

**POEM (2002)**

Benjamin envisaged in the 'monad' or in the Heaney poem, or even a series of individual moments stacked up one after each other in a kind of 'flicker-book' version of history, or like Duchamp's 'Nude Descending a Staircase' where the movement becomes a series of stills, but moments that are linked and connected both horizontally, through space, and vertically through time. For Massey 'there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, or not, potential links which may never be established. Loose ends and ongoing stories' (p. 107). In this conceptualization of space it 'can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established' (p. 107).

It is hard to think of a better description of the Raworth poem and in this configuration of space and time the distinctions between centres and margins, figure and ground, and events and their locations, dissolve into a series of relationships. This is not, however, the depthless present of post-modernism, but a reconfiguration which acknowledges interconnectedness, and contains within itself the means of its own deconstruction. Power structures are revealed as much as concealed and normative assumptions questioned through processes of coincidence and juxtaposition.

## 5 Space, Place and Identity

If identity is pragmatically linked to our place of origin and of residence, language, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, then in recent years identities have become more fluid and impermanent as the world's population becomes more mobile and as our experiences increasingly take place, through information and communication technologies, in the places where the self is present. Recent critical theory has explored the relationship between the idea of an essential identity and one explained by its relationship to others. Gender, sexuality, age, and ethnic and national identity amongst others are said to be a series of constructed or performed rather than inherent characteristics.

A relative and non-essential notion of identity is mirrored in contemporary notions of place as expressed by Massey and others. A place is identified through its relationship to other places and, as a consequence, is unstable. It will shift under different pressures, change from different perspectives and respond to different contexts. Identity in literary works is similarly problematized. Terry Eagleton talks about the way in which, after structuralism, 'The confident bourgeois belief that the isolated individual was the fount of all meaning has taken a sharp knock' (Eagleton 1996, p. 93). Bob Perelman refers to 'The lyric I of the voice poem' as 'a prime object of attack in early L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing theory and practice' (Perelman 1996, p. 109). Somewhat more ironically Rae Armantrout refers to 'the stifled yawn' which greets yet another discussion of 'the speaking subject in contemporary poetry' (Armantrout 1999, p. 43) in her essay on Fanny Howe's poem 'Q' in *A Folio for Fanny Howe* (Green 1999).

For some writers explorations of the relationship between ideas of an essential and performed or constructed identity inform both the form and the content of the poetry and the idea of language as a form of self-expression. The more spatial practices of 'language' writing, for example, draw on a poetics of form that denies notions of identity as unproblematically expressed through language, and resists final interpretation and closure through an exploration of concepts of deferred meaning and signification, and through an examination of the social function of the language system. In his essay 'Writing Social Work and Political Practice', Bruce Andrews echoes Burroughs on the 'cut-up' when he refers to the way in which, in language writing 'the poetics would be those of subversion: an anti-systemic detonation of settled relations, an anarchic liberation of energy flows. Such flows... are thought to exist underneath and independent from the system of language. That system... entraps them in codes and grammar' (Andrews and Bernstein 1984, p. 134).

Yet in denying the expressive norms of the language system, practices that support local and regional identities, they could be said to embrace those same spatializing processes that support global capitalism, processes of flushing out historical and local meaning through a process of homogenization. The poet Jeremy Prynne, in a letter to the Canadian poet Steve McCaffery, also questions the illusion of freedom that might result from the process of deconstructing the language system:

But in the political question of reference to a world in which social action is represented linguistically and its consequences marked out by economic function and personal access to social goods... the ludic syntax of a language system is mapped on to determinations and coercions which by invasion cast their weights and shadows parasitically into the playing fields. I do not believe that freedom from this aspect of the social order is more than illusory... No free signifiers: no unvalorized process: no free lunch.

(Prynne 2000, p. 41)

However playfully or procedurally the writer tries to divert the 'weights and shadows' cast by the social usage of language in order to create writing free of the 'social order', they still get through. The

subject may, in part, be the subject of language, but deconstructing the language does not liberate the subject. The subject, writer or reader, performs their identity within the constrictions of those 'weights and shadows'.

In 'Lure, 1963' Denise Riley uses a series of cultural references, drawn from the fashion industry and popular songs, to locate and identify herself:

Navy near-black cut in with lemon, fruity bright lime green.  
I roam around around around around acidic yellows, globe  
oranges burning, slashed cream, huge scarlet flowing  
anemones barbaric pink singing, radiant weeping When  
will I be loved?

(Caddel and Quartermain 1999, p. 211)

She performs her gender within ideologically produced sexualities, where the 'I' in the poem is both subject and object. As a 'lure' she is dressing herself in bright colours to attract others, in the same way that a fisherman will attach coloured feathers to a hook to make a 'lure' for fish. Her expressions of romantic love are constructed via the language of pop songs that are collaged in the poem, a process that provides a critical distance for the examination of her own experience. She is testing herself out against the world, the songs suggest, getting a sense of her identity by comparing it with others in a series of relationships. There is no sense for Riley that representation through language is an undistorted process of self-expression. The 'I's in the extract above are both those that are in the pop songs, and the person that is wearing the 'Navy near-black... ' yet, as Prynne points out, there is no sense that the deconstructive process of examining her own cultural production will free her 'self' from those 'weights and shadows'.

Judith Butler is similarly ambivalent about the relationship between language and identity when she says:

I do not believe that poststructuralism entails the death of autobiographical writing, but it draws attention to the difficulty of the 'I' to express itself through the language that is available to it. For this 'I' that you read is in part a consequence of the grammar that

governs the availability of persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this 'I' possible. This is the bind of self-expression, as I understand it.

(Butler 1999, p. xxiv)

It is this tension, between language as a means of self-expression, the self as a construct of language, and the poem as a constructed object with an existence independent of the author that provides a framework of ideas within which contemporary poetry operates. This is a framework that brings together ideas of authorship, of the lyric self and of the poem as 'construct', ideas of the space of the self and the space of the text.

Some familiar theoretical texts from the middle of the twentieth century develop a relationship between writing, space and the self as author. Roland Barthes in 'Death of the Author' refers to writing as 'that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' (Barthes 1984, p. 142). For Barthes, as it is for Lefebvre and later Foucault, it is the body in the performative act of writing, the physical act of writing itself in a specific time and place, which produces a positive space. Once written, the text becomes 'neutral' and 'negative', an abstraction only brought back to life by the performative act of reading. But while the writing may begin with the self in a particular time and place, that process, too, involves others; writing is not 'original' but intertextual:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

(Barthes 1984, p. 146)

Writing and reading may involve the situated embodiment of the text, but they are not solitary activities and are more complex processes involving each text in a network of relationships with other texts.

Foucault picks up on Barthes's reference to negative space when in 'What is an Author' he says:

It is not enough to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. Instead we must locate the space left empty... follow the distribution of gaps and branches, watch for the openings.

