mark or impression"; "a pair of ropes, chains or leather straps by which the collar of a draught animal is connected"; and its near relation to 'tress' describes strings of "corn plaited together so as to be hung up" ('Trace' *Oxford English Dictionary*). From the spatial and physical to the ephemeral and then back to the object and the specific actions associated with them, the traces of Sarah Edwards that at

[6] I use the term 'translation' here consciously taking from Current exploration of the possibilities of the practice as outlined in Sophie Collins' introduction to Currently and Emotion: Translations (2016). Collins writes, "As an approach to creating texts, translation promotes a move away from solipsism and towards direct engagement with cultures outside of our own, including those pertaining to non-textual media" (17).

first appear to be so marginal and elusive, reveal themselves as "coiled" (SP 26) around the project of mapping and colonizing of American land. Howe's "skein" (26) of poems that address and draw from the fragment of wedding dress *does* speak to the fragmentation and erasure of feminized labour and creativity. But it further insists that biography should always be allowed to spread beyond the context of an individual's historical dates. Rather than reading this piece of fabric as a sign of what work has been erased, the unfolding poems in this sequence connect the material to the founding of the "American Academy" (SLT 119), as intertwined with to the ongoing material and cultural destruction of the "Indians at Stockbridge" (118), and as parallel to the contemporary agro-chemical industrial complex that began "on the edge of sowing seeds and its springing" (117).

Sarah Pierpont Edwards was the great granddaughter of early settlers and religious nonconformists[7], who, breaking out of the framework of European social structures and religious doctrines, made traces through the unenclosed land of America, beating those first paths of colonialism that would lead to the mapping and subsequent enclosure that would deprive indigenous people of the right to even exist on the land. The impact of her marriage, the eleven children produced from it that would spawn generations of lawmakers, religious leaders, and educators, laid the literal foundations for modern America, cementing the role of the family form as colonizing unit.

There is "no end to the traces" ('Encloser' 195) of real events Howe states in the discussion of the *Politics of Poetic Form* symposium. All these traces of traces are sewn into the piece of woven fabric, itself an example of the unbreakable connection between surface

7 "Sarah Pierpont Edwards's mother, Mary Hooker, was a granddaughter of Thomas Hooker. In 1636, at the height of the antinomian crisis, he led his congregation along Indian trails to the bend of the river where Hartford is now. In my unspeakable fish net spectra version she's still roaming" ('Vagrancy in the park' 17).

embellishment and invisible grid-structure below. 'America' is a product of imagination that relies on a unified, if fabricated, framework to exist. Howe's poems insist on uncertain definitions and frayed edges as a way to visualize language's potential to resist narrative enclosure. The final poem of the sequence is a sliver of practically unreadable text. The word 'trace' is sliced in half bringing the full range of meanings to bear on the last image. Is this a narrow path forged from the wildness of the blank page; an unbending course; an impression; the last sign of a dissolved network of threads; or a single arm of a harness unable to contain the narrative that has slipped out, away, and off the page?

The fugitive line

Howe's interdisciplinary practice that gives equal weighting to the textual, visual, and aural can easily be traced to influences of several artists and poets. In her 1974 essay 'The End of Art' Howe makes a claim for the productive tension between the fluid and escaping nature of language when set against the confines of the grid. She draws out the many layers of Ian Hamilton Finlay's 'Fisherman's Cross' and points to the resonant inter-material visual and verbal works of Ad Reinhart (4-6). In later interviews, essays, and even the 'about the author' note in her 1990 collection *Singularities*, she explicitly states the influence of Agnes Martin's work at the time she was transitioning from the gallery wall to the printed page. Each of the above artists pays consistent attention to the boundaries of the spaces they work on. Their works disrupt the traditional sense of the poetic 'line', and they use surface and depth to alter the perception of the viewer. Finlay constantly traverses the visual and verbal; Reinhart troubles the borders of colour/geometry, secular/sacred; and Martin's neat hand drawn grids push "conformity [until it becomes] a form of non-conformity" (Chave 4). Howe describes the emotive titles of Martin's work "in relation to [the] severely abstract grids". This tension Howe

says “acted as an opening, almost the way a scrim does onstage. […] What you thought was background becomes transparent and you see something new and unexpected that was always there, but hidden.” (Thompson ‘Interview’ n.pag) Howe’s ‘visual’ poems may be “postlinear” (Reed ‘Postlinear Poetics’ 14) in that her stanzas are often not constructed according to the traditional idea of the line, but there is a deep attention to the possibility of lines to reveal and connect even as they evade containment on the page.

In her survey book on mid-century linear art, Briony Fer (via Deleuze and Guattari) suggests that “[l]ines that escape geometry are […] ‘fugitives from geometricization’.” (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Fer 55) As these fugitive lines break through the boundaries of formalised, contained or enclosed space they take on a new significance as gestures or objects that, in their breakthrough, speak both to the enclosed system and to its failures. Fer states; “Outside the realm of perspective, the fugitive line becomes that which constructs and escapes the system, as lifelines from a commodity culture predicated upon obsolescence.” (56) This potential to simultaneously break out of and break open containing structures applies also to errant narrative lines that trouble the solidity of conceptual frameworks. Krauss describes the disruptive nature of Martin’s paintings as managing to be both material “by redoubling [the canvas’] infrastructural weave”, and spiritual, when the lines appear to “dissolve” thus gesturing “towards a scene of the infinite […] a reference to the sublime.” (‘The Grid, the True Cross’ 307). Fer takes Krauss’ contention one step further. Rather than simply a gesture, Fer reads Martin’s grid as *displacing* a revelatory or epiphanic experience of ‘the sublime’ with the viscerally experienced idea of ‘the infinite’. The infinite for Martin maintains something “visionary […] beyond the merely literal” (Fer 48). Fer suggests that what is evoked is “a kind of crossing. It is not simply a matter of looking at the vista before us, but of entering into and moving across a field of vision. Distance […] is collapsed as a kind of limitless depth that engulfs

us." (57) Martin's engulfing grids are both a space that the viewer passes through and a framework that entirely surrounds them. Howe's textual practice (that insists "we are in the field of history" ('Frame Structures' 25)) is intertwined with her training as an artist. Her prose works articulate this tension between the enclosing structure and the potential of the fugitive line to break out.

Enclosures/Inclusions

In 'Encloser' and 'Incloser',[8] two interrelated prose essays that address the dual enclosures of land and narrative that form the basis of an American identity, Howe makes visible "the way origins envelop us" ('Encloser' 175). These essays examine the "dialectical construction of the American land" (181) through the Puritan frameworks of expulsion and containment that form the basis of an American literary tradition. Howe writes, "[m]y writing has been haunted and inspired by a series of texts, woven in shrouds and cordage of Classic American nineteenth-century works; they are the buried ones, they body them forth." ('Incloser' 45) Howe articulates the link between the Puritan 'righteous' colonization of an unknown land and the righteousness of American foreign policy today, she writes, "the arena in which scripture battles raged among New Englanders with originary fury is part of our present American system and events, history and structure." ('Encloser' 181). The fugitive lines

8 'Encloser' was first read in 1988 at the Politics of Poetic Form reading series held at the New School for Social Research, New York. It was later published (in 1990) in a collected volume edited by Charles Bernstein. 'Incloser' was published in 1993 in Howe's book of essays, The Birthmark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History. There are enough differences between the two texts to include both, but enough similarities to treat them almost as two parts of the same series. The earlier text was printed alongside a Q&A with the audience which operates, to my mind, as a kind of bridging passage between the two texts. Howe writes that both "install certain narratives somewhere between history, mystic speech, and poetry, I have enclosed them in an organization although I know there are places no classificatory procedure can reach." ('Encloser' 178) I will signal in the chapter which one I am referring to when it is important that the difference is made clear.

that simultaneously construct and escape the system in the essays discussed below can be turned to think about the power or failure of dissent on a contemporary political/global stage.

Howe is trying to tell a story that has multiple knotted narrative threads in a way that does not simply replicate the rigid framework she is simultaneously trying to dismantle. The early American Puritan colonies whose conversion narratives make up the body of both essays, were escaping the double enclosures of religious freedom and the forestry enclosures of 1630s English King Charles I.[9] Expulsion from the newly enclosed land sentenced the non-landowning class to dire poverty. Simultaneously the Catholic Crown was waging war against Puritan nonconformists. These dual attempts to enclose/exclude triggered the mass migration of Puritans to the shores of the new world.

No wonder the conversion narratives, noted down by the preacher Thomas Shepherd, turn and turn around fears "over what is inside or outside" ('Encloser' 190). The aspect of Howe's poems that "strongly resist fixity because of the way in which the dialectic between site and non-site sets up a fluctuating relationship between outside and inside that is never resolved into a static moment" (Olsen par. 38) draws on her studies of the conversion texts that reproduce such layers upon layers of enclosures. Howe writes that the text of the English language Bible was a framework of "fictive realities connecting the emigrants to a familiar State-form and to home. Though they crossed a wide and northern ocean, Scripture encompassed them." ('Incloser' 49) An understandable enough form of comfort for people escaping known persecution and entering unknown dangers. The biblical narratives both offer familiarity of home and frame whatever they found in the new world as a "virgin garden pre-

9 See Stephen Collis *The Commons* which concerns a later set of enclosure laws as experienced by the poet John Clare, but similarly addresses the resonance of English enclosure laws across the world (Canada, Yucatán Peninsula, Spain & Rome), and calls for "not collective ownership but collective use of the unowned, unownable, of that which exists outside the dynamics of property and capital" (139)

established for them by the Author and Finisher of creation" ('Incloser' 49). Howe presents us with an interpretation of the Bible as a kind of theological grid that connected the Puritans to homes they would never see again, but also contained them in a mode of thinking that promoted an imperial project, more than it promoted freedom of thought.

Howe notes that the narrators of the conversion narratives "enveloped themselves inside God's Plot to survive the threat of openness" ('Encloser' 190). The narrative of identity building is entangled with the literal construction of land. A narrative plot connects each part of a story to the onward drive for resolution, and the plotting of land on a map inevitably leads to the domestication and division of open expanse into manageable and individual portions. Howe recognises that a framework, in the actual or metaphorical form of a grid, while providing a comforting structure against "the threat of openness", simultaneously spoke to the dread of breaking through previously solid social hierarchies. The fictive framework the early Puritan leaders applied to the formation of communities and landscapes operated on a grid whose two axes were the contradictory "rage against authority and rage for order" ('Encloser' 183). Anne Hutchinson, the figure around whom the essays pivot, threatened the rigidity of the narrative frameworks. Howe presents Hutchinson as a scapegoat, a figure the Puritan founders used to assuage their own guilt and pious doubts at having disrespected the hierarchy of the British crown. The expulsion of Hutchinson from the colony belies the fears and instabilities of the newly formed social structures and is a marker of the fragility between how communities are defined and what they are defined against.

The title of 'Incloser', the later essay, is taken from Noah Webster's definition of 'enclose' found in the earlier edition of his *American dictionary of the English Language* in which Webster insists the word is spelt 'inclose'. While the meanings of the words enclose and inclose amount to the same thing, i.e., "to surround; to shut in […] To separate from common

grounds by a fence" (Qtd. in 'Incloser' 46), this second definition evokes the 'in' of 'include'. The essay 'Incloser', which opens with the parable of unprepared virgins seeking admittance to an allegorical kingdom of heaven, explicitly separates those on the 'inside' from those shut out. Although this parable is not about physical doors and walls, it is about which side of the divine divide you will find your soul at judgement, the divisions discussed here have a pragmatic and distinctly spatial feel: If you do not prepare your oil, you will be left outside the city gates. When read like this the drive to enclose the new world in a spiritual framework and a physical system of grids is merely the work of a pragmatic and god-fearing people. This cohesion of material and spiritual is embedded in the words "ENVELOP FENCE PEN COOP CORRAL CAGE WALL" (175), that open the earlier essay 'Encloser'. The evenly spaced capitalized line of text that the reader crosses over in order to enter the body of the essay signify both the structures of containment and the gestures of the "Encloser" of the title. Language at first merely descriptive or allegorical becomes the material by which real space– in the landscape and on the page– is apportioned and contained.

Howe reads the external (both physical and theological) threats to early American communities as a contradictory relationship to land and ownership that bears relation on contemporary American policies at home and abroad. What Howe reads as a uniquely American affliction– "[t]erritorialism is our exile" (Beckett, 'Difficulties' 20)– comes from the Puritan longing for unity with a land simultaneously divinely gifted and always escaping. The drive for territorialism at home can never be satisfied because the seeker's exilic identity is bound with their identity as invading force. The fugitive unity then of a proprietorial relationship to territory emerges as an ephemeral sense of "the sound of something unbegotten looming over assurance and sanctification, over soil subsoil sea and sky." ('Encloser' 180)

In the three years between the essays Republican George Bush Sr. conceded the White House to Democrat Bill Clinton. Bush's imperialist drive to invade the Middle East was countered by the Clinton campaign who seemed to redirect the attention to domestic policy with the slogan; "The economy, stupid" (Kelly par. 3). What Howe's essay suggests is that domestic and foreign policy are entirely intertwined axes on the same grid, rather than opposing forces. Her works undermine the sense that the political system to hand offers any real or effective difference from the social frameworks laid down by the invader/exiles whose domestic policy was a form of foreign invasion. Howe attributes the modern-day nationalism and drive to colonise abroad to what Rachel Tzivia Back describes as the "central strain in American Literature, the legacy of Puritan parent seeking—and imposing—the semblance of stability at all costs, despite the uncertainty at their core and the extreme wildness on all their borders." (41) The compulsion to control the land is bound with the need to 'civilize' the social via the didactic creation of borders and enclosures. By complicating categories Howe's prose knots together the loose threads of "Assurances, citations, expressions, dams, figments, errors, echolochaic slivers" ('Incloser' 83). These "emblazoned ciphers of inspiration" (83) are textual disruptions that break the solidity of the object/gestures that open 'Encloser'.

Using text's contradictory ability to "weave, to join, fit together, construct" (SP 19), while simultaneously unravelling the "twistings and contradictions of a [narrative] skein" (26) Howe rejects a fixed and finished "portrait of history" by "pulling representation from the irrational dimension love and knowledge must reach." ('Incloser' 83) In these essays that show language's potential to disrupt as a form of narrative construction, Howe reaches toward a representation of national identity that is pulled from multiple sources and intersecting frameworks. By contradicting one another they construct a mode of seeing that forces seemingly disparate things– such as the domestic and the political– into an interconnected

relationship with one another. By leaving text open to the "irrational dimension" of the "felt fact" the enclosures and barriers that emerge simultaneously separate and connect, suturing themselves into a never-ending relationship of holding together and pushing apart. Howe writes, it is only "the repetitive irruption of death into life [that] is mightier than this notion of enclosure." ('Incloser' 58).

What does this reading of death as a disruptive force suggest in the context of Howe's 2010 collection, *That This*? This work, that opens at the death-bed of Howe's third husband, Peter Hare, and closes at the death-bed of French Baroque painter Nicolas Poussin, is also a return to Sarah Edwards' wedding dress fragment, which is printed on the front cover of the book. As stated at the start of this chapter, the archival object's shifting narrative over time is due to Howe's own shifting relationship to what the object signifies. Reader and read are not in a fixed relationship, but an intertwined narrative, the threads of which are constantly fraying, unravelling and being reworked. The archived fabric object becomes the still point around which narratives revolve, a way to view and practice material readings that do not get trapped in fixed and final form. Another way of thinking about this is that Howe engages with the past by scrutinizing the present. In *Spontaneous Particulars* Howe experiences this palpable connection with the past via an "occult invocation of verbal links and forces, the qualities peculiar to our seasonal changing light and colour. It's a second kind of knowledge—tender, tangled, violent, august, and infinitely various." (59) I will close this chapter with a reading of 'untitled' (109) the closing poem of *That This*, that knits together everyday politics and everyday existence rather than pulls them apart. Via this process of textual construction Howe explores how fragments, signs, altered perspectives, and side-long attention can gesture toward a reading of the entangled frameworks of the self.

love relics, illusory correlations, and the secrets of touch

Howe's material practice and a return to the "event" of the text brings into focus her own chiasmatic frameworks of wife/widow/artist/writer/American. Whereas 'E/Incloser' attempts to map a Puritan framework onto a contemporary political situation, here the text practice is a way of mapping Howe's own subjectivity. In 2008 the sudden irruption of Peter Hare's death temporarily destroyed Howe's ability to work. By putting herself back in productive tension with the archival object and through her textual practice she was able to reinscribe herself into her frameworks. But what are those frameworks and how can we track them as part of the construction of the poem?

Similar to the opening poem in 'Fragment of the Wedding Dress', the poem 'untitled' echoes in its visual construction the shape of the scrap of fabric. The poem is rectangular with fraying edges and overlapping or under threading text that gestures toward a visual grid on several levels. The top and bottom lines of the poem– "him carrying home in his handkerchief" and "He replied, simply: 'Je n'ai rien négligé.'" (TT 109)– provide a vertical axis where the 'h's of the top line reach up and the 'y's, 'g's and the 'p' of the bottom reach down, while the horizontally laid lines on the page keep our eyes moving left to right. We know Howe has no scruple about manipulating the direction of text so here she is making a choice to retain the tension of the grid structure, the underlying warp and weft of the text's construction. As the eye adjusts to the visual materiality of the poem, a shadowy cross emerges that quarters the work vertically and horizontally. Krauss writes that "a cross that is present which is simultaneously a cross that is past can already be seen to carry this potential for two opposing temporal vectors in the very weft of its simplest physical description." ('The Grid, the True Cross' 305). This shape probably emerged incidentally as Howe's material process moved her "between computer screen, printer, and copier, scissoring and reattaching words and scraps

of letters" toward a place between poetry and visual art "where facts and apparitions mix" (Lane n.pag). These "two opposing temporal vectors" come out of her interactions in the present with text that contains the past. Krauss further writes that the cross as an insubstantial or shadowy form that "mark[s] the position of the spectator relative to the object, is the very index of subjectivity" ('The Grid, the True Cross' 310). The shadow of the cross in 'untitled' admits into the visual grid of the poem the tangible marker of its creator. Via the event of the text Howe recreates the frameworks through which she can map a new and emergent identity, even if that poetic 'I' is characterized as the photonegative "trace or relic" (306) of a shadow flickering above and below the surface of the poem.

As our focus on the poem shifts once more Howe inscribes herself via coordinates that allude to her axial relationship to visual art. These coordinates are the potentially antithetical practices of Nicolas Poussin– whose works are famed for their use of perspective and direct translation of myth and allegorical story into paint– and the minimalist adjacent non-figural works of Agnes Martin. As we know already Martin was a foundational influence on Howe's transition from the known world of visual art into the unknown territory of poetry. Martin's insistence on the experience of the painting, and hand-drawn grids that seem to disappear as the viewer steps back from the 6X6 canvases, emerges in this work as the sub-surface presence of a visual grid. But beyond the structural, Martin's attempts to translate feeling into language via the practice of painting allows Howe to blur the boundaries in her own practice and create a work that functions more as a space through which the reader passes rather than a fully realized visual experience of a narrative. Thinking in this way sheds some light on the title and complicates what could at first indicate the emptiness of silence.

This poem is recorded in the contents page as 'untitled', an uncommon way of naming a poem, but common enough in a gallery. The 'un-naming' of the work is a kind of opening,

but not in the sense of a doorway, rather a semi-impermeable fabric curtain that alters/blocks/reveals depending on how it is lighted. This sense is emphasised by the formatting of the book which, rather than repeating the title of the poem leaves the four pages preceding the work blank out of which poem seems to emerge. As with an experience of viewing Martin's paintings, 'untitled' reveals different depths depending upon the viewer's perspective, what is seemingly a surface phrase could slip beneath words and allusions that suddenly emerge on top. The poem unfurls in the way an image does, rather than follow a syntax the way text does. Though, as Reddell Olsen points out,

> Where Martin uses hand-drawn lines to complicate the abstract regularity of the grid's form, Howe uses the indeterminacies, associative meanings, and acoustical repetitions of language to complicate the clear and abstract representation of historical events and in doing so redraws the assumed maps and borders of the conceptual tracts she inhabits. (par.29)

What "indeterminacies, associative meanings, and acoustical repetitions" does Howe use here and what "clear and abstract representation of historical events" is she complicating with them? If Martin's layers of paint washed gesso, pencil line, and coloured stripes dictate a sense of independent elements working separately and in tension with one another in a way that draws out elemental properties of each (the grade of canvas the pencil passes over, the contrast between colours, the determined vs indeterminate line), then Howe's layering of syntactic and paradigmatic grids pull and push one another toward narrative horizons that only exist in the interrelations between them.

'untitled' approaches the contradictions of death, thus reflecting more widely on a global sense of endings and collapse. The final line that represents the historical event of the deathbed combined with the use of past tense in conjunction with the male pronouns– "[s]een

him", "struck his", "he replied" (109)– is a clear indicator of this. Contrast that with the instances of the first-person present "I ask" and "I have", at the outer edges of the horizontal line bisecting the poem and multiple temporalities emerge. But these are not just those of the present against the immediate past, a wider reaching timeframe rubs along between the dipoles of "he" and "I". The far and idealised past is evoked by the obscured (or obscuring) words "ancient Rome", a place that only exists in ruins, the imagination or as a recreated place in the present. As in the 2015 essay where Howe asks, "[i]n the future general progress of things, will Manhattan be a field of ruins, like the ruins near Rome in Poussin's late landscapes?" ('Vagrancy' n.pag), the timeframes in this poem become quickly jumbled. What is in the past refuses to stay quite there, or perhaps, more accurately, we create the past as we move into the future, either by building monuments that will become future ruins, or by (re)calling into the present/surface consciousness an event or image from the past/memory. These indeterminate timeframes in 'untitled' are contiguous with a tactile syntactic grid of the monumental and mythologically 'eternal' against the partial lines and language of the fleeting and intimate. The grandeur of the 'eternal city' "ancient Rome" (109) contrasts with a small, distinctly un-sublime nature composed of "stones and moss and flowers". Approaching the poem more specifically the totalizing death-bed pronouncement of Poussin contrasts with the distinctly anti-monumental death of Hare, compounded by the depiction in the preface of all the little things Howe crossly announces that he *did* neglect before slipping away in his sleep. Read as contiguous frameworks within the poem these details describe a domesticated and personal attention that guards against any elegiac memorializing. The monumental and male may be historical in the space of the poem, but the edges of the poem depict the way into the future.

Bill Brown suggests that an attention to materiality is a way of imagining and feeling the "radical contingency of history" (102). If we attend to the material life of this scrap of fabric, what "things might have been, and might yet be, other than they are" (102)? The fragment of the wedding dress doesn't seem to be a particularly auspicious way of projecting material life into a conception Howe's future given that Sarah Edwards died a spare two months after the death of her husband Jonathan. Nevertheless, what Howe picks up on is the endurance, however small, of the material reality of Sarah's life. As suggested above, the relic is both a marker of everything that has been lost, but also stands in for how things can survive. The poetic 'I' in 'untitled' is only partial and tentative, similar to the way Sarah Edwards is pushed to the edges of the poem in *Souls*, but the questioning of the 'I' here ("I ask, I have" (109)) keeps that voice open and alive, even if they are only tiny and partial. This doesn't stop Howe from demonstrating the serious and material need that is bound with widow-hood in the prose preface 'The Disappearance Approach'. Here Howe explicitly depicts the precarity of the surviving spouse bringing our attention back to the reality of the couple form as an economic unit, bound with the economy of the home as tightly as it is bound with the wider socio-political model that surrounds it.

This poem, in fact, the entire body of work surrounding the wedding dress fragment is about marriage as much as it is about death, specifically, marriage as an economic contract. In 'The Disappearance Approach' Howe depicts the economic shifts she experiences as a result of her relationship to Hare, and the further shift she experiences at his death. The elision at the beginning of their relationship between "money" and "you" ("You can save money—it's to save you." (16)) is a way of reading a self subsumed within the materiality of the forthcoming marriage. Hare himself is a figure of wealth and security, connected to a paternalistic patriarchy via his solid ancestry and Benjamin Franklin-esque epithets that are laced with the language of

saving and economy ("at any rate", "squared away", and "bang for your buck" (15-16)). After his death the sudden vulnerability of Howe, her fears of "being cheated by people" (19), and her ignorance about a land tax, are all ways of indicating the way institutions alienate our relationship to a wider economy, our precarity in the face of their collapse.

Read alongside an attention to the partial versus complete dynamic discussed above, marriage is worked through this poem both as an institution *and* a union between individuals; a space of intimacy and transition; a colonising unit and a space of economic control. This poem's attention to ruin, and the radical shift in the economics of the home, reveals the material unconscious of the work which is the radical (catastrophic) economic shift experienced on a global scale in the 2008 financial crash. The material life of the work, as it reaches backward and conceives of a future disentangled from the framework of marriage, mirrors a world vulnerable by its reliance on economic structures that could give way at any time. The poem doesn't articulate what a different future might look like, but it contains the future ruins of what might happen if no practical changes are made.

By putting herself back in productive tension with the archival object Howe is able to move into a new life, not removed from the event of the death, but intricately bound with it. The attention of the poem examined above faces multiple directions at once. It faces backwards toward Howe's past practice that relied on the structure of the grid as she moved from the known practice of visual art into the unknown world of poetry. It also faces inward to the theological grids onto which death is mapped. But the elegiac nature of the work pivots outward too, just as in the sequence in *Souls*, the traces of real events are bound within the play of text.

The poem as an elegy is also about collapse, what is left behind, what relics survive the breakdown of a civilised unity. As a meditation on what future ruins signify alongside the

economics of marriage, it folds within itself the simultaneously domestic and global effects of the 2008 crash and the extent to which we can or cannot rebuild a society from scraps. If *Souls* is the biography of a union (both personal and social) as told by the remnant of the dress, then 'untitled' is an autobiography that recreates a self via a textual and textile practice. In other words a textual practice as a way of coming back to life, of moving on with life, of addressing the great unknown that *is* life.

The intimacy of intertwined narratives that leap between I and he, the public and private, is directly related to the semantic field of fabric that is worked throughout the poem. The word "handkerchief" finds a thematic slant rhyme in the word "négligé", which evokes the intimate fabric of the negligee (109). The objects of study, the "stones and moss and flowers", are carefully wrapped in the fabric of the hankie, a material that (as with the scrim-like title) covers and hides but also touches and enfolds. The half hidden/emerging phrases then take on the properties of folds of cloth as much as they suggest the layering of a weave. The construction of the lines similarly points toward this ambivalent surface that both touches and is touched. The edges of each line are frayed, as if about to unravel, or, in the very uncertainty of their disappearance, connect to unseen lines.

Woven objects gesture toward a world that breaks and works against a decontextualized structuralist reading of text/image. If the fresco or painting is designed to be viewed from various angles but always as separate from the viewer, how does the materiality of an object designed to be worn complicate the dialectic? The wedding dress scrap is given to us framed by the space of the page, held separate and in such a way that it can be 'read' as a picture, but to think about it as only or as always in this way is to erase what the dress comes to mean once it is worn and used in the ritual of marriage. One cannot have a full perspective of oneself in a dress, it can only be 'seen' when it is held apart as a fragment or remnant. And

the wedding dress itself is a transformational object, not simply woven, but the wearer enters it as one thing and emerges as another. Howe's transformation of the wedding dress scrap from material object into a sign "displac[es] it from the site of its effects in the historical past into the deictics of its activity in the present" (Krauss, 'The Grid, the True Cross' 307). But the 'sign' it is transformed into is not a simple allegorical symbol, rather, she creates a new material translation of it, one that speaks to its original materiality, the manner it is made and the narrative frameworks it emerges out of. The little square of material becomes a passage into Howe's meditation on remains; our private and public archives; and collapses the time between the original manufacture of the garment and the decaying scrap left behind. Whereas the first consideration of the scrap feeds in Howe's attention to the tension between wild and tamed land in American literary and spiritual history, when it emerges in *That This* the perspective has shifted and draws from her training in visual art, from representative tableaux to abstract structures, and her own practice alongside and within that nexus of thought.

Sound and Boundaries: Collaboration and space creation in *Thiefth* and *Woodslippercounterclatter*

> There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make silence, we cannot.
>
> — Cage, *Silence* 7-8

> It is not a call for free speech, or to have an equal platform for all voices to be heard. It is an intervention into, and a reorganisation of, the forms of listening to speech itself. A politics of listening does not simply seek to amplify voices and have issues heard, but rather attempts to redefine what constitutes speech.
>
> — Hamdan 46

This final chapter investigates the materiality of sound in Howe's collaborations and texts. How does the material experience of sound connect to the central themes of this thesis: the continual emergence of history in the present, poetry's resistance to enclosure, and the poetic 'I' as a fragmentary cohesion of memory? Heretofore I have paid most of my attention to the visual elements of Howe's poems, reading the theories of the 'delay' and the 'grid' as related to the physicality of her "material constructions" but Howe herself has stated that, "strangely the strongest element I feel when I am writing something is acoustic." (Kelller 13) Sound in Howe's practice is bound with her interdisciplinarity, her openness to the 'telepathy of archives' and her determination to keep history open and continually emerging in the present.

In this chapter I look at two audio 'translations' of Howe's poem sequences: *Thiefth* (2005) and *Woodslippercounterclatter* (2014). These two works, that are collaborations with the musician David Grubbs, are also collaborations with the non-human beings found in the spaces of the recordings, and even history itself. My readings will focus on the materiality of sound as expressed by stuttering, silence and soundscape, and the radical potential for each of these elements in the aural versions of the works. Stuttering, a feature of Howe's poems from her earliest readings of Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville, confronts the fluidity of speech via breakages, slippages, and interruptions. Silence, as a theory of attention that

destabilises existing hierarchies of sound and communication, contextualises Howe alongside those exploring the fallacy of silence as emptiness. Borrowing a term from Krauss' theorisation of an expanded creative field, I argue that Howe's soundscapes are a form of the poem at its "outer limits" ('Sculpture' 37) that reflect on the poet's continual concern with formation of American landscape-identity-voice. The violence of colonial settling and the colonialist drive to name, contain and maintain plays out acoustically in the soundscapes depicted in *Thiefth* and *Woodslippercounterclatter*. These three sonic elements expand the field of the poem and through their difficulty force us to think dialectically; connect the planned with the unconscious; the deliberate with the chance; and the audible with the invisible.

Ming Qian Ma notes how the "physicality or materiality of [Howe's] language" is more barrier than textual key, almost "breaking off communication" (730) with the reader. There are times when Howe's poems seem entirely made-up of breakages, symbols, and interruptions. But rather than thinking of them as impassable aporia, these partial utterances when heard acoustically are a form of communication more closely related to the materiality and physical reality of the voice. This chapter argues that Howe's sound works use the particular properties of sound and non-conforming utterances that refuse standardization to re-establish the intimacy between speaker and listener. Sound blurs the distinctions between audience and participant in ways that radically alter the history being examined.

A note on the materiality of sound

One of the overarching themes of this thesis is language in motion as refusal of enclosure; spoken language is the ultimate form of contingent movement that refuses such containment. In 'Frame Structures' Howe writes, "Boundaries interlinking public and private are very well, precaution and policy, thought is arranged over this, the property of *h* (breath

without sound) comes between *g* and *t* (sound without breath) in daughter slaughter laughter." (10) The written materiality of language contradicts its own internal rules and breaks into the listener's consciousness. The 'h' above is silent but still "comes between" the experience of the written and spoken word, what you *hear* is not necessarily what *is*. This example of text's *potential* for an aurality is not the same as describing a materiality of sound. For the purposes of this thesis I risk setting up a "rigid division between two worlds, of mind and matter" (Ingold 137) by hypothesizing an examination of sound that holds it separate from Ingold's description of it as pure experience. Sound examined here takes on a slippery meaning but at root is a way to think about the "relations between objects, images and their interpretations" (136) in an expansive and productive way. Listening is a political act. What we hear is a choice. This chapter ends where my own practice begins, with the politics of the multi-voice (of the human and non-human world), and sound's potential to both investigate and illustrate the experience of living in a world full of social, historical, and economical echoes.

Marshalling materiality: 'performed poem as environment'

In his article that imagines Howe's citations as ghostly voices, Gerald L. Bruns (following phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas[1]) suggests that "[s]ound is discord, disturbance, disruption, dissonance, disarray, disintegration, distress, disaster, but not distance. Eyes are easier to close than ears" (38). While Bruns is highlighting sound's potential to interrupt narrative, he is also referring to the intimacy of sound. In all its "discord" sound violates boundaries more easily and in more tangible ways than the visual. Similarly, Bender, Corpis and Walkowitz, in the introduction to their edited collection of essays on the politics of sound, state

1 "Whereas, in the realm of vision, forms embrace and soothe their contents, sound is like the sensory world overflowing itself, forms being unable to hold their contents–the world ripping asunder–that by which this world here extends a dimension which cannot be converted into vision" (Levinas qtd. in Bruns 37)

that "the very form of sound itself can be transgressive, since it can breach barricades, blockades, and borders." (2) The sound-poem requires an adjusted way of paying attention, a kind of *listening* in an expanded field where the listener cannot escape their role in the interaction. Fred Wah writing on M NourbeSe Philip's work *Zong!* discusses a similar interpolation between the listening body, the performer, and the text. He writes that Philip's physical and sensual engagement with the text "sustain[s] a provocative and confrontational relationship to the normative materiality of history by juxtaposing […] the nonmaterial or immaterial layers is it always cloaked within" (par.8). Performing a space for text, sound, and document to coexist is not about recreating a lost environment, then, but rather about "offering a more capacious understanding of the operations of power on the ways that historical actors mediated their experiences, including their sense perceptions" (Bender, Corpis and Walkowitz 2). Connecting sense and context, Charles Bernstein writes that Susan Howe's poetry "sounds the limits" to the "promise of aurality" by evoking "sound as embedded in a sensorium of memory, smell, rhythm, song, and recitation. She charts this theater of lost history" (*Close Listening* 4).

Michael Davidson delves into the potential for material layering of text, history, and sensual engagement both in his recognition that "[t]he poem is a palimpsest of the quotidian" (xii), and as he widens the net of the 'textual'. Davidson's insistence that "[a] palimtextual study of modern writing must investigate the interstices of the material word in its multiple forms as visible page, poetics, sign system, and archive" (10) gives rise to Mandy Bloomfield's theorisations of the palimtextual as a way of reading Howe's poetry off the page and her performances as stepping out of the space in which they are performed. She writes that by thinking of "the soundscape of the performed poem *as* environment, [Howe's] poetry makes

links between poetic space and the spatiality of the land" (694). From utterance to articulation, the aurality of Howe's textual practice finds new meaning in oral realisation.

The palimtextual layers of these two works which simultaneously immerse the listener and keeps separate the spaces within the performed poem, hold in common layers of history as a way of reading the quotidian structures of the 'now'. The performed work embodies the "physically, conceptually, and ideologically entangled layerings" (Bloomfield 670) that structure these spaces of cultural acquisition and display. Borrowing from Gregory Dale Adamson, "if noise constitutes the intersecting relations and non-relations of the passage of social information, then this ontological memory is the network the subject is in." (117) These entangled layers in *Woodslippercounterclatter* allow for a form of immersion that continually navigates between Howe's words and the space in which they are set. Harriet Tarlo identifies the continual lyric shifts "between the micro and macro perspective [as] a natural and necessary perspective for the environmentalist [and eco-poet]. These poets do not claim the role of detached observer; they accept implication in, and complicity with, the ways of the world." (par. 15)[2] Howe's co-creation of soundscape is a way of acknowledging herself as part of it, not an Emersonian transparent eyeball, but an embodied, conscious being interacting with and being acted on by the non-human that surrounds her.

Howe's sound-works are the most embodied versions of her poems; we hear her vocal pauses and breaths, the non-human squeaks of her shoes, and how her voice resonates in each space. While considering the centrality of performance and recitation to Howe's practice, what happens when we apply this expanded listening to the collaborations with David Grubbs?

2 For further contemporary discussion on the gallery space as environment that can radically alter human/non-human dynamics see Elizabeth Jane Burnett; "collaboration between poetic and visual arts economies through poetry exhibitions may present opportunities for wider audience engagement, when art and poetry communities convene. Yet greater numbers do not necessarily make for more valuable exchanges and the question of size of audience in relation to the efficacy of poetic practice is itself one to be interrogated." (164)

These works are specifically sited and open, not just to Grubbs and the technicians he works with, but also to the stutters and silences of the recording environment itself. The recordings create their own 'scape', a "disclosure of sound within the exhilarating experience of listening." (Cascella 84) The communication that emerges around the edges of the composed texts and music reveals layers of voices that complicate the concept of participation and make the space of the poem porous, where the listening and recorded space temporarily coexist. Grubbs himself states Howe's ambivalence to the idea that the recorded versions of the collaborations are 'final' versions. (Free Verse) Howe's sense that these works are contingent is bound with her long-standing principal that history is continually emerging. These are not definitive poetic 'versions' of history, space or time, but temporary, continually changing spaces that look forward as much as they sound out the past.

The tension in Howe's work between articulation and its breakdown is brought in to focus by the textual and performative potential of the verbal stutter. The stutter is not just a symbol that stands against temporal linearity, it is an embodied utterance that works against the idea that language is disembodied and dematerialised (Scott 'North of Invention'). Though the stutter can resist linear fluidity, it also indicates the ways a person's utterances of existence are *forced* to stutter because they are being silenced, cut off, and broken up. As Craig Dworkin notes, "[w]hen speech continues without communicating anything, when speech intransitively reaches the limit at which its communication becomes silent, we can hear the body speak." (*The Stutter of Form* 167-8)

For Howe broken and partial acts of speech reflect the impossibility of retrieving history intact. But this stuttering is not a failure of communication with the listener. As Peter Quartermain in *Disjunctive Poetics* states, when we acknowledge the contingent, shifting, and impermanent nature of the *attempt* to address history "the poem is *free* to be inarticulate […]

even to stutter" ([my emphasis]3). When we track the role of the stutter through Howe's practice, what kind of freedom emerges?

The stutter: 'Interruption and hesitation as a force'

When characterised as a "constitutional nervous defect" ('Stutter' *Oxford English Dictionary*), the stutter is a byword for a failure of communication. Described by Craig Dworkin as "the necessary malfunction" (*The Stutter of Form* 167), the stutter "structures language in two opposing directions, both blocking certain speech and impeding the facile consumption of language, while at the same time permitting or producing literary compositions based on its formal characteristics." (182) Not only does the double action of the textual stutter challenge "any notion of a dematerialized or disembodied language" (183), but it also gives rise to what Ming Qian Ma names Howe's "double position" through which she is able to "critically engage history" (718). The stutter as a blockage and a breakage "involves a fracturing of discourse […] [i]nterruption and hesitation used as a force." ('Encloser' 192).