(Foucault 1991, p. 118)

For Foucault the 'death of the author' has not resulted in a closed 'negative' but opened up a range of possibilities, a series of gaps within the text where each one provides a potential for 'travelling' through the text in different directions. Pierre Joris, in his essay 'Notes Toward a Nomadic Poetics', develops the idea of a relationship between identity and language that is in a constant state of assembling, dissembling and reassembling through the analogy of travel, producing poetry that is always on the move and resisting location and a fixed identity. He celebrates the multifaceted, the endless idiolects within any structure of language and, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the nomad and the rhizome, asserts that all languages are foreign to people without a place, and that poets need to free themselves from the 'prison house of the mother tongue' by adopting a multilingualism:

A nomadic poetics will cross languages, not just translate. But write in all or any of them... it is essential now to push this matter further, again, not as 'collage' but as a material flux of language matter, moving in and out of semantic and non-semantic spaces... a lingo-cubism.

(Joris 2003, p. 38)

He goes on to discuss the matter of identity in poetry more directly:

Barthes' doleful sense that 'the author is dead'. Were it so that would only transcendentalize him or her, for who else is god but the dead author, *deus absconditus*?... What has happened is that the author has multiplied, has lost its, his her identity as singular subject... We now have to say 'I is many others'. A nomadic poetics will thus explore ways in which to make - and think about - a poetry that takes into account not only the manifold of languages and locations but also of selves each one of us is constantly becoming.

(Joris 2003, p. 43)

The nomadic, and its metaphoric representation as rhizomatic, exists between space and place and combines both, and Joris proposes an aesthetic not of collage, but of the rhizome – a root system that follows its own way and many other possible ways, a system that is connected but not a closed circuit.

All three writers use spatial metaphors to describe the relationship between a text and its author. For Barthes the shift is from the serial linear text, issuing from the point of the author's pen, to a multi-dimensional space. Foucault perceives the possibility of metaphorically entering that space, as readers, to hook up to the different possibilities now that the authoritative meaning has been removed. Joris invokes a more organic metaphor of following a root system, moving in and out of semantic and non-semantic spaces. What they also have in common is the idea that one can get inside a text, become part of it and, by extension, as readers, constructors of an individual text within the many possibilities that both its spatial construction and a spatial reading can bring. It is as if the author has been disconnected from the many power points of the text which hang, fizzing in the air, for the reader to come along and plug themselves into, in an endless number of different combinations. Works like that of Tom Raworth's 'All Fours' have a variety of apparent perspectives, making any link with a stable identity, or time or a place arbitrary and transitory:

though it might have been chronic  
 around his neck and shoulders  
 filled with thick high weeds  
 the road was lined with stone  
 almost entranced she started  
 ordering quantities of everything  
 down the windows of your station  
 combed and perfectly normal  
 bees through blood and perhaps  
 night air while we rode back  
 followed him to the front porch  
 and the chimney bricks were fallen

(Raworth 2003, p. 456)

The first three stanzas have three different pronouns as their object or subject. The poem does not inexorably narrow down the possible meanings of words and phrases but sets up innumerable new 'offshoots', each one containing a variety of possibilities. The 'I' within the poem is not simply fragmented but seems to keep appearing and reappearing in a different guise, often referred to in the third person. A sense of place is similarly difficult to identify, despite the architectural references. The title seems to refer to the form of the poem and that it is written in four-lined stanzas (an earlier publication had a cover on which there were 16 collages arranged into a square). It could also be an extended joke running on from the title of another collection, *Tottering State*, where the adult is reduced to the level of the baby on 'all fours', a reading reinforced by a later part of the poem where there is reference to 'a lovely little thing with eyes/.../ shambling on...' (Raworth 2003, p. 456). The poem also contains numerous references to a building, suggesting 'four walls'. All these references remain possibilities within the poem, but the relationship between the population of the poem and its geography are never resolved. The 'blown cell with a dusty bulb' in the final stanza seems to indicate both a point of origin for the poem, as if the order of the material is the order of memory, and the origin of the poem as the dusty cell, until that meaning is destabilized by the next line in which 'an instant to blank shining glass' (p. 456) suggests the cell might be the cell of a flash bulb for a camera, and the instant a moment amongst others.

Sometimes it seems as if there is either no self at all in the poem, or too many potential selves. Another Raworth poem from the 1990s appears to have the self written out of it, whether in the first person or as a third-person character. It is a poetry that lacks consistent names or pronouns, such as the poem 'UNABLE TO CREATE CARRIER' from the 1999 collection *MEADOW*:

pigeons, explained the supremo, perhaps  
 basins of attraction and so  
 easy to identify undefended  
 footnotes to a moral atom  
 forced-to show traces of serious style

interacting among enzymes to undergo  
ritual sabbaticals for a rush of air

(Raworth 2003, p. 539)

The poem's neutral voice is not conversation and has only traces of address, despite the reported speech of the 'supremo'. Is it someone talking to the reader? If so, where can they be located in the text? What is their perspective? A clue comes in the third and final stanza where someone is 'guarding time in an overnight bag/ which according to the pronoun you/ surpasses the apprehension of thought/ represented on screen by a halo' (Raworth 2003, p. 539). If there is anyone talking within the poetry, or if there is any mode of address, then it often seems to be the poetry talking to itself within a matrix of responses. It is not 'you' who suggest(s) that 'time' 'surpasses the apprehension of thought', but the 'pronoun you'. It is no single you, but every and all of you as well as the word 'you'. The indeterminate nature of the second person is interrogated, as is the incapacity of thought to retain or perceive time. Thoughts may be 'carrier pigeons' in a 'rush of air', but they are also the experience the thoughts are unable to apprehend, as well as 'footnotes' forced to show traces of 'serious style' (which support 'ritual sabbaticals'). The mind begins to leap backwards and forwards between the verses, trying to make links and close them, but the poetry remains stubbornly open: each time an identity begins to be developed it is pushed aside or broken up in the movement of the poem. Raworth's point, of course, is that identity is not stable, and that a lyric poem which suggests a single perspective from a fixed identity is itself involved in the manipulation of embodied experience in order to produce a poem which may 'capture the moment' or 'make sense' out of a particular event.

If there is no single and direct relationship, which can transcend space and time, between language and an empirical reality it is trying to express, a range of potential relationships exist. Language is not simply something that reveals an *a priori* or external truth or fact, a neutral tool through which 'we' express our 'selves' but, even when syntactically arranged, has a number of possible syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships in a particular context. Identity, and our social and cultural identity is at least in part a product of language

just as our language is a product of that identity, does not naturally reside within the self, but is located in our historical and spatial relationships with others and will change according to the context in which we find ourselves. Identities become fluid. The implication of this for a poetry of personal expression is that the poem is not, and never can be, an expression of a pre-existing identity through a carefully selected vocabulary.

In the 1982 poem 'Mirror's Song' (Tuma 2001, p. 736) Liz Lochhead describes the way in which she fragments the socially constructed self through smashing her reflection in the mirror. The mirror, according to Foucault, is both a utopia, 'a placeless place... an unreal virtual space... that enables me to see myself there where I am absent' and a heterotopia as it 'exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy' (Foucault 1986, p. 24). The mirror confirms absence (I am over there) and presence (I can see myself and my connections with the space that surrounds me). Lefebvre talks about the mirror as representing both repetition and difference; within the mirror the 'Ego is liable to "recognize" itself in the "other", but it does not in fact coincide with it'. It is a 'reflection which yet generates an extreme difference' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 185), in which everything within the reflection is inverted. Lochhead sees her 'other' self within the mirror and sets up an opposition between the two, with the poem told in the voice of the mirror:

Smash me looking-glass glass  
coffin, the one  
that keeps your best black self on ice.

(Tuma 2001, p. 736)

The mirror is a 'glass coffin', with the body on display but immobile. Once smashed 'she'll whirl out like Kali', the Indian goddess of destruction, the new self reducing the old to a list of contents in her 'alligator mantrap handbag'. In the final stanza, having fragmented her public image through smashing the mirror and naming and revealing the objects that constructed her, she enters public space in her new identity. Her construction as 'feminine', by 'the/tracts and the adverts, shred/ all the wedding dresses, snap/ all the spike heeled icicles' (Tuma 2001, p. 737), while providing her with a

public persona, also kept her apart from her community of 'daughters' and 'mothers'. Her concerns become the more political interests in wars and Greenham Common, and Lochhead discovers an essential feminine self, able to move more effectively into the public space.

Yet Lefebvre is critical of Lacan's use of the visual reflection in the mirror as a way of locating the subject in space. For Lacan the pre-language infant sees itself as complete in the mirror, in contrast to its physical fragmentation in a 'real' world in which it cannot yet properly explore. The infant's sense of a 'real' embodied experience is lost during the development of language, a process of abstraction, and through the 'law of the father' as exemplified by the phallus. This visual and conceptual understanding of the relationship between subject and space continues, for Lacan, through to the subject's entry into the symbolic order of language. For Lefebvre, on the other hand, it is the body and the body's movement through the world that produces space and in which the subject's knowledge of the world is situated. To return to another distinction of Lefebvre's, the reflection in the mirror is a signifier, not a signified, and therefore a 'representation of space'; it is not the embodied experience of 'representational space'. Similarly, subject formation through the symbolic order of language is, for Lefebvre, an abstraction which creates a 'yawning gap that separates this linguistic mental space from the social space wherein language becomes practice' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 5).

Lefebvre compares the directly lived and more concrete relationship to space of earlier civilizations (their 'representational space') with the modern tendency to develop visual 'representations' of space through a process of abstraction. This process of abstraction is one in which the mind, rather than the body, 'produces' the space. In pre-modern society for 'seasonally migrant herders . . . directions in space and time were inhabited' and the 'networks of paths and roads made up a space just as concrete as that of the body - of which they were in fact an extension' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 193). In modern society this direct relationship with space, according to Lefebvre, becomes lost:

the architectural and urbanistic space of modernity tends precisely towards this homogenous state of affairs, towards a place of confusion and fusion between geometrical and visual which inspires a kind of physical discomfort. Everything is alike. Localization - and lateralization - are no more . . . it is [also] the space of blank

sheets of paper, drawing boards, plans, sections, elevations, scale models, geometrical projections and the like. Substituting a verbal, semantic, or semiological space for such a space only aggravates its shortcomings. A narrow and desiccated rationality of this kind overlooks the core and foundation of space, the total body, the brain, gestures and so forth. It forgets that space does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible - readable realm, but that it is first of all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements).

(Lefebvre 1991, p. 200)

Lefebvre puts the body, a body that produces the space around itself, at the heart of ideas about space and identity. He sees the reclamation of the body, from the Cartesian mind/body split, as the key to reclaiming space from the nation-state and its systems and a global capitalism which seeks to divorce the body from the space it produces and which has produced it. The pre-verbal gesture is one way in which he explains this. Gestures, rather than thoughts 'lie at the origin of language' and 'embody ideology and bind it to practice' (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 214, 215). Writing itself, the act of moving a pen across a page, becomes both gestural and a result of abstraction via the language system. Finally, 'bodies themselves generate spaces, which are produced by and for their gestures' (p. 216).

For Lefebvre, therefore, the individual produces space through their senses, that is, what is within hearing, eyesight, touch, smell and so on. This production of space is from a certain perspective and a change of position of the self changes the space. As the body moves, it produces new spaces and objects pass from obscurity into light. The outer production of space through sensual apprehension is matched by an inner space, both physical and a state of consciousness, and this internal space develops from childhood into adulthood. The skin becomes a surface that, although liable to penetration, acts as both a barrier between the inner and outer space and provides a closure of the self. The skin is a boundary. It is also a means of identification and recognition; appearance is one source of our difference from others and marks out age, gender, social status and nationality.

The poet Lee Harwood frequently draws on a relationship between the visual, the optic, and the haptic, the communicative sense of

touch, in his poems about North Wales. In 'September Dusk by Nant Y Geallt' (Harwood 2004, p. 397), for example, he moves from 'The scent' of bog myrtle as it is 'brushed through' and when it is 'pressed between fingers', before moving to a more visual description of 'A flat moor – the colours muted'. Another poem, 'Cwm Uchaf' (Harwood 2004, pp. 408–9), begins when 'someone yells from a window/ down into the dark street'. This situated and contemporary activity is set against the imagined space and timescale of the moon where 'in a vast barren crater/ a rock very slowly crumbles'. The poem contains references to the death of Harwood's friend, Paul Evans, in a climbing accident with Harwood, and draws comparisons between the importance of the 'here and now' and the finality of death. The poem then moves from 'A fuzz of stars' which 'sweeps across the world' as a visual phenomenon which is 'partly known and unknown', to the specific and detailed location of an imagined 'fragile bone sphere cracked and shaky'. The fall of the body, 'tumbling down', is compared to the feelings of the survivor and his 'stumbling descent through the day's maze' and the abstract visual images of the night sky become a symbol for the acceptance of the dead body into all space and all time in the 'stars arms remote embrace', before the detailed and located imagery of the drops/ of rich red blood' and the physicality of the 'thick orange bag on a hospital trolley'. The sense of physical presence, of the haptic experience of 'thick', is immediately set against the redemptive visual, a necessary removal from the immediate pain of death, to 'The faint glitter of the rocks mica the sky/ catching the eye'. The poem returns to its starting place in Brighton, where 'the waves' are 'going nowhere in particular', and are compared to the loss of blood in 'a gradual leaking away'. Through his combination of visual distance, and the sense of embodied presence, Harwood is able to combine both the physicality of the death and the intellectual and emotional response to that death. He can say 'this is how it feels', and simultaneously ask 'what does it mean'.

Just as there is an arbitrary relationship and, for poets, a creative gap, between language and meaning, there exist creative possibilities in the relationship with others, and one of those others is the self as it is perceived and represented in poetry. One function of contemporary lyric poetry is to know and represent more about ourselves and different ways of representing the world. It is the place from which many poets start, in a process of discovery and loss, a process in which

self-identification can be both the end point and a consequence of writing.

Marjorie Perloff describes a lyric as a 'short verse utterance in which a single speaker expresses, in figurative language, her/his subjective vision of the truths of moments, situations and relationships' (Perloff 1985, p. 173). Thirty years earlier, Olson referred negatively to the 'lyrical interference of the individual as ego' (Olson 1997, p. 247) as a restriction against which 'open-field' poetry had to work. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* traces the genealogy of the contemporary lyric back to Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and Hegel's idea of the lyric as containing 'intensively subjective and personal expression' (Preminger 1975). Within the contemporary lyric, according to much of the argument, the form and content of the poetry are fused to form a personal expression of deeply held feelings. In spatial terms the lyric is described as a closed form, its practitioners using the poem for 'self-expression', as against the 'open' form of more experimental writing.