First encountered in Howe's work 'Hinge Picture'– whose mirroring displacements I discuss in Chapter One– Howe uses visual and aural stuttering to break into an authorized voice. The subject passively receiving the "mute vocables/ of God" is opposed by a "h/ieroglyph and stuttering." (33) The visual glitch of the line break that interrupts the flow of the word 'hieroglyph' coupled with the aural hiccough of "stuttering" reveals the failure of language to confront the subjugating and totalising silence of an invisible, more powerful, authority. The poem stutters to silence, like a flame guttering to blackness. Howe's employment of the stutter makes visible the instances where articulation breaks up or is broken in on.

In *My Emily Dickinson* (1985) Howe equates linguistic interruption with narrative uncertainty: "HESITATE from the Latin, meaning to stick. Stammer. To hold back in doubt, have

difficulty speaking." (21) In her talk/essay 'Ether Either' for the collected work *Close Listening*, Howe writes that the stutter is "some phonetic chiaroscuro of disorder" (123). Chiaroscuro is the painted tension between shadow and light. The technique is as much about the uncertainty of the light source as it is about what is being illuminated. Shifting metaphoric registers from the aural to the visual reconfigures linguistic hesitation as a form of illumination where the pause in articulation makes a space for the emergence of another. What then, Howe asks, is illuminated by the stutter, "What voice when we hesitate and are silent is moving to meet us?" (*My Emily* 22). The poet answers her own question in an interview with Ed Foster;

> I hear the stutter as a sounding of uncertainty. What is silenced or not quite silenced. All the broken dreams. … History has happened. The narrator is disobedient. A return is necessary, a way for women to go. Because we are in the stutter. We were expelled from the Garden of the Mythology of the American Frontier. The drama's done. We are the wilderness. We have come on to the stage stammering (181).

What emerges is a partial and fractured voice of history, one that echoes the stutters of the present. This complex set of contradictions– where the way forward is also a necessary return, the marginalised exile is also the main actor– characterises the textual and ideological stutter for Howe. The stutter is a dwelling place or landscape ("we are in the stutter"), it is a way of articulating desire, need or identity (as "broken dreams") and a trace of the "disobedient" narrator against the smothering power of myth[3]. The 'tool' of the stammer propels her imagined disobedient narrator to seek spaces in language that can articulate the contradictions

3 The sequence of poems "Scattering as Behaviour Toward Risk" published in *Singularities* opens with a transcription of a line from Herman Melville's genetic manuscript of *Billy Budd the Sailor*. Ming-Qian Ma suggests that this reproduced fragment acts as a "literal demonstration" (726) of the sense of interruption and breakage. The fractured fragment represents the material of the story more accurately than a lyrical retelling. Melville's story is about the unevenness of language and communication, his genetic text as represented by Howe the most faithful way to encounter those ideas.

of the present. The hesitation of a stammering poetics makes space for a communication founded in the act of listening, out of which old yet unfamiliar mythologies can (re)emerge.

This sense of emergence is captured in Howe's questioning and questing lyric voice that simultaneously seeks and denies an 'authentic' American literary history:

> You are straying, seeking, scattering. Was it you or is it me? Where is the stumbling block? Thoughts delivered by love are predestined to distortion by words. If experience forges conception, can quick particularities of calligraphic expression ever be converted to type? Are words children? What is the exchange value? Where does spirit go? Double yourself stammer stammer. Is there any way to proof it? Who or what survives the work? Where is the patron of the stamp? (BU 4)

The above quotation, which begins mid-sentence, doubles and hesitates as a way to confront the "stumbling blocks" of "proof" and doctrine. Attempts at speaking are bound with questioning existential, familial, and social structures (i.e., equating children, value, and spirit), and testing language's limited ability to resist a "predestined … distortion". Howe goes on to write; "I know records are compiled by winners, and scholarship is in collusion with Civil Government. I know this and go on searching for some trace of love's infolding" (4). This passage comes from the introduction to Howe's collected essays that work to destabilise the concept of 'wilderness' in American literary history. The hesitation that pauses, redoubles and illuminates is a chaotic force that breaks speech out of the confines of an ordered, recorded, and authorised language. The stutter is connected to Civil Government's project of land enclosure, as much as it is connected to the individual's struggle to speak.

What does this sense of interruption and hesitation as a force bring to the audio collaboration with Grubbs? What can we read from the work that depicts the partial cries of

“[w]hat is silenced or not quite silenced” (BU 181)? Though *Thiefth* is drawn from texts that address an imperial project at ‘home’, the material unconscious of the work sonically illuminates the uncertainty of the imperial project abroad.

Thiefth: ‘I heard poems inhabited by voices’

In 2003 Grubbs was invited to work with Howe to create an audio recording and sound collaboration. After discussion the two met and Grubbs took a first unplanned and raw recording of Howe reading ‘Thorow’, a multi-part sequence first published in the 1990 collection *Singularities*. Grubbs writes, "It's difficult to tell in the final version of the piece which pops and snaps and violent interruptions were created in my editing and recomposing, and which ones occurred in [Howe’s] first but completely electrifying performance in my living room—electrifying because both informal and impassioned." (‘Shadowy Hush’ par. 6) Howe’s deliberate and embodied non-sense making in her reading insists on the presence of the body in the poem, and on the presence of bodies in the historical accounts. But by inscribing the body into the performance the work does not reanimate the dead or even depict Howe’s own body as medium, it rather asserts the presence of bodies as inarticulate and partial within the socio-political moment of the early new millenium. The stuttering voices in *Thiefth* are the “chthonic eco-signals” (D 11) of the “undervoice that was speaking from the beginning” (‘Encloser’ 192). Specifically, by setting Howe’s disfluent utterances of ‘Thorow’ alongside Grubbs’ "slow-moving, drone-based sonic sculpture” (Montgomery 740) the work sounds an uncertainty against (and depicts the palpable ‘affect’ of) the totalising inarticulate figure of the drone in a post 9/11 military context that leaves no room for dissonance, hesitation, or breakage.

This 2005 recording of *Thiefth* distributed by Blue Chopsticks at Drag City Records is spilt between four sections: 'Introduction', 'Thorow I', 'Thorow II', and 'Thorow III'. The text for the work is collaged from early colonial narratives and the writings of Henry David Thoreau among other sources (White). The 'Introduction' of the sound-work opens with a low fluttering deep drone which is like the feel of a helicopter. Overlaid to this sound that comes in and out of aural focus is something that sounds like two saxophone tones and a high cicada-like ticking. About halfway through the 'Introduction' fragments of Howe's voice interrupt. Partial words and sounds of sharp inbreaths are intercut between coherent phrases, "you are of me", "and I begin", "blue" (*Thiefth)*. But while the abbreviated vocal expressions emerge from Howe's text and her embodied voice, these initial stutters are experienced as electrical glitches. Grubbs' engineering distorts the sound entrances and exits in a way that recalls the zapping of an electric fly killer or the buzz of a broadcast coming in and out of view. The short prose introduction in the written text (S 41)– that contextualises the poems alongside the liminal urban spaces of Buffalo, New York in 1987– has given way in this aural translation to the low and throbbing drone that registers in the stomach as an incoherent threat.

Although cognisant of the musical, spiritual and symbolic idea of the drone, in this context the mechanical property of the sound speaks to the drone technology used in the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq. Andrea Brady in her article on 'Drone Poetics' writes how the object of the military drone has entered post 9/11 poetry. Because "[d]rones are an apparatus of visual surveillance whose threatening presence is conveyed sonically" (118), reproducing them audibly in poetic works creates a language of threat that is felt more than understood. The language of sacred militarisation that Howe uses in her 1990 written text– where she writes that "Pathfinding believers in God and grammar spelled the lake into *place*" (S 41)– re-emerges in the religious rhetoric surrounding the 'War on Terror' and finds sonic materiality in

the underscoring of the audio work with the drone-like and digitised sounds. Though the spoken text of 'Thorow I' suggests that the greatest danger is from the snow "falling very deep" (*Thiefth*), and fences "blown down in a winter storm" (*Thiefth*), the language and the sounds of the pieces layered upon one another lead the audio/text toward an inevitable turn to militarised destruction. Grubbs' ominous rhythmic whirring at the bottom register of tonality is the mechanism driving the colonialists. The knowing poetic voice reminds us, this was never intended to be a story of discovery and preservation; "[t]here are traces of blood in a fairy tale" (*Thiefth*).

The uneven tone of Howe's voice as she reads her text contributes to the sense that there are multiple voices jostling below the surface of the text. The second section, 'Thorow II', builds on these polyvocal interlocutions. Howe's voice at points is layered, in short bursts with no alteration in audio level. The effect of this is that of a multiply mouthed Howe speaking simultaneously in short bursts like volleys of a gun. Textual meaning is lost as the speakers overlap and multiple urgent bodies are brought into the listening space. What began as a disembodied drone threat, by this section has become immediate and confrontational. These ejaculations highlight places in the text where staccato consonants depict the violence of invasion. The text does not directly name Thoreau or his literary milieu, but his role in naming and shaping an American nature-culture is bound inescapably to the idea that 'America' began as and continues to be a military exercise.

'Thorow III', the final section of the audio sequence, opens in the middle of a firefight. Listening on headphones Howe's sudden ejaculation that depicts a digital glitchiness of disfluent, mad, and violent war, is practically a jump-scare. Unlike the first two sections, the language in the written text of part three bears the clarity of this violence on its surface. Not only are the words themselves of war ("Hatchet…Encampt…garrison…snapt"; "Traverse canon

night siege Constant firing"; "Gabion/Parapet" (56-7)), but they are also blown apart, doubled, and toppled on the page. In the performance this violence is even clearer. The pops and spits of Howe's voice, the audible movement of her lips, the changes in tempo and volume, make the spoken text unpredictable and disjointed. Words with non-violent meanings ("cusk…walk…Picked…entreat") gather around them the hardness of physical blows. Howe's physicality at this point in the reading, conflates the lyric subjects as she says, "[y]ou are of me & I of you, I cannot tell/ Where you leave off and I begin" (S 58). The written work that considers early settler colonialism within the frame of theft, containment, and incarceration, in the audio performance sutures the speaker and listener into an intimate relationship with the remerging presence of the historical past.

Following the opening explosiveness, the section gradually slows to quieter, partial and unfamiliar words. The audio work concludes in the same way the source text does: with the elongated articulation of the title word "Thiefth" (S 59). Howe spits out the final "th" rather than letting it fade into a silent lisp. This non-textual expression of disgust and disrespect is utterly bodily, you can almost feel hot breath on your cheek.

The aural materiality of *Thiefth* that arises out of Howe and Grubbs' interdisciplinary practice refuses the enclosure of narrative and reorients the listener toward the spaces *between* the public rhetoric and the confidential accounts of war. Returning to Brady's drone poetics we can see that;

> the lyric poet who claims a heroic capacity to confront the gods of militarisation must recognise her empathy for the other also includes her symmetry with the power of death. The best she can do is not to attempt to police the boundary of civility and wilderness, but to demonstrate the confusion and horror which permeates her own city, a reality which the exercise of prosthetic violence brings out of virtuality into

> proximity and which contradicts the imperialist ideology which seeks to compartmentalise geographies and psyches, or to contain them in lethal boxes. (136)

The work sounds the confusion and horror that occurs between the intimacy of the spoken and the inescapable noise of the drone. A war that is taking place on foreign land is simultaneously being played out in the ideology of nationhood. What should be easily compartmentalised (terrorist/terrorised; home/away; righteous/punished) is broken down in the space between articulation and listening. The utterances in these performed poems are the continually emerging voices of history that contradict containment.

While the language of invasion and war depicted in *Thiefth* is at the pointy end of colonialism, the "imperialist ideology" that Brady writes of finds a different realisation in the acquisition of cultural artifacts as depicted in *Woodslippercounterclatter*. The field recordings of this more recent work remind us of Bruns' assertion that sound crosses boundaries that keep other things out. This work depicts 'silence' as full of 'other' voices that further alter our reading of that space. In order to hear these apparently peaceful works as "poems inhabited by voices", we first need to re-think what we register as voices in the first place. *Woodslippercounterclatter*, with its adjusted listening field, collapses boundaries between speech act and silence which is another way of thinking about the border between civility and wilderness.

Form as cage: 'Silence becomes a Self. Open your mouth'

Salomé Voegelin in her text that thinks through the possibilities of a philosophy for sound, describes "listening as communication" (*Listening to Noise* xv). Listening should be encountered "not as a physiological fact, but as an act of engaging with the world. [...] always

now, unfolding in the present." (3-4) Silence functions both as passage between sounded expressions, and as an altered temporal field. But thinking of silence as an act rather than an absence is not new. At its most tangible, enacting silence is an American citizen's constitutional right, though like all rights this first depends upon recognition as a citizen. Considered like this silence is not empty, passive, or equal, but a way of framing a pause through which hierarchy can be considered and recomposed. Howe writes that silence as a compositional process has the potential to "chang[e] order and abolish [...] categories. It has to do with sounds in silence. It has to do with peace" (*The Birth-mark*, 164). These active forms of silence reveal the difference between the composed space *for* silence and the act of silencing. The blank space of composed silence Howe suggests, allow us to perceive the "[g]hostly step pre-articulate hop" (C 9) of history that is continually seeking expression and continually escaping fixed form.

We cannot think about Howe and silence without citing John Cage. What Douglas Kahn calls Cage's attention to "sounds at the amplified threshold of their disappearance" (557) has heavily influenced Howe's own understanding of the materiality of sound and the possibilities of the compositional process.[4] In Cage's *4'33''* (where an orchestra and audience are assembled and for four minutes and thirty-three seconds sit in collective stillness) the work opens to the existing non-human collaborative forces of the environment. By expanding the field of listening the work destabilises existing hierarchies of expression. In *4'33''* these are the unique sounds of the audience and auditorium, but in other works Cage's use of "chance

4 In his critical reading of Cage, Kahn suggests that, "the world he [Cage] wanted for music was a select one, where most of the social and ecological noise was muted and where other more proximal noises were suppressed" (556). We must filter Kahn's criticisms through his view that there is an inherent "social project of music" that is somehow divorced from Cage's involvement in organising a New York musician's strike in [year] that Kahn dismisses as "a labor issue [...] a distraction" (569). If the question of labour organising in the face of unfair recompense for musicians' work is not a social issue, it is worth asking what does Kahn define then as "the politics of music" (569)? Cage doesn't refer to a party politics in his sense of composition, but there is certainly a politics to his work. In fact, I would argue, his attention to silence rather maps a set of principals onto the social more than Kahn seems willing to allow. Cage's work is hopeful in that it reveals the surrounding objects; structures of the building; the audience; and the external world, as all partaking in music-making all the time regardless of a composer's need to order and direct. The social and ecological noise of the world is already muted, but not by Cage attempting to make space to hear it.

operations" (*Silence* 41) in his compositional process open the work to its own material unconscious. 'Communication' (1958), for example, disrupts traditional forms of address such as the question-and-answer form and the lecture. This work, in which a lecture is fragmented and threaded between jumbled up questions and answers brings to the fore the true nature of public address (as a didactic performance and not a sincere form of dialectical communication). The politics of the public interrogation are also broken open. Cage's intrusions into the structure of enquiry by chance-dictated parallel statements, both undermine the question form, and open-up the field of what a question is and what can be questioned.

Howe's long-standing interest in the hierarchies of communication is pulled in to focus via the disruption of the interrogation form that she explores in her lecture 'Encloser'. The settler-colonial conversion and captivity narratives, often narrated by women (though transcribed by men) are described by Howe as "bereft, brief, hungry, pious, *authorized*." (182) There is a gap between the speech act of telling the tale and the attempt to preserve it in writing. What is added or missing during that authorisation process? What emerges when we listen to what is communicated in the spaces between authorised articulation? Howe goes on to write:

> "Silence becomes a Self. Open your mouth.
>
> In such silenced women were talking. Undifferentiated powerlessness swallowed them. When did the break at the degree of distance happen?
>
> Silence calls me himself. Open your mouth." (182)

Silence, in the context of a mediated authorisation is not an anticipatory blank space; here it is invasive and sexualised. The women continue "talking" beneath the blanket of silence, but they

are voiceless themselves and can only communicate through gesture. The visual echo of those repeated/altered lines where “silence” both becomes a “Self” and is named as an 'other' (“himself”) is followed by the repeated command to “Open your mouth” which is not necessarily an invitation to speak. The testimonies were taken out of their mouths; made consumer-ready; ‘enfolded’ into the authorised colonial narrative; and used in the service of naming and containing the land. The silence described above is not to do with sound or its absence, but about reinforcing the order of social narratives. The structures of patriarchy, religion and colonialism dictate the terms of narrative production, in a material sense, by mediating the speech of the women, but also in an ideological sense by refusing to recognise their unauthorised utterances as speech. In Voegelin’s “post *silence*” theory of performance, the “listening subject” is able to scrutinise these “invisible dynamics, power structures and hierarchies” (‘The possibility of sound’ n.p.) hidden in the partisan form sound takes.

For silence to register in this radically different way there needs to be a reckoning with hierarchies of speech. Howe’s call for “some phonetic chiaroscuro of disorder” is a call to break socio-historical frameworks and narrative enclosure by refusing disciplinary containment. New and socially critical insights occur when these separations between materials of expression break down. The disruption of formal categories creates a productive disorder for Cage, who writes;

> ART IS DESCRIBED AS BEING ILLUMINATING / AND THE REST OF LIFE AS BEING DARK. NATURALLY I DISAGREE [...] I RATHER THINK THAT CONTEMPORARY MUSIC WOULD BE THERE IN THE DARK TOO, BUMPING INTO THINGS, KNOCKING OTHERS OVER AND IN GENERAL ADDING TO THE DISORDER THAT CHARACTERIZES LIFE (*Silence* 45-6).

Cage's light and convivial tone here belies his radical message; art is not separate from its production and consumption but emerges out of and reflects back on history and society. The "confusion and horror" of state sponsored violence and ideological imperialism can be brought "out of virtuality and into proximity" (Brady) by breaking apart the interrogative and subjective form of listener/speaker and immersing all actants in a destabilised and disorienting landscape of sound. In the performed work the tentativeness of hesitation is a force; silence is an amplification of non-authorised voices; and surface text and sound give way to a depth that radically alters the space the work inhabits. The layers and partial erasures of a stuttering poetics cannot simply be reclaimed through revision or rewriting because the attempts at erasure are now a material part of the narratives. In other words, language bears the burden of its own history.

Woodslippercounterclatter: sound scaping as a 'wilderness of doubt'

Whereas *Thiefth* depicts the relics and remnants of speech in a fragmented landscape, Howe and Grubbs' later work rethinks the relationship between voice and landscape altogether. *Thiefth* ends with a robber eluding capture, *Woodslippercounterclatter*'s last spoken word is 'Vanished'. Both works use sound to complicate our perceptions of what is there and what is absent, what returns or comes into view as the listening frame is adjusted. The aural gestures in *Woodslippercounterclatter* are forms of speech that challenge the enclosing didacticism of the gallery-scape. Cage's lesson in radically readjusting attention to destabilise traditional forms is played out in the soundscapes of the work that are set against Howe's text.

The intertwined layers of aural space are mainly made of field recordings taken by Grubbs at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (ISG), Boston during Howe's residency.

Grubbs' complex layering of "real-world music" (Norman) captures speech at the limit of intelligibility and reorients the listener to what Michael Pisaro describes as "the beings of objects" (Pisaro, 'Liner notes'). The captured sounds combine Howe discussing artworks and objects with a curator; the sounds of sweeping workers preparing the building for visitors; certain non-human beings such as the air-vent; an elevator; the resident canary 'Whistler'; the creaking floorboards; and the lively chatter of visitors arriving. In live performances alongside this recorded track Grubbs plays sparse and repeated piano notes and Howe reads a live 'script'. By making space for and consciously capturing the sounds of the non-exhibited participants in the space, the work picks up on the "shadow histories of provenance and sediments of meaning" (Pisaro, 'Liner notes') that cling to, not just the objects, but the surface narrative of the space itself.