Lyric expressions of identity are often most clearly demonstrated in explicitly oppositional work by those whose identity is oppressed, denied, or under threat. Recent examples run through the work of women writers from the 1970s and 1980s and the work of writers from minority cultures, particularly first-generation immigrants into the United Kingdom. The other indigenous minorities in the United Kingdom (the Welsh, Scottish and Irish) have all used lyric poetry as an affirmation of identity, as ways of sustaining, defining and refining their national and linguistic allegiances. Other poets, particularly those within dominant cultures, are more inclined to speculate on the nature of their identity and in the case of the more experimental poets, who are often explicitly critical of national or cultural allegiances, happy to write themselves off the map rather than stake a claim to their own space. Such distinctions between poetry are, in the twenty-first century, increasingly difficult to map, and I have some sympathy for Peter Barry's view in *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* that there is now a 'widespread preoccupation on the part of poets of all persuasions today with more-or-less "experimental" explorations of such things as: linguistic registers, implied voices' (Barry 2000, p. 12). His conclusion is that 'To imagine that the anxious or celebratory meta-poetics of the deconstructed subject are still the exclusive preserve of an always excluded avant-garde is to be

twenty years behind the times' (p. 12). It is a useful reminder that the circulation of ideas is both faster and more widespread than ever, and that to stamp your foot and identify your position within an oppositional binary between a mainstream that is assured of its place in the world and an avant-garde that is critical and experimental almost certainly means you'll be either mown down or left in the dust by more mobile forces.

Jo Shapcott's poem 'Phrase Book' draws on a tension between invasive external forces and the desire to discover or retain an inner self as expressed by language. In the poem she uses material from the phrase book of the title and the language of the Gulf War of the early 1980s to demonstrate the way language itself is contaminated:

I'm standing here inside my human skin,  
which will do for a Human Remains Pouch  
for the moment. Look down there (up here)  
Quickly. Slowly. This is my own front room

where I'm lost in the action, live from a war  
on screen. I am an Englishwoman, I don't understand you.

(Tuma 2001, p. 843)

On the one hand the tension in the poem seems to reside in the way in which the personal space of the speaker in the poem is invaded, whether actually, through the media, or potentially, through smart bombs. Her Englishness, as determined by her language, becomes open to doubt, and her language, based on random phrases, becomes fractured and incoherent. On the other hand, Keith Tuma in his analysis of the poem in *Fishing by Obstinate Isles* points out the way in which the reader is drawn into the parody of the 'Englishwoman', the way the reader is 'flattered, asked to join the poet in mocking the speaker' (Tuma 1998, p. 199). The repetition of 'let me pass' is significant, referring to the desire of a 'phrase book' user to pass herself off as an Englishwoman, as well as the more mundane meaning of letting someone pass by. The poem, rather than a discussion of the relationship between language and consciousness and the role of language in the construction of national identity, becomes an exploration of the relationship between the implicit author and the person who foolishly tries to 'pass' as an 'Englishwoman'. While there are different

strands within the poem, its entirety is not located in the more distant reaches of the discourses it contains. The poem appears inclusive, as if it is seeking to include those discourses within its frame, but the phrase-book language and military jargon, rather than being used as a way of unsettling ideas about relationships between language, experience and identity, simply become part of the tool box of the unspoken 'I' of the poem, a kind of lyrical 'implied' author, who is distancing those other discourses in order to discover, support and retain an essential self who understands the 'real' Englishwoman.

### Catherine Walsh and Eavan Boland

Despite having some sympathy with Barry's assertion that varieties of poetry now experiment with the relationship between language and identity, it is still worthwhile comparing a poem like Eavan Boland's 'Distances' (Boland 1995) with Catherine Walsh's work 'from Pitch' in the *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry* (Tuma 2001). The poems demonstrate the way ideas of the lyric, as a structuring device for the poem and as a set of ideas to be worked with and against, are used by different practitioners. Boland's poem immediately identifies time and place, a speaking narrator and a person addressed:

The radio is playing downstairs in the kitchen.

The clock says eight and the light says

winter. You are pulling up your hood against a bad morning.

(Boland 1995, p. 170)

Through naming a popular song, 'I Wish I Was in Carrickfergus', the poem conjures up images of a past Ireland for the narrator of the poem. It elides memory and place; 'the way the streets/ of a small town open out in/ memory' (p. 170). The image is that of harmony through tradition, and the protagonists of the poem, back in Ireland, see 'salt-loving fuschias to one side and// a market in full swing on the other' as they 'walk the streets in/ the scentless afternoon of a ballad measure' (p. 170). All the images conjure up the idea of an ongoing rhythm, of a continuation of a life that is measured in the time of tradition and with the ballad measure a symbol of the way in



which language itself can be ordered to represent a continuing story. But the poem reminds us of 'how// restless we would be, you and I, inside the perfect/ music of that basalt and sandstone/ coastal town' and uses references to a number of objects to explore the tension between a nostalgic longing for the perfection of the past and an awareness that the reality might be somewhat different. The 'tacky apples' become 'mush inside the crisp sugar shell' and the 'spectacles out of focus'. The poem ultimately questions its own premise, established in the song, that they wish they were back in Carrickfergus. Despite this ambivalence between image and reality, exacerbated by the marketing of the Irish lifestyle as a desirable commodity, the message of the poem is straightforward; that it is better to be at a distance to the unchanging nature of tradition than part of it.

While Boland's poem is arranged on the page in eight stanzas of three lines each, Walsh's 'from Pitch' meanders down the page from a variety of left-hand margins. The title says it is 'from' something, presumably a longer sequence. So the first difference is that the poem is not bounded, we don't know when we're going to reach the end, or if it is the end when we get there. The poem's first few lines set its conceptual boundaries. Reminiscent of the Objectivist 'Thinking with things as they exist' (Zukofsky 1981, p. 12), Walsh begins the poem:

matter  
of fact  
poetical  
fabulous  
(Tuma 2001, p. 926)

The poem is 'matter of fact', that is day to day. In addition the poem is a material object; it may be 'matter', made up of 'facts', but facts that are 'poetical' and 'fabulous'. The poem is set in a 'time' which is 'of the mind', not necessarily in a narrative sequence. The tension is between the idea of the poem as a record of some event or a process of speculation, as in the Boland, and a poem such as Walsh's that also creates its own experience. It is a fabrication, which may be made up of occasions or events, but is not a report on those 'instants'. The empty open brackets positioned over the word 'stasis' also indicate a preference for a field of possibility over a fixed position. Walsh

continues this explanation or coda for a few more lines before getting into the story of the poem, a story not radically different from that of Eavan Boland. She confirms that 'this is not memory' before the next word, 'conditions', both completes the idea of memory as a condition and forms a link to the next phrase where 'memory/ conditions/ the state of the subject at/ the moment/ in question' and then a slight gap leads to the next word, 'being' (Tuma 2001, p. 926). Walsh is explicitly exploring the construction of her identity within the psychological space of the poem and the geographical space it refers to. The next section is a fragmented description of landscape, located in a real place by the annotations rather than the information in the poem.

When the poem becomes most expressionistic, however, in its recollection of another person, Walsh uses repetition to draw attention to the language itself and to question that process of expression. The repetitions are not 'true' but a little off-centre, each one adding a different piece of information and from a slightly different perspective:

having not forgotten  
smell colour  
of eye  
hair tone  
flesh  
having not forgotten  
there should be  
some where eye  
hair colour of  
voice smell  
having not forgotten  
etc.  
(Tuma 2001, p. 927)

Walsh is not content with conflating place with identity. It is not enough to remember and name the places of her memories, but she must work with them in the context of the conceptual space of the poem, calling into doubt the value of the process of naming: 'how can/ what I name anything/ do anything' (Tuma 2001, p. 929). She

denies herself the agency or authority to order a structured narrative out of the events but has to self-consciously reflect on the processes of the poetry and the structures of language as well as its products and their relationship with embodied experience.

None of the above is to deny Barry's account of the differences or lack of them in the attitude to the lyric 'I' in much modern poetry. It does demonstrate, however, the way in which two Irish women poets work with relationships between identity and place very differently, and produce quite different poetry. In other words, the fact that they both problematize identity does not mean they do it in the same way and come to the same conclusions. Boland is exploring, although not without doubts, the nature of an Irish identity located in a specific place, while Walsh is interrogating the notion of identity and authority as expressed through poetic language. Similarly, and this is not to overload the Walsh/Boland contrast and comparison, a poet writing out of assumptions of normative systems may still seek to question her identity. This is different from a writer questioning ideas of the authority of language, of its expressive qualities and the ways in which cultural and political representations seek to retain control and authority. More traditional lyric forms seek to identify a place in which identity can be located and defined, while more experimental and spatial forms will undercut that certainty in order to bring relationships between identity and places into question.

### Ralph Hawkins

The English poet Ralph Hawkins, for example, uses a range of local and domestic references in his work while simultaneously locating other work in more remote and imaginary landscapes. His long poem, 'Tell Me No More and Tell Me', consists of 23 pages, with each page made up of between three and six four-line stanzas with the occasional couplet. Some themes occur consistently in the poem: domestic scenes, the landscape seen from inside a house, the scenery outside the window and the colours of it, and the flora and fauna. Yet the overwhelming concern of the poem is a construction of the space of the self. Lefebvre says:

Space – my space – is not the content of which I constitute the textuality: instead it is first of all my body, and then it is my body's

counterpart or other, its mirror image or shadow: it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other. Thus we are concerned, once again, with gaps and tensions, contacts and separations.

(Lefebvre 1991, p. 184)

Earlier, Lefebvre had referred to objects 'slipping from the non-visible realm into the visible, from opacity into transparency' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 183). It is through this process, he claims, that the 'existence of space is established'. He refers to it as a 'process of decipherment' (p. 183). It is common sense that what we can perceive through vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste becomes our space, or at least our experience of a space from a particular perspective. Where that space is also domestic, and is shared with others, then it will also have its own history. A house, as Bachelard demonstrates in his *Poetics of Space*, is a place of accumulated memory and is produced by the repetition of apparently insignificant actions.

'Tell Me No More and Tell Me' is written indoors; the poet describes both what is around him and what he sees out of the window. There is a sense of physical presence, of a body produced by, and producing, the space. The poem is a painstaking search for identity, not with any apparent hope of completing the task by trawling back through time or through locating the self in broader spatial structures, but by picking up the bits and pieces that go to make up that domestic space, turning them over and examining them:

Yes it comes back to  
that finally with an  
effort to unfold with  
clarity this subject matter  
...  
the present voice looped  
back to the first line

(Hawkins 1981, p. 17)

and also:

trying to get it straight  
for the poem within the poem

(Hawkins 1981, p. 15)

The poem combines immediately perceived phenomena with the memory of what he has seen before:

birds through the glass  
I know a row of trees through  
the mist and a room of  
feathered bed

(Hawkins 1981, p. 11)

It is in this constant swinging to and fro between his immediate environment within the house, including that which is outside the window, and that which comes in from afar, that the poet locates his search for identity. The poem is not saying these are things that made me, but rather these are the things that are part of the process of constructing my identity and a space that my body has produced.

The focus of the poem is the everyday, and it has formal elements that make it similar to a diary. It reads as if written a page to a day, and many of the opening lines to each page/section give the impression of a 'fresh start' to the poem, as in the three examples below:

O little life  
where is the way forward

(Hawkins 1981, p. 13)

empty day again  
you have formed

(Hawkins 1981, p. 17)

morning  
then afternoon

(Hawkins 1981, p. 19)

From such beginnings the poems, or particular pages of the sequence, follow an irregular pattern of inside the house, outside the house, afar

(which can involve things coming in from away as well as the poet moving out of himself) and then an ending which involves either a folding back into the poem or an opening out from where the poem is. An example, and all the poems demonstrate differences, is:

no more blue whiles  
put away pages of paper  
this time keep secret all your brother thoughts  
and winter on a horn of light  
is sky full  
the ash is filled with birds  
as the eye wanders  
while the birds stream  
what are they  
in the distance the trick  
of light fails  
without you and with you  
as on a pillow of feathers the mind  
glides with electric borders of  
light the light now is green  
and I have been taken away,  
sea voyage, in my own thought I drift  
watching winter leaves much to be done  
yes chop wood and the air chills

(Hawkins 1981, p. 22)

The 'story' of the poem is fairly straightforward. The poet tidies up his work for the day, his thinking time over. He begins to notice and describe the winter light, notices the birds but fails to identify them as the light is failing. He then drifts off into his own thoughts while simultaneously recognizing there are chores to be done and the temperature is dropping outside. The poem opens on a space of work before shifting to a transitory or 'between space' of watching the world outside where 'the birds stream', a process which leads into an inner space of contemplation. This is broken by a realization of his physical situation, a coming down to earth in the last line and a half, to the place in which he is located. The 'other' is both directly

addressed as another person, 'without you...' and is a reflection of the self within the poem 'and I have been taken away'. The spatial structure of within and without is reflected in the language of the poem. It begins on a business-like note, 'no more blue whites', and finishes on a similar tone, 'yes chop wood and the air chills'. In between the language becomes increasingly meditative until 'in my own thoughts I drift/ watching winter leaves', where the tone turns on the pun from 'leaves' (as the plural of leaf and as the verb to leave), and he drops back to earth.

Some of Hawkins's other poems seem to run counter to the domestic and 'everyday' frames of 'Tell Me No More...' and are set in 'distant' or imaginary places. He does not, however, use the exotic as 'nostalgia directed towards the distant and the strange for the sake of novelty' (Preminger 1975, p. 265) but to question notions of authenticity through the creation of imaginary spaces. Rather than resulting from travel, they are products of processes of globalization, of the ability in a post-modern world to experience other cultures through cuisine, television and film as simulations of themselves. In the chapbook *Well, You Could Do* there is a sequence of some 14 poems entitled 'China'. In the first poem he clearly describes China as an alternative reality that refers to, but is not entirely, the geographical reality that is China. It is also a mental construct that he relates to his immediate surroundings:

... China the brain is  
too busy for you ...