The museum– which displays the private collection of Gardner who built the mock Venetian palazzo to house it– is bound by the "Rule Against Perpetuities" (D 13), an antiquated law that forbids removal, addition or adjustment to the objects and artifacts within the space. The museum's architectural and legal contradictions (a Venetian palace thousands of miles away from Venice and a written law that attempts to freeze time) are about capturing an ideal of culture and attempting to isolate it from the material realities of its surroundings.[5] The ISG invites an engagement with the concept of time because of its own mission to control it. Howe points to the inevitable failure of this project; "in String Theory matter falls in. So the less said here concerning the ultimate nature of possible worlds and supermassive black holes in this

5 Museums and galleries are all having to reckon with this fantasy that the objects and narratives they maintain are somehow divorced from history and separate from the societies that surround them. I'm thinking here of the ongoing protests against spaces funded by big oil (Tate and BP), pharmaceutical companies (Nan Golding's protests against Sackler family who own the company that makes *OxyContin*), and the most recent double woes of the British Museum, an already embattled body that struggles to engage meaningfully with contemporary calls to decolonise collections, now under fire for appointing Gideon Osborne its board of trustees, a body dependent on the Arts Council funding that he actively slashed as Chancellor.

our Godforsaken twenty-first century, the better." (D 14) But "matter" referred to here is not just the eventual decay of paint, wood or canvas, Howe uses the term to pivot to the passage of history as having its own material presence. The shared space of "our" century and the distant future is called into being by the expansion of scientific knowledge.

The confrontation between the material and theoretical constraints of the museum and the non-authorised voices of the sound-work reveals the impermanence of the museum, and the constructed and contingent nature of culture in general. In the sound-work language's tangible effect on the world is both agent and fugitive: agent because of how it structures the space, and fugitive because the textual rules that prevent change are constantly being broken by the movement and actions of the 'silent', non-human beings in the space. Between the recorded sounds of the museum and Grubbs' sparse piano this tension between agent and fugitive voice finds form in Howe's poems that address the topsy-turvy logic of the fairy-tale contract. This narrative form, that reinforces social constructions and pushes logic to the outer limits of rationality, also highlights the contradictions in the laws that govern society.

Unlike *Thiefth* which comes from a single source text, Howe's words in *Woodslippercounterclatter* appear across the sequences collected in *Debths* parts of which were exhibited at the 2014 Whitney Biennial[6] as the visual sequence *Tom Tit Tot*.[7] The complex publishing, performance, collaborative and exhibition history of Howe's interdisciplinary practice, and the collaged form of the poems, destabilises a wider sense of formal and narrative hierarchy. In the full published version of 'Tom Tit Tot', which refers to a folk story also known as Rumpelstiltskin, Howe uses the visual stutter to think about identity, language, and narrative formation across the two scales of the individual and the social. The original folk-tale is a story

[6] The last Biennial held at the "old Whitney Marcel Breuer building" (D 12)
7 The principal texts used in *Debths* are the archives from the ISG, the exhibition catalogue of the 2011 posthumous retrospective of Paul Thek, and collected works and manuscript materials of both the poets Yeats and S T Coleridge.

(or stories) about misnaming, identity, trickery, and contracts: all ways relationships are structured by language. Howe's echoes and stutters on the page and in the recording are reflections of a parallel, linear narrative, the one of the stolen, tricked, or silenced voice. The legal and contractual language that cuts across the sequence ("pay our (defter) court" (52), "his strong arm hath sworn" (Howe strikethrough, 53), "the witch's bargain" (92)) remind the reader that stories are "Tangible Things" (46-7).

But the contract or bargain is only half the story. Stutters of repeated words, letters and sounds force a pause in the flow of text and break the eyeline of the densely constructed collages. A repeated wailing dyad "wa/wa/wa/wa/wa" (52), the marching line of "T"s (54-5), the widely spaced stuttering "dd d d" (70), all visually and verbally break in on the voices emerging around them. The "T"s that slice across the page drown out the capitalised "BARBARIC IDEAS" that "the people of the coming times will know" (54-5).

But these stutters are also enacting the silenced voices. The wail mentioned above is hushed and the "d"s edge a block of text that gradually constrains the multiple "she"s and "her"s (70), "entrap[ping]" them to silence. This swallowing is broken *up* by the break *in* of the unevenly repeated letter. Text's "quick particularities of calligraphic expression" are an escape route for the trapped figures of the text, they escape through the stutter, because they are *in* it. Throughout *Debths* sound is entangled with the roots of language learning and national mythmaking. By breaking apart recognisable 'speech' the text makes space for the "undervoice" of the material unconscious to surface.

Reading Howe's text alongside *Thiefth* and the instability of language is even more clear. The puns and doublings demonstrate the fluidity of words which can be made to mean anything you want. The stammer/hesitation/interruption that forces a pause against clear naming and containing, sets the spoken word against the concreteness of law/the written

word. But the two are intertwined, what is broken apart is the 'natural' relationship between the two. The law against perpetuities is disrespected by the non-textual world, what has been created out of speech acts, can be undone/resisted by speech again.

In the sound work, these stuttering breakages of the text are contrasted with the drone-like 'undervoice' of the museum ventilation system recorded by Grubbs. The sound, which finds textual form in Howe's sequence 'Titian Air Vent' (D 23), is both an enforcer of space and an unauthorised presence. The materiality of the sound when set alongside Howe's text and the oscillating position of the ventilation system itself, complicate the differences between preservation and incarceration; acquisition and theft; enclosed utopic cultural space and insistent material history of a wider enveloping landscape.

Adjusted listening

Salomé Voegelin describes how "[l]istening's focus on the dynamic nature of things renders the perceptual object unstable, fluid and ephemeral: unsettling what *is* through a world of sonic phenomena and audible spirits. Sounds are like ghosts. […] The spectre of sound unsettles the idea of an invisible world" (Voegelin, *Listening to Noise* 12). Though Will Montgomery questions the extent to which "[t]he voices of the dead [can] return as an affective disturbance in the texts of the present" (Montgomery 749), he does acknowledge that naming "is the point of entry of nature into culture" (742). Making land into 'landscape', then, is the point where nature becomes possession. By investigating "historical processes of the land's inscription" (Bloomfield 670)[8], 'landscape' can be made to undo itself.

8 Mandy Bloomfield cites WJT Mitchell "Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and a presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum" (WJT Mitchell qtd. in Bloomfield 670)

Woodslippercounterclatter sutures Howe into this 'landscape' of object and history in a way that reframes the museum as a porous "wilderness of doubt" that unsettles (BU) a space that has been designed to separate the definitions between 'past' and 'present', between 'wild' and civilised.

Where *Thiefth* equates the militarisation of the early American landscape with the drive for foreign invasion, *Woodslippercounterclatter* refocuses that imperialist attention to incarceration and containment within domestic cultural spaces. In the earlier work the drone is experienced as a threat bound with the violent bursts of the spoken text. In *Woodslippercounterclatter* the drone's "constant, inescapable noise" (Brady 118) and continual presence speaks to its other characteristic, the uneven power relation of surveillance. The physical and temporal boundaries of the museum are broken in on by the 21st century air-conditioning system that monitors, adjusts, and alters the humidity and temperature of the galleries depending on external weather systems and the presence and density of visitors in the space. Sound's intimacy– that is weaponised in interrogation techniques and used to structure and control participants in civil spaces– is felt in the soundscape as an all-pervading entity that responds to and dictates the comfort of the bodies in the rooms. The aural fluidity of the mechanic hum is contrasted by Howe's poems from 'Titian Air Vent' that she partially re-sites in the recording. The text gives the ventilation system a multi-faceted, collaged voice as it moves between rooms, flows over and around visitors and artworks. The poems printed in *Debths* are presented as a series of oblong blocks, visually referencing the signage of galleries and museums that contextualise, define, and explain the work on display. Several of the performed poems list typical gallery items ("Ceramic, plaster, laquer, newspaper" (D 26)), while others list militarised forms of communication ("Morse Code, army flag signal, plaster" (31). This overt reference to the way galleries control the

narrative of artifacts by deciding what is described and what is omitted, is put in tension with Howe's claim that "[a] work of art is a world of signs" (D 25). Just as language bears the burden of its own history, so the materiality of an artwork communicates something beyond its surface. The paratactic references within the text-sequence refuse narrative continuity thus disturbing language's ability to describe, define, instruct, or contain– just as the working air vent disturbs the air that moves around the rooms, thus disrupting the control of the legal parameters of the space.

Howe's textual examination of invisible presences that envelop the present, alongside Grubbs' recording of the system at work, contradicts the museum's 'mission' of absolute preservation and destabilises the sense of who or what is in control of the space. The air vent attends to the intimacy of the bodies, and simultaneously emphasises the *absence* of certain bodies and narratives. The law binding the space in temporal suspension breaks down when continually being broken in on and broken apart by air, dust, the inevitable death of the caged bird; things that register in the space and change every-day, beyond the jurisdiction of the law.

The modern gallery and museum, in the drive for preservation, creates an uneven power relation between the objects and the observer. Objects are presented as if their current position is immovable and 'true'. But we know cultural spaces are *created* and dependent upon the dual histories of wealth accumulation and object acquisition. By viewing the history of the space as coexistent with the conditions of the present this work troubles that definition. We see the works, not as cultural markers, but rather witnesses to an imperialist history of acquisition that structures the power relations of the present.

By reciting her textual material constructions both in the museum and alongside the museum, Howe (re)sites them in a new resonant 'scape' that simultaneously opens the space that is encountered as 'poem' and reframes the various voices the text collaborates with (Milne

and Pisaro). The new site of the poem (i.e., as a recording) is then able to encompass the textual origins of the voiced parts; the architecture of the space that houses them; the invisible (because unnoticed) non-human contributors to the environment; and the silent (because unvoiced) presence of history itself. Howe engages history (the history of the space and the history of its presence on colonial land) in a way that is "simultaneously a 'deconstruction' of the order of the present, and the affirmation of the past as the violent and indeterminate passage of history that coexists with and conditions the present." (Adamson 123)

My main contention in this chapter is to think of sound as *feeling* the ways in which boundaries are broken. The stutter breaks in and apart fluidity and linearity, silence readjusts the listening frame and soundscapes suture the listener into the environment as co-creator and observer. But alongside this, the spatial, architectural, embodied elements of sound that Howe describes as both “a refuge and a bridge” (Beckett, ‘The Difficulties Interview’ 17) reveal sound as not merely something that passes through us, we also pass through sound.

The polytemporality and polyvocality of *Thiefth* and *Woodslippercounterclatter* that complicate time, space, and participant further disorder hierarchies of authorised narratives. These works re-frame listening in Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s terms in order to redefine “the very conditions under which one is being heard.”(46)

Conclusion: Touching across

Art critics have for a long time considered the shell without the context of the ocean.

— Smithson collected, 371

Inheritance

I wish someone had told me how hard it would be to write a PhD on Howe. The study and reading of her work is an ever-expanding pleasure but trying to pull together conclusive thoughts without enclosing or smothering the expansiveness of her poetry is nearly impossible. Organising the thoughts of this critical work under the rubric of an interdisciplinary materiality has opened more doors than it has closed. Ultimately, thinking about Howe's work from a material and interdisciplinary perspective is a way of attempting to think broadly about the poems, but also about the figures and histories they enfold, intersect, rupture, and remake.

The first chapter reads Howe's navigation between the contemporary moment in which she was writing and her own inheritances. The idea of the delay in glass is a way of thinking beyond the symbolic presence of glassy objects in her works that allows the substance of glass to inflect our readings of the poems. Here, delay's form of 'anti-progress' performs a kind of parataxis that allows the visible and invisible figures of history to exist in the present. Reading Howe's shifting early practice via the transparency and transformational pause of glass activates the potential for change within the space of the text. Changing direction, perspective, material, and value; glass allows us to read poems as reflective non-sites that have the potential to turn solid buildings into the liquid flow of oil-money. Glass invites a model for dialectical reading where the refractions and reflections of the wider socio-political climate can enter into the space of the poem itself.

Thinking of thread as a storied trace but also a material intervention on the page helped my readings into and across Howe's works in chapter two. Borrowing from Ingold's meditation on the permanence/impermanence of the physical trace (*Being Alive* 194), Howe's archival traces simultaneously break new ground, and are what is left over. Her textile connection between texts is a kind of connection between temporal zones and states of being. The archival trace's interventions in the world (their refusal to either disappear or remain intact) are felt in the poem/translations. The wedding dress scrap embodies its own right to exist as a form of disintegration. Through multiple translations into text this object reveals the way the institution of marriage 'presses' on the land that 'pathing' through history to the present day. Marriage, depicted through thread as a colonising force, insists on the personal at the heart of the geopolitical and vice versa.

Both these materials are ways Howe holds in tension the often-contradictory elements of her work and the competing voices she encounters in her quest for an American voice. Dialectical rather than didactic, observational rather than declamatory, her work can at times be cold, distanced, or feel depopulated, though there may be many historical figures whispering through to the present.

The urgency of the whispering voice requires an adjustment of listening practices as discussed in chapter three. Sound's ability to cross boundaries allows the poem's borders to become porous in ways that impact and politicise the listening experience. The works discussed here do not flatten the multidimensional practices of Howe and Grubbs but enact a radical openness to the resonances of the wider cultural, social and non-human bodied surroundings. Though experienced as difficult works, the rejection of an easy listening experience and the reorientation away from the listener toward the listening *space* enacts a

politics that emphasises the presence of what structures the spaces, and what is pointedly absent from them.

These three frames through which to read Howe's work have in disparate ways structured and shaped my own practice. The complexity of Howe's role in my practice can broadly be defined in two ways. Partially formal; my work draws both from her own innovations in form and from, as this thesis demonstrates, the magpie nature of her interdisciplinary eye. My use of the open form (further discussed in the following section of portfolio notes) borrows from the interventions of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry, and a Contemporary poetry that thinks about the page in a different way, but equally from the poetics of the internet, visual art, walking tours, government guidelines, etc. Partially thematic; The language of faith and ritual; a disrespect of given hierarchies; the myth, fable, folk-tale. Howe's adjustment of the frame from 'landscape' to 'environment' has widened my net of attention. But most significantly, this deep engagement with Howe's work has given me permission to write poems that may not give up all their secrets at once. Howe has taught me not to conflate accessibility and sincerity or assume that an innovative poetics is inherently radical. Howe's pedagogical generosity still requires the focused attention of the reader.

Leaping Points II

To think about where this thesis will go next, I want to briefly mention what I left behind. The first paper I gave as a PhD candidate was on Carl Andre's poem sequence, *100 sonnets.* The "rule governed process" (Perloff, 'Palpable' 293) of Andre's 14-line, un-spaced, single-word blocks use the limits of the typewriter grid to govern the aesthetic. The uniform pattern of the sonnets reveals surprising and at times transformative meanings where 'elbow' becomes 'bowel'; 'earth' becomes 'ear', 'heart', 'hearth', 'art'; and the word 'river' ripples in a

square box like a pond ruffled by wind. Additionally, by aligning the poems with the sonnet tradition Andre encourages the reader/viewer to read this transition within the word as a kind of volta, we are in a very different physical location by the end of the poem. The poem's spatiality opens a reading that would be hard to communicate in a more eloquent way. By delaying the words within the framework of the grid new meanings and depths unfurl. As with the concrete poetry movement of the late 50s and early 60s, Andre's sonnet project "revolt[s] against the transparency of the word […] the sound and shape of words [is] its explicit field of investigation." (Waldrop qtd. in Perloff, 'Palpable' 293) We are forced to confront the word as a material, not simply as a sign that disappears into the thing it points toward.

The tension in Andre's sonnets between traditional and open form in the works gives them a rebellious poetics that acknowledges boundaries– here the traditions of the sonnet form– and finds ways to break them apart. These works indicate how Andre "attaches himself to a modernist poetic tradition rather than explicitly connecting with the literary avant-gardes with which he is contemporary" (Mavridorakis 8). Looking back to Gertrude Stein, the sonnets clearly echo her "freedom with regard to the weight of language, its history, and its conventions, her rejection of pleasing images and easy emotions, as well as, of course, her use of repetition" (9).

All these elements– the play of language, visual experimentation, butting against tradition, the freeing of words from a historical and conventional system– influenced my textual practice. The poems that came out of this process were laced with my own relationship to language, my specific biography, political principals and social blind-spots. Finding for myself a language to articulate what I had always already known– that of course the personal is political– fundamentally affected how I thought about a textual practice as a social rather than a solitary event.

This acknowledgement in my own work led to my break with Carl Andre's practice. Early on in my research I had read accounts of the death of Ana Mendieta and Andre's suspicious proximity to it. Whatever happened on that evening in New York, a woman died as a result of her relationship with him. What disturbed me most, and what came to be irreconcilable was the complete erasure of Mendieta within the art-world of the time, the ranks that closed around this middle-class white man and the continued disconnect between Andre's history and public perception of his work. I thought I could draw an equivalence between Andre and Howe based on their chiasmatic practices between visual art, text, the gallery, the page, the spoken, gestural. But this text practice is not just about reading their works, it's a consideration of practices. When does a poem's "freedom with regard to the weight of language, its history" turn into an ahistorical disconnect? Is it on the falling body of a woman, the refusal to acknowledge emotion as political, imagining there is a "pure past" out of which artworks can speak just for themselves?

Howe's work is restless, interrogative, and works to keep the routes open between the poem and the history out of which it emerged. Between her prose prefaces, poem sequences and the recorded performances emerges a voice as subjective, complex and material as the histories she draws into the pages of her books. Through this welcoming in of subjectivity I found a model for my practice that could be personal, revealing *and* dwell upon the material possibilities of language. Materiality can be a kind of telepathy between the work the writer and the reader. What the preceding chapters have hoped to resist is the sense that any of these connections are natural, unconstructed, or that we can ever remove ourselves from the practice we are engaging in.

Problem solving

During the interview for my PhD funding I was asked 'why would I read a poem to understand the economy'? At the time I had no answer. What does poetry *do*? On its own, the answer is very little. Poetry as a tool for real activist change is an utter fantasy if not shared within the context of contiguous community. [1] As Hogue and Hinton remind us, contiguity as a textual practice,

> acknowledges common ground: the shared political and aesthetic interests among various schools, and cultures of writers and readers. The advantage of contiguity as a social practice is that it maintains and respects the integrity of these same groups' oppositions and differences, at the same time as their exchange and dialogue in a public forum fosters a broadening sense of community—intellectual, political, and social, as well as artistic. (2)

My poetry is a broken chair in the barricades, or a barking riot dog simultaneously narrating and contributing to the general fabric of revolutionary sound.

[1] On audience and community see the discussions between Bernstein, et. al., 'Poetry, Community, Movement', that politicise community making and defining; Elizabeth Jane Burnett *A Social Biography* which reimagines and radicalises the idea of the poetry gift and the spaces they inhabit. The current UK small press poetry community is astonishingly rich and varied, attempting to sincerely address the whiteness and class divisions within poetry spaces. Small presses like Gong Farm, the 87 Press, Red Herring all take their cue from Mark Nowak's *Social Poetics* that works to reconfigure what poetry communities look like and how they intersect with the world.

Portfolio notes #1: Radical dialogues

> *Dead Pledges* does not argue that the economy itself is representational–it does not argue that the debt economy can be reduced to our collective belief in it. Rather, my claim is that debt is such a ubiquitous yet elusive social form that we can most clearly and carefully understand it by looking at how our culture has sought to represent it.
>
> — McClanahan 2

> Frequently I've overheard her and faint voices
>
> of slave-girls chatting about her vices,
>
> naming names I've named, obviously not thinking
>
> through I might possess either ears or tongue.
>
> — Catullus '67'

> As companies move beyond the recession, the key challenges for business, HR, and talent are becoming clear to Deloitte. At the top of the list? Globalization, the drumbeat of technological change, intense regulatory environments, and the reality of distributed work in the cloud. The implications of these changes for human capital are profound.
>
> — Eng 9

The epigraph above taken from Mercedes Eng's biographical poem sequence enfolds the language of business and politics into a story about growing up with a father behind bars. The work depicts the tension between the industrial complex of incarceration and the atomization of "distributed work in the cloud". In the context of a post-recession landscape, how to find a way through poetry to articulate a resistance to businesses solving their financial issues by capitalizing on "human capital"?

Eng chips away at the totalizing structure of incarceration by enfolding the voice of the systems into her work, breaking their hold over the timeframe of her life. In the work highly personal and significant family photographs of Eng gradually growing-up are placed alongside dehumanised questionnaire samples; a product of language at its most meaningless. The poetic 'I' offers a resistant timeframe that cannot be enclosed by the prison sentence her father is serving.

Jordan Scott's confrontation of incarceration through his long project *Lanterns at Guantánamo* similarly uses an embodied experience of space to destabilise structures of meaning and meaninglessness. Scott's recordings of the environment of the prison act "as a kind of empty form that resonates with the visually-redacted photo or the lexically-redacted poem. Redaction looks like ambience sounds." (*Lanterns*) The space of Scott's recorded works shimmer with the absences of the non-bodies he is not allowed to record. The sound-work saves space for those erased by the system, refusing to let the case close.

While thinking about the geopolitics of Duchamp and Walter Benjamin's 'suitcase aesthetics', T.J. Demos writes that "[t]he nationalist body, as we know, imagines itself nostalgically as whole, illusionistically unified." (Demos 28) Therefore the appropriate resistance is to make visible the truth of disunification. The 'nomadic' body not only acknowledges "the impossibility of an essentialized, national identity; it also reveals that its condition of deterritorialization is not necessarily or simply liberatory, but caught up in the effects of institutionalization and reproduction that it both analyzes, mimics, and resists." (29)

This PhD did not start with Susan Howe. It started with the shark eyes of George Gideon Osborne's[1] passion for austerity, and the Conservative Party slogan for the 2015 general election: "Strong Leadership, A Clear Economic Plan And A Brighter, More Secure Future" (BBC). The future the campaign promised was 'strong, clear, bright, and secure'; words that describe a light-emitting fortress. This imagined space hides behind the rhetoric of openness and dazzles the viewer with its lack of specific shape. The clear economic plan in practice was one that would further entrench wealth inequality and remove support for the most vulnerable of society (Toynbee). The patriarchally inflected suggestion that the Tories could lead the

[1] Chancellor of the Exchequer 2010-2016

economy backfired during the 2015 European Union referendum. Why would leaving the EU affect an economy they had depicted as a separate entity from complex webs of interrelation that they alone were capable of controlling? Suddenly the economy had to be protected, given flesh and bones, but, as we know that didn't work out. I heard debates about the economy everyday on the radio, in pub conversations, and on front pages of newspapers. As a piece of language it was so huge it had become invisible and abstract. But I saw first-hand and experienced myself the pain of debt, cut services, deprived areas snuggled up to massive development projects.

The closer I got to the word itself, revealing the way the term bridges the private (oikos and home) and the public (markets, GDP forecasting), the more imperceptible the meaning of it got. Just as you learn nothing of the politics of the NRA by taking apart and putting rifles back together, I found that simply examining economic slogans would not lead to mastery or a further comprehension beyond what the word already told me. My aim– to think about how the term 'the economy' is manipulated– is not about trying to write an economic-poetics but to think through the emotions and origins of a word that is purposely kept so far away. The poems that follow begin with the belief that attention to the resonance of language is a political project.

The five sequences submitted in this thesis seek to force a dialectic engagement out of the economy by reconstructing the landscapes through which it passes– both physical and digital– and by re-framing the language that populates these spaces. These 'dialogues' are an attempt to make material the "rhetoric of market abnegation and the surrender of human freedom to a now lavish invisible hand." (Jameson 274) Through a dialogic form we can enact

a radical reading of these spaces and "open the way to the emergence of a new form of social autonomy." (Berardi 8)

There is no way to see, hear, smell, or taste the economy. The conduit through which we understand this sensually inaccessible theory, is language, that unstable and ever-shifting mode of communication. However, my enquiry is not so much into the use of language as signs, but with the forms that language co-opts. Didactic or demonstrative, but never truly dialogic, the linguistic forms the economy uses are certainly not democratic. What truly is the difference between a global economic system that is based on; 'trust'; fictional quantities; promises; the word exchanged between a metonymic figure (the Bank of England) and an individual (me), from an occult world based on magic; belief; imagined landscapes; on that most squeamish of (im)material things: feelings? And how can poetry, "that under-achieving commodity, that greeny flower" (Derksen 54) provide the landscape on which to site this investigation?

Jeff Derksen's (disingenuous) lament of the failed and failing commodification of poetry, offers hope of a working poetics as always rejecting marketability. A pain for any poets who are hoping to exchange their labour for capital, but possibly what gives both Berardi and to a similar extent, Stephen Collis cause to look to a radicalization of poetics to combat the slippery allure of neo-liberalist capitalism. While Berardi lays much responsibility at the door of poetry with his call for a "poetic revitalization of language" (8); Collis is curious about dialectic engagement with what may be seen as the 'old ways' of discourse. He writes, "we are not yet done with sincerity as a social, and potentially radical mode." ('Dialectical Poetry' par. 32) Ah sincerity that under-achieving commodity, that greeny flower.

In ‘Same New Ritual’, an early experimental audio poem, I visited the financial center of London and walked the few hundred meters between and around the perimeters of the Bank of England and the Bloomberg L.P European headquarters. The actual spaces I encountered did not yield nice, neat narratives through which I could relate my findings to the world. In fact, I went into the city to try and find out what I could read into the spaces and came away with knowledge based on nothing more than feelings. I retreated from the powerful indifference of the buildings and their guardians, an indifference that redacted my critiques even as I formed them. When listening back to my recordings my voice is shy and girlish, I can hear myself stumbling to appease. It’s the voice I use when someone bumps into me and I apologise to neutralize the situation, it’s the voice of fear.

Berardi’s depiction of the financial sector as mystified within the rituals and mantras of commercial regulation interested me here. The City (of London) works hard to dismiss the image of itself as a space enthralled to both an upper echelon of the initiated few, and forces beyond the powers of the devotees—while simultaneously enacting a Jamesonian ‘wrapping’ of it into their identity. This became clear as a bell to me when I collated the recordings I had made with notes taken from the websites of The Bank of England (BoE), Bloomberg, and Bitcoin. The contrast became even clearer when I noted how these custodians of finance/innovation/open-source trading present themselves as educators. The BoE and Bloomberg host museums on their building premises and explanatory videos on their websites, while Bitcoin has a series of drop-down menus aimed at educating users; from a ‘history of’ to a ‘vocabulary of words used’. And yet the spaces themselves, both physical and digital, became more confusing and harder to navigate the longer I spent there.

At street-level there is no textual surface to the European HQ of Bloomberg, but the website is full of information. There are digital tours of the new building; the history of Michael Bloomberg & associates; the subterranean museum and gallery that showcases the Mithraeum excavation and restoration; and the good-work of Bloomberg Philanthropy. Berardi writes how the "general intellect" is unable to cognitively comprehend and resist the exploitation of labour because, "in its present configuration, [it] is fragmented and dispossessed of self-perception and self-consciousness." (8) Footage of barefooted children lining-up for the camera football-team style, piling upon the backs of philanthropic employees is intercut with over-the-shoulder shots of stock trading screens listing the price of those products that day. There is no suggestion that a market based on the exploitation of labour to keep prices buoyant may be the direct cause of the need of those barefooted kids. However, after some time on the Bloomberg website, while the strike for pensions at my University dragged on and the winter seemed to be getting colder, I began looking at the 'search jobs' drop-down menu. My examination into these worlds of power had resulted in my own postmodern "psychic fragmentation" (Jameson 90), an inability to comprehensively respond to the delicious world I consumed from my screen.

Lisa Robertson's text on the imprint of money on public spaces in Vancouver makes the following claim that conflates the public and private in architectural and linguistic ways. She writes, "The partition and structure of communicative speech and its mimetic transmission was a necessary precursor to architectural structure." (157) It is in the divides, breaks and forms that contain and structure speech acts, that communication—both psycho-spatial and psycho-linguistic—occurs. Furthermore, according to Berardi it will be through renewed employment of "[t]he voice and poetry" where we find our "two strategies for reactivation" (20) of these

spaces. 'Same New Ritual' became about the "mimetic transmission" of these spaces into voice.

Ultimately, my work seeks a way for expressiveness to coexist with constructivist modes of textual appropriation and must foreground that duality in order to be radicalizing what has heretofore simply been seen as either construction (avant-garde), or expression (lyric). Borrowing from Brian Reed's discussion on Flarf and post 9/11 poetics, "instead of seeking to banish the concept of the voice to literary-historical hell, [I hope to] let scandalous voices loose to vex an unsuspecting public." ('Flarf Folly' 101) Enter in my cast of characters and the eyes and mouths through which I (re)construct the spaces I've spent time absorbing.

There are many precedents for non-verbal figures being used as commentators, but the first interlocuter to my poems came from the ancient mode of the 'lament beside the door'. This form presents the door as simultaneously barricade and portal with an eye and an ear in both an internal domestic and an external public space. Catullus' 'Poem 67', which imagines a dialogue between the narrative 'Catullus' and the door that bars him from his love, is a comic masterpiece. The door is a gossipy, inconsistent and archly crude voice in a poem that foregrounds untruth, social etiquette and the rituals of daily life. The dialogue, as a conversation in two (or more) parts, reveals more about the questioner, the lamenter, than it necessarily does about the questioned treacherous portal. The door represents some manifestation of desire or insecurity, as well as serving as synecdoche for the household in general. In this work Catullus uses the tension between expression and formal construction in the service of both critical and lyrical creation. The voices of door-keepers and the doors themselves heard in 'Same New Ritual' became the mediated voice that threads through 'An Opening' in the sequence *Paternoster Square*. Some of the doorkeepers outside the financial

buildings could not resist asking me my business, but as soon as I moved to venture further in, even just for a second, I was made suspect and turned away. On the websites I was invited beyond the façade but then similarly rebuffed by walls of incomprehensible information: Dealers in transparency then, but only up to a point.

The non-linguistic 'atmosphere' that surrounds and structures the financial district is another form of interlocuter that surfaces throughout my sequences. In 'An Opening' the fossils and stones built into the cityscape are emerging relics of deep time, 'speaking' in the present. But in *Harbingers & Passwords* I address a more literal idea of atmosphere. Both as wind and aura, atmosphere is a connective, affective force that carries history within itself and bridges the gaps between disparate spaces. But what is experienced is not uniform, we are not all experiencing the weather in the same way. This sequence, in order to find a space that hold these ideas in uneasy tension, takes mourning as a political organizational tool and explores what 'substances' can mediate between private and global griefs. Can we comprehend and bear the weight of genocide, mass extinction, the sudden death of a parent, as a form of radical compassion? The way toward a collective experience of grief is perhaps first through voiced expression. *Harbingers & Passwords* thinks about cries, crying, song and speaking as a way of articulating the "inner immensity" (Bachelard 185) of feeling, in order for it to be shared.

Pierre Bourdieu's recognition that "the most material types of capital … can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital" (242) suggests that, conversely the dematerialized language of dialogue can make visible the oppressively 'lavish invisible hand' of capital. While the experiments in aural collage that began with 'Same New Ritual' would provide the practical form for the audio parts of *Complex Kinships*[2], the sense of

[2] See Portfolio Notes #3

confronting abstract space though language and ritual evolved into the work submitted here as *Paternoster Square*.

The series of 'paternoster' poems borrow from a performance R.A. Villanueva gave where three readers read a single poem of a new form he had just invented. As with my poems, the paternoster Villanueva shared had both a chant-like rhythm, and complex interweaving rhymes and clashes between the three voices. Villanueva's poem on the page sets the text in discrete bead-like sections that refer to the rosary. Mine take the form of three columns. The spacing of them like this emphasized their verticality and two of the other touchpoints of the poems; the continually moving mechanics of paternoster lifts and the proliferation of classical columns in central London that variously support buildings, bar entry, and evoke a reconstructed distant past. Though they show moments of harmony and dissonance that bring out the contradictions or oddities of the assembled words, these works are essentially spatial. The broken sentences of 'An Opening' that act as threshold, doorway and passageway help think toward spaces of language as spaces of transformation; what is transparent and what only appears to be so.

Finally, the paternosters form was useful as a way to think about the continually emerging polyphony within language (Tedlock). The poems that use repeated and minutely altered semantic fields are designed to be read by multiple voices similar to 'rounds' in music that need multiple voices to take their full form. It is important to note that in this way the textually enclosed and aurally silent printed poems enact a form of failure, just as the anti-capitalist protest Occupy London that encamped in and around Paternoster Square in 2011, which was also in some ways a failure. Though the poems contain the potential for full

expression, they are presented here as simply placeholders, biding their time for the next uprising, in the meantime refusing to let the case close.

During the second year of my PhD I, along with a group of graduate teaching associates, zero-hour contract assistant lecturers, students and administrative staff at the University of Kent, created the Temporary Centre for Resistance (The Temp). The name that was given to the space in the building we occupied (a large gallery in the Art School) has had an afterlife as an online community. The work that was more occupation than residency, was messy, communal, difficult, fun, and instructive. We built a gazebo inside the gallery, hosted talks, parties, food sharing. We pissed off the head of campus security and made allies with the reception team in the building. It was a small gesture against the neoliberal university, doomed to failure because sanctioned and contained by that very structure. Those of us earning money at the time on our precarious contracts were earning it off the back of the marketisation of degrees and the slow chipping away of academic freedom. But it was still an important gesture, one that made plain the smooth blanket narrative of the university. These paternosters are dedicated to that space, and all spaces like it.

Portfolio notes #2: Janes in the line-breaks

haptic abandon in enemy territory
joyful apostasy
seasonal shibboleths

speak invite demarcate

touch my hand to yours Jane
sing me the songs of oikos

show me the shape

of my home

— Porritt 'An Opening'

The myth that the economy is a neutral entity is powerful. The economy exists out there, away from the messy realities of the daily. It does not happen to us, we tame it, bend it to our will, and simultaneously are blown about by its capricious winds. We have all experienced– are continually experiencing– the economy our whole lives, no matter what form that life takes. You are experiencing the economy in all the places you walk to in a day, in all the things you have ever owned, or consumed. In all the fluids that have ever entered or exited your body, in all the faux wood desks you have ever rested on to sign your name, in all the ways you have traveled; the vehicles, or lack of them, the roadways, or lack of them. Economy, from *Oikos*, meaning 'household' is 'housed' in everything we encounter, but not everything we encounter is in the shape of a 'home'. Language disappears into meaning when we try to address it. Why look to a poem to understand it?

Jane stepped into my poems out of these contentions and questions. Jane is my middle name, the name of my mother, and also of my late father's sister. Jane (as in Eyre) is plain, poor and small, negotiating different shackles of wage relations, marriage, and morality. Jane (as in Calamity) that poster girl of American Expansionism, refuses to be silent on the construction of her own mythology, which is a mythology of colonial violence turned manifest destiny. Jane (as in Doe) is a placeholder for a redacted or unknown someone, she keeps a silent watch over anonymous broken bodies. Sweet refusing Jayne County is the utopian punk-future and rebellious backdrop to a post Thatcher summer of discontent lived in the longing bodies of teenage girls (my mother and her three younger sisters) waiting for their lives to start in the rural suburbia of Somerset.

Jane moves between the poems of the sequence *Waterrun-Daily-Breadeater*. It is through these poems that turn on the site of Jane's body that language makes visible flows of capitalism; the subjugation of workers to the rhythms of capital's weekday; the individual as alienated consumer and consumed.

swee sw
t dream eet love
s sweet d living your
reams sweet sweet li
drea fe

(Porritt 'Sweet Jane')

I borrow Veronica Forrest-Thomson's framing of time and pronouns as ways to organize space within the poems, to consider both the experience of lived time under capitalism, and what naming my subject 'Jane' brings into the world of the texts. Forrest-Thomson writes:

> The time of the 'now' [in the poem] is a purely relational linguistic fiction with no referent in the external world. … A contrast between 'now' and 'yesterday' or 'five years ago' in a poem does not lead us out into an empirical situation but tells us that a temporal contrast will be an important device for thematic organisation; and the same holds true for references to 'I', 'we', and 'you': these oppositions, lifted away from external contexts, limit the invasion of the external world and provide scope for internal thematic expansion. (78-9)

Jane's 'time-frame' spans familial generations, but also, as she traverses different media, continents, and bodies. By drawing in and reaching out to disparate relationships and across factual/fictional borders she is able to inhabit different sites and disrupt a hetero-normative linearity of traditional female timeframes under patriarchal capitalism (Freeman).

While naming Jane as a subject is a form of lifting 'her' away from external contexts, I also disagree that limiting the external world is the only way to plumb the poem's depths. Certainly, setting parameters, creating confrontational borders, allows for the rich inner life of words to emerge; 'Equivalent Materials', the final sequence presented in this thesis, plays with a narrow semantic field in order to rework the facets and resonances between and within the spaces of words. However, the politics of my practice insists I make attentive space for moments when the external world cannot be kept out. The breakages are as important as the borders.

The breakages occur within the expressions of the subjects as much as they occur on the landscapes of the poems themselves. The open form and movement through semi-urban

liminal spaces as well as crossing registers within language owe a debt to Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems*, even as they work away from the didacticism of his practice. Kathleen Fraser suggests his work speaks to the practices of women poets because women (forced. into fragmentation under patriarchy) seek ways to radically "em/body space and its tesserae of human utterance." (198) What Olson gave poets as diverse as Howe, Barbara Guest, and Myung Mi Kim was a way to reconceive of the text as a body. Gloucester stalks the pages of Olson's rangy poems, the wide spaces are his breaths, they invited the women reading his work to find spaces to breathe for themselves.

Working against this embodied subject, but equally important to my arrival at Jane and how she appears on the page, is J.H. Prynne's *Down Where Changed*. Mediating the social, private and linguistic spaces of dour 1979 Britain, this sequence pushes the body to extremes of meaning. The figures, like the fractured infrastructures that are "cut up already" (296), are "worn thin" (297) or conversely "bloated over sand" (299). As a portrait of the way "consumption" structures social and private spaces it is remarkably absent of consumers. What are the feelings of this space, where are the surfaces? Jane, with her porous borders and specific feelings, is one form of my feminist response to Prynne's static voicelessly disintegrating "idiot pear tree" (294).

Another is in the sequence *A Partial and Mediated Zone*. The poems in this sequence try to reach across the tesserae of human utterance without attempting to smooth over the cracks. In 'Encounters' various materials and objects (sound, earth, roads, calendars, crying babies) suture the figures within collectively felt spaces. Nodding toward George Oppen's utopian desire to choose the meaning "Of being numerous", 'Encounters' remarks n the luxury of choice in the first place. 'Equivalent Materials' draws from and looks out from the sentences

of ‘Encounters’. The dense little prism-poems depict a narrow semantic field that harmonises and clashes in a similar way to the echoes within the paternoster series. These two works attempt an impossible and ever-moving mediation between sites of the social and personal.