(Hawkins 1979)

And then later in the same poem:

in Brixton the houses  
are made of mud and wattle  
very little money called glue

(Hawkins 1979)

Other poems in the sequence are less clear about the status of 'China'. In '5' it operates as no more than a pun: 'I think I'll buy a china/ blue teapot'. In 'The Fortune Cookie' he goes from fried duck to the duck in the bath and once again combines a reference to cuisine,

the fried duck, and a more culturally British scene by referring to 'what it quacked/ in the bath when/ it was yellow' (Hawkins 1979). In 'China' Hawkins is drawing distant places into the space of the poem and, through their juxtaposition with his everyday experience, drawing on the imagery to construct a space other than his location. As Hawkins says when interviewed, China is for him both 'imaginary and real, and a place that isn't a place' (Riley 2000, p. 27).

In 'From the Chinese', from the 1988 book *At Last Away*, the title suggests a translation, but there is nothing to say of what. On the other hand the title could be a reference to a take-away meal as in 'get something from the Chinese on your way home'. The poem is in seven sections, each one containing between four and six unrhymed couplets and the 'I' in the poem is firmly located in the Chinese landscape. The poetry is sparse, reflecting a clean and uncluttered landscape which hovers somewhere between willow pattern and the post-nuclear world that William Burroughs describes in *Cities of the Red Night*. In the first couplet of the poem Hawkins uses capitals:

in the Nine Wilds  
the People's Temple  
(Hawkins 1988, p. 1)

suggesting the names of real places. The next line appears to deny that, referring to 'eight continents' and an 'orbit of stars' as the place where 'Chang handed/ me his tracing'. The 'tracing' suggests a map; on the other hand it could be a child in school (Hawkins was a school-teacher for part of his life) who has completed a piece of work and is handing it in. As well as a series of exotic descriptions that appear to make sense but on closer examination do not, there are a series of biological references to speech and memory. There are 'towers in the five coloured air' and 'mist hides the fast planets/ from the drained lowlands'. There are series of numbers that don't add up, 'Nine Wilds', 'eight continents', 'four edges of heaven', 'eighth month' and, finally, 'nine turns', to coincide with the 'Nine Wilds'. Within this off-centre landscape so carefully depicted, yet not finally constructed, there are both humans and animals. There is a 'me' in the first line who is handed a tracing by 'Chang'. In the second section a 'he' 'chose our planet/ and our stars' and 'searched the green/ void'. This might be Chang from Section 1, it might be a projection of the first person or

it might be someone different altogether. In Section 3 we are introduced to 'the brain of the ape' that is 'able to summon . . . the powers of healing'. The poem seems simple enough, and there seem recognizable characters and narratives within it and the landscape seems plausible but on closer examination the poem spins off and out of representation into physical impossibilities. It is a place in which the poet can 'lose himself' and construct a complex interplay between ideas of coherence and clarity. It is, though, a poem in which the poet can also find himself, a space into which he can project identities. The poem suggests both the deterministic and structured order of Deleuze and Guattari's genetic and biological tracing, and the disorder of a journey that he makes up as he constructs the map. It is an order and a structure that eludes him by the intrusion of the messiness of everyday life.

A later book, *The Coiling Dragon* (1999), more explicitly combines the themes of domestic space and the exotic. It is not a poem written in the poetics of collage in the way that 'China' was, a process of placing the familiar next to the strange or the domestic next to the foreign, but a poem that combines surfaces and depths, a poem that takes you down into itself before it throws you back out. One way Hawkins does this is through that most common of poetic devices, the metaphorical process of giving one thing the qualities of another. The city in the poem becomes a wok in which there is 'simmering, stewing, deep sea frying', then a 'city of radical pronouncements' (Hawkins [1999]). Yet things do not add up as they should in a metaphor. There is no resolution or synthesis: things seem to go together but also stay stubbornly apart. An address to the city in Line 4 now becomes problematized; the relatively straightforward 'you remain my favourite' is complexified by 'my favourites sell condiments'. Is there more than one city? Is the favourite in Line 4 nothing to do with the favourites in Line 12? Or are the condiments the favourites, the syntax distorted? The condiments themselves start off as unusual, 'ginger juice, lily buds', and end up completely fanciful, 'star anis on clouds' before the next line slides into cod mythology, 'five immortals/ riding rams'. The rest of the page then slips from the cooking through *Isfahan* (a province or town in Iran and a type of hand-woven rug), through the gut, yanked by the dragon to a meditative chant on city. It is a city of many characteristics and many perspectives.

His particular technique is to use words and phrases in combinations that at first appearance seem to follow syntactic and paradigmatic norms, but which on closer examination do not; where readers think themselves on solid ground before the rug is pulled away from underneath them, opening out into a space where many connections become possible. On page 1 of *The Coiling Dragon*, as he makes the switch from city to cooking and refers to 'simmering, stewing, deep sea frying', he echoes both deep-fat frying and deep-sea fishing, but says neither. When he uses 'teeming' in Line 4, one thinks of a teeming population, but this is soon to be recast as waters teeming with fish, and then turned on its head in the penultimate line of the page in 'city of teeming rain'. Poem 9 has a 'Punminister' and:

brews of wheat and rye  
put wriggles into prepositional constructions  
have an almost pissed  
off effect on the reader  
wanting satisfying habits  
there must be an axis of selection  
bound up with an axis of combination in composition  
so many worms like scrambled legs

(Hawkins [1999])

This section illustrates a source of tension in the poem, a movement back and forth between the poem as a construction with no single point of origin, a grid system into which activities and ideas can be mapped, and a more organic and rhizomatic structure. There is a humanist desire for coherence, through the rhythm of time and history, alongside a post-modern playfulness in which any word which sounds a bit like another word can take its place along the paradigmatic axis of the line, thereby discarding any accumulated meaning. So the poem, and the series of poems, is a construct that combines the organicist notion of the rhizome and the Euclidean space of the grid, but one that takes its coordinates from a body in space, rather than from a predetermined system. These coordinates are always on the move, always seen from different perspectives within a four-dimensional space that combines the axis of space with the axes of time and history. Because it is constantly reformed

with every shift of perspective the 'grid' doesn't limit possibilities of combination or impose 'coordinates' on all words and objects. The success of the poem is that it keeps a series of dualisms in play, never allowing them to fall into simple dichotomies. The Punminister invents the word' . . . pallaksch/ which meant either yes or no/ and served as a means for avoiding yes or no' (Hawkins [1999]).

The Coiling Dragon is a poem about places, real and imagined, language and identity. The space of the city in the poem is not a result of a planning exercise, but occurs because of the movements of bodies through space and the way they relate to each other. It uses a version of the techniques of narrative prose: bits of stories, the odd character that appears and reappears. The first-person narrator shifts around under the pressure to give it a stable identity but is located within the contents and contexts Hawkins chooses for his work. He is resistant to indeterminacy while finding the evidence of it everywhere. His work over the last 25 years is an exploration of his identity, from the search for a clarity that never really emerges in 'Tell Me No More and Tell Me', to a desire for coherence amongst the endless punning of *The Coiled Dragon*. And this exploration of identity is not only historical, although it is carried out over time, but it is also spatial. Not only does he locate himself in different imagined spaces, he also uses ideas of space, often linking the structures of language to the structures of space, to inform the space of the poem.