The figure of Jane borrows elements from several sources. Like Carla Harryman’s ‘Sue’, Jane “is a breakaway type” (12) who shares some of the arch-desires of Chelsey Minnis’ ‘I’ who is a shifting, diamond faced voice from the past. This sense of projecting a voice out of several sources wavers between Lisa Robertson’s ‘Debbie’ who is made from equal parts “Unhappy, frugal/ hope” (375) and “dreaming brevity in dazzled font” (512), and Joshua Whitehead’s shape-shifting “zoa” who holds a space open for the poet’s indigenous, queer body in the glitchy scroll of the text.

Jane came out of my need to diffuse the subject of my poems in a way that did not dilute the critical lens of them. Taking the contention that the personal is political, I wanted to resist the trend of making the political individual or of universalizing experience we all know to retain the variations of class, race, gender, physical and neuro divergence. Jane is not trying to speak for all women but is trying to make available to all readers the issues, sensations and emotions depicted in the lines.

Portfolio notes #3: Complex Kinships

> continuity in the presentation of history is unattainable.
>
> — Benjamin [N7a, 2] 470

> So many species, so many kinds, meet in Jim's dog, who suggest an answer to my question, Whom and what do we touch when we touch this dog? How does this touch make us more worldly, in alliance with all the beings who work and play for an alter-globalization that can endure more than one season?
>
> — Haraway, When Species Meet 5

> As an approach to creating texts, translation promotes a move away from solipsism and towards direct engagement with cultures outside of our own, including those pertaining to non-textual media.
>
> — Collins 17

My poetry project that began by seeking the productive failures of the polyvocal, developed into a consideration of the intimacy and failed ontology of touch. The multi-voice and multi-media poetry project *Complex Kinships* was sparked by Donna Haraway's ideas of 'significant otherness' and Howe's poly-auditory poems that use language "just to touch across" (FS 29). In these portfolio notes I want to share with you my feeling that voice, text and gesture can entangle to the point of transformation: that multi-voice poetry can be the form through which we imagine different 'presents' that can open the routes to alternative futures. Feminist and queer theorist Karen Barard suggests that, on a narrative level:

> To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. (ix)

Entanglement's tentacularity attempts to resist a neatly concluded and over-simplified neoliberal individualisation: entanglement rejects the singular perspective. While the quantum

entanglement that Barard goes on to discuss refers to the intra-relations between particles that reverberate right up through matter, my project *Complex Kinships* is rather an attempt to apply these ideas of interconnection to the everyday narratives of significant otherness. With it I hope to complicate subjectivity into a vibrant and complex collectivity.

Haraway, in *The Companion Species Manifesto* demonstrates how gesture enacts this complexity of kinship as she writes:

> When 'pure-bred' Cayenne, 'mixed-breed' Roland, and I touch, we embody in the flesh the connections of the dogs and the people who made us possible. When I stroke my landmate Susan Caudill's sensuous Great Pyrenees, Willem, I also touch relocated Canadian gray wolves, upscale Slovakian bears, and international restoration ecology, as well as dog shows and multi-national pastoral economies. (98)

Haraway here is pointing out the constant presence of history contained within her "dog products". Via her act of touching Cayenne, Roland and Willem she asks us to consider what it means to live a responsible entanglement. The works collected in Complex Kinships pose this same question; when I'm touching you, what else is touching me?

Haraway's great sweep is most effective for a poetic practice when read through the frame of Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant advises caution when thinking too specifically, or too broadly about how acts emerge out of language. He writes:

> [n]o specific history (joy or tragedy, extortion or liberation) is shut up solely in its own territory nor solely in the logic of its collective thought. The woes of the landscape have invaded speech, rekindling the woes of humanities, in order to conceive of it. … [W]e must also involve this imaginary in the place we live, even if errantry is part of it. Neither action nor place are generalizable. (196)

Glissant's sense of the porous borders of poetics is insistent on the specific histories and experiences of people and land, specificities that any move toward a sense of interconnectedness must protect. How to make these specificities visible? Or perhaps the question actually is, how to readjust our lens to re-frame the possibilities of the visible?

Tim Ingold sets out the need for experimentation *with* (as opposed to *on*) substances and non-human surroundings at the root of art and culture making. His text *Being Alive* provides the material experiments for articulating what that network of interconnectedness could look, sound, and feel like. He writes that materials

> partake in the very process of the world's ongoing generation and regeneration, of which things such as manuscripts or house-fronts are impermanent by-products. Thus, to cull one further example at random, boiling fish-bones yields an adhesive material, a glue, not a fishy kind of materiality in the things glued together. (26)

Ingold's practice of adjusting the lens to what is alongside or obfuscated by the encountered commodity is one way of thinking about an experimental materialism as giving voice to a material unconscious.

Bricolage Telepathy

Maurizia Boscagli points to Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* as a foundational text of "experimental materialism" (Boscagli 39). Benjamin's work came out of lived persecution and the persecution of friends that forced him to think about the ways materials and 'stuff' structure the world as much as the great emotive theories of love, hate, passion, and nationalism. In the work a narrative of totalising progress is countered by the ever present "marginal version of the commodity, its detritus" (Boscagli 40). Benjamin frames the object as

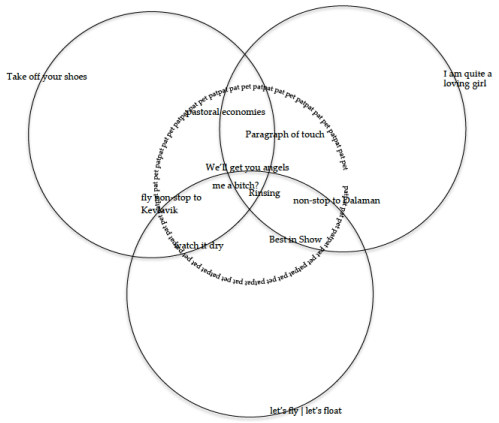
able to “reactivate a sleeping historical memory, a dream of social justice still alive in nineteenth-century industrial culture and its technological modernity [that had been] derailed and appropriated by the logic of consumption” (Boscagli, 40).

Howe’s texts and sound-spaces are built from scraps and detritus. Her practice echoes with Benjamin’s injunction to renew (rather than make it new), to piece together rather than ‘progress’. Howe, instead of preserving, records or reconstitutes decayed and decaying fragments, finding out what ‘gases’ they omit in the present. The debris of history-making, in the form of notebooks, marginalia, ephemera, scraps of objects and partial or unreliable accounts, are the equivalent of Benjamin’s bric-a-brac. They offer a counter-narrative to the well-rehearsed and edited versions. Narratives can be assembled from them that critique as well as direct toward other more obscured and invisible histories.

Collage, bricolage, Howe’s “facsimile aesthetic” (Jennings) that permeates her paintings, poems, films, and sounds-works, give materiality their due space. But alongside this is also the belief in the unconscious (or in Howe’s words ‘telepathic’) relationship with objects and materials as a source for social and political change. Howe’s sense of the telepathic as a felt relations with the material draws from Benjamin who “shows how a mimetic relation to commodity-culture’s debris can be used to reactivate … ‘magic’, fantasy, chance.” (Boscagli 41)

The ability of ‘things’ to connect across temporal zones (past-future, here-there), and refract and connect toward other personal and subconscious specifics of the being encountering them, is summarised in what Boscagli describes as Benjamin’s “dream-memory […] brought to the threshold of consciousness” where “the fullness of experience […] is never once and for all realized, but always in the process of becoming” (41).

Visible and invisible structures



('Complex Kinships: Experimental notation')

Behind the scenes of the poems presented in the sequence *Complex Kinships* are a series of diagrammatic intersections that helped me think through the touching places of the surface sounds and texts. The three parts of the poem series made of three audio recordings woven together by three connecting texts are meant to be read aloud live. Each section explores touch as ontology of being in the world and thinks widely about the multiple meanings of touch, security, interconnectedness, instructions, naming, and object experience.

Polyphonic music, or works for multiple voices, blend individual sounds to create whole textures. The continuous, all-encompassing world-building of polyphony seemed like a useful way to make material the idea of the entanglement and total systems made from– and reliant on– multiple strands. Polyphony has a history alongside religious/cultural/political revolt making it a natural structure through which to explore a poetics that resists. Working across poetry, visual and sound art, I combined field recordings, manipulated sounds taken from YouTube and wove found images together, playing with the ideological ramifications of producing poetry for/of multiple voices.

YouTube is a useful way of thinking about entanglement and Haraway's kinships of touch, alongside a reframing of Ingold's quest to be alive to the things of the world as applied to digital avatars. His thoughts about touch, action, and engagement with materials can reimagine the real-world effects of online actions. An experience and manifestation of the unconscious is not private or something we only do behind closed doors, but it is affected by the spaces we habituate. The semi-private/public platform of YouTube– with its multiple options to act, consume, perform, or hide oneself– is a useful way to expose and question the colonization of the unconscious. YouTube is run by its participants and depends upon them to create, upload, interact with and regulate content. As you watch a video your presence increases the view count and its ability to trend, its popularity: the viewer makes the viewed viewable by simply being near it. The platform and these interactions generate a whole subset of simultaneous economies through multiple forms of advertising. And all that before the action of 'liking' or 'disliking' takes place.

YouTube comment sections are a whole world of their own, a subset of engaged communities. They have their own languages, codes and ways of interacting, you are exposed, speaking or being spoken to publicly, and also hidden within threads of conversations and away from the central video. YouTube is an organism that you contribute to collectively though most people act singly. What is valuable is agreed on by general consent, and while there are people who ostensibly regulate it, they do not control it. YouTube spans the globe, connects in surprising ways, archives the history of the internet and audio-visual texts, and reaches into the future to predict and influence trends in purchasing or socio-political thought. Watching a YouTube video performs the same function as patting that dog, it is the same as the Ingoldian experiment of taking off one's shoes in the supermarket or the playground or the underground car park. All these actions leave footprints of one kind or another, and each connects the

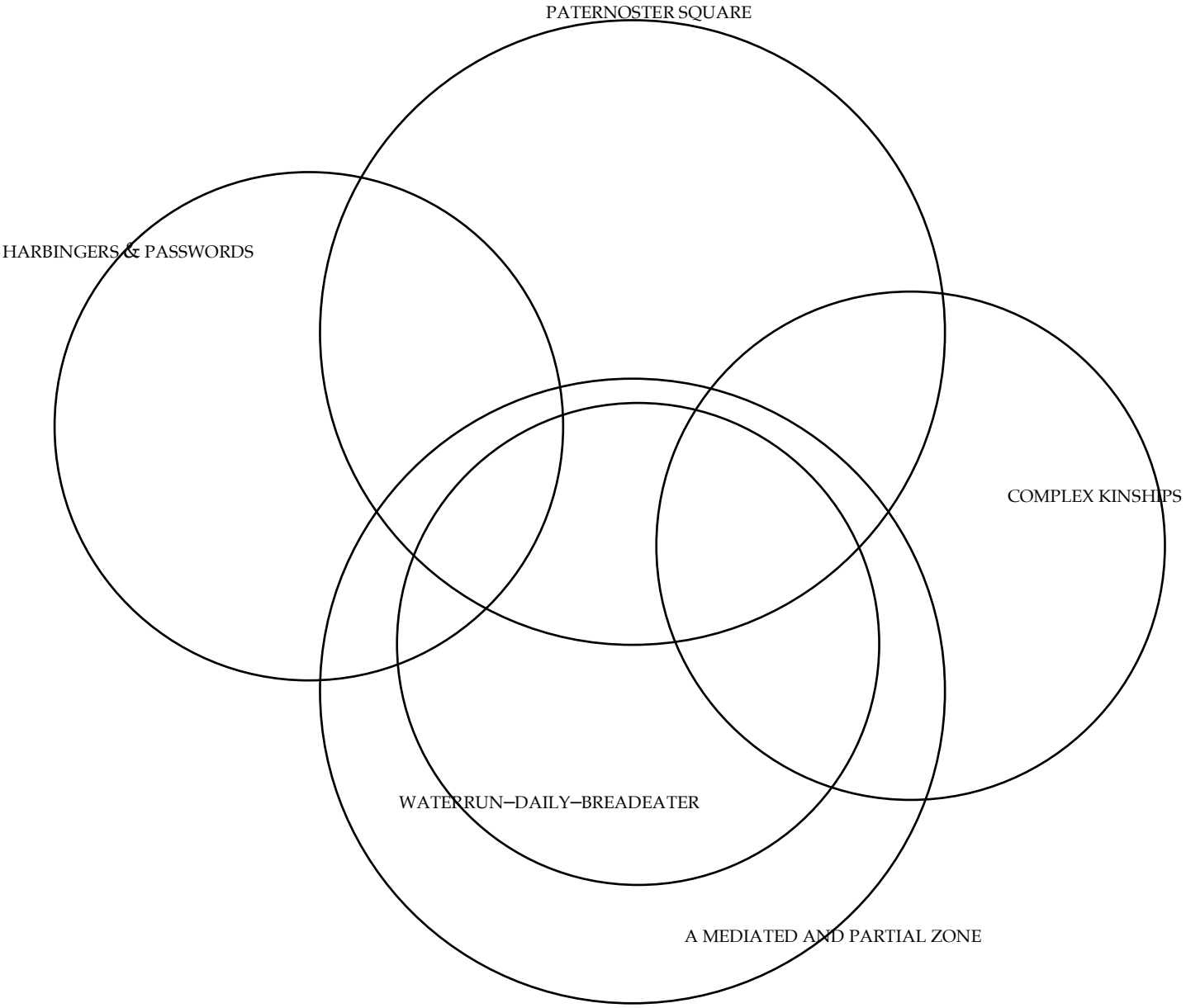
‘toucher’ with all the millions of decisions and networks that brought that dog, that space, that video of someone washing their hands into being.

The sense of touch as desired and dangerous is addressed in Howe’s text of mourning *That This*. The allusions to the Midas myth coincide with the always escaping desire of the archive diver. In the text Howe longs for contact even as she knows it is both unavailable and all around her. The action draws from the felt facts but can also reveal the complete unknowingness of the thing touched. Just touching the scrap of wedding dress does nothing to communicate Sarah Edwards’ physical trauma of childbirth and the pressure to continually perform the role of Puritan minister’s perfect wife. If touch is a connection, what kind of connection is it?

Touch as pleasure/care, as safety of handwashing or affixing a seatbelt, through prayer–which is another kind of safety, hands as instructional and revealing, human-animal hands as communicators. Rippling out from these initial thoughts came ideas of dog naming as class indicator; manufacture of soap in now destroyed factories in Aleppo; social politics of the body; international travel/trade; the search for refuge; work and the multiple ways we secure ourselves. This work began in the summer of 2018, I write these portfolio notes post-Covid-19, in the Summer of 2021, the complexity of the handshake as binding, securing, aggressive action has taken on totally new meanings. These poems have an entangled and ongoing future.

COMPLEX KINSHIPS: FIVE SEQUENCES

BETSY PORRITT


PATERNOSTER SQUARE
HARBINGERS & PASSWORDS
COMPLEX KINSHIPS
WATERRUN–DAILY–BREADEATER
A MEDIATED AND PARTIAL ZONE

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

sing me the song of the oikos
I call to Jane
and 'what is oikos?'

If you walk the perimeter of the Bloomberg Building you will not learn about the desk materials. Below is a mocked-up sex temple and a dead river, above is white film October sky. Salmon grey London is the centre of the world's metals. Tell me doorway who passes?

ear me hearth the hard earth heareth

The story behind Paternoster Square a bench and a bird bath square column slap bang cavity vents open gills leached drained bled quarried great fire base bed best bed pen shop slightly soft uncompromised ink stand porous shelly rich clarity wiped out wiped up not uninterrupted whizzed blitzed.

sing me the song of the slim lip connector
the homely the holy the homily

Inner pockets of housewives' budgets my friend is being destroyed by her husband who rules at the coin edge. Penny pinching nation run by your horrible uncles make things invisible. Centre of ring-dealing surrounds the piazza benches with bivalves weathering through Portland chalk fossils holding walls apart bombed book trade bombed religious centre loose leafs scattered blocking the gutter. Naked austerity without discernable heartbeat.

economy come name me yon echo

Words are hopeful little bridges, I mean treacherous. Massive dogs idiot pear trees a-stuttering the poet singing her bloody heart out overlapping litanies pouring different liquids around

and drinking. It's being all funny in a weird way, I mean real. Essays are impossible buds. A smashed window is a crystalline event. Attending to the stars in daytime has a politics. My god I know so much and so so so so so very little.

Jane, do you know where your daughter is?

I went to Texas to look at big sculptures and grasses reflected in metal surfaces. I went looking for containers for my rabbit thoughts. In that dry expected desert air, eating a life-altering breakfast burrito by an art world industrial complex.

down the arcade of former Janes

Someone is always annihilated not that far from where you are, but like, what is the point of all these chairs if I can't sit on a single fucking one? Do you not know that all things collapse are collapsing despite the clear preserving air? Yes I am hungover but don't let's get personal.

What are you saving them for? Bones of people locked in a container and the key is an anxiety dream, I mean national vote. Idiot pear trees too stupid to plant themselves somewhere safer. Labour rebranded as love and love rebranded as don't even think about sitting there.

Curf view thickly bedded Genuine marble slab worktop. Cockroach-full holes advice sterling molds starling shadow casts prayer options. Wren's dumpy rounded secreted niches notable dome names widely spaced joints domain ring-dealing.

Jane knows the price
of a silver crossed palm

Hot idea the collector of building stones notes crystals in the lower portions of the kiosk façade. Versatile fossils surface as the buildings weather limewash keystone stock exchanging a grassless churchyard gate for bivalve flint cobbles. Lemon

squeeze shallow seascape providing a foot for scale. Fused plastic sheeting bonefold poorly built quarry firms loading bay. In 2014 there was still enough stone for 500 years of use.

once crossed can't return
the same way

When I touch my hand here words echo themselves into my eyes and I lip their shifts and small movements in the world and you, when you read them are reading shadow echoes. There is space for you to sit.

how me heart eat here at doorway

Quartz grains shell debris book debris dumpy almond rounded. Cocked up fine big dead bill metal with a satin finish piece by piece. Original sheep gateways old Devonian names imported from the mountains of Slovakia.

Pre-history sushi futures eating insects instead of spiders. Flagstone bivalves kneel down slightly. Pink mica lithium rich lickable floor. The radial passage leads to colonnaded row upon row. Thresholds between eons sheep and shepherd relief. Lonely granitoids among ripped tarpaulins & Precious Metals.

Jane show me the way to go home take me the long way

We have a problem of longevity at the Temporary Centre for Resistance. The internal structure is a treated wood frame. The worm turns inside the neoliberal university, temporarily.

What worth or weight
a poem has?

Pits now filled with the square belongings of the Mitsubishi estate. Water radiating beyond a global scale sea lily packed over 8 million territories. Cod grey in black limestone grey oyster shells and cavities of other leached out fossils. White fur white forearm emerges out of poorly understood origin.

Soft velvet black painted noon-mark. Free freshwater weathered out of iron staining the limestone canopy of Job's mausoleum. A pair of zebras coined smokey quartz. Metamorphic Temple Bar re-erected among hidden salmon pink carpark ventilation. You have to move on now, or else.

riot dog run amok
beholder

Peculiar also means specific particular particled partial. The second knowledge that precarity is 'tender tangled violent august and infinitely various'. I've missed the sun so long I cannot stop looking. Astonishing spring.

A poem is a prism or a passageway or a delay in glass, says Sweet Jane. She is cold and far away and anxious. Light, which is language, travels via strange unscientific pathways. A preface is a fish-tank she also says and an afterimage.

haptic abandon in enemy territory
joyful apostasy
seasonal shibboleths
speak invite demarcate

touch my hand to yours Jane
sing me the songs of oikos

show me the shape

of my home

I

household	privacy	locked room
pocket	marking	chit-chat
market	doorway	go ahead
private	household	ground-work
locker-	body	dining
room talk	my wet	breathing room
green light	tall drink	kitchen
dining	cash bar	avocado
shell pink	short skirt	face wash
bathroom	points win	salt cure
liquor	delightful	un-shell
oyster	chop house	sky high
Davos	say-so	chase skirt
char-grilled	voting	chagrin
tasty	speaker fee	chief whip
speaker	tasty	corner room
voting	charming	trickle down
records	Davos	winner
chagrin	oyster	honour
delight	liquor	bright spark
tight skirt	bathroom	beauty
cash for	soft peach	regime
honour	dining	sinful
your bright	green room	homely
body	playing field	public
household	locker talk	shoulder
pocket	private	locked room
inner	market	talk

II

this rock	needle tip	filmy
dig it	blood track	clutter
encamp	rock face	deer path
parking	this rock	half shape
quasi	danger	uninform
legible	colour	falling fast
red route	wet room	river bed
open	clever move	leaf litter
untold	filament	total gamble
autumn	back road	byway
goldrush	crack-pot	sulphur
litter	scatter	little bother
gamble	tooth gold	acid drizzle
byway	power up	local trouble
street light	top-down	napping
bother	open road	cracked pot
drizzle	green road	ripped
local	wide eyed	paper trail
trouble	half light	lost again
dark rock	hitch up	dark rock
tick bite	escarpment	parking lot

III

cherry	pearl pink	baby
bomb ball	drone eye	dowdy
blonder shell	touching	grubby
hostile	sucker	offering
meeting	trudging	roe deer
blister	dirty	barking
marching	pillar box	gorging
muddy	fluid	feathery
waters	evenly	ice chips
brick red	spy plane	eye line
river	sticky	lastly
mutual	end times	juicy
mutiny	pearl shell	split seam
cherry	long eye	battle
fire ball	sticking	sticking

IIII

now clad	deadly	black bill
hold fast	bone bath	eave grit
bone mine	holding	silken gown
ready debris	now read	alleyway
sticky bill	root lick	sheep portal
blinking house	quarry path	small sadness
strip Moor	sprouting flame	bleach rock
pit passage	loose level	slipping
window square	bright gutter	arrowed
little lonely	tiny	flint cobble
white granite	glass	dirt toe
sliding level	sheep pass	well shod
toward flaming	strip rich	knotted
street fossil	glinting roof	common
thinner root	slim bill	edging
now clad	nearly debris	vantage
hold on	boney	lowing

V

silent	fruit pits	borne upon
metal	gift	wheat futures
gift	metallic	lawn level
mouth	hushed	bone to bone
stone	mapped	contact trace
borne	birthdays	marrow taps
wheat	scallop	facing west
lawn	we	we believe
bone	facing	crushing shells
contact	tapping	eating dates
tap	contact	mapping routes
facing	bone	silent stones
we	grassy	metals sing
shell	wheat ears	perfect gift
date	carry	open mouth
map	stones	gather stones
silent	mouth	weather borne
metals	gift	perfect wheat

HARBINGERS & PASSWORDS

in the teeth of the wind

say its name—

IN THE MANNER OF A NET

water speaks on behalf of wind carved object
voices life mugget ripped out on the grass grey
silken fawn foetus under a moon dog something
like 'what is spoken in the forest
must not make it to market'

beat-cops mumping meals commerce in blind
eyes & a little light fiasco lambs with twinkling tails
and filthy arses nuzzle teeming plump & plim

jack queen king of oak trumping whatever
you're pawing maybe take a wob of words like a
city with an animal name and the colour of torn go
where they'll take me rural suburbia

coming across 'das Waldgeschrei' cries in and of and
from the wood the Santa Ana moans around a flat
  cries as specific chants or broken sound say
the Lord's Prayer backwards and whisper it again

  tom-cat is a her curled around a Devonian tongue
fell Goodyear sucking the marrow of teeming cow-keen
piercing cruel and vigorous level the mux-toad his low rank
  touch the sky with your finger

outrate the runner because they are de-territorialised

pairled to tremor peril akin to bird rame

searing out the dark crying again and

refrain (as in repeat) and refrain (as in stop)

mizzle drops no bigger than a minute stretched

thinly over a waiting hour at the bottom of town

darkling all around

until counting cars no longer helps

☪

pulls

out of sleep with a purr

Zee-boys skate pools

before it was filthy paradise

before the Bonaventure Hotel & mirror skin

happy labyrinth webbed with golden thread

dripping sepia edges to 70s Dogtown

cotton white & blue vans neatened to

break bone point are uniforms before it was

penal battalion of the French Foreign Legion

heathery sweet smelling blast

fairytales to get your dick hard showing them

who's boss a little spun sugar

around black rectangle strips

enclosing the redeemed

zephyrs ruffle at the brick cracks

before it was: sir yes sir

they used to say: la la la

master of the runnel bark master of the ginnel

thistling ugliness– howling through lavender
this wind whips by the border
valley shadowed over – a spell of
sun in November – Saint Martin's Summer

vibrating stone dust – secrets in the rafters –
pious winter country – burned toward origin
afterimage a halo aura –
a Roman soldier [saint]
halves his cloak for a beggar –

master of the crow murder master of the dewdrop

extreme bliss seeping – colour of dyeing
rework a crookedness – alongside paradise plume
large spirit like a glass dome

soaring epistle – mistaken for charity
he rode cold – according to legend –

master of the dripping yaw master of the cufflink

– mistral exports a cloying soapy smell
tacky words clip clopping behind
magnificent poster eyes

‘who are these, who seem like clouds?’

☹

today is the feast day of conscientious objectors
pressure at the wrist bones rising sensation
forbidden potholes caused by yeast and
agonal breaths authentic &
microwavable
there are crustaceans bottlecaps heroes in the
seaweed coin operated door to the dead via
a slim unleavened wafer
as if the
rising sun blows from the dampish sea
Mediterranean fell facing land
illusory communion of refusal
seeking imperfect joy loafing toward
the condition of things

out of sleep

called my name

like a bell

chuck-chuck-chuck axe against a woody mouth, who named this wind: Chinook, a volatile aura a national salt, living metal icon, the tongue helicopter, actioned by monthly bank movements, peculiar gear and foreign crap assembled, droning on and on about origin, premonition, until sharp electrical discharge, flashboys and shitstorms, opposite of open or transparent, architectonic migraine, among hotels with Anglo-Saxon names, capitalism will die no natural death, in the pavilion of solidarity, iron railings like lace-work, concealed by jargon, whip wheals on manhole covers, the word with the gammony smell, we cooperate a residual cry, electrified to voracious hopping point, utopian longing in the high cathedral nave, fan blades from jet engines put in your hip-bones, billions more are carrots of the future

♠

buttery San Diego well mirrored lobby
cross-town tucks in the silk
little bus-rides little pleats
sunny naval base out in the sand dunes
I lost my heart to a musty wax woman
in the spring of 1987
seconds remained until the year '2000'
to pass the time we drank a Cointreau
as the postcard suggested
Mr Death nestled among the mega-tonnes
very nice and neat like hemlines and haircuts
ornamental eggs and tongues
ovolo and acanthus leaves
chewing my jam sandwich into a little pistol shape
anyway an inelegant solution
a reindeer cyclone from space
roundabouts clotted hurricane eyes
the dismal little flowers on the island
bee-free since '93

‘lay my head down
Along the way, way, the way
The way, the way
The way’

weather is *there*

it happens to us everywhere

terribly

there is no such thing as The Wind

stuff held by internal chaos

eventually they land

The Missouri

on the Iowa side

Chinese dirt

dumped by indifferent air

forms grassy bluffs

along the snakey river

atmosphere in the diagram

a chain drops from heaven to below

we path through the sky

air tic tac bombs

space travel's dirty colonial project

harboured as nautical traces

good ships bullet the horizons

whose horizons?

our horizons!

chainlinks between realms

rings hollow hold

together and apart

ornament boundary erotic

warlike ranks attention

point zero on the spreading map

inventing new symbols to mean

landscape roadway direction

why am I talking about

American Midwest expansion?

somewhere nearish

my cousin sews paintball headbands

my aunt sews lampshades

in not quite enough light

concentrating

my dad glimmers

at the edges of their faces

had his peculiars

laugh I can't hear

treegrowth

under the eyes

dirt inside a bathtub

form of time passing

this concentric absorption

feeling terribly ring-rusty

rosary bead navigation

locate the pious

at the fingertips

of our father

the taking-place of prayer

Paternoster Square

kind of a backyard

at the feet of St Paul's

mechanical innovations

slowly circulated out

last ridden in certain

East German states

the risk of them

severed limbs

danger of little

curled-in fossils

bidden under

fragile cliff face

a right of way

a marching order

It's easy to get maze headed

when newly laid flagstones

plinth a shiny human tooth

concordance

raised bands passing

round the body of a cannon

like a cock constrained

to finger and thumb

or silicone ring

they are killing trees

by biting into bark

on mushrooms

the veil remnant

moon halos

as harbingers and harbourers

expanding concentric circles

something dropped

a tray shimmers

or a bomb

a massive explosion

at the port

non-porous cycles

I'm noting the collective

possibilities of the air

songs sung in the round

verses renew

and when the fun stops stop

orderly virtues

Time fights with the Devil

circles Hell atop raggedy voices

pinnacle and dive

drawing in parallel nodes

the walls speak echoes

particles borne in

on the breath

Medieval assemblage

body of whatever

in orbit you can still trespass

atmosphere apes territory

birds borne as capitals

on high columns of air

bearing the kinetic sky

on avian shoulder blades

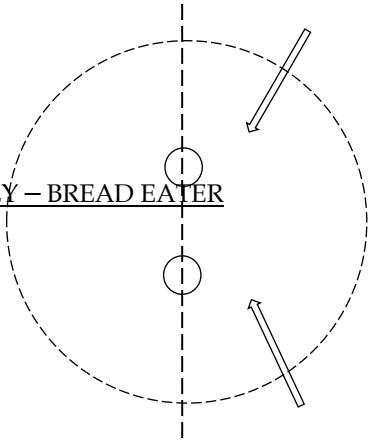
flat feathers parallel

to the horizon

which is not as flat

as you think it is —

WATERRUN – DAILY – BREAD EATER



Lon burning burning

London's burning

fetc engines fetch

fetch the burn do rnin

fire fire

fire the engines

pou on water water !

pour on pour on water fire!

our pour water

WATERRUN

Dull lidded Jane
waterrun bears

the body a moment
skin calls through soap scurf

waterrun and brush
for a rhyme length

phone rain
brings sleep again

praise to the god of the app store
Jane makes rain elide

her haunchy thoughts
that lie in wait

things she owes
gaps between

meeting points of months
far away afloat–

waterrun floods the room
blocks passage

what she cannot name
that her eyelid

is a shapely liquidity
tongue tip site

of plosive solvency
the economic crisis

is cupped
in the liquid crucible

of her lungs
sharp eyes spot

patterns wipe out
billions vulnerable

poor little
bodiless dollars –

just a dirty hunch
just a fever dream

Jane fears her nerve ending
as rain cleans.

It is early
pipes sing waterrun

bare toes to work clothes
dry skin Jane calls

so the social appeals
asks what she lacks

screens her gradually
liquefying assets

breeds the basic hygiene lie
fluid site of beauty

work crux kitchenette where
small breaks happen

power the unnamed substance
between the slippy fingers

waterrun Jane pays attention
what emerges from the shadows–

arid phantoms
seeking succour–

in a mirrored bathroom
eyes the briny glare on her skin.

London is a wet and queuing city
around the wisdom of Jane's sad body

solids cross between counties
honey eyed homes river

money boils to mist
greasy droplets coat

inside the bus window
blur the passing street

cannot quench Jane's thirst
against capital's salty snacks

shadow language breaks
double speak

like tender like inflation
like household like meltdown

solid turns to air like
newly solvent icebergs

waterrun sea mist
roil to hurricane

even tax collector wax

labour's warm and yielding nectar

shaped & wick-thread
lights the state becoming smoke

ever shifting substance
though it might be viscous.

Later waterruns for soft skin
for the foamy state

sanguine Jane studies
the liquid options of her body

turns and turns upon
Jane's site of dialogue

the ever present shadow
self slowly muddies

late waterrun to sleep
nerve endings greet

invisible white
noise of the social

if you need it
rain floods the room

delays at the threshold
sleep takes a handhold

fair of face/

d is full of

grace/ Wei

child full of woe/

far to go/

loving

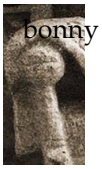
and giving/

works

for his living/

hat is born

on the Sabbath day/



bonny blithe, good

and gay.

DAILY

Wednesday Jane is woeful
coffee cups again

fears a hodgepodge
am I brave enough

to reshape Thursday
cries out

"our [bricolage] minutes
must be up to the minute"

Jane is rightly suspicious
of the overly functional

demean dull luxury
it is another blank faced Monday

coffee morning Jane thinks
where the weekday children?

Rain concrete posters curl
cups a sticky residue

it is Friday's loving arms
in (not) her building

Jane fights the deep lead edge
devoured by work

drinks the thick dark lie
and drinks it another

it is a chancy Tuesday
when you search for heroes

here your peers
dowdy drowned away

Jane weary
beneath the shoulder

take stock of your rivets
rivets echo suspicions

– mine turn dried tear litter
peel my daily body into matter –

difficult talk the rip tide
scale a rocky sea-bed

words gulf shared spaces
when I write these things

Jane's infrequent desire
to bear children ebbs.

It is any given Friday
before rationalisation

Jane figures
she's fingered by numbers

rent paid chairs owned
cliff edge proximity

threshold palmistry
tells a different story

– Jane was born at 9am
on a living Saturday

her lungs an 80s

late September gale.

It is broken hearted Wednesday
time now to blow

firecrackers fuse informal
remake organizing principals

unpick the murder-blur
bare blue Albion

keep a vulnerable eye on
those protected rights to protest

it is a Thursday
that took long to arrive

Jane makes index art
on the bosses time

re-vivifies dead text
reveals the paler project

Jane has a hunch
the system broke on purpose

tells us numbers but –
it is a bonny love-filled Friday

Janes are power producers
with bricolage community

they face the gulf
of sovereignty

navigate bi-cameral
pseudo-democracy

minuted bilabial trills
from the gallery

raised in gale and rayed
aloft our daily matter

it is Refuseday
the future is not a

shiny bullet
Strikeday's children scaffold

a bony resistance
assemble grand plans with

a hundred fishbone details
their minutes are up to the minute.

Come fair Monday
Jane roams a moral dream

riven bone structures
ancient river courses

break banked systems
on purpose

Jane studies
the language that laces

atomised heartache
steady accumulation

gradually breaks something
worth it.

at ak pat ak ak

bake me a cake as fast as you can

pat it and prick it and mark it with B

and bake it in the oven for baby and me

pat-a-cake pat-a-cake baker's man

bake me a cake as fast as you can

pat it and prick it and mark it with B

and bake it in the oven for baby and me

bake me

pat-a-cake

Clap Your Hands: 12 Steps ...

BREAD EATER

Gobble-gobble
Jane hungers

chair flesh
lyric nectar

narrow galley kitchen
turned at the doorway

Jane's lunch
materialises

do any of us know
how sandwiches grow?

The wheatfield
against Wall Street

white ocean liner
pleasure of cake icing

passes over
a wheatsheaf season

green grey blue
gold grey blue

reclaims a timescale
two blocks from the DOW Jones

swatch the size
of soft outline

against Italian
meringue clouds

reflected in site specific
glass dollars

dear bread
bears the brunt

gold is sewn
into river beds

in the beginning
there was a germ

Jane's wicked
small round pellet

how can we shoulder it?
Nothing more chilling

than the phrase
agrochemical industrial complex

do any of us really know
how stocks and shares

and equity grows?
Wheat prices level

the playing field
is covered against

glass knowledge
wouldn't you say

fruiting wheat
is progress?

But where are all
the baker's men?

Silkworm eggs and trapped bubbles
are seeds are delays

a seam struck generates chaos
silk is sewn on a roiling surface

when the Prime Minister says
wash up on our shores

he's checking the teeth
of his magnificent horses.

Jane chokes on
homely economies

encourages precipitation
shooting crystals into weathersystems

salt seeds gather
become heavy

"rainmakers"
how else do you party

incorporated sugars
of a big win at market?

COMPLEX KINSHIPS

in a classroom as I was teaching I took off my shoes in the cafeteria I took off my shoes at the edge of a stubble field I took off my shoes as I was driving I took off my shoes in WH Smiths I took off my shoes and then walked between the Bloomberg Building and the Bank of England I took off my shoes in the Bakery section of the Supermarket & the Booze aisle & the meat aisle & the frozen veg aisle & the checkout area I took my shoes off in a rescue centre for animals I took my shoes off in a farmyard in Devon I took off my shoes on the bi-weekly bus & the regional train & a small open topped ferry I took off my shoes in a much protested multi-storey carpark I took my shoes off on this little patch of grass under a silver birch tree at the end of my road and then walked onto the road I took my shoes off in a graveyard and walked

ADULT
CHILD
RFD

pet

I. LET'S FLY | LET'S FLOAT

please pay attention to
silence obtained by
achooo
a certain ridiculous little
object held in the hand
pat
I want to share with you
the correct way to pet your dog
insert the metal buckle
I want to instruct you
I want to follow you
the prayer for increased business
pet
this is a big prayer request
monthly basis
pat
we agree on the myth that
this rubber ring will save your life

Bombay Peru Acapulco Bay
Acapulco Bay
please pay attention
I pray that you have a concept of yourself

patpatpetpatpetpetpat
come along Bruno, do your business

help those who help themselves
to secure your seat
soothe aggravate or alarm
yes there are dos and don'ts
a man sneezes on newly stacked soap
a mongrel looks up
at the camera
in slo-mo

your business has the touch of all things
touching it now
you can do more
you can be more
you can help more
long slow strokes
yes there are
spreads the soap mixture
to attract attention
don't forget to wash your hands
automatically
on contact with water
all good things
scratching into the skin
breathe normally
it's such a coo coo day
pet your dog
long slow strokes with a bricklayer's trowel
personal space
sensitive to touch
the glistening surface slowly becomes matte
tightens the straps like this & this
gentle stroking when inserted
will bring great good
jet engines sound like
wonderful income
vacuum cleaners
further inflation