### Fanny Howe

The American writer Fanny Howe fails to fit into any of the major poetic groupings. She comments on the spatial and paratactic nature of the work of the language writers when she says they:

perform the critical function of putting work into a verbal landscape without judgement (content) which renders the words equal. I admire this work a great deal and regret that I am unable to free myself from the language of a charged romantic.

(Brito 1992, p. 102)

She, somewhat ironically, oversimplifies her position. Her poetry, like language writing, draws on an implicit understanding of relationships between language, meaning and identity. The 'I' in her poems is not

an unquestioned 'I' (or eye) or a fixed perspective. She plays with the idea of being hidden, of being other, of identifying with others and of disappearing altogether, and her later work is composed of layers, of moving in and out of alternative realities, perceived from different hiding places. In her essay 'Arctobiography', she says:

words come through me, and, . . . it is only up to me to be prepared. . . . The massive amount of revision I put the words through is only a way of absolving them from the taint of having passed through me at all. I want to abolish the personal, or hurl it to the furthest point; and polish the impersonal, until its dazzle unfocusses a complete clarity, as with everything good.

(Perelman 1985, p. 206).

It is therefore not only the speaking 'I' who hides, successfully or otherwise, in the content of her poems, but she claims here that she tries to eradicate the presence of self within the structures of language. Her description of the process is physical: language becomes tainted and like other matter it is 'passed through' the body. In contrast the impersonal language 'dazzles', freed of the clumsy gesture of the body writing.

Rae Armantrout, writing about Howe's poem 'Q' in *A Folio for Fanny Howe* (Green 1999), relates Howe's writing to ideas of the nomadic, quoting the poem which begins 'the neo-neolithic urban nomad school of poetry' (Howe 1999, p. 32). That line is a satirical critique of schools of modernist poetics, and the end of the poem a plea for collectivity where 'we're lost at last/ and can really see through words including "me"/ to the other side that multiplies/ the interior matter' (p. 32). As Armantrout says, Howe's 'nomadic anarchic collective' is ultimately embodied in the form of the serial poem itself where 'sequential we's . . . [are] the shape of these poems' (Armantrout 1999, p. 45). Howe moves through the isolation of the individual to a communitarian collectiveness.

While Howe is drawing on the idea of the nomad to describe the wandering of her 'characters', her irony should not be lost. Within the context of the poem 'Q', and particularly its many references to war, Howe is making a distinction between the nomad, who moves because she wants to, and the refugee who moves because she must. In her essay 'Purgatory and Other Places' she says: 'To choose to

leave home is one thing. To be forced – by political or economic realities – is another. If you have to leave home and inhabit a place where you don't want to be, you reach the very lowest point in uncertainty' (Howe 2003, p. 103). Her critique is of the more romantic configuration of the nomadic and a rhetoric of globalization which preferences the mobile over the static; a configuration in which the global population is able to move at will and be at home anywhere and everywhere, capable of shifting between multiple identities and multiple languages. Refugees (Deleuze and Guattari use the more neutral term 'migrant'), by way of contrast, are lost and bewildered in their new surroundings. They have only a few bits and pieces of their old life with which to demonstrate their identity and the land and landscape itself are not just 'unknown', but 'alien'. Even the weather itself becomes 'menacing', and the climate 'lack[s] any corresponding climate from your own past' (Howe 2003, p. 102). Out of their homeland they are unutterably and often abjectly other, needing to either band together with other refugees to maintain their identity or become assimilated into their new culture and surroundings and therefore change their identity. As Deleuze and Guattari say:

the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point as a consequence and as a factual necessity: in principle points for him are relays along a trajectory.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 50)

For Howe the refugee needs to adopt the strategy of the nomad: 'Our task is to read the Bedouins/ now that we're lost at last' (Howe 1999, p. 32). The poem 'Q' begins: 'We moved to be happy' (p. 7). This movement is in the context of global urbanization and where they move to the 'crash that we call a city' (p. 7). There is an element of compulsion to this movement though, an unstoppable force of the water going 'south for the winter' that carried them 'down like storm driven gulls' (p. 7). In the second poem in 'Q', 'we' are referred to as 'A lost tribe searching for new digs' (p. 8).

As the poem progresses its atmosphere becomes uneasy. In the sixth poem 'Everyone lacks reassurance', in the seventh 'Outside's a gray and wasted place./ Sleet slides into grease and trees/ into black

needles eyelass lace/ till alienation becomes delirium' (Howe 1999, pp. 12, 13). It is in the eighth poem that the theme of the refugee and the relationship between identity and place becomes more explicit:

I was talking about a person  
who was a place.  
The place had one name  
and infinite ways to get there.  
  
One way was by speech.  
  
When lost person is a lost place  
first the word stays  
in the voice. But then the ear  
has disappeared.  
  
You have a choice.  
Relief – or fear.

(Howe 1999, p. 14)

The poem describes the trauma of people losing their 'place', and the relationship between the language they speak and the place they live in. The place was the centre, with 'one name and infinite ways to get there', a sense which is lost. They become marginal and have to 'fit in', to develop an appropriate voice. The 'word stays/ in the voice', but there is no one who understands as 'the ear has disappeared'.

In the fragmentation of communities through movement around the world (often communities of resistance and subversion), individuals and groups become potentially more exposed to the exploitative nature of international capital and better suited to its needs. The final couplet turns on the word 'choice', and the choice of the refugee is relief: both freedom from fear of violent death and relief as charity or parish relief. In the context of this stanza the 'neo-neolithic urban nomad school of poetry' becomes not merely a witty jibe, but an attack on a carelessness that fails to engage with the realities of people's lives. The nomad becomes a convenient metaphor for the subversion of global colonization and a lifestyle choice for the socially mobile. It works out differently for those who have no choice but to move and whose lives are violently fragmented. Yet Howe is

not simply calling for a nostalgic unity, a reassertion of place and identity neither possible nor desirable, rather she is creating a poetry in which abstract or theoretical assumptions are called into question and examined against the harsh test of practice. Towards the end of the sequence she outlines 'home', which is down:

The path I will never find  
leads me to a farm  
by the sea with a donkey

...

(Howe 1999, p. 35)

before going on to question its construction:

But what is a birthright?  
Does it help me to write poems and live in a shoe?

(Howe 1999, p. 35)

Beginning with the word 'we', the poem ends with the assertion, 'I'm being split into the longitude of one' (Howe 1999, p. 37), suggesting both a development of identity over time and a splitting of that identity by lateral movements and pressures.

Another collection from 1997, *One Crossed Out*, expresses its ambivalence in its title, simultaneously referring to the number 'one' crossed out, the letter 'I' as an alternative form of that number or 'one' as a pronoun, crossed out. Howe sustains this ambivalence to the end, and the penultimate prose poem in the collection begins:

One is my lucky number? Her sneakers were wearing down to two gnarled scoops, but she was never surprised that the vertical pronoun was also a number.