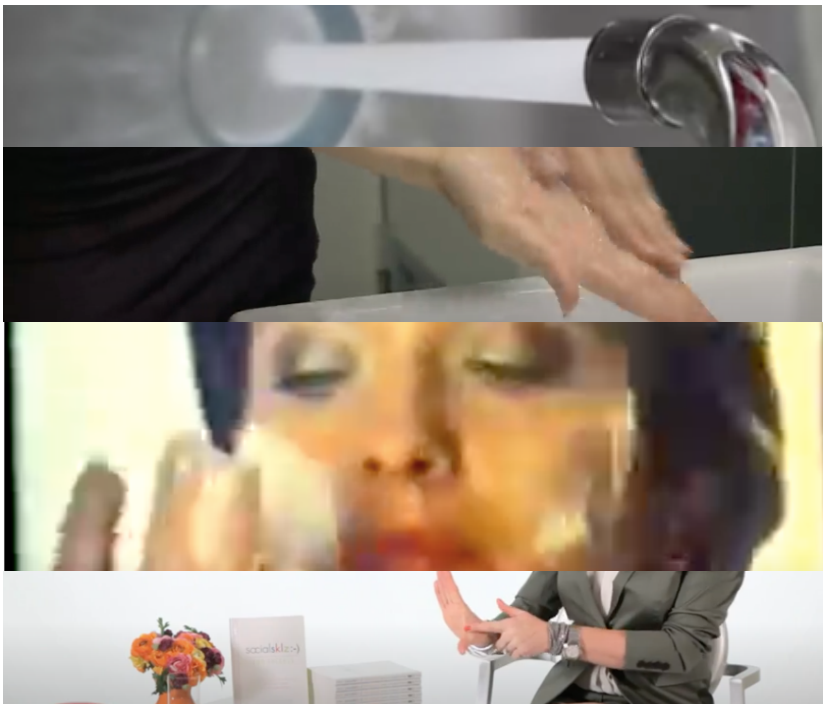
and your business is in this vortex of wonderful income
video of TSA touching my butt
strokes
patting the body is something
if by touch we mean exchange
outside the aircraft
as the cabin crew are now demonstrating

pet pet pet

you can tell it is extremely heavy
by the way he loads it onto his back
I pray that the great magnetic power of your business
pleasant pressure
flight excited
glistening surface slowly
c
a
bin
pre
ssu
re
loss of
cabin pressure
prayer for increased business
prayer for springtime life
every time I pray to St Christopher
fish-scale design
the truth behind
belly patting
shiny fur coats
Milanese catwalks
this really works
submissively rolling
soothe, aggravate, or alarm
avoid getting sick and spreading infections
long slow strokes
I want to share with you
wonderful income
spreads the soap mixture
air dried in Aleppo and
stamped with tiny hammers
achoo
this is oddly satisfying
cocks his head at the sound

I'm going to share with you
wreaths of bay leaves
my soap had a Nike footprint on it
the touch of yourself
Western people are too afraid of bacteria
the touch of all things
men move behind wooden slats
honeycombed stacks, honeycombed bricks
the tan dog on the tan sofa on the tan stone tiles
they will be drawn to you
touching attention
for the victorious
it is a magnetic energy
Bombay
Peru
Acapulco Bay Acapulco Bay
so that you can do good
the surface
tightens
please pay attention to
everyone you touch
this rubber ring
this ridiculous little object
this increased pressure
patpatpetpatpetpetpat
patpatpetpatpetpetpat
that lost personal space
my honeycombed soap
had goddess bacteria on it
patpatpetpatpetpetpat
I want to share with you
the touch of all things

touching it now
touching it now
patpatpetpatpetpetpat



take off your shoes
soft palm to
palm skin
a very expensive soap
Paragraph of water

scallop-shell ceiling
static light
mmm soft and smooth
I think I prefer
by the shore say
that old fisherman's prayer
pure white floating
rub hands palm to palm
to obtain a good quantity of foam
to lie down naked with his mouth to the ground
swore would be the last time
let the water run smoothly
number one you should be standing up
let the water run smoothly
laurel bay and olive
come from Turkey Lebannon

Let the soap speak!
palm to palm
with fingers interlaced
passed customs both ways
slipped right in after taxes
let the water run smoothly
left thumb clasped in right palm

Paragraph of rinsing

wash your wash your filthy
let the water run smoothly

to obtain a good quantity
rinse in dust in times of drought
rinse in ash rinse seven times until
interlaced
palm to
interlaced
palm
secure
roughly cut in cubes
& stamped
& shipped palm to
palm to palm
to palm to
palm palm palm palm palmpalmpalmpalm
papapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapapa

touching it directly
in dust in drought
in ash you should you should
be shaking the entire time
roughly
also, smile! pa-ching
if your wife complain
show me
smile!
yourself
your hands are now clean and safe

Paragraph of safety

make sure that you are shaking the entire time
let me
sometimes people say it's three shakes
but it's actually not
let me be borne along
commit my bones to water
soft skin
biodegradable clothing tallit or kafan

touching it directly
soft
saves our matter mixing
miserable that from sinners this

Paragraph of touch

you should be standing up
to lie down naked in the ground
your body is good
men and women make sure
touch the web of the other person's web
Fits every hand/ Fit for every hand
you're touching the web

bury me at holding hands point
at the needles spoil ground
fifty quid and an identity tag
pa-ching

Paragraph of touch

if you have a tricky last name
trim-ankled Nike
you might want to practice it
naked in the ground
you want to make sure that you're touching

make a great
tricky last name
run smoothly
you might want to practice
mirror soft skin

a very expensive need
soil grace
toilet paper does not purify
nor do wet wipes nor does bleach

how does your skin feel
touching it directly

shaking the entire time
you want to
show me your foot soles
cover up your mouth and nose

you want
strange men
sweets
make sure that your body is soft
sticky paws
don't forget to take off your shoes
ultra large
smile!
in front of the mirror
simultaneous resonant tones
conglomerate & coagulate
at the windowsill
this is considered the web
interlaced palm to
interlaced palm

my lords ladies and gentlemen,
it is now the moment we have all been waiting for

III. I AM QUITE A LOVING GIRL

experiments
indirect towing
dogs from overseas
wanting to please
the price of fame
a glass of champagne
great Pyrenees
Canadian grey wolves
Slovakian pet bereavement support services
ever golden pastoral economies
French bulldogs on Milanese catwalks – fur – coat – hair

the terrier man with the terrier face
residue of sweet pea and vanilla shampoo

I took off my clothes
in the cafeteria come on then, there's a good
glittering prizes of the dog world
upon the esplanade to creep
long fine refined head
perfect condition
in the forest
as I was driving
the picture of style and grace
wrapped a champion's golden turd
in the tangible film of petrochemical empire
happiest of breeds
perfect proportions
fulfilling the function for which it was bred
strong sturdy
big ribbed
deep chested

and strongly boned
Thessaloniki to Izmir fly
non-stop to Turin to Pisa to
Dubrovnik Tirana Ban fly non-stop
glittering prizes of the dog world
while on strike and at the picket line
I like to worship in a silent ring

clapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclap

the beaters
the bloody ones
trellis narratives of the trafficked
champion champion multi-champion

Icarus' waxwings harden
as they hit the water
the glittering business
geological layers
are epidermal
ghost sensation
gorgeous prerogative
spreading like
wildfire burning down firewalls
viral | vital | vivid
in France
in the British Isles
patted down
on the street
searching eye of the sun
Champion Hot Sensation Cowboy Prerogative
Champion Victory Wins Ghost Whisperer
Multi-Champion To Russia With Love
Betty Olga Shirley

lapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapclapc

bred in America
from Sweden he was British Isles
imported from France
ancestry country
ever golden
bright blocks
DNA linking little fingers
ladders of commerce
bred in France in Sunbury on Thames
in Russia in the United States
Finnish Swedish Norwegian
hugely glittering
discovery of body parts
did limb come from sea?
come fly to Thessaloniki
for twenty quid
terrier grace
exhausted champion
Roxy Ronnie and Reggie
Bruno Bowie
Gromit
Cleo Yeah? Yeah.
I think he's a Billy
tall white cliffs blue sky grey sea
smooth white sand blue sea green trees
white flecked sea grey sky black scree

I gotta do this this is what I I love to do
she's always given me 100%

using myth to wash away origin
bad days
glittering prizes
happy go lucky
trellis logic
moss and blackberry stitch
they look like trouble
some poor souls

Aran mothers spot their drowned sons
and this rather portly Gromit!
clinical obesity
Bruno
bit whiffy isn't she?
happy fatso
Billy
to Dalaman Come fly with me,
let's fly let's fly Lamaca Beirut Paphos non-stop to
Rhodes to Athens
via Petra
to my home, in Devon
darting glances
thrust through spaces
deep chested family pet
Roxy you're fat!
you're back where you belong
lucky to be alive
Betty you're gorgeous
gregarious back-slaps
down the bone esplanade
tread to level
palm to palm
she's exhausted and not coping
come on then! who's a good girl?
wrong
Olga
imported ancestry
training idiot pear trees
love my crosshatched heart
you're fat
Shirley
you're gorgeous

from an old grave to a new grave down a gravel path I took my shoes off on Margate Sands in March and in May and in October I took off my shoes by the Dead Sea via Petra I took my shoes off in the toilet of my nephew's nursery I took my shoes off in Turin I took my shoes off in a home for the elderly as I was talking to a blind lady I took my shoes off in the toilet of the Ritz and looked at my toes as I ate a finger sandwich I took off my shoes in the English department at my university & the Law school & the school of Architecture I took off my shoes in the house of an enemy I took off my shoes in a scout hut & then walked to the house of an enemy I took off my shoes in several cathedrals I took my shoes off in Spain next to the grave of Franco I took my shoes off and stepped on a fossil I took my shoes off and put my toes in water I put my toes on a hand on a back in the crook of your neck I took my shoes off and rubbed salt in the soles of my feet I took off my shoes at a party I took my shoes off in the mortuary at the funeral home while they were talking to my brother I took my shoes off at my desk and rested my feet on the wooden bar I took my shoes off at the airport when I was required to and again when I was asked not to I took off my shoes when it was dawning somewhere else because the treeline was passing over the sun I took my shoes off as the air was filled with hyacinths which is the smell of anticipation and when all I could smell was heat which was burningwood

A MEDIATED AND PARTIAL ZONE

ENCOUNTERS

light a candle as evening falls
domestic and unavoidable, who are you
in relationship to this space? Passenger
to paternal law
rings spectacular resistance
touching a relic that blessed 'clean' governance

footpaths invent themselves
waterruns in the public square,
different alphabets lap lap lap my mum
and I talk about my sister's eggs
I push at the scrim with my eyes closed
my nephews are tactile and puppyish

with my back to the core I'm looking out
a truck vibrates by to Dover
silences are blocked passages in our gut intelligence
I keep on taking my shoes off
in private
we hear our neighbours, sound sutures us

I plant bulbs because I'm in love
with the closeness of promises somewhere my
mother turns her attention to logistics
we drink coffee from a flask in the crown of a
fallen Ash I won't write the difficulty of being
numerous my hands are framing the daily

between feast days and tax returns are concrete
blocks paving slabs iron sheeting and a weapon pit
a baby is crying in a different
part of this building
I'm talking about acts of horticultural
and civic care

I've made a triangle with my fingers tenderly
trying to enclose what I mean
holding you all at arm's length
I can come in the time it takes you to clean
your teeth turning my face to the ground so I can
bear witness to the future

EQUIVALENT MATERIALS

*

hours ooze contains 'we' and 'was'

now we threshold diagonally eave deaf peeping

cottony holding place we're bookshelf people

shoulder part of the building envelope

hold pronounced 'house'

*

echo no *no* no *no* come hold mine

name a turned tied

testing time can only opt in

turned hand linked to pocket

homely or holy or homily

*

weeping length of wood

pliant willow casket pint accomplice

pinup trial the worst of

both non-porous worlds

brick shock refusing minor outrage

*

broke what belongs

speak friend crack apart the sea

strip ready, soft bough

sticky municipal finger

my rumbling belly your fluorescent leap

*

arcade skinned rabbit aloft said
maybe a public chair thin sunslip for
seeds borne on sticky flypaper
dragged blinking somehow shared
particles feather our ice flows

*

indistinct length thin lip connector rivet

golden marble eyeball splinter

gobstopper whisperer readdressing

the ground

blinking pin drop rootling strip stump

*

delightful eyelid liquidity russet dyed

strip to origin plain metal body

rabbit eyes in the rabbit light

shared outline

'your' safety is important to 'us'

*

seeking safer passage grub grown

slivers level against your plinth

decomposition hold

fast roundel

transgressive orgasm dug down groan

*

room crux interleaving tones scrunched

dime tissue secret rood passage

slim pliant length

cuddle picturewindow ululate

cupped around juicy orange lungs

*

evil eye mouth box pretty little wreaths

silent keeper draught excluder

laugh dowdy mistress hider

struggled via an equivalent

dove through the wicked window

*

locker-room talk
white wiped tiles
ha ha ha
indistinct outline
rejoice empire dissenter

little imposter
lingering
at the window
raptor
doorway witness

*

exhibit on a sliding scale

pretty street boundary

as a white plastic bag

mere market meat

rackety

craw stuck

terror

vibratory coin edge

*

slough white wave ruffs slap slap moan

treble the knots on the sliding rope

fly beat disturbance

changing face of tender

troubled wager re-re-returning

*

deft turning

toward outer galaxy

soaring and ruining clouds and roots

gold against wallstreet

mourning low yielding crops

*

untoward root slab

ear a small bridge sliding pitch thatch

held wheat and street dirt

wreathed in fear puncture

a human tooth micro anything handshake

*

eatery attached muck room

shining gloom bridge silent elements

plate glass goblet ting—

many more

died at the greed root

*

neither linen thinner niche

slow kitchen explosions

different metals sing

silent bread histories

could be a place of spinning or making

*

unlucky hand

shackles bite down on slim ankles

a gift going both ways

different metals between paychecks

words and laws and locks do that

*

blinking gorgeous

metallic desire in the mouth

pretty little gift

dove through the mirror

struck off the back teeth

*

achey bathroom basket

avocado apricot peach pits

pearled songbird

wipe damp tiles

submerged mouth stones

*

shimmer stretching mirror

windless

shoreline stones writhing mass

crabs sandflies lugworms drone

entangled faces looking away

*

assembled

shoulder the roof peak

milky spicy sharp

drone drunk into being

the liquid call arrested crystalline bodies

*

donor rind renewed

molluscs on ice chips liquid against

whatever saline mountain pearling

seeds borne on a fleshy bed

germinate with me

*

mapped mountain cold cold coin edge

borne on the high wind

secret wheat futures

metal presence between handshakes

feels weird and bad

*

tempting fire promises
delicious softened ligaments
tenacious bone
ugly presence of murder
at eyeline or lawn level

*

how to shoulder the teeth futures

making eye contact hands in continual motion

speak boney truth

buckle under it's ok

readdress the ground

*

dried at tide turn

picking tippety tip taps

chagrined at a molecular level

invisible contact with the roadway

contract to a pinprick waiting

*

black seeds borne on hot air

thunderclap handshake

facing inward or out palm taps on

sandstone slabs high notes

scything through thick air

*

we tend to meet at the end
rendering fat to liquid
tarmac slaps skipping ropes
near the patch of rushes
gorgeously mouthing candied peel

*

seeking shells we come up with washers
gutters between crop rows whole
moon fat and waxy
mind how you plate your dish
we know 'harvest' means dominion

*

shells all crusted over buttery tasting promises

dead metals

between sworn enemies

some kind of dead pledge

still biting into slim dates

feared and thrived at handfast

*

pliant waterrun pillowy and kind

rare equivalent to hours

collared on a long walk sucking motion

webs as networks as out of date maps

condense into milky opals

*

always always partial

now moving out toward another globe

map a daily lengthening a fish and chip supper

steps into lemony sunlight

here I am

*

for now little bread biter

we're wild grass people

waiting on the rushcutters

grubbied council vans hold the tar rate

baked in a bottomless pie and ate it

NOTES

PATERNOSTER SQUARE:

'tender, tangled, violent…', Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, 2014 (p.59)

Language throughout borrowed from Ruth Siddall, 'Geology in St Paul's churchyard and Paternoster Square', 2015

Thanks to R.A Villanueva for inventing & sharing the 'paternoster' poem.
These poems are for The Temp

HARBINGERS & PASSWORDS:

'who are these…', Hildegarde von Bingen, *Ordo Virtutum*, trans. Linda Marie Zaerr

'lay my head down…', Diane Cluck, *Sara*

Language throughout borrowed from Sarah Hewett, *The Peasant Speech of Devon*, 1892

For my late father & in homage to my mother's lateness

WATERRUN–DAILY–BREADEATER:

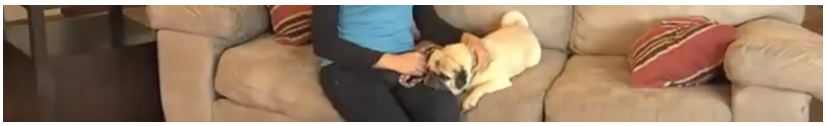
'Waterrun collage': R.H Quaytman, *חקקן, Chapter 29*, 2015; David Hockney, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*, 1972; Agnes Martin, *Summer*, 1964

'Daily collage': Anni Albers, 'Plate 27. Loom, Santa Ana Hueytlalpan', *On Weaving*, 1965; Linda Seidel, 'Sleeping Magi', *Legends in Limestone: Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun*, 1999 (p.126)

'Breadeater collage': Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield - A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan*, 1982; 'How to clap your hands: 12 steps with pictures', *wikiHow*

COMPLEX KINSHIPS:

'The Right Way to Pet a Dog'



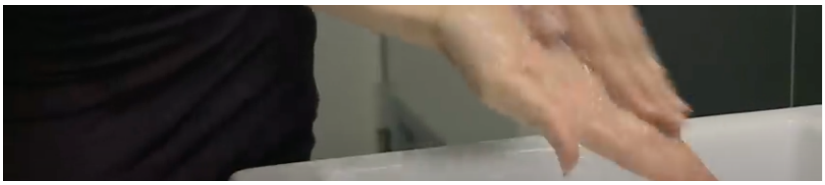
'Nablus Soap Factory 2014'

'IAOT- In-Flight Safety Demonstration

'Prayer for Increased Business'

'Paul O Grady For The Love Of Dogs S03E01'

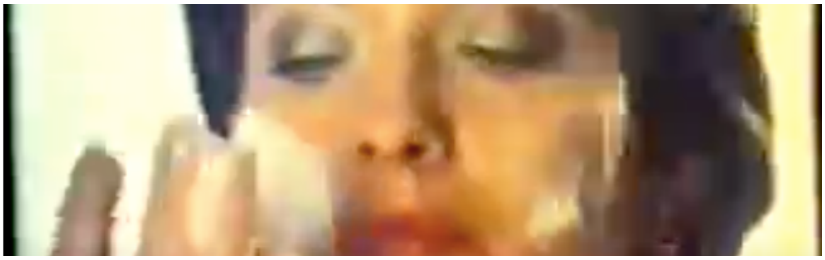
‘WHO: How to Handwash? With Soap and Water’



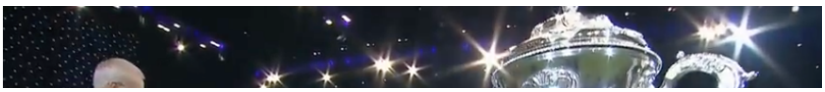
‘How to shake hands and introduce yourself | Good Manners’

‘Water Sounds Sleep’

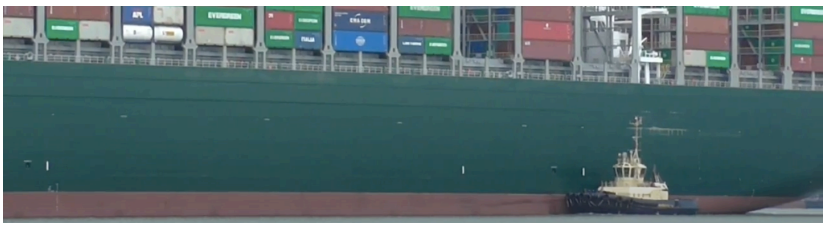
‘Camay Soap TV Advert, UK, 1970s’



‘Best in Show Judging | Crufts 2018’



‘EVER GOLDEN sounds horn on departure from Felixtowe 9/8/18’



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Betsy Porritt Thesis

Link to audio visual works:
https://betsyporritt.wordpress.com/