(Howe 1997, p. 60)

As well as the word 'one' referring to a pronoun and a number, the figure '1' and the letter 'I' become interchangeable. The blurb on the back cover claims that:

the poems speak in the voice of May, the girl crossed out, the bad girl, the mad and drunk girl, the jailed and drugged girl. May is swirling in language, and the language convinces us that we really are deep in the core of human consciousness, near the foul rag and bone shop of the heart. May is a neonomad, bringing to the world the opposite of worldliness, offering a glimpse of the invisible.

(Howe 1997)

May is also conditional: she may or she may not. Blurbs are meant to help sell books, so it is not surprising that it tries to sell to the reader a simplicity of expression that is not present in the poems. A reader certainly doesn't get one unified voice, but a number of voices; voices which themselves question their own right to be voices. The poem is an examination by Howe of more than the 'character' of May, it is also an exploration of both the spaces that have produced May and of the spaces she produces, including the hospital, the jail, the refuge and the street. Sometimes the poem is difficult to locate, as in the beginning of the title poem of the collection:

The walk up La Breaking to the Hills,  
then a shortcut to rosemary and wild foresight. Walked her  
burning around.

(Howe 1997, p. 46)

The sequence of two sentences, but three blocks of meaning, appears paratactic in its structure. The first line leads you in gently, assuming that it is possible to consider La Breaking and the capitalized 'Hills' as real places, but it doesn't lead anywhere. The poem goes from the 'walk up', to the 'shortcut' and then 'around'. The first sentence ends on a pun, and I keep reading forsythia for foresight. Rosemary is probably a bush; a bush which 'her' is walked around and which is either burning or the 'her' is burning in the sun. God speaks from a burning bush.

The poems are not all this complex, but this speed of reference is evident in many cases, introducing a bewildering range of images, events and voices, and simultaneously presenting information and obliterating it. A reader will struggle sometimes to find May in the urban and rural landscapes Howe describes, as well as within the



language of the poem. This is a key element of *One Crossed Out*, which reflects Howe's interest in the 'Apophatic' (see Romana Huk's essay in *A Folio for Fanny Howe* (1999) for a further discussion on this), a theological concept of describing and expressing knowledge of God by the use of negative, rather than positive attributes. God is therefore described as infinite, invisible, incomparable, immortal and so on. The final poem in *One Crossed Out* is called 'The Apophatic Path'. It begins:

What isn't what is  
not Discover me  
or try to find me.  
If being is finding,  
can you find me?  
Who to, this address?

(Howe 1997, p. 61)

The poem ends, 'even the base of me being, unknown' (Howe 1997, p. 62). May is therefore not simply some 'other' that we discover via Howe's descriptions of her actions and locations, but one also defined by negation. This emphasizes both her economic and social marginalization as well as her humanity as someone created in God's image. She is unknowable. Huk draws on Derrida in describing Howe as 'pursuing ... a linguistic faultline alongside otherness that eschews hidden teleological ends in exchange for "a certain difference, a certain trembling, a certain decentring that is not the position of an other centre"' (Huk 1999, p. 68).

May exists within the language of the poem. Like the 'I' within the poem 'Q', she also questions that existence and how the language is a representation of it:

This time of year reminds me of the dot that  
completes my name.  
The dot over the letter that pertains to the first person  
singular is a symbol for me of my head.  
I always put on my dot when I'm already out of the word.

(Howe 1997, p. 10)

The capital 'I' emphasizes the importance of 'the first person/singular', yet May compares herself to the lower case 'i', which functions as a hieroglyph with the dot forming the head on the upright body. Because of its process of negation, the poem does not define an 'other', but asks questions about how we know some 'other' and how they can be represented. Lefebvre says, while describing the relationship between the body and space, that 'we are concerned once again with gaps and tensions, contacts and separations' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 184). Although Howe works within a spatial aesthetic of simultaneity and contiguity, and May exists where 'past, present, and future exist simultaneously' (Howe 1997, p. 24), the poems also works within social spaces where some are invisible, and refused their allotted space and time:

No one asked 'who's there?'  
Not not.  
'Not what? Not who?'  
Not not you, but not not me neither. Here or then.

(Howe 1997, p. 52)

The negatives spin their own tale, denying the person, crossed out, deleted but still there. Another poem also begins with a negative, 'Nobody wants crossed-out girls around' (Howe 1997, p. 53). A few lines further on she says: 'They only know how to wisecrack'. They go with the flow of whatever is happening, ride the juggernaut, 'make a pact' with 'whatever happens to be the meaning of their days' (p. 53). When asked, 'are you who's who in America', May, if that is the speaker in this poem, replies with gallows humour, 'No, I'm just here with my corpse'.

Howe sets the dispossessed and the homeless (negatives to set alongside immortal, infinite, etc.) in a variety of spaces, but draws on their desire to be found inside their own history. Many of the people in Howe's poems 'Q' and 'One Crossed Out' seem to be inhabiting barren landscapes and marginal spaces, with Howe working creatively in the tension between the positive elements of nomadism, the way in which it can question and subvert a desire for control and homogeneity, and the despair of the homeless and the refugee.

### Old endings and new beginnings

I began this chapter by restating the pragmatic relationship between place and identity. I demonstrated previously that Deleuze and Guattari embrace the liberationist potential of the breakdown of that relationship, and assert that people must step outside of the striated space of the comfort zone of family and state in order to experience freedom. They give Antonin Artaud, a surrealist poet who suffered mental breakdown, as a literary example of the 'schizo' and as someone who has 'broken through the wall' to 'smooth space'. In his poem 'All Writing is Garbage', Artaud attacks those who write as if there is certainty between the word and what it means or signifies:

All those who come out of nowhere to try and put into  
words any part of what goes  
on in their minds are pigs.  
...  
All those who have points of reference in their minds ...  
in well localized areas of  
their brains, all those who are masters of their language,  
all those for whom words  
have meanings ... - are pigs.

(Rothenberg and Joris 1995, p. 515)

Deleuze and Guattari claim that:

few accomplish ... the breakthrough of this schizophrenic wall or  
limit ... the majority draw near the wall and back away horrified.  
Better to fall back under the law of the signifier, marked by castra-  
tion, triangulated in Oedipus.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 135)

For some, of course, that journey through the wall will be a one-way trip, and I'm obviously not alone in feeling some irritation at Deleuze and Guattari's enthusiasm for an acutely painful condition. Yet, in any discussion of the relationship between language, the culture that produces it and the culture it produces, the schizophrenic condition is undoubtedly fascinating. Sufferers of schizophrenia are

equally distributed across space and time, between gender and race, and apparently unaffected by environmental conditions. Anthropologists have recently argued that schizophrenia is, in fact, a condition coterminous with the development of language. The split between reality and the representation of reality caused, for some, a condition of confusion; the abstract and arbitrary nature of language always seemed to have an oblique relationship to embodied experience. Janusz Wróbel in his book *Language and Schizophrenia* (1990) argues convincingly that schizophrenia is a semiotic illness, characterized by a failure to understand the role of language in everyday communication and the relationship between language and experience. The result is a language usage by schizophrenics that is fragmented (crazed) and apparently unrelated to the here and now. R. D. Laing in his study of schizophrenia in *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1970) emphasizes the anti-establishment nature of schizophrenic behaviour and the way those he studied were often attracted to underground and cult activities of 1960s Britain in preference to the stultifying family environments